Housing acquisition and community participation by migrants in depopulated areas of Japan: A case study in Osaki Kamijima Town, Hiroshima

H SUMIKURA¹, S HYODO¹, A ISHIGAKI¹
¹ Department of Architecture, Hiroshima University,
1-4-1, Kagamiyama, Higashi-Hiroshima, Hiroshima, 739-8527, Japan

sumikura@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

Abstract. In Japan, the number of migrants from urban to depopulated rural areas is increasing. The migrants’ participation in the local community encourages them to settle down and promotes revitalizing the area and utilizing vacant houses. This study aims to clarify housing acquisitions by the migrants to the depopulated area and the interaction with the locals after migration in Osaki-Kamijima town located in the Seto Inland Sea. Based on data gathered from questionnaires and interviews with migrants, the authors led that the migrants thought much about communications with the locals during the migration process and acquired housing through direct negotiations with homeowners. Also, we mainly indicated that there is a tendency to blend into the community while participating in local management activities.

1. Introduction
In Japan, in recent years, the number of urban residents moving to depopulated areas like villages, which were previously unrelated, is increasing.

In these villages, traditional communities remain on the premise of mutual assistance among local people (henceforth, locals). There is a concern that migrants may not be familiar with the area and isolated, depending on the way and density of communication with locals. Therefore, they need to blend into local communities to live longer in the areas. Especially in the case of migration to unrelated villages, the process, including housing acquisitions, becomes an essential opportunity to achieve it for them.

On the other hand, depopulated villages have a social issue that vacant houses are increasing. Many of these generally have lower performance than the current standard and are often damaged somewhere. If more migrants utilize them well to live, it will promote to solve the problem.

In short, it is supposed that the migration process that encourages them to participate in local communities contributes to managing sustainably depopulated areas. So, how housing acquisitions do make it easier for migrants to join communities in depopulated areas?

Kobayashi and et al. have recently published a thesis describing actual situations of providing housing to migrants by residents' groups to maintenance elementary schools in a depopulated area of Japan[1]. However, nothing from the viewpoint, as mentioned above, is seen.

Based on these situations, this study aims to clarify the style of housing acquisition by migrants in depopulated areas and the actual situation of their participation in communities after migration.
2. Methodology
The subject of this study is domestic migrants to Osaki Kamijima Town in the islands of Hiroshima, where it is designated as a depopulated area by law and has a population of less than 10,000. To clarify the recent trends, the authors define that the residents who emigrated to the town during the ten years up to 2017, when the authors surveyed, are as migrants, and other residents are as locals.

![Figure 1. Geographic location of Osaki Kamijima, Hiroshima](image)

The authors conducted two surveys for the migrants. One of them is a questionnaire survey that was carried out with 41 migrants to Osaki Kamijima to obtain data on the process of migration, housing acquisitions, and their participation in local communities et al. Another is an interview with 17 migrants. The town office introduced migrants used as the survey samples.

3. Characteristics of migrants to Osaki Kamijima
Many of the migrants to Osaki Kamijima are young households. More than half of the migrants are not more than 39. Including those in their forties, that percentage is about 70%.

Eighty percent of them have never lived on Osaki Kamijima before, and are of the type generally called I-turn migrants.

Their primary purpose of migration is to realize slow life and rural life, living in calm climates.

4. Selection of migration destination and housing acquisition
Many migrants selected Osaki Kamijima as their destination and acquired houses while interacting directly with the locals during the migration process.

4.1. Selection of migration destination
Fig. 2 shows that the main reasons for selecting Osaki Kamijima as a destination by migrants are the mild climate and the approachable personality of the locals. Besides, it also indicates that interaction with the locals and their providing information on jobs and houses support the selection of migration destination.

According to the migrants, this process brings valuable opportunities to get to know the locals and to see and hear situations of life in the town. In particular, I-turn migrants need to choose the destination while determining if they can adapt to the local environment and the community they have never lived in before. On the other hand, according to locals, the island has long been a trading area, and many of them are relatively tolerant of outsiders. Their characteristics seem to have led to support for the prospective migrants.
4.2. Housing acquisitions in Osaki Kamijima

Fig. 3 shows that the migrants are more likely to acquire houses while negotiating directly with homeowners. The ratio of this method (henceforth, Direct Negotiation Type) exceeds 40%, which is a significant tendency.

According to the results of interviews with the migrants, there is no brokerage by real estate agents, and the locals generally introduce homeowners, who are not specialists for real estate, to peoples who seek migration and visit the island. For this reason, there are concerns about house maintenance, rent, contracts, et al. In exchange for these, they have been acquainted with the locals before migration and have more opportunities for communication. It seems that this leads inevitably interaction and communication between the migrants and the locals, which in turn, the awareness as a community member grows before migration.

The Osaki-Kamijima town office, like other depopulated municipalities, supports those who seek migration, to acquire houses. The representative policies are introductions of vacant houses through "Akiya Bank" [2] and the town office. However, only about 10% of the migrants have acquired houses with these services, which is an insignificant tendency.

5. Migrant's participation in local communities

The migrants generally get into local communities in Osaki Kamijima while participating in community activities to interact with the locals.

5.1. Tendency of whole migrants

Whole migrants value occasions of interacting with the locals through festivals and sports day in the town and villages, as well as daily neighborhood relationships. As shown in Fig. 4-a), each ratio is about 70%, which is a significant feature.

5.2. Tendency in the Direct Negotiation type

Fig. 4-b) shows that migrants of the Direct Negotiation type think much of interacting with the locals at events in their communities and villages and their daily relationships. In particular, more than 80% of them think much about interaction with their neighbors. This fact indicates that they are deeply involved with the locals living in the communities.

Also, relatively large numbers of the migrants take advantage of local cleaning activities and community association meetings in the villages as important occasions of interactions. It suggests that
they relate to the local community while being deeply involved in village management activities. For example, some migrants have become board members of the associations with recommendations by other members in the villages. There are no such cases in other housing acquisition methods. One of the factors of such community participation is high awareness as a community member, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Based on situations like these, housing acquisition in the Direct Negotiation type makes migrants smoothly and deeply blended into the local community after migration.

6. Conclusion
In this study, we clarified the following about the present situations on housing acquisition and community participation by migrants to Osaki Kamijima town.

- Communication with the locals has essential roles in the migration process.
- Many migrants acquire housing through direct negotiations with homeowners.
- They get into the local communities while participating in the activities of village management.

It is fruitful that we build housing acquisition systems, which facilitate migrants to communicate smoothly and deeply with the locals during their migration process. It will contribute to the increasing number of migrants who have solid awareness as a community member. Besides, given the increasing vacant houses which generally are of lower conditions, it is essential and efficient to improve the houses enough to live. If renovating the houses can control unnecessary redevelopments, it would raise the possibility of sustaining the local environment and communities in depopulated areas.

References
[1] F Kobayashi, S Yamamoto, A Ishigaki, R Shimokura, and Y Fukuda, Housing Supply and Support by Residents' Groups and the Characteristics of New Residents, J. Archit. Plann., AIJ, Vol. 79 No. 704, pp.2173-2180, Oct. 2014
[2] “Akiya Bank” is portal systems that support bridging between vacant houses and people by public sectors in Japan.

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