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## **Contemporary art as a catalyst of change: reviving neglected rural communities in Japan through the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Setouchi Triennale**

Deun, Anaïs Van

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# **Contemporary art as a catalyst of change: reviving neglected rural communities in Japan through the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Setouchi Triennale**

Anaïs Van Deun

s2322692

Leiden University

Faculty of Humanities

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Prof. dr. K.J. (Katarzyna) Cwierтка

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# Introduction

## Research background

Futuristic, highly advanced technology; Japanese anime; samurai; tea ceremony and geisha. These are some of the stereotypical associations with Japan and Japanese culture, made especially by non-Japanese people. While these examples are certainly part of it, Japanese culture encompasses (much) more than the examples stated above. For instance, Japan hosts a large amount of festivals. Festivals or ‘matsuri’ (祭り) were originally held in commemoration of deities where people would pray in (Buddhist) temples and or (Shinto) shrines (Guide Memo, 2018). While the majority of them are religious celebrations, ‘matsuri’ can be secular as well. Examples are the ‘Sapporo Snow Festival’ (Hokkaido, northern Japan), famous for its sculptured ice statues and the ‘Sakura (cherry blossom) matsuri’, events held in public parks or places with many cherry blossom trees to appreciate the beauty of the flowers (Live Japan Prefect Guide, 2021). Yet, some festivals are not hosted to worship deities or to celebrate nature, but to exhibit art. These festivals are ‘geijutsusai’ (芸術祭) or ‘art festivals’ called ‘Art Triennale’ (or *āto toriannāre*; アートトリエンナーレ). Contrary to usual exhibitions, Art Triennale convey activities in which multiple artworks are exhibited in various places in specific areas. Specifically, these festivals also make use of buildings and outdoor spaces to present their artworks besides ‘regular’ exhibition facilities. (Jiyukokuminsha, JapanKnowledge Lib, 2019). Two of the largest and best-known Triennale in (and outside) Japan which are located in countryside areas are the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT) and the Setouchi Triennale (ST). My reason for choosing these two festivals is that both share similarities regarding their establisher’s philosophies and objectives on revitalizing de-/underpopulated rural sites. International visitors (and audiences) mainly recognize the festivals under these names, but they are actually also known under different ones in Japan(ese).

The ETAT is referred to as *Daichi no Geijutsusai Echigo-Tsumari Ato Toriannāre* (大地の芸術祭、越後妻有アートトリエンナーレ) which means the ‘Art Festival of the Land’ whereas the ST is called *Setouchi Kokusai Geijustusai* (瀬戸内国際芸術祭) which actually means ‘Setouchi International Art Festival’. The former was established by Kitagawa Fram (1946-present) and is situated in the Niigata prefecture (see fig 1), located in the central north of Japan’s main island, Honshu, and covering about 12, 584 km<sup>2</sup> (Participating Local Governments: Japan/Niigata Prefecture, 2021). Since its inauguration in 2000, the ‘Art Festival of the Land’

has toured visitors around the six rural districts of the Niigata prefecture: Tokamachi City, Tsunan Town, Kawanishi Town, Nakasato Village, Matsudai Town and Matsunoyama Town (Kanaya, 2014, 77-78; Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 23-27; Echigio-Tsumari Art Field, travel information, 2010-2019). These districts have been abandoned in the shadows of economic growth and contemporary art has visibly come to a standstill (Kanaya, 2014, 78). As depopulation in this region advances as a result of these factors, the Triennale attempts to connect these districts. The ST is the ETAT's successor and was co-founded in 2010 by Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soichirō (1945/46-present). The festival is located in the Seto Inland Sea or 'Seto Naikai' (瀬戸内海), the largest inland sea of Japan (see fig 2), which surrounds the western part of the islands of Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. The area encompasses approximately 700 small islands and covers about 23,203 km<sup>2</sup> (Seto Naikai no kankyō jōhō, n.d.). The 'rehabilitation of the Seto Inland Sea' is the Triennale's main theme. Its focus lies on the Setouchi region's remote islands where the depopulation and ageing population are striking. The first festival was held in 2010 and it was hosted on seven islands: Naoshima, Teshima, Shodojima, Ogijima, Megijima, Oojima, and Inujima (ibid). Since 2013, five islands have been added, resulting in an expansion of the ST to a total of twelve islands (Kanaya, 2014, 76; Meng, 2021, vi and 6).



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Fig 1. The Sankei Shimbun. "In Niigata, A Quest for Unique Islands and Local Food." 2018, *JapanForward*, [japan-forward.com/in-niigata-a-quest-for-unique-islands-and-local-food/%e3%80%90j%E3%80%91m%E4%BD%90%E6%B8%A1%Ef%BC%88%E6%96%B0%E6%BD%9F/](https://japan-forward.com/in-niigata-a-quest-for-unique-islands-and-local-food/%e3%80%90j%E3%80%91m%E4%BD%90%E6%B8%A1%Ef%BC%88%E6%96%B0%E6%BD%9F/). Accessed on 9 June 2022.

Fig 2. Meng, Qu. “The location of Seto Inland Sea and twelve Setouchi Triennale islands.” *The Influence of Setouchi Triennale's Rural Art Festival Tourism on the Revitalization of Islands in the Seto Inland Sea*. 2021. Hiroshima University, Graduate School of Integrated Art and Sciences, Doctoral Thesis, pp 3.



Both festivals were created as a strategy “focused on sustainability which is achieved through identity, creativity and renovation” (Brebba, Longhurst, et al.; 2018, 327) to tackle Japan’s increasingly ageing population. Japan contains the largest proportion of elderly people per head of population in the world, with a current life expectancy of 84. 91 years old (Japan Life Expectancy 1960-1922, 2010-2022). In 2021, the total population was 12,484 in which 54% of the population was aged between 20 and 64. 29% was even older than 65 whereas only 16% of the population was (under) 19. According to the Ministry of Finance of Japan, the total population will have decreased to 8,808 in 2065. The percentages of the young population and the populace between 20 and 64 will continue to drop by 2% and 6 % respectively, whereas the percentage of the elderly population (65+) will rise by 9% (see table 1). The aftermaths of Japan’s population decline and ageing society were first noticeable in provincial economies through inflation caused by the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990’s (Morichi, 2014, 48). The continued population decline since 2004 has become especially severe in rural areas, since the majority of the population consist of elderly people (Knoema, n.d.).

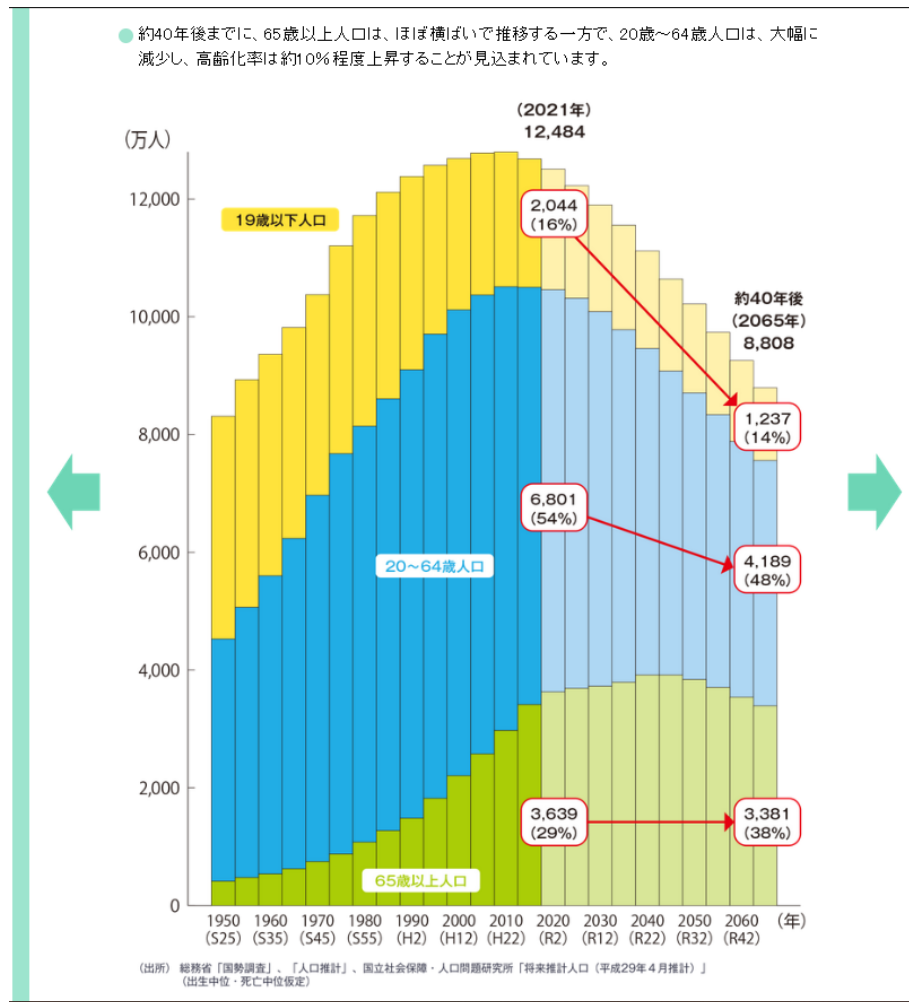


Table 1, “Sankōshiryō 1 nihon no shōshikōreisha ha donoyōni susunde iru no ka 参考資料 1 日本の子高齢はどのように進んでいるのか [Reference data 1, How is Japan’s declining birthrate and ageing population progressing?].” Zaimushō 財務省 Ministry of Finance JAPAN, n.d. <https://www.mof.go.jp/zaisei/reference/index.html> . Accessed 26 April 2022.

