

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Economics and Business Administration
Contemporary Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Elsa-Maria Poopuu

PLACE IMAGES IN THE PLACE MARKETING OF
DIVERSIFYING RURAL ECONOMIES:
HOKKAIDO, BIRATORI

Master's thesis

Supervisors:

Professor of Marketing at the University of Tartu School of Economics and Business

Andres Kuusik (PhD),

Lecturer in Qualitative Methods at the University of Tartu School of Economics and

Business School, Bianka Plüschke-Altof (PhD)

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I have written this Master Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

Elsa-Maria Poopuu

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Introduction

With the transformation from productivism to post-productivism of the rural economy, new ways of self-sustainment for rural areas have emerged, such as heritage culture, rural tourism (Kauppinen, 2014), renewable energy production, the rural area as a place for “workation”, and others, which incentivize rural areas to utilize endogenous resources and exogenous resources beyond agricultural production, thereby aiming to make regional economies more versatile and resilient (Bristow, 2005, 2010; Raagmaa et al., 2013). In this context, place marketing can be used as a tool that has the potential to be beneficial for rural areas in terms of image “improvement” and “putting themselves on a map” (Plüschke-Altöf & Grootens, 2019).

The research aims to identify changed images of „rurality” that mirror a diversified economy and to critically discuss their portrayal in place marketing materials. The main **research question** is whether and how rural economic diversification is reflected in the place images of the rural place: on the municipality homepage and the closest equivalent of local destination management organizations' social media. The research will analyse the case of a small rural town in Hokkaido (Japan), Biratori by conducting a deductive content analysis of place marketing materials from mainly from 2020 to 2022.

The findings of the research aim to contribute to filling the research gap in the field of rural marketing brought forward by Kompaniets and Rauhut (2016 & 2013), who point out that place marketing research has mostly focused on the national or large city level and rural places “are resigned to remain firmly ‘in the shadow’ of these larger entities” (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut, 2013, p. 14). The other gap this research helps to fill is that place marketing research in the context of Asia is lacking, as pointed out by Kumar and Panda (2019) as the authors state that “very scarce literature is found on studies based on Asian context” (p. 276-277).

Hokkaido's unique history as a colonized region, its distinctiveness in terms of agriculture compared to Japan's mainland and its culture provide a compelling case study for understanding how rural areas can be marketed and represented in a time of rural economic diversification. The case study location Biratori is home to the largest population of indigenous Ainu people adds an important layer of complexity to the analysis, as their presence and culture have historically been marginalized and suppressed, but their culture has been used as consumable products within the borders of tourism (Nakamura, 2007). By examining the place images of „rurality“ presented in place marketing materials, this research

contributes to the field of research on rural commodification, hence on how rural areas are being (re)defined and packaged for consumption for urban audiences or by them.

The overall shift in developed countries from production to postproduction has impacted the rural areas significantly but the realities are not reflected in the representations in (social) media (for examples and alternatives see; Amerani & Partalidou, 2020; Bell, 2006; Andersson & Jansson, 2010, Ryan & Tileva, 2022). By examining how this transformation is reflected in the images and representations of „rurality” presented in place marketing materials, this research can provide insights into how rural areas can effectively utilize place marketing to promote their diversifying economies and attract tourists, residents, and investors.

The current research will look at place promotion and place image as one of the tools that can forward the changed meaning of new „rurality” and by this support the diversification of the rural economy. For answering the research question whether and how rural economic diversification is reflected in the place images of the small rural town of Biratori the research framework is following:

1. Define place marketing, and place image in relation to rural development
2. Provide an overview of theoretical approaches to economic diversification in terms of rural change
3. Introduce the context of rural change in Hokkaido
4. Conduct deductive content analysis of Biratori town’s social media accounts and homepage
5. Analyse the coded categories of four predetermined -scapes (farm-scape, wild-scape, adventure-scape and gastro-scape)
6. Discuss the portrayal of diversifying rural areas in terms of “rurality” in the place promotion materials

The thesis structure includes a literature review in three parts, covering place marketing and place image, theories of rural change, and an overview of rural change in Japan and Hokkaido. The second chapter outlines the methodology used in the study, including the overview of constructing the text corpus, analytical framework, and analysis method. The third chapter presents the findings of the case study of Biratori town in Hokkaido, in the context of rural change “rurality” reflected in the place image. The conclusion summarizes the main findings and implications for understanding rural change and “rurality” in place marketing and suggests potential areas for future research.