The common aim of the ETAT and ST initially seems to be the restoration of these economically declining rural areas through contemporary art projects. Yet, a deeper examination of Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake’s Soīchirō’s philosophies and their application in both Triennale shows that their objectives are larger than mere rural revitalization. Their partnership and organization of both art festivals is based on their mutual understanding and their shared values of two particular philosophies: *satoyama* and *furusato*. *Satoyama* literally means “village mountain” or “livable mountain” (Machotka, 2018, 108-109), but it is often defined as “mountains and forest which are closely located to human habitations and are linked to

people's lives" (Shokakugan Inc, JapanKnowledge , 2001-2022). To Japanese people, the term mainly brings feelings and/or memories to mind which are related to "idyllic rural landscapes consisting of fields and woodlands" (Takeuchi, et al., 2003, 9). *Furusato* literally means 'old village', but it is often translated as 'one's hometown' or 'native place' (Robertson, 1988, 494). However, Jennifer Robertson and Lindsay Morrison both argue that *furusato* incorporates a much deeper meaning of a temporal and spatial dimension. *Furu(i)* (古い) represents the former through its associations with a "patina of familiarity and naturalness that objects and human relationships acquire with age, use, and interaction"(Robertson, 1988, 495-96) and its indication of 'a past place' (Morrison, 2013, 2). *Sato* (里) represents the latter through its suggestion of "several places which humans inhabit" (Robertson, 1988, 494). These philosophies will be explained further in chapter 2.

These ideologies are applied in both Triennale and intend to provide a solution to Japan's demographic issues by reshaping the society into an art community which is united through the festivals. For this reason, my hypothesis is that the ST and ETAT's objective is not actually about rural revitalization. Kitagawa and Fukutake hold idealistic views about the countryside and 'traditional' countryside lifestyles through their personal convictions and interpretations of *furusato* and *satoyama*. Therefore, I claim that both men (attempt to) reshape Japanese society by reidentifying (negative) perceptions of heavily underpopulated rural areas through contemporary art, based on their idealistic perceptions.

## Structure

This thesis is divided into four chapters. My first chapter consists of a literature review which aims to explain the validity of my thesis by contextualizing prior literature, theories, methods and gaps within the research of the ETAT and ST in the field. My second chapter intends to demonstrate Kitagawa and Fukutake's idealistic views about the countryside and countryside lifestyles. It begins by contextualizing what *satoyama* and *furusato* exactly encompass and how these ideologies are interpreted and implemented by both men in both Art Triennale. The chapter proceeds with explaining the meaning and value of these ideologies for Kitagawa and Fukutake and how they reflect their personal convictions. My third chapter illustrates how the ideologies and convictions of the previous chapter are implemented in both Triennale. It focuses on Kitagawa and Fukutake's functions in the Triennale and the festival's importance in the larger framework of rural revitalization. Lastly, it shows both men's beliefs about the



importance and use of contemporary art and how the ETAT and ST are structured around their convictions. My fourth (and last) chapter specifically illustrates how Kitagawa and Fukutake's convictions are reflected in artworks. It analyzes three different artworks and aims to demonstrate the similarities between different artists' beliefs and those of Kitagawa and Fukutake.

## Methodology

This section focuses on the research methods I used and types of sources I consulted to verify the validity of my claim. I argue that Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soïchirō reshape Japanese society by reidentifying (negative) perceptions of heavily underpopulated rural areas through contemporary art, based on their idealistic perceptions. As my thesis is based on the *satoyama* and *furusato* philosophies, this section will first explain the reason why I have chosen to center my research around them. I will proceed with an explanation of the type of research I conducted, the different types of sources I used and how I have analyzed them. Lastly, I address the limitations of my thesis. My research is based on qualitative research, since I based my findings on existent theories and philosophies. The only exception is the introduction, where I consulted data provided by the Japanese government to demonstrate the current and future population decline in Japan.

This thesis is centered around the contextualization and application of *satoyama* and *furusato*. The reason that the ETAT and ST are centered around Kitagawa and Fukutake's interpretation and application of these philosophies. Specifically, Kitagawa Fram's philosophy of "humans are part of nature" (see chapter 2) is heavily influenced by *satoyama*. Moreover, his philosophy is adopted in both art festivals. Additionally, specific features of *furusato* are highly important in the organization of both art festivals as they reflect both personal men's convictions. Although I already briefly touched upon these concepts in the introduction and will refer to them in the literature review (chapter 1), the concepts are most clearly contextualized in chapter 2. My reason for making a separate chapter in which I explain these concepts is to prove how both men's personal declarations (and convictions) of *satoyama* and *furusato* fit into the established theoretical framework of both philosophies. Since *satoyama* and *furusato* are existent concepts which have already been discussed, I started by contextualizing them by consulting already established theories in secondary sources (books and journal articles). For *satoyama*, I mainly consulted Takeuchi, K.'s theoretical framework in *Satoyama: The Traditional Rural Landcape of Japan*. I used this book, because it gives an in-depth explanation of the history, nature and conservation (among others) of *satoyama* landscapes in Japan.

Additionally, I have consulted the online (Japanese) database ‘JapanKnowlegde’ to consider how this concept is defined and understood in Japan(ese). Lastly, I examined how Kitagawa and Fukutake apply these philosophies in the ETAT and ST by looking at the festival’s objectives written on their websites. In other words, I examined how both men interpreted and stated these concepts on their websites. Visitors can select different languages on the websites, but I have translated the information provided in Japanese to English. I also consulted the website’s English version, but I mainly used it as means of comparison to consider to what extent the English content is similar to one provided in Japanese. During my translation I always considered how Takeuchi’s theory has been applied in both Triennale. Lastly, I have consulted Brebbia and Longhurst’s work “WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment, Volume 226, 2017, Sustainable Development and Planning IX” to defend my argument that human intervention to preserve *satoyama* landscapes is not indispensable (chapter 2).

Jennifer Robertson and Linsey Morrison’s theories have been my main source of information for *furusato*, as I could not find appropriate definitions in JapanKnowlegde. Morrison’s research about the context of the deterioration of the countryside has been particularly helpful to prove Kitagawa and Fukutake’s personal feelings and convictions about this ideology and how they are reflected in the Triennale. I examined Kitagawa and Fukutake’s personal convictions and pro-rural and anti-urbanization strategies by consulting both primary and secondary sources. The former consists of (Fukutake’s) personal statements given in the press kit (of the ST) or written statements (from both men) I have collected by consulting English and Japanese newspaper articles from the Japan Times- and Asahi Shinbum databases. The latter consist of books or periodical magazines written by Kitagawa or Fukutake themselves and journal articles by researchers who have done extensive research about (including fieldwork in) the festivals. I translated Fukutake’s claims (since the press kit article was in Japanese) and interpreted Kitagawa and Fukutake’s statements in regard to the *satoyama* and *furusato* theories. Moreover, I consulted Eimi-Tagore Erwin’s thesis and theories as a base for the use of *machi-zukuri* (community-building) in art festivals in general. Afterwards, I selected Fukutake and Kitagawa’s claims from the Japan Times newspaper articles and ‘Art Place Japan’ to illustrate their own thoughts about the importance of *machi-zukuri*. Lastly, I consulted the Asahi Shinbum database and translated Futoshi Koga’s critique to prove the influence of both men in the ETAT and ST.