Keywords: diversification of the rural economy, rurality, periphery, place marketing, image creation, social media marketing, Japan, Hokkaido

Common European Research Classification Scheme (CERCS): Sociology (S210), Social geography (S230)

1. Literature review

Among the main idea of the thesis, it treats place marketing as one component in the diversification of rural economies and attracting a diverse range of potential target groups, while acknowledging the critical discourse surrounding its promotion of the "urban gaze" (Duenckmann, 2010; Murdoch & Pratt, 1993; Paasi, 2010; Woods, 2015) for primarily urban tourists.

The thesis is not arguing that place marketing and branding are the main drivers of rural economic diversification, nor does it measure its impact on development, recognizing that other factors such as access to capital, infrastructure, and social capital can also play a role (Raagmaa & Noorkõiv, 2013) and even opinion leaders' discourses on rural regions (Plüschke-Altöf, 2017). However, the thesis finds support in that negative or outdated portrayals (as backward) of rural areas, which are often spread through media and social media, are hindering efforts to attract investments, visitors, and residents to these areas.

This thesis adds value as it focuses on an under-researched area, namely the place marketing of rural areas in Japan, particularly in Hokkaido. Given Japan's rapid urbanization and the decline of rural areas, it is important to examine the images being promoted through place marketing and what they convey. This is particularly relevant as Hokkaido is in the context of Japan an agricultural area (Hansen, 2020) where traditional rural and agricultural images are not necessarily competitive in a domestic or global market.

Due to rural areas often lacking unique selling points (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut, 2013), promoting them as "idyllic" or in terms of productive agricultural areas may not effectively distinguish them from similar locales. However, highlighting the unique agricultural products and practices found in many of these areas can set them apart from other rural regions and be leveraged in marketing initiatives. Yet the present study investigates whether productionist depictions of rural areas prevail or if more multifunctional depictions emerge within the chosen case study. While acknowledging the effectiveness of promoting rural areas as agricultural in attracting target groups interested in farm-to-table cuisine or rural living, the study aims to highlight that even such efforts can be seen as post-

productionist functions of the rural space. Thus, while recognizing the potential of diversified representations for rural development, it is important to be mindful of the drawbacks, such as an overemphasis on consumption and the tourist gaze.

1.1. Place marketing and branding in rural areas

The first sub-section will bring out the theoretical framework in the context of place marketing, place image, the connection of place images and representation of rural space and what place do place images play in rural development.

Contemporary place marketing has gained importance for the regions mainly in the context of globalization and neoliberal competitiveness (Bristow, 2010). In this, competitiveness that successful place branding and marketing can facilitate, is seen to be a crucial factor for economic, political, and social gains (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008). In a globalized environment “where the developing places are now competing with well-established old places” (Kumar & Panda 2019, p. 258) and with people able to settle, work, or visit almost anywhere, there is a growing need for both urban and rural places to differentiate themselves and offer unique, compelling attributes often to attract inhabitants, workforce, visitors, and investors (Kotler et al., 2004) which is the simplified idea behind place marketing.

To address the conceptual confusion between the academic field and practitioners (including advisers, government employees, individuals, and organizations) regarding the terms “place branding” and “place marketing,” this thesis takes an approach that acknowledges that the two terms are frequently used interchangeably, while also recognizing the terminological distinctions based on their contextual use (Boisen et al., 2018; Kumar & Panda, 2019) and mostly refers to the process as place marketing.

Place marketing involves optimizing a location to ensure that there is a balance between the supply of offerings and the demand of specific target groups 1) visitors, 2) residents and employees, and 3) business and industry (Rein et al., 1993) Boisen et al. (2018) emphasize that place marketing takes an outside-in approach, which places the needs of targeted groups at the forefront. In their definition place marketing should “manage supply and demand – of target groups in certain market segments” (2018, p. 6), deal with marketing communication and has limited influence in local policy-making to make the target groups choose one place over another. Hospers (2011) focuses more on the inside-out approach to place marketing and cautions that place marketing is not just a “promotion trick” or tool of place differentiation to bring out the unique aspects of the place to the target groups nor an

image creation via taglines, logos or slogans nor can it capture the attention of various stakeholders and aim set of target groups via a single brand (p. 168-174). However, place marketing should be seen as a “long-term process aimed at satisfying the needs of an area’s target groups”, the author points out (2011, p. 174). In essence, place marketing involves a range of stakeholders with unique priorities and agendas for their preferred target groups and it is a complex task that involves managing a variety of mandates (Boisen et al., 2018, p. 6). In comparison with for example place promotion that focuses on generating favourable communication and is limited to increasing attention to what the places have to offer, place marketing can be seen as a much broader term (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005, Hospers 2011). Place marketing can facilitate and bring forth a sense of pride for citizens and attract (cold-marketing) and retain resources (warm-marketing), yet it must involve well-organized efforts over time, and require active participation from the community to achieve success, other authors confirm (Kotler et al., 2004, p. 12). From this we can see that, place marketing is the process of managing a location to meet the needs of specific target groups, which include visitors, residents, and businesses. It involves balancing the supply of offerings with the demands of these groups through an outside-in or inside-out approach that prioritizes their needs. Place marketing goes beyond promotion and involves a range of stakeholders with unique priorities and agendas for their target groups. In summary, it is a complex and long-term process that aims to satisfy the needs of these groups and requires the management of a variety of mandates.

In addition to place marketing, often the term place branding is used, it refers to the process of creating, sustaining, and shaping a favourable identity for a place, and can be understood as a form of reputational management. Place branding is characterized by an “inside-out” “identity-driven approach” that builds on established values and narratives of the place and aims to consciously sustain and/or improve its reputation. (Boisen et. al. 2018, p. 7) The authors continue, that this involves a mandate for “image orchestration”, which seeks to influence people's perceptions and associations with the place through coordinated promotional efforts (place promotion). The concepts associated are not only “logo” and or “visual identity” (Anholt, 2005), but also “image” and “identity”, however similarly with place marketing, often both private and public stakeholders use place branding as a promotional endeavour, thereby aiming to showcase the distinctiveness of a place by using only place promotion which can be counterintuitive (Boisen et al. 2018, p. 5-6). It is mainly within place branding where the “place image” comes to the foreground as a central concept.

"**Place image**" is a crucial component of place branding and marketing, which can influence future potential visitors, investments, and new inhabitants. It is brought out by Kotler, (2000, p. 164) that place image should be valid, believable, simple, appealing, and yet, distinctive. Place image can be seen to comprise the overall image of a place, including its brand, visual image, reputation, sense of place, and identity (see Figure 1) (Clouse & Dixit, 2017). The authors identified five key categories to help understand "place image". First **attraction factors**, a **brand**, a multifaceted blend of images, meanings, associations, and experiences that distinguishes a place from its competitors, **visual image**, which is a symbolic representation of a place and **reputation**, which is a widely held belief about a place based on certain clichés and prejudices. As a second category the authors brought to conceptualize "place image" are **retention factors** which include characteristics catered around the need for individuals and businesses to be physically present in the place, identify with the place, and maintain their location there, aspects of retention factors are promoting a **sense of place** and a positive **place identity**. By retaining residents and businesses, the place can sustain its economic growth and development over time. In conclusion, place image plays a critical role in the branding and marketing of a place, as a well-crafted place image can attract potential target groups and to a length retain them, thereby promoting economic growth and development.

A large part of the place marketing research in terms of place image refers to the destination image aimed at tourism development as in attracting tourists and in overall tourism management success (Lopes, 2011), where the positive image is associated with visits and negative with no-visit (Selby & Morgan, 1996). In this context, Selby & Morgan bring out two approaches to destination images – as "naïve image" that people have before the visit, which is one of the factors for making the decision to travel and is made up form "organic," as an image which is derived from non-tourist sources (such as popular culture, media, and literature), and "projected" images which is derived from official and commercial sources (such as DMOs, guidebooks, and advertisements) and "re-evaluated" place image that forms after the visit. Further noting that in the case of media, these categories are not mutually exclusive, as tourism uses media to get the "projected" image across.

In addition, a positive visual image is crucial to places as it affects how people feel about them, and it has become an active part of their economic success or failure (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). However, places should not be reduced to a shallow and one-dimensional representation, but rather approached with a holistic understanding of their various factors

and stakeholders (Govers, 2011, Zenker & Braun (2017). Also, “place image” is not constant but changes over time (Clouse & Dixit 2017) and for places it should be stressed again that the overall negative image is hard to change by simple “place promotion” (Anholt, 2005, 2010). According to Boisen et al. (2018), what can be used to attract the attention of different target groups, especially investments, is a "strong image", still “place image” must be improved and maintained over-time to remain competitive (Clouse & Dixit, (2017). Yet, Anholt (2010, p. 7) adds that even a "positive image" can act as a catalyst for attracting visitors and new residents, resulting in a circle where attention, attraction, and word-of-mouth marketing establish positive connotations about a place (Boisen et al., 2018, p. 5). A “place image” that is negative is hard to change by marketing campaigns, nevertheless, an orchestrated long-term place marketing strategy that considers the different stakeholders’ perspectives and target groups and is adjusted in times with the changes of place image can attract positive attention that in turn is a more sustainable solution in terms of overall place marketing.