After having demonstrated both men’s views and convictions, I proceeded by showing how these were specifically applied in both festivals. This is the content of my third chapter. Its objective was to connect the evidence in my second chapter and place this in the larger framework of the overall organization of the ETAT and ST to understand both men’s influence in the festivals. First, I looked into the roles of Kitagawa and Fukutake to gain a deeper

understanding of their involvement in the festivals. Nobuko Kanaya and Qu Meng's research have been my main sources. My reason for choosing them was that both have conducted (fairly recent) fieldwork in the ST. Afterwards, I examined how Kitagawa and Fukutake themselves view and use contemporary art in the ETAT and ST. Here too, I used (and/or translated) their personal statements written in the newspaper articles. In addition, I consulted Favell's article "Echigo-Tsumari and the Art of the Possible: The Fram Kitagawa Philosophy in Theory and Practice" (from Kitagawa's book 'Art Place Japan') for contextualizing "slow art" and Yiwen, Kelemen and Tresidder and Nicolas Bourriaud's theory about "relational art".

My final chapter consists of an analysis of three different artworks (two from the ST and one from the ETAT). This chapter's objective is to show how Kitagawa and Fukutake's convictions and philosophies are implemented in and/or reflected through artworks. For the discussion of my first artwork, I used both the artist's personal claims written in the JapanTimes article and his oral statement in a panel discussion in 2016. The former consists of his personal thoughts about the artwork in question whereas the latter was a statement of his own philosophy. I consulted and cited his statements from a YouTube video of 2016 for the panel discussion. The ST official site and Favell's research were used to provide a contextual background to the artwork and artist. Lastly, I translated Fukutake's statement written in the press kit to demonstrate the parallels between his and the artist's convictions. For my second artwork I used a similar approach, but the difference is that I heavily based my understanding and analysis of the artwork on the periodical magazine (of January 2019) of the Benesse Art Site Naoshima. This periodical magazine was edited by Fukutake himself, as the Benesse Art Site Naoshima is a company he owns. The context of my last artwork and Kitagawa's personal statement come from Kitagawa's book 'Art Place Japan' and the information on the ETAT's (Japanese) website. I analyzed all three artworks by considering and demonstrating how they reflect and visualize Kitagawa and Fukutake's personal convictions and thoughts about *satoyama*, *furusato* and *machi-zukuri*.

As a final point, I want to state the limitations of this thesis. The main limitation is that I have not conducted fieldwork in the ETAT and ST myself. I have tried to overcome this by using the findings of researchers who did conduct fieldwork in the sites in question. Moreover, I actively sought statements written and spoken by Kitagawa Fram, Fukutake Soichirō and the artists themselves or used the claims from researchers who did interview them. I did so to make up for interviewing them myself. Therefore, it would be best for future researchers to conduct fieldwork in the Niigata prefecture and/or Setouchi region to gain the best understanding of the organization and philosophies of the festivals. Despite the lack of personal fieldwork, I do think that this thesis has used a wide variety of (both primary and secondary) sources and

different research approaches to gain a deep understanding of the personal convictions of the general director and producer of the ETAT and ST.

## Chapter 1: Literature review

The ETAT has already been thoroughly examined as a strategy to revive under-/depopulated rural areas in Japan. Similarly, different scholars have previously discussed the importance of its “humans are part of nature” and *satoyama* philosophies. Yet, with the exception of sociologist Adrian Favell, there are few scholars who have focused especially on the views and ideologies of Kitagawa Fram. Favell discusses Kitagawa’s personal background, philosophy and objectives of hosting the ETAT in the larger context of the Triple Disasters of 2011 (the earthquake and tsunami which resulted in Fukushima’s nuclear meltdown in March 2011). He particularly focuses on how rural art festivals can provide alternate solutions for its ageing population, declining birthrate, and economic and political stagnation in comparison to the political ‘Cool Japan’ strategies of the government. The objective of ‘Cool Japan’ is the strengthening of economic, cultural and diplomatic relations between Japan and other countries through several aspects of Japanese culture (including manga and Japanese anime) and traditional heritage (Cabinet Office, n.d.). Favell states that the heavy emphasis on community-building and the traditional approaches of art festivals in countryside areas-, might be a better solution for these concerns. This is because rural art festival’s social interventions address Japan’s dysfunctions rather than trying to conceal them. Favell’s conviction is that Kitagawa’s anti-urbanization philosophy and idealized vision about reviving the countryside through art, might create a possible future for “post-Bubble, post-growth, post-disaster Japan” (Favell, 2011, p 167). The reason is that the art festival succeeds in providing opportunities for the “lost generation” youth and the “surplus” elderly population by reuniting elderly inhabitants and young (volunteers) in the countryside. Additionally, both are giving a ‘common objective’ (learning from each other’s lifestyles), despite their generational and cultural differences.

Suzanne Klien has focused on (young) volunteers and their role of “go-betweens” or intermediary persons from different (sites within) regions. These volunteers act as mediators between local residents and participants of art festivals (stakeholders and artists) during the collaboration in the ETAT (2010, 174). Her research (2010, 153-178) has demonstrated their importance to convey stakeholders’ intentions without neglecting the requirements of the local

community. Similarly, Nobuko Kanaya (2014, 77-78) has paid attention to the role of the 'kohebi', a large group of volunteers whose main constituents are youths from urban areas. Her research (ibid) showed that they enormously contributed to the diminishing of local inhabitants' initial resistance to the building of artworks on their properties. Therefore, ETAT's emphasis on locality, community-building and creating relational and local-friendly art projects in Japan can simultaneously be seen as a radical rejection of modernism and global art elitism. This elitism centers around "inserting 'Japanness' into a global concept or commercial discourse" (Favell, 2011, 151-25). Favell's elaboration and positive/encouraging views of the ETAT (and Kitagawa's) philosophy, goals and mission are mirrored in Kitagawa Fran's 'Art Place Japan, The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Vision to Reconnect Art and Nature'<sup>1</sup>. The book was (mainly) written by Kitagawa himself and was intended to explain the festival's principal objective. This contains the creation of a 'matsuri community' for remote rural area's elderly inhabitants as a substitution for their own distinct traditional community (Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 14). The key approach is 'machi-zukuri' (community-building) by creating opportunities for local residents to cooperate in artworks by involving them in dialogues with artists and organizers. The intention is to discuss the artists' intentions and plans for their art projects. According to Kitagawa, every step in the process of creating art projects involves consulting the locals or keeping their needs in mind.

Yet, the positive effects of his machi-zukuri approach are strongly contrasted in Klien's findings. She (2021, 172-174) has also conducted research on collaborations between locals and urban artists in the ETAT. Klien concluded that locals of Tokamachi City are actually often excluded from creative projects. Even when they are included, their contribution to (the end result of) the collaborative project is largely overshadowed by urban artists. John Rippey's book review of 'Art Place Japan' states a similar point: "A third common characteristic of the works is their continuity with the local culture and consistency with the folkways. (...) Many of the works reference or celebrate everyday agricultural or household tasks, and some incorporate the participation of local citizens" (Rippey, 2017, 148). His choice of the word "some" suggests that there are many artworks in which local citizens do *not* participate. Qu Meng's examination of the General Reports of four editions of the ST (2010-2019) confirms that the locals (who participated in the questionnaires) perceived their lack of participation as a negative impact of the Triennale. This view was shared by inhabitants of Naoshima and Teshima (Meng, 2021,

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<sup>1</sup> *Art Place Japan: The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Vision to Reconnect Art and Nature*, the English version of Kitagawa Fran's book 『アート・プレイス・ジャパン——越後妻有アート・トリエンナーレそして芸術と自然を再びつなぐための思想』 in which he introduces the reader to the ETAF.

49-65). The findings of Klien, Rippey and Meng are significant to take into account, since they provide a more neutral view of the ETAT and ST by stating the negative aspects as well.

Most of the academic literature which takes the ETAT as a case study, has focused on *satoyama* and its role and significance in the festival. Lana Tran's research examines the role of the ETAT from a museological perspective in which she focuses on human-nature relationships (Tran, 2019, p 27). Her findings show that *satoyama*'s definition in the festival is placed in a broader context of national and regional identity. This is obtained through the ETAT's deliberate strategy of interpreting the harmonious relationship with nature as "a continuity with an archeological past" (Tran, 2018, 42). She argues that, in doing so, the art festival's approach sustains both the festival and regional and national identities (Tran, 2018, 46). Ewa Matchoka puts *satoyama* in the larger framework of contemporary art's geopolitics in which she specifically focuses on the antagonisms between the local and the global (Matchoka, 2018, 106). Matchoka's work states that the ETAT emphasizes locality and differentiation from Eurocentric approaches and perceptions concerning environmental art. Yet, her findings demonstrate that the festival has nevertheless been largely influenced by global standards. These include the "contemporary global art discourse and the institutional framework of the international biennial" (Matchoka, 2018, 112; 117).