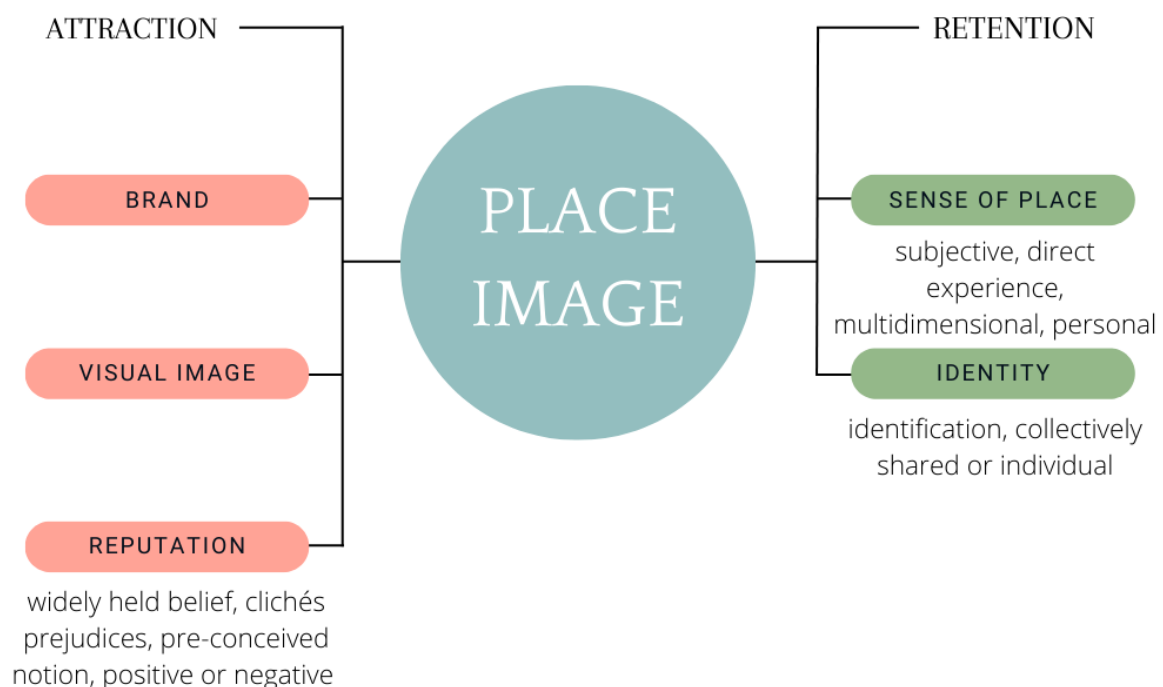


Figure 1. Place image

Source: Modified by author based on Clouse & Dixit 2017

In summary, place image is a crucial component of place branding and marketing as it can influence visitor decisions but can also have an impact on other target groups like investors and workers, in addition, it can be related to retaining residents. It should be valid, believable, simple, appealing, and distinctive. Place image comprises various factors such as attraction factors, brand, visual image, and reputation, which are spread through entities such as organizations, governments, media, and individuals. The study of place image is essential in the development and promotion of a place in a context inside and outside tourism.

“Place image” can be promoted by various traditional channels like television, radio, print media, outdoor advertising, and promotional materials, and communicated through for example, public relations, direct marketing, and sales promotion (Rein et.al., 1993) digital channels, including websites, email, mobile devices, and media (Baker, 2019). In recent years, social media has emerged as a crucial tool for promoting a place's image (Rauhut Kompaniets, 2022). In this traditional media and social media can influence the valuation or devaluation of a place and shape its identity. Media can foster and help to overcome both hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourse, particularly on the topics of "„rurality “" and "peripheries," as suggested by Bürk (2013).

Before the emergence of large scale use of social media, in the early 21st century the emergence of websites and homepages became increasingly crucial for places to market and represent themselves globally (Kauppinen, 2014). This was and is especially relevant for peripheral areas, which can use websites to reach out to the local and global markets and a length offers a possibility to redefine their identity more inclusively compared to traditional media. As the use of homepage(s) for marketing and branding purposes is often one of the first contact points for potential visitors, who are seeking information on major events, services, and tourist activities. (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut 2013)

In addition to websites, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become versatile channels for promoting place image. Visual representations have gained prominence, particularly on TikTok and Instagram. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) pointed out that social media has increasingly become one of the major sources of information for place image promotion for both visitors and DMOs (Destination Management Offices/Organizations)¹ due to search engines directing information seekers to

¹ Scaglione et al., (2021) noted that Japan has lagged behind major European destinations in tourism promotion via Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), but there is potential for leapfrogging the use of

social media sites. Add to this and in conjunction with the previous, resident roles in place marketing are seen to become more important with the increasing use of social media, where they are becoming primary sources of place marketing (online brand ambassadors) and active advocates of place branding (Braun et al., 2013; Uchinaka et al., 2018).