Despite the extensive research into *satoyama* in Art Triennale, the importance of *furusato* has been seemingly neglected (in previous literature). Robertson (1988, 494-518) already discussed *furusato* as a signifier for nostalgia through its adoption in politics and Japanese society, while Morrison's research (2013, 1-27) showed its appropriation as 'a home of the heart'. However, the importance of the *furusato* ideology in the context of art festivals (particularly in the ETAT and ST) has not extensively been addressed. This thesis will therefore show the influence of *satoyama* and *furusato* on the convictions of Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soichirō. A second gap in previous literature is the lack of research specifically focused on Fukutake's philosophies. Meng has done extensive research on (and fieldwork in) the ST. His findings demonstrate that the combination of tourism and art education enabled possibilities for the revitalization and strengthening of social bonds through the creation of "social innovation for the island community" (Meng, 2020, 248). Nevertheless, his research concentrates more on theoretical and interdisciplinary aspects in art festivals and rural revitalization instead of Fukutake Soichirō's ideologies and their use in the ST. Lastly, the majority of the literature focuses on either the ETAT or ST instead of comparing both of them. Both art festivals share considerable parallels, due to the implementation of Kitagawa's philosophies in many different art festivals, including the ST. Therefore, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the shared aspects of Kitagawa and Fukutake's (personal) ideologies and how their similar views of rural revitalization are implemented in (artworks of) the ETAT and ST.

## Chapter 2: Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soīchiro’s views and convictions

### 2.1. Satoyama and furusato: explanation and implementation

Kitagawa Fram is the (general) director of both the ETAT itself and the Art Front Gallery in Tokyo (Kanaya, 2014, 77-78; Klien, 2010, 115). His philosophy’s main concept, on which the ETAT is based, is “humans are part of nature” or *ningen ha shizen ni naihou sareru* in Japanese (人間は自然に内包される) (gaiyō, Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2010-2019; Kanaya, 2014, 78), which is centered on the *satoyama* ideology. Nowadays *satoyama*’s meaning has become broader and represents the small part of remaining natural environments. This is linked to (an awareness of) the need to preserve natural sites from fast-growing urbanization and to reduce environmental destruction in urban areas, because it results in the loss of nature (Takeuchi, et al., 2003, 9-10). The development of suburbs combined with rapid economic growth in the 1960s led to a growing consciousness of the need to protect *satoyama* landscapes. Hillsides containing coppice woodlands and dissected uplands needed to make space for the development of large residential spaces. This in turn spurred the interest in *satoyama* landscapes and popularized *satoyama* as a “traditional Japanese rural landscape” (Takeuchi, et al., 2003, 9-10). As the conservation of *satoyama* landscapes requires proper management, the affluence of *satoyama*’s natural spaces is (arguably) enhanced by both its own original natural diversity and the involvement of man (ibid). The positive effects of human intervention to preserve the ecosystem are stated in another definition:

“(…) Satoyama indicates regions in which the balance of the ecosystem is attained by moderate human intervention, and also includes agricultural lands, where people are adjoining in mountain forests, and villages” (Shokakugan Inc, JapanKnowledge, 2001-2022).

The ETAT’s website specifically states that the Niigata prefecture is still overflowing with “*satoyama* life”. This is visible through agricultural activities, resulting in people’s engagement with the land, and the natural location of artworks throughout the year. Inhabitants have also led their lives in close-knit communities while searching for and investigating the inseparable relations between humans and nature. By focusing on how humans are involved in nature, the ETAT’s regional development has advanced with the aim of becoming a model in which this possibility is represented. Kitagawa himself phrases (the importance of) *satoyama* as “the border zone landscape of cultivated, arable land between the forested mountains, is Japan’s unique and traditional contribution to the concept of sustainability, based upon interconnections between people and ecology in a seasonal landscape that is exemplified in

Echigo-Tsumari” (Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 49). Yet, Kitagawa’s philosophy is almost identical to the primary long-term objectives stated in the ‘Japanese Basic Environment Plan’ in 1994 rather than being an original concept. In here, *satoyama* landscapes are described as: areas consisting of considerable secondary nature which do not restrict the coexistence of humans and wild animals and where human activities, including farming and forestry, are shaping the natural environment. This is a reflection of an idyllic Japanese landscape which has been imagined for a long time (Takeuchi, et al., 2003, 11).

Fukutake Soīchirō is the general producer of the ST and the president of Fukutake Foundation (Meng, 2021, 9), which is referred to as the ‘public interest incorporated foundation Fukutake Foundation’ or Kōekizaidanhōjin Fukutake Zaidan in Japanese (公益財団法人福武財団; Kanaya, 2014, 77; Meng, 2021, 2). Considering the background of its establishment, it can be expected that the connection between humans and nature is also expressed in the ST (and in Fukutake’s convictions). Yet, there are remarkable differences in the content depending on which language (Japanese or English<sup>2</sup>) visitors choose on the ST’s website. The information provided in Japanese is far more elaborate and extensive compared to the information written in English. The Japanese website explicitly states that “its beautiful nature and inhabitants have mingled and now reverberate with each other in the islands of the Setouchi region”(Setouchi Kokusai Geijustusai, umi no fukken, 2022) whereas this information is entirely absent in the English webpages. The term *satoyama* is not specifically mentioned, but the (Japanese) website states that “the Triennale teaches us the existence of people’s origins, who intermingled farming, industry and commerce, while thinking about the prospect of the future of human life on earth” (ibid). Aspects of the *satoyama* ideology in both art festivals are thus a mix of environmental/governmental policy reflections and Kitagawa and Fukutake’s personal perceptions of the meaning of *satoyama*.

However, I suggest that the primary necessity of human intervention in art festivals is about the necessity to sustain traditional (*satoyama* and *furusato*) communities rather than preserving nature and *satoyama* landscapes. The reason therefore is that neglected and damaged natural sites can also perfectly revive themselves without human intervention (Brebbia, Longhurst, et al.; 2018, 327). This is especially the case when considering that human intervention has done more harm to nature (e.g. contribution to global warming, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, etc.) than improving it. The “humans are part of

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<sup>2</sup> Choosing Chinese and Korean are also options, but my discussing remains limited to the comparison of the content written in Japanese and English, since I cannot read Chinese or Korean.



nature” philosophy and argument that human intervention is indispensable to protect *satoyama* landscapes is thus, in terms of natural preservation, only partly true. Stressing interconnectedness between humans and nature, and people’s engagement with nature makes sense when considering the need to preserve locality, traditionality and communality by emphasizing local rural landscape’s beauty. Furthermore, the main emphasis of artworks in the ETAT and ST is the application of local, traditional and site-specific elements and Kitagawa and Fukutake’s philosophy rather than focusing on ecology and environmental sustainability. This does not mean that these aspects are entirely neglected, as many artworks are composed of natural or environmentally friendly resources (Cwierotka; Matchoka, 2018, 224). Their main message, however, is the visualization of Kitagawa and Fukutake’s convictions. This will be further explained in the following chapters (3 and 4).

Changing the identity of de-/underpopulated rural areas means changing current (negative) perceptions to a more appealing one to revitalize the region. In addition to *satoyama*, *furusato* plays a crucial role in enhancing associations with the countryside. There is a strong connection between *furusato* and nostalgia, because it evokes feelings of warmth and fuzziness. According to Robertson, *furusato* signifies the generalized nature of a site rather than indicating a specific place. Contrarily, Morrison argues that the feelings of warmth one experiences-, can be connected to one’s own hometown or to another place without any relations to one’s birth-place. She does agree, however, that *furusato* carries a largely emotional message with it, due to its evocation of feelings over factual bases (Morrison, 2013, 2-3). Both authors agree that *furusato* strongly connects the association of a place where someone can return to when necessary and/or desired (Robertson, 1988, 501; Morrison, 2013, 2). In short, *furusato* implies a sentimental site triggered by particular feelings rather than an actual geographic place. This is important, because this idea plays a crucial role within both art festivals. Firstly, the total surface of both the ETAT and ST encompasses different rural districts within the Niigata prefecture and different islands of the Setouchi region. Both festivals can be perceived as sites which transcend ‘fixed’ geographic boundaries by uniting regions (and islands) with (slightly) different (cultural and historical) backgrounds. They focus on interaction with the landscape and local people, and the engagement with arts rather than place-specificity.

Secondly, Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soïchirō both hold strong feelings towards *furusato* in (depopulated) rural areas. Before Japan became urbanized, the countryside was the home of 90% of the population. This explains why traditionality and cultural authenticity are strongly infused in the *furusato* ideology (Robertson, 1988; 495-96; Morrison, 2013, 6-7). However, the mass-migration of countryside youth to large cities to achieve their goals-, has led to the countryside’s deterioration since the 1950s (Morrison, 2013, 5-7). In comparison to the city, where more than 90% of the population resides (O’Neill, 2022, Statista) the countryside can

be identified by its shortcomings: a place ‘without a future’ and with very limited job opportunities. The countryside is thus “defined in terms of what is not rather than what is” (Morrison, 2013, 7). One strategy to change this negative perception is to do the opposite: to find traditional rural areas’ positive aspects and benefits and contrast these with urban site’s negative aspects. An effective tactic is changing perceptions of the city to being ‘mere’ occupational places where one ensures self-achievement, especially in economic or materialistic terms, thereby, stressing its unfavorable aspects as a “cold, artificial and dehumanizing” place (Morrison, 2013, 4). Fukutake in particular holds noticeably strong convictions about large cities and metropolises:

“In cities, nowadays, there is no need to see indiscriminate killing, abandonment of children in child-rearing and a complete indifference towards one’s neighbors [to realize that] it is not a spiritually enriching place where one belongs to at all.<sup>3</sup> Children have no more playgrounds where they come into contact with an abundant nature and they are already thrown in and brainwashed by the economic center of a competitive world from a small age.” (Fukutake Soīchirō in BASN プレスキット, 2015, 3)

Unsurprisingly, for Kitagawa, *satoyama* has a strong connotation with the loss of rustic traditions, since (contemporary) townspeople are unable to live a lifestyle other than “an alienated modern life” (Favell, 2011, 150). Therefore, one of his objectives is the reattachment of urban people’s regional roots through the Triennale by taking them away from the cities and attracting them to the countryside (ibid). Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soīchirō are thus basing their art festivals on the representation of rustic sites by highlighting the aspects which are absent (or not found) in suburbs and metropolises. These encompass: a (genuine) community, interaction with locality and traditionality, creating meaningful interaction between people, compassion, companionship, warmth, etc. By using this strategy, the countryside becomes romanticized as a kind of ‘common, traditional’ home where rural *and* urban inhabitants can go to. The catalysis to bring them ‘home’ are the feelings evoked and the effects created through the artworks in the ETAT and ST (see chapter 4).

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<sup>3</sup> The original text uses the word ‘kokoroyutakana ibasho’ (心豊かな居場所) which can be translated as “a place which is affluent for the soul”, but ‘ibasho’ can also be interpreted as “a place where one belongs” or “fits in” <https://iisho.org/search/%E5%B1%85%E5%A0%B4%E6%89%80>

## 2.2. Pro-rural and anti-urbanization visions and strategies: Kitagawa and Fukutake's personal convictions

The idealized aspects of 'traditional countryside life(styles)' found in *satoyama* and *furusato* ideologies are actually also a reflection of Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soichiro's personal convictions. The reason why they value these ideologies so much is mainly due to their strong sense of rebellion against the paradigm of contemporary society. According to them, society is solely focused on obtaining economic growth (Kanaya, 2014, 77-8). Thus, they reject this paradigm and desire to change this (standard) by holding a 'different' kind of art festival which prioritizes idealistic values and philosophies over economic ones. Considering their objective (to reshape the countryside's identity and to recreate Japanese society,) it is understandable that they rely so heavily on *satoyama* and *furusato*. Firstly, both promote and stress awareness of the conservation of nature (and tradition) against modernization and urbanization (something that both Kitagawa and Fukutake strongly advocate). Secondly, these philosophies idealize past, traditional concepts. This allows Kitagawa and Fukutake to highlight the consequences for cultural identity, social, political and psychological changes which are 'suffering from' modernization and urbanization (Morrison, 2013, 23). Both men hold strong opinions about the harmful outcomes of modernization and urbanization:

“When [I looked at] the present situation in large cities/metropolises, [and] at the ways of life of the people from the Setouchi region, I remembered my strong doubts/suspensions of the current state of the ‘creation and destruction’ of civilization, which became the base of modernization. In other words, ‘a civilization which destroys existing things, continues to build new things and keeps enlarging.’ We must change [our current civilization] from ‘a civilization which repeats destruction and creation’, [a] so-called [civilization], ‘which takes advantage of existing things and produces non-existent things’ to ‘a civilization which continues and grows.’ Otherwise, we cannot inherit and develop our culture, and the things we created will eventually become erased by future generations.” (Fukutake Soichiro on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in BASN プレスキット, 2015, 3)

“In subsequent decades, the government even ordered that the remaining members of rural communities should stop farming too and move to the cities, where their work and lives could be more efficiently managed. These shortsighted and imbalanced policies of prioritizing the urban over the rural not only fatally weakened the country, but also robbed elderly families of their dignity and purpose in life. Their agricultural work was an important part of their identity and being stripped of it — which was to deny their years spent cultivating and learning the skills of the trade, living with nature, and creating a way

of life—, was devastating. I imagine the elder's sense of loss (.....) .” (Kitagawa Fram, n.d., in ‘Art Place Japan’, Fram, Matsuo, Monsma; 2015, 10).

Fukutake's reasoning is understandable when considering that smelting work factories emitting sulphureous acid gas were built on Naoshima and Oojima. Additionally, Teshima became the victim of illegal industrial waste dumping starting in 1978. These occurrences were severely harmful for both the natural landscape and local residents, especially for the inhabitants of Teshima who had to defy the perception of their home being a ‘garbage island’ (Meng, 2020, 250-51; BASN プレスキット, 2015, 3). Fukutake's conviction demonstrates that Japan's contemporary civilization is a threat to the preservation and existence of traditional culture. Modernization's unlimited desire for growth and renovation is always at the expense of things which originally (pre-)existed. Kitagawa's claim adds that modern approaches focused on developing urbanization flourish at the expense of locals' traditional and ancestral identity. The statement also reflects his personal feelings of dissatisfaction with governments' policies prioritizing urbanization. This can be interpreted in the following manner. According to him, underscoring urbanization equalizes both damaging rural inhabitant's local identity and endangering Japan's national identity as a country where ‘the love of nature’ by the Japanese is highly valued. In other words, Kitagawa's criticism implies that neglecting the rural is actually also neglecting or even threatening a part of Japan's cultural identity (namely *satoyama*). Conversely, this means that prioritizing the rural over the urban would be expected to strengthen Japan and regain elderly inhabitants' dignity, purpose and legacy. Therefore I propose the following: the significance of applying *furusato* and *satoyama* values for Kitagawa and Fukutake is an attempt to manage a society in which Japan's national and cultural identity as a ‘nature loving’ country is protected and maintained by the ‘art community’ created through the art festivals.

Another major aspect applied in both Triennale is the portrayal and interpretation of the ‘new furusato’ ideology outlined in several people's articles in the Asahi Shinbun newspaper. According to a civil servant, the following features were indispensable for a site to be considered *furusato*; a high esteem for traditions and lifestyles, and the (further) developing of familial bonds and feelings of solidarity in the region. This is achieved by reflecting and passing on a town's/village's local history to future generations through storytelling. Despite some substantial differences, all the writers agreed that ‘new furusato’ entails the recollection of the “affective relationships and sociabilities presumed to have mediated and moderated life in ‘old villages’”(Robertson, 1988, 501-2). All these values are specifically visible in Kitagawa and Fukutake's ‘machizukuri’ (community-building) strategy. ‘Machi-zukuri’ both revitalizes de-/underpopulated rural areas and reflects both men's own values. According to Eimi Tagore-Erwin (2018, 15), art festivals utilize the following approach to attain this objective. Firstly,

participants include both national and international artists. They are expected to collaborate with local residents and to apply local materials when creating site-specific artworks. Secondly, artworks are scattered in different regions and/or towns and span a large amount of the total surface of the festival. The intention is to show visitors the artworks by letting them travel throughout the (whole) region. Thirdly, art festivals, including the ETAT and ST, heavily rely on the support of volunteers to manage and maintain artworks during the years in which there are no festivals, to greet visitors, etc. Kitagawa and Fukutake personally express their (own) principles of ‘machi-zukuri’:

“[T]he objective of economic activity is not the money; it is rather the creation of culture, the creation of shared communities. This is the polar opposite of the way of financial capitalism works.” (Fukutake Soïchirō, August 20<sup>th</sup> 2010, Japan Times).

“(…) This story isn’t just about ageing. It is, in part, about the result of not having a community, neighbors, someone to help shovel snow, because the next generation has left. This is how a village breaks down. (...) [I] decided that the triennial’s purpose needed to be primarily this: to give the elderly the *matsuri* (festival) experience once every three years in a community that no longer has enough people to have its own traditional annual *matsuri*. This is the central premise that the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale is based on.” (Kitagawa Fram, n.d., in Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 10; 14)

These statements demonstrate that rural revitalization’s larger purpose is the (re-)establishment of an existing community (consisting of elderly inhabitants of agrarian sites) and the creation of a shared community (brought together through contemporary art).