Social media, especially Instagram, can turn ordinary places into tourist destinations by promoting their aesthetic aspects that can become viral (Oh, 2022). The platform has been recognized as playing an important role in the creation and promotion of destination brands and place image, as users of the platform play increasingly an active role in this process (Arefieva, Egger, and Yu 2021) On the other hand, Oh (2002), much like Urry (2011) and Campanella (2013), sees that this can lead to the narrow representation of a place and ultimately result in over-tourism, gentrification, and dispossession of the place (p. 1057). Oh (2022) highlights that social media promotion lacks the controlling force to regulate the natural and built environment that conventional tourism management via DMOs often has. Finding that uncontrolled social media promotion (posts becoming viral) can result in unplanned overdevelopment and disorder, which can have a direct impact on a place's physical and social environment.

To conclude, there has been a move of traditional channels for promoting a place's image, to websites and social media platforms such as Instagram. The use of websites and social media has become increasingly important also for peripheral areas to reach local and global markets and redefine their identity. Social media, especially Instagram, has the power to turn ordinary places into tourist destinations by promoting their aesthetic aspects, but can also lead to negative consequences such as over-tourism if not regulated properly. With social media, the resident's roles the online brand ambassadors and active advocates are increasing in place promotion via place images.

For understanding the multidimensional, complexities and diversity of rural spaces that the place image should reflect, Halfacree's (2006) „triple model of rural space“, which is built on Henri Lefebvre's ideas (1991), can be fruitful, because it can be applied to different contexts for seeing different perspectives (Schneider, 2019; Wang & Liu, 2021) and it helps to bring structure to the conceptualization of “rural”, “„rurality“” and “image” as it highlights the notion of “representations of rural” that is of interest in terms of this research.

Web 1.0, as DMOs in Japan are increasingly using social media accounts for tourism promotion, however, further empirical research is needed to understand the impact of these trends on the tourism industry in Japan.

The model (see Figure 2) brings out that the rural space is a complex concept that cannot be reduced to a singular “material or ideational form” therefore considering the multiple specialities, lived experiences, change and the contested nature of rural areas is crucial (Halfacree 2006, p. 44-46, Lefebvre 1991). Connecting this to the thesis, it aims to show that the depictions of “rurality” are dependent on different stakeholders, target groups and processes – not constant in time as the media depictions often reinforce. From Figure 2 a “representation of the rural” is the main category this research touches upon.

According to (Halfacree, 2006, p. 50-51) rural space can be understood through three concepts: rural locality, formal representations of the rural, and the everyday lives of the rural. The rural locality is linked to spatial practices and economic and political processes that shape rural spaces. Representations of rural are often associated with formal conceptions of space and ideological constructions that reflect how rural space is perceived and understood. The lives of the rural refer to the everyday practices and experiences of individuals living in rural areas, where their personal and socio-cultural beliefs influence their interpretation and identification with rural life. It is important to note that the "lived rural space" is often overshadowed by formal representations of the rural, as noted by Halfacree (2006, p. 50-51) and exemplified by (Duenckmann, 2010). These three concepts intersect to shape people's experiences and practices within and outside rural areas (Halfacree, 2006).

For this thesis, it is important to bring out that, representations of rural are often associated with formal conceptions of space by developers, planners, scientists, and academics (Halfacree 2006, p. 46), but also “how rural is framed mainly in the mainstream media, through the eyes of politicians and capitalist interests” (Schneider, 2019, p. 31), in addition it is often imbued with symbolic and cultural meaning or in other terms, it can be “a socially constructed” space, “cognitive representations of rurality“, yet, there exists ways for individuals and groups to reinterpret and subvert (or to maintain) these representations within daily life (Halfacree 2006, p. 46-51) or to extend this e.g. in social media.

Place marketing images of rural areas are to a length related to all three spaces mentioned in Halfacree's (2006) “triple model of rural space”. Place images can promote a simplified image of rural areas that can shape people's experiences and practices within and outside rural areas by imbuing symbolic and cultural meaning. However, place images may be disconnected from the everyday experiences of individuals living in rural areas, overshadowing the direct experiences of rural inhabitants. Therefore, it is important to understand the complexities and diversity of rural spaces when promoting rural areas through

place marketing. Failure to do so can lead to false expectations and negative word-of-mouth publicity, perpetuate stereotypes, and marginalize local stakeholders who rely on agriculture or other industries for their livelihoods that can be seen as marginal in terms of for example tourism promotion.