Despite the high emphasis on ‘machi-zukuri’, collaboration, etc. Kitagawa and Fukutake are actively managing the society they want to recreate through their respective roles as general producer and director. To begin with, artists can (only) participate in two ways: 1) through Kitagawa’s personal selection and invitation of (inter)national artists with a proven track record or 2) through the judgement of the public advertisement category by the Executive Committee, of which Kitagawa and Fukutake are members (Tachikawa Kotoko, 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, Asahi Shinbun database; Kanaya, 2014, 76). This implies that artists are chosen for their abilities to reflect Kitagawa and Fukutake’s ideologies in their artworks. The transformation of the Niigata prefecture and the Setouchi region into cultural landscapes visualizing traditional, idealized countryside lifestyles and enhancing natural landscapes are all reflected in contemporary art (see 3.2. and chapter 4). Moreover, Kitagawa ensures that his vision is understood by volunteers, who need to mediate and sometimes even persuade locals to allow artists to build artworks on their properties (Klien, 2010, 17; Kanaya, 2014, 78). Art festival connoisseur and professor in the College of Fine Arts (Tokyo) Futoshi Koga criticized the ST and stated that:

“There is an over-reliance on the Fukutake Foundation and Kitagawa Fram. There are many permanent artworks from the Fukutake Foundation. I am worried that there will be an increasing amount of artworks which will (therefore) be evaded. “I saw these works last time, so I don’t need to see them again.” (Fukutake Soīchirō, August 26th 2014, Asahi Shimbun)

Therefore, he proposes appointing a different director for each festival and having a clear theme:

“The significance of the Triennale (which is held every 3 years) is to see the trends of contemporary art from this time. This meaning will become lost, at this rate.” (ibid)

Futoshi’s critique implies that the way in which Kitagawa and Fukutake organize the art festival is too concerned with achieving their (personal) objectives. He also suggests that they have forgotten the festival’s original intention, which is hosting an art festival which focuses on displaying the most recent (types of) contemporary art. Bringing artworks from his personal collection to Naoshima (see Favell, 2011, 160-61; Meng, 2021, vi (6)) also reflects Fukutake’s personal art preferences instead of that of the local inhabitants’ or visitors’. Hence, it becomes clear that, in practice, both the ETAT and ST are organized to reflect its general directors’ and producers’ values and convictions rather than solely those of local inhabitants’.

## Chapter 3: Reflection of Kitagawa and Fukutake's convictions in art festivals

### 3.1. Elaboration on Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soïchiro's roles in both Triennale

Although, Kitagawa's and Fukutake's positions are seemingly separate, they are actually intertwined in both the ST and ETAT. The Art Front Gallery and the Fukutake Foundation are collaborating and co-directing the ETAT and ST, which makes Fukutake and Kitagawa the general producer and director of *both* festivals (Kanaya, 2014, 77-78; Meng, 2021, 37). Fukutake has also been the ETAT's co-partner since 2003 and its sponsor in 2006 (Favell, 2011, 154-55) while Kitagawa was the ST's general director in 2010 (Kanaya, 2014, 77-78) and in the festivals in 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015. Therefore, Kitagawa's role is to ensure that the philosophy of the ETAT is shared and maintained in the ST as well (Favell, 2011, 161). Yet, both Art Triennale are not solely the product of two men sharing similar convictions. Instead, they are the result of a (complex) partnership between prefectural governments, (non-)profit organizations, large top-down art galleries and private foundations. Both the ETAT and ST are an outcome of what Nobuko Kanaya calls a 'Public Private Partnership' or PPP (Kanaya, 2014, 76). A Public Private Partnership is essentially a public project connected to government direction on the maintenance of social capital and service provision related to welfare education, culture, etc. It also arranges various methods via which private entities can participate in aspects-, such as project planning, enforcement and the financial burden. Private entities include both profit-making organizations and non-profit organizations. Expectations are that there will be possibilities in PPP to adopt innovative ideas in public projects, which will also result in the augmentation of the standard of public service. This is due to private entities being allowed to participate from the planning states onwards.

Additionally, there are tendencies in PPP to imitate cooperative systems centered on NPO's (Non-Profit Organizations) and civic entities, such as public institutions and civilian activity groups. However, there are various entities related to the ST. These include: local governments, small-scale entities, NPO's and profit-making organizations (ibid).<sup>4</sup> PPP in the ETAT consists of a forged partnership between the Art Front Gallery and prefectural and provincial governments. Subsequently, the festival has been funded by public (municipal and prefectural) and private associations. The prefectural revitalization incorporated the ETAT in the so-called 'New Niigata Risō Plan' of 1994. This plan was part of government led initiatives in the 1990s for the development of local communities, including community building, regional

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<sup>4</sup> own translation

development and provincial revitalization (Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 11). Its objective was similar to the 1998 'Echigo-Tsumari Art Necklace Seibi Koso Plan' which aimed to enhance the attraction of site-specific features, including the natural landscape and (local) culture and tradition. This would lead to the amelioration of Niigata's informal policy, a sparking of short- and long-term visitors' interest in the area, and the cultivation of locals' attachment to their home region. In other words, the ETAT's inauguration was part of these two government plans' central activities (Klien, 2010, 154-56 and Tsuboike, August 2009, The Japan Foundation, 2009). Since the ST has been (re-)modeled after the ETAT and maintains Kitagawa and Fukutake's core values and philosophies, both ST officials and the media perceive the festival as an effective example of revitalizing depopulated rural communities (Meng, 2021, vi; 3).

### 3.2. The role of art in the ETAT and ST

One can ask the question why (exactly) contemporary art should be used to improve the current demographic situation in Japan. Art can trigger rural revitalization for several reasons. Firstly, it can revive remote rural areas through tourism. Contrary to other art festivals in Japan, there is an increasing amount of those, including the ETAT and ST, which value the promotion of regional development through tourism. The latter's mission especially intends to solve the depopulation in the Seto Inland Sea's islands by utilizing cultural heritage, attracting visitors to the region and obtaining tourists funds (Jiyukokuminsha, 2019; Meng, 2021, 2). Secondly, and more importantly, is Kitagawa's perception that art is a powerful catalyst which unites people and interconnects divided things. According to him art "reveals and creates relations between people and landscape, the environment, the past and the future" (Julian Worrall, August 20<sup>th</sup> 2010). These features are particularly visible in 'slow art' (Favel, 2016, 115). 'Slow art' obliges visitors of consuming arts to slow down, socialize with the local population and to connect with the natural landscape. It is one of the main pillars in both Kitagawa's and Fukutake's philosophy which encompasses key aspects for agricultural revival in both festival's depopulated areas. Attracting short-and long-term visitors to the Niigata prefecture and the Setouchi is important. Yet, according to Kitagawa, the role of contemporary art is something that requires the visitor's effort to experience and view, as it is located in the harshest and most atypical sites. Therefore, art embodies more than mere pre-packed 'tourist attraction experiences' (Favell, 2011, 146). Kitagawa's vision is mirrored in Fukutake's claim:

"We are revitalizing depopulated and damaged islands along with local residents through contemporary art. It is not a matter of building a large number of community facilities



(hakomono) and making them the centerpiece of tourist attractions.” (Fukutake Sōichirō in 2010-2013 in Kanaya, 2014, 77-78)

‘Slow art’ also challenges visitors to find appreciation in their (active) search for art in neglected schools, old houses located on hills or uninhabited fields (ibid). In other words, ‘slow art’ is not really about art itself, but about how it is used. Hence, it considers what art can do to improve the current demographic and economic situation in the countryside and, eventually, to reshape the society. It is therefore insufficient to make ‘site-specific’ art by placing artworks in these depopulated areas with these philosophies in mind alone. Revitalization is about *how* these projects can create meaningful interactions between local residents and outsiders. Furthermore, several processes connect people with “key activities, institutions and places” to help establish community relations (Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016, 140). The inhabitants of Teshima (ST) also clearly expressed their main concern about the purpose of art, namely creating interaction and exchanging knowledge leading to social vitality (rather than the art itself) (Meng, 2020, 257). People from different generations (elderly residents and young people, who are primarily volunteers and university students (Meng, 2020, 261; Liwen, Klemen and Tressider, 2018, 1766-1783)), occupational, geographical and cultural backgrounds (especially in the case of international artists) are united through art. This can be interpreted as reshaping Japanese society and contributing to the creation of one ‘global art community’ in rustic sites.

Place-based workshops and activities in both Triennale provide visitors with education about rural environments and encourage visitors and inhabitants to learn from each other, and exchange information and/or suggestions for revival which have a lasting impact on the inhabitants(‘ ways of life) (Benesse Art Site Naoshima, n.d.). Practically, this means that art projects also need to be ‘relational art’ undertakings to embody ‘slow art’. Preferably, these are organized by (small-scale) bottom-up businesses whose projects engage with locals themselves and correspond to their ways of live and visualize their lived experiences. This is the opposite of top-down, corporate style approaches organized by (political and economic) operators who are ‘outside’ the local community (Meng, 2020, 252-262; Favell, 2011, 164-65). According to Nicolas Bourriaud, relational art “creates a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity. (...) [R]elational art produces encounters between people. Through these encounters, meaning is elaborated collectively, rather than in the space of individual consumption” (Wikipedia, 2021). In short, successful rural revitalization needs art to be relational and educational. In terms of the former, art needs to include traditional knowledge about the area and, ways of life and/or consist of place-based activities informing visitors about the local history, culture and ways of life in the areas. This is important, because visitors can learn about the local community’s lived experiences and daily activities and can

understand their necessary needs. In other words, what locals need to successfully revitalize their hometown without neglecting their requirements (Yiwen, Kelemen and Tresidder, 2018, 1777). Hence, art acts as a catalyst for creating interactions between locals and non-locals/visitors. This simultaneously reinforces communal ties and forges in locals a sense of belonging to their hometown areas.

## Chapter 4: Implementation of Kitagawa and Fukutake's convictions in artworks

### 4.1. Artworks as manifestations of the ETAT and ST's philosophies

“The important point is that building megaliths establishes a particular form of ordering and domesticating in the landscape bound up with stressing ancestral presences through architectural orders. (...) In this manner the natural order of the environment could be incorporated within the social organization of the landscape. The tombs incorporate and exploit the symbolic powers of their settings to create specific experience effects on populations entering, coming out of and moving around them.” (Tilley, 1993, 80-81)

Tilley's research about the use of megaliths in Sweden holds surprising parallels with the use of artworks in the ETAT and ST. The contemporary artworks do not emphasize ancestral presences, but they do (re-)order and domesticate rural landscapes. Depending on the type of artworks, artists are trying to connect past memories of the places themselves (such as abandoned houses and schools) or to (re-)evoke the memories of people who used to live there. In this sense, it is arguable that artworks in both Triennale incorporate lived memories and experiences to create “specific experience effects” on visitors. In other words, existing, natural landscapes are recreated in social spaces through the creation of site-specific experience effects. These intend to visualize Kitagawa and Fukutake's philosophy as best as they possibly can.

A clear example is Yanagi Yukinori's (1959-present) artwork ‘Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum’ (ST). Yanagi collaborated with architect Sambuichi Hiroshi and transformed Inujima's former (unused) copper refinery to an eco-sensitive underground museum in 2008 (see fig 3). The copper refinery was built on the island with local capital funds in 1909 as a measure against smoke pollution and for the benefit of transporting raw materials. Yet, a crash in the copper prices resulted in its closure after only ten years (Benesse Art Site Naoshima, n.d.). The revival of this refinery implements the Triennale's philosophy of creating a site-specific, relational artwork which embodies and preserves part of the island's history and heritage. What is more

interesting, is that the artist has implemented themes of Mishima Yukio (1925-1970), a writer known for his pride in Japan's traditional culture and resistance to Westernization and modernization (Wikipedia, 2022; Benesse Art Site Naoshima, n.d.). A possible reason for choosing Mishima's motifs might be Yanagi's personal (artistic) background, since he himself emphasized an "ambiguously critical Japanese nationalism" in his artworks during the 1980-1990s (Favell, 2016, 110). However, choosing Yanagi to revive Inujima's copper factory is by no means coincidental. Yanagi was already active in the Setouchi region since 1990 and Fukutake was involved in the discussion of his plans to transform the copper refinery (Favell, 2016, 110-11). Yanagi Yukinori inspired Fukutake Sōichirō himself to "find" his mission to revitalize the Setouchi region through art, due to Yanagi's ambition to transform Inujima itself into a whole artwork (ibid). Therefore, it is no wonder that the two share overlapping ideologies about urbanization's negative aspects and admiration of remote (countryside) areas. In a speech in the 'Innovative City Forum'<sup>5</sup>, Yanagi explains his reasons for working in the Seto Inland Sea region:

"(...) I'm active in a remote island area, and I don't feel too good about Tokyo. The reason why is because there is too much centralization. Even cultural aspects are all centralized and that means that they are exploiting a lot of things from the original areas, such as the labors, nature and even culture. And so, therefore I rebel against that and so I decided to exile myself to an island and I'm carrying out a project on a remote island." (Innovative City Forum (0:19-1:00))

Yanagi does not explicitly mention any dissatisfaction with (the negative aspects of) modernization itself, but his statement clearly shows another "malfunction" of large cities which threatens the existing aspects of original areas, including their nature and culture. In other words, his opinion clearly mirrors Fukutake's that contemporary civilization, focused on growth and advancement, threatens and destroys "(pre-)existing things" and is worth rebelling against (see 2.2.). Additionally, his belief about the meaning of his artwork also clearly fits into the ST's mentality. Yanagi explains:

"I've chosen subjects including 'light and shadow' and 'past and future' as part of my theme, which is based on Japan's mythological Sun Goddess and our present day', he clarifies. 'These site-specific projects are meant to highlight the contrast between today's frenzied urban consumption culture with this depopulated, isolated island community and the original Japanese ways of life – standing in awe of the gods while

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<sup>5</sup> A forum which unites "opinion leaders from around the world to participate in a dialogue about the future of cities", <https://icf.academyhills.com/2016/en/about/>

respecting ancestors and nature -with few wants.” (Yanagi Yukinori, August 6th 2010, Japan Times)

His citation implies that the “original Japanese ways of life”, still exist in Inujima’s (depopulated) community today. This highly resembles Fukutake’s conviction that:

“Many of the islands of the Setouchi region are now considered to be remote and depopulated islands, but they have not been washed away by the waves of modernization, [because] the psychological mindset and way of living that the Japanese originally had, remained on the original landscape of the region.” (Fukutake Soīchirō, in 2010 in プレスキ ット, 2015, 3-4).

Fukutake refers to people’s customs, interaction with their neighbors and a self-sufficient lifestyle in which they “directly accepted wealth from nature” (ibid) as the “original lifestyles and mindset”. Yet, he portrays an idealized depiction of the country side lifestyle, since these “original countryside lifestyles” only reflects peaceful aspects: people who “receive” blessings from nature. This conviction completely negates that people themselves needed to work hard to receive these “blessings”. It also neglects any hardship included in a lifestyle where people are living from the land. Yanagi’s personal rejection of Tokyo’s centralization combined with the meaning of his artwork reflect Fukutake (and Kitagawa’s) visions in which cities’ negative aspects are contrasted with the countryside’s positive features. In short, his vision reflects Fukutake and Kitagawa’s (ideal) *furusato* and *satoyama* values and strategies.



Fig 3. Yanagi, Yukinori. *Inujima Seirenscho Bijutsukan* 犬島製錬所美術館 [Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum]. 2008, Inujima (Setouchi Triennale), Benesse Art Site Naoshima, [benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/seirenscho.html](http://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/seirenscho.html) . Accessed 11 June 2022.

A second artwork which fits very well into the (philosophy of the) ST is Christian Boltanski's (1944-2021) "Les Archives du Cœur" (Teshima, 2010). The artwork itself is actually a museum, consisting of three different rooms: the "Heart Room", the "Recording Room" and the "Listening Room" (see fig 4). The first room contains a device of electric lights which switch on and off in the rhythm of the recorded heartbeats. The second room gives visitors the opportunity to record their own heartbeats whereas the third one allows them to listen and search for heartbeat recordings from visitors from over the world (プレスキット, 2015, 22-23).