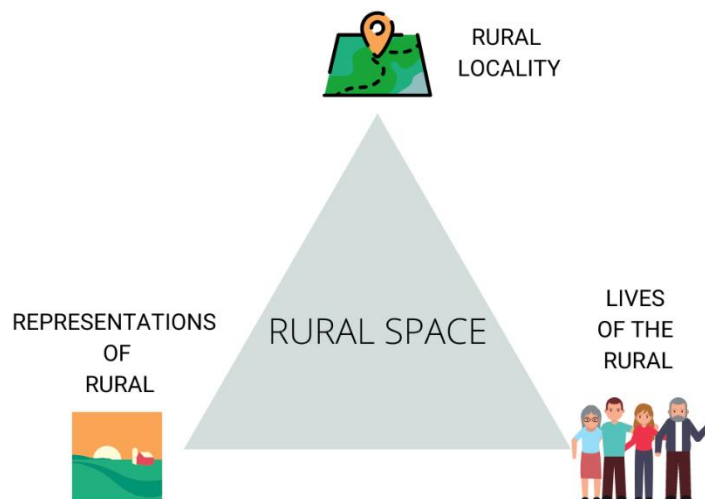


Figure 2. The totality of rural space

Source: Halfacree (2006, p. 52) (modified by author)

Although place marketing and branding research has focused on cities and nations, rural and peripheral places should not dismiss this approach. According to Kotler et al., 2004, places that are in decline or face stagnation must find ways to provide themselves with growth opportunities. Balogh (2015, p. 228) argues that “images of places” contribute to future development and potential investments in places. However, Govers, (2011, p. 229-320) and Zenker & Braun (2017) caution against abstracting places to a "brand" solely for tourists or investors, neglecting the role of residents, history, culture, heritage, economic situation, geographical location, and demography. As places are expected to compete in the local and global arena, this puts pressure on already disadvantaged rural localities, often by diminishing structural factors like negative discourses (Plüschke-Altof, 2017) or regional policies that contribute to the peripheralizing image or sustaining economic disadvantages. Furthermore, as rural places often lack resources or unique selling points, compared to larger units, creating of strong place image is difficult. Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut (2013) research points out that when promoting a more rural location, it can be difficult to differentiate it from other destinations and convey its unique qualities. Therefore, local municipalities may emphasize the aspects that are popular or expected by visitors and investors, rather than the distinctive

features that set their location apart, writing that “about 80% use selling points related to fresh air, nature and outdoor activities” (p. 30-31). In terms of tourism, Campanella (2013, p. 41) highlight from destination marketing perspective, deriving his argumentation from the theories of (Urry 2011), that the influence of images on destination marketing, that repeatedly emphasize certain objects or destinations, leads people to prioritize them over other attractions in the same location. Finding that even if place images are linked to specific locations, they can convey knowledge that goes beyond the individual objects and contribute to a broader comprehension of the place where they are situated. Therefore, a rural place image that reflects only the attraction part of the place image and aims to only attract the attention of visitors, can result in a sense of false representation among some local stakeholders (e.g see Annist, 2013, p. 16). In essence, an overemphasis on certain aspects of a location even when the inside-out approached marketing can create an incomplete and misleading image that does not accurately reflect the broader context of the place.

Historically, rural areas have been linked with traditional lifestyles centred around agricultural production, and this perception is often reinforced by media images of "rural" and “rurality” (Bell 2006; Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010) Bell (2006) notes that media often depicts rural areas using the category of the “rural idyll” or "farm-scape," which is associated with small-scale agricultural production and pastoral imagery. In terms of tourism and in-migration, Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen (2010, p.198) argue that: “The failure of modern agriculture and rural landscapes to meet the standards of the pastoral myths can lead to criticism and support the dystopic images”. Furthermore, symbolic images used in rural tourism promotions often portray a sense of belongingness, nostalgia, community, and a "past agrarian existence" as a hometown to return to (Creighton 1997, p. 242) Nevertheless, the prevalence of agricultural elements are decreasing in images created by residents of contemporary „rurality“, with a focus on local people, resources, and everyday life (Pospěch et al. 2015, p. 83). In addition, Zimmerbauer (2011) sees that often the marketing-oriented “place images” spread attractiveness and positive place image in hegemonic ways as they are driven by outside-in approaches that are for groups outside the region. Extending Zimmerbauer’s idea of regional institutionalization to rural place marketing, we can argue that representations of rural areas as overly “idyllic” or focusing on one central aspect in place marketing, often created top-down or outside-in, leaves out representations of different stakeholders who live in rural places and thus their identity with a

place could become weaker. Yet, when a negative image is turned positive the opposite can take place.

Nevertheless, as indicated above place marketing should also aim to retain the resources – local people, and businesses, not only attract outside attention. In this, it should become clear that if the representation is more wholesome (encompass identity and sense of place) and bottom-up, representing different stakeholders and is aimed not only at attracting outsiders, but the place marketing could also possibly have a more meaningful impact in the long run. As the representations should aim to satisfy the needs and requirements of different types of rural inhabitants, not only those that have more social capital or networks, or who are active as it risks leaving out certain groups and can impact social cohesion (Gielsing et al., 2017).

1.2. Rural change

The next sub-chapters will introduce the theoretical notions behind the process of rural change in terms of economic diversification and the conceptualization behind “rurality”. The first sub-chapter explores the theories of post-production and multifunctionality and draws a connection to how rural areas have changed the consequence. For the second sub-chapter, the author will bring out theories behind changes in “rurality” that the first process has contributed.

From the late 20th century to the early 21st century rural development in developed countries came to be associated with finding new pathways for agricultural development, in other words economic diversification. In these terms, diversification refers to the process of rural areas and rural businesses exploring alternative economic activities to generate income.

These activities may include the development of recreational, leisure, or tourism opportunities, as well as the cultivation of distinctive local crops that diverge from large-scale monoculture operations. Among other theories, economic diversification can be conceptualized in the context of the transition from production to post-production. (Marsden, 1999) In this, post-production indicates that rural areas have diversified their source of income and that agriculture no longer holds the dominant role, furthermore, newer discourses on post-productivism see that production and consumption both are related to rural sites (Vanclay, 2011) which indicated that rural areas can be conceptualized more in terms of their multifunctionality.

In general, the move from post-productivism is seen in terms of agricultural restructuring can be described as following categories:

- as a shift from quantity to quality in food production
- increasing off-farm employment (pluriactivity)
- promotion of sustainable farming through agri-environmental policy
- dispersion of production patterns
- environmental regulation and restructuring of government support for agriculture.

(Evans et al., 2002, p. 317 based on Ilbery and Bowler, 1998; Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1997)

In addition to this, with the move from post-production an ideological aspect emerged where the importance of agriculture decreased in society, going even as far as a “view that sees agriculture as the reason for problems in the countryside” Wilson (2001, p. 80). Similar to this, with the overall diversification emerged the notion that “the ‘rural’ is no longer the monopoly of farmers” (van der Ploeg et al., 2000, p. 404) which meant that further rural development was, on one hand encompassing a diverse set of local actors, on the other, putting the pressure of diversification and development to them.

Nevertheless, researchers have pointed out that the concept of post-productivism by itself might not be applicable “within Europe and beyond” (Wilson, 2001, p.76, p. 92) mainly due to its development in the context of the UK, therefore suggesting the usage of the term “post-productivist agricultural regime”, indicating belongingness to the field of agriculture, and “considering the relative changes in action and thought of rural societies” might be more at hand for understanding the overall change. The main critique of the reluctance to use “post-productivism” per se seems to lie in the idea that post-productivist “rural areas” and “countryside” may not exist in the same terms outside of the UK (Gilg et al. 1997, Wilson 2001) Add to this, the post-productivist transition is not a clear shift from one mode of production to another (Almstedt et al., 2014), because productive modes may exist at the same time as the transition to post-productivism takes place (Wilson, 2001).

Authors have offered an alternative in terms like “shift to multifunctionality” (Wilson 2001, Knickel and Renting 2000) as the next stage from a move from production to post-production and perhaps this concept entails the essence of the process more clearly (Wilson 2001). Van der Ploeg et al. (2000, p. 394) write “previously highly specialized, monofunctional farms are being transformed into new, multi-functional enterprises” and Wilson (2001, p. 95-96) points out that the multifunctionality better encapsulates “the diversity, non-linearity and spatial heterogeneity that can currently be observed in modern agriculture and rural society” as this conceptualization allows the existence of both “productivist and post-productivist action and thought”. Therefore, the concept of

„multifunctionality” has been used by researchers as possible theoretical advancement to „post-productivist transition” (Almstedt et al., 2014).

In conclusion, the concept of post-productivism has certain limitations and its ability to fully capture the complexities of the changes occurring in post-modern agriculture and rural societies. To tackle this, the concept of multifunctionality has been suggested as a more suitable framework for understanding the ongoing transitions in agriculture. This approach sees that rather than a total change in rural economy and society from one form to another, there can exist both production and post-production in a form of multifunctionality, which can provide a more comprehensive and realistic analysis of the challenges and opportunities in agriculture and rural development.