The artist's vision about the artwork is that:

"There is an island in faraway Japan with thousands of heartbeats. It is very simple. What is important to know is that the place exists and that your heartbeat is in Japan." (Christian Boltanski, August 6th 2010, Japan Times)

Boltanski's statement can be interpreted in different ways. The literal interpretation is that the actual recording of a visitor's heartbeat is located in Japan, on the island of Teshima. Yet,

visitor's heartbeat recordings and their personal messages on the database are actually essential parts of the artwork (プレスキット, 2015, 22). Therefore, another interpretation is that the artwork connects your personal heartbeat with the thousands of heartbeats of other visitors and inhabitants. This is reflected in a statement of an American visitor, who revealed that the artwork had a large emotional impact on him. He stated that:

“The process of coming to this place made my experience here even more special. I realized that nature is present here, people are here, and *Les Archives du Coeur* truly belongs to the community.” (Benesse Art Site Naoshima, periodical magazine of January 2019, 5)

Yet, the first person who recorded their heartbeats, was actually a resident from Teshima herself. Recording her heartbeat became a special memory, because the artwork's location enabled her to recollect memories from her childhood (Benesse Art Site Naoshima, periodical magazine, January 2019, 5-7). However, the art project also holds a special meaning for a woman from Tokyo. Her positive experience in the “Heart Room” (in 2016) comforted her, because she found a place she could return to whenever her life in Tokyo became challenging (ibid). The feelings of warmth and comfort she felt through the artwork resonates with Kitagawa and Fukutake's *furusato* ideology and strategy of making the ST a “welcoming home” in the countryside for every visitor (see chapter 2). Moreover, Boltanski himself highly values the aim to “preserve somebody” (Birmingham, 2010). His objective to preserve visitor and inhabitant's memories through his artwork resembles Kitagawa and Fukutake's aim to sustain the rural community's memories through “specific experience effects”. Recording your heartbeat in “Les Archives du Coeur” makes you part of this “new” island community by deliberately sharing your own heartbeat with others. Recording an incredibly personal aspect of yourself (your heartbeat) and listening to the thousands of other heartbeats, facilitates a sense of belonging to others. Everybody can understand the sound of a heartbeat, regardless of one's personal, geographical or cultural background. In short, Boltanski's art project fully implements Kitagawa's vision that contemporary art unites people in the Japanese countryside and gives them a “home” away from home.



Fig 4. Boltanski, Christian. *Les Archives du Cœur*. 2010, Teshima (Setouchi Triennale), Benesse Art Site Naoshima, [benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/boltanski.html](https://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/boltanski.html). Accessed on 14 June 2022.

The last artwork which will be discussed is Tashima Seizo (1940-present)’s “Hachi and Seizo Tashima Museum of Picture Book Art” (Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2009). Tashima’s artwork (fig 5) revitalized the abandoned Sanada Elementary School in Tōkamachi City. He attained this by making a picture book story centered around the school’s last three students: Yuuki, Yuka and Kenta. These students “tour” visitors around and revive the building by recalling memories and telling ghost stories (Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 130-31). Tashima’s intention is to “reproduce” former students, teachers and even monsters in his artwork (“Site-Specific Artists in Echigo-Tsumari”, Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2010-2019). His artwork is part of the ‘Art House Project’, a project which transforms abandoned schools and (scattered) houses into artworks by collaborating with local residents themselves. The aim is to use and visualize former inhabitants’ lived experiences, history and memories (“Ie purojekuto”, Benesse Art Site Naoshima, n.d.). In other words, the project aims to sustain the memories and experiences of the local community. Fukutake Soīchirō had already started this project on Naoshima in the 1998s, before the ETAT even existed (Kanaya, 2014, 77-78). Yet, the ‘Art House Project’ is also prominent in the ETAT. It is therefore arguable that it reflects Fukutake and Kitagawa’s personal convictions of (the importance of) machi-zukuri and furustao ideals

of communality, interaction and locality. The transformed buildings become places where visitors can interact and bond with local residents through the exposure of locals' personal experiences and memories. The artist's task is to incorporate local inhabitants' personal experiences and/or memories in such a way that they evoke these feelings and memories in the art projects. Tashima's artwork provided a bonding opportunity for artist and locals, as actual former students of Sanada Elementary (and Kohebi volunteers) collaborated in its creation (Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 130-31). Lastly, visitors also become 'involved' by immersing themselves in locals' lived experiences/memories and by trying to grasp the deeper meaning behind these artworks. In this way, locals, visitors and artists are connected through the same artwork.

Here too, choosing Tashima to revitalize the neglected school building was intentional. Kitagawa explains:

"I immediately thought of my old acquaintance, the artist Seizo Tashima, as someone who could transform it [Sanada Elementary] for the fourth triennial. (...) I wanted Sanada Elementary to have Tajima's powerful works to occupy the space, and it became a center of children's picture books." (Kitagawa, n.d. in Kitagawa, Matsuo, Monsma, 2015, 130-31)

Kitagawa's statement clearly shows his personal bias: he already had an idea of (the end result of) the project and therefore chose an artist he personally knew. This is most likely a strategic choice to ensure that Tashima's artwork fits into the art festival (and Kitagawa's) philosophies. Moreover, despite the collaboration with local residents, the creation of the art project actually limits locals' freedom in visualizing their experiences/memories. This is because the artists and the kind of art ("powerful works") had already been chosen in advance by Kitagawa. Hence, "Hachi and Seizo Tashima Museum of Picture Book Art" reflects Futoshi's critique (chapter 2) that the ETAT is in truth more centered around Kitagawa's personal objectives and convictions than the festival seems to proclaim.





Fig 5. Tashima, Seizo. *Hachi and Seizo Tashima Museum of Picture Book Art*. 2009, Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, *Echigo-Tsumari Art Field*, [www.echigo-tsumari.jp/en/media/202100806\\_site-specific/](http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/en/media/202100806_site-specific/). Accessed on 15 June 2022.

## Conclusion

This thesis examined the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT) and the Setouchi Triennale (ST) and considered how these festivals intend to provide a solution for Japan's continuing ageing population and declining birthrate. I claimed that Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Sōichirō's idealistic views about the countryside and 'traditional' countryside lifestyles resulted into their attempt to reshape Japanese society by reidentifying neglected rural areas through contemporary art. Hence, my thesis has demonstrated that the ETAT and ST are heavily influenced by Kitagawa and Fukutake's own convictions and interpretations of the *furusato* and *satoyama* ideologies. This has indeed resulted in these art festivals' larger purpose, which exceeded rural revitalization, namely the creation of a 'new' society which is brought together by the Triennale. Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Sōichirō collaborate with prefectural governments and (non-)profit organizations. Yet, it is actually Kitagawa and Fukutake's strong partnership and their active involvement in both Triennale which shape these art festivals according to their own convictions and objectives. This is because both men share similar perspectives about rural revitalization, (the destructive consequences of) modernization, the role of art and community-building. As a result, they maintain similar strategies to create their desired community. This is attained by incorporating their personal convictions into both festivals and by choosing artists who can reflect these into their artworks.

Kitagawa and Fukutake's first undertaking to obtain their objective is through pro-rural and anti-urbanization strategies. The foundation is the combination of the general director's and producer's personal feelings of *furusato* with their strong convictions to rebel against modernization and urbanization which threaten traditionality, identity and locality. This leads to the rebranding of the countryside. Specifically, this means the positive alteration of (current) negative perceptions of the countryside as a place "without a future". Kitagawa and Fukutake have done this by intentionally focusing on rural areas' positive and idealized qualities and contrasting these with the negative aspects of cities. Lastly, both men have deliberately applied aspects of *satoyama* and *furusato* ideologies and made these the 'mission' of (hosting) their art festivals. The ETAT and ST thus became means to reidentify neglected rural areas by showing their potential and thinking about what 'they could be': places where all kinds of people become (re-)united through art. Their second undertaking is to shape and organize the Triennale as means to reflect their convictions. The core principle is Kitagawa and Fukutake's conviction about contemporary art being a "catalyst" which unites people and connects things which are divided. "Slow art" is the concrete manifestation of their beliefs. Its main objective is to demonstrate the way in which art is used to improve the current demographic and economic situation in the countryside and, eventually, to reshape society. Kitagawa and

Fukutake's strong beliefs in centering their festivals around community building (where interaction, collaboration and site-specificity are key), justifies the necessity of art to transform these regions into art communities. Moreover, their personal involvement as the general director and producer strongly influences and manages this art community through their personally choosing and selecting which artists can participate. Lastly, many artworks in the ETAT and ST are reflections of (or very similar to) Kitagawa and Fukutake's philosophies and convictions. Chapter four demonstrated that artists are deliberately chosen based on either their personal connections with Kitagawa and/or Fukutake or because their personal beliefs fit into the Triennale's philosophies.

Overall, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and Setouchi Triennale are inextricably linked to Kitagawa Fram and Fukutake Soïchiro's personal purposes, convictions and philosophies about art, the past and the future. While their views are idealized and sometimes even radical, Kitagawa and Fukutake's approaches to organizing their art festivals in de-/underpopulated rural sites might simply derive from a desire to create more awareness about the Japanese countryside by sharing its natural beauty, locality and culture with the world. While their original aim has changed, these festivals still oblige visitors and scholars to reflect on and consider alternative solutions for complex issues, including greying populations, man's harmful and beneficial attitude towards nature, the meaning of community, tradition, etc. both inside and outside Japan. Contemporary art can both transcend cultural, geographical, generational and language barriers and often address issues, obstacles and dysfunctions which need to be solved. The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and Setouchi Triennale might then inspire us to reflect on our own actions (which shape and influence) our natural environment and encourage us to create a better future for both the upcoming generations and our planet.

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