With the move towards multifunctionality, the use of endogenous resources has become increasingly important for rural development as traditional agricultural economies shift towards new industries and activities. Endogenous development is a type of economic development that focuses on utilizing and improving the resources within a local area that can be used, among other fields, as selling points for regional competitiveness and growth (Willett & Lang, 2018). This means utilizing the natural resources of the ecosystem, the local labour force, existing knowledge and skills, and regional patterns of production and consumption to revitalize these resources and prevent them from becoming obsolete (Long & van der Ploeg, 1994). It prioritizes the local community's initiative and control in rural development, with the goal being more self-sufficient, sustainable in growth and development, without relying solely on external resources and focusing on economic growth (Vanclay, 2011). It is pointed out that tourism can act as a part of endogenous growth for peripheral rural areas (Brouder, 2012). One step forward from endogenous development, neo-endogenous development builds strong local institutional capacity based on social and human capital and knowledge-based business networks to mobilize resources and cope with external forces, with local actors participating in both inside and outside development processes for economic and business development rooted in the local context (Ward et al., 2005, p. 5-6).

The main principle of endogenous development lies in the empowerment of the local population to utilize their inherent resources, including biodiversity, cultural heritage, traditions, and skill sets, to drive growth and progress at the local level (Takai, 2013) and this approach is often used for further economic diversification. Vanclay (2011, p. 59) adds that endogenous rural development “accommodates niche-marketing of value-added products and flexible specialization” and it elevates the value of “local culture, tradition, artisanal products

and regional typical food”, as done in Japan’s regional development program “One village, one product” (一村一品運動) and European Union LEADER program.

By this, the local resources of rural areas can be further used in mainly consumption-oriented place marketing and place image, based on rural endogenous resources, becomes a tool via place promotion attracting tourists, residents, and investors. Place promotion of rural regions is one way to forward the post-productivist or multifunctional image of “rurality” to the people with “spare time/disposable income in an informative-rich post-Fordist, post-modern society” as Vanclay (2011, p. 62) indicates.

The above can be seen in relation to the regional competitiveness discourse, which has been part of the main discourse of policymaking in developed countries (in Europe, North America, and the UK) since the 1990s and is “influenced by globalization and marketplace logic with the overall aim to growth” (Bristow 2005, p. 291). Bristow is arguing that regional economic development policies often use a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which fails to consider local differences, resulting in a uniform but the ineffective implementation of strategies that follow the logic of competitiveness of firms suggesting that a region's success or failure is determined by its relationship with other successful core regions, rather than the performance of enterprises or the local environment, with local actors being seen as responsible for economic growth (p. 291-293). This carries over to a “responsibility shift” where local actors are increasingly seen to sell places in terms of “image making” and “place marketing”, in this way the centre pushes the responsibility for economic development and growth to local regions and actors leaving them over-burden (Plüschke-Altöf & Grootens, 2019). What is more, as indicated in the place marketing paragraph, local actors often use “place promotion” or “place selling” (Berglund & Olsson, 2010) instead of long-term strategic place marketing (Boisen et al., 2018).

To summarize, the usage of various endogenous resources has become increasingly important for rural development with the economic diversification and move to multifunctionality and it can act as a part of endogenous growth for rural areas. In this, place marketing of rural regions based on rural endogenous resources can become a tool for economic growth as it can attract tourists, residents, and investors. However, the regional competitiveness approach can set rural, peripheralized, or declining regions at a disadvantage because these places often lack competitiveness due to structural or economic changes or their geographic or economical peripheral position. The use of "place promotion" or "place selling" instead of long-term strategic place marketing (in some cases seen even as place

making) is also a problem. In addition, economic development and growth are often pushed to local regions and actors, leaving them overburdened.

As noted, the move towards multifunctionality has had a significant effect on rural areas and could offer a new imagining of “rurality” or the emergence of a more heterogeneous portrayal of rural areas - a shift from mainly agriculture-related images to more multifunctional and multifaced depicting, which can be positive in terms of overcoming negative images. As with the discussion of economic diversification, Gkartzios, Toishi, and Woods (2020) point out that although in academic literature increasingly diverse approaches are encouraged, the conceptualization of what is “rural” is based on mainly UK-based terminology formed in 1980-the 1990s and is thus “monolingual” assuming a “common point of reference” (p. 325).

Noting that, „rurality” can have positive connotations as “rural idyll” and negative as “backwards”, as opposed to urban that form according to the context or space it is situated (Gkartzios et al. 2020, p. 325). When “defining” the terms, “Rural” and “rurality” it should be noted that they are not fixed or objective, but rather a product of human imagination and social constructions and are shaped by cultural contextual factors, such as historical traditions, economic structures, and political ideologies (Woods 2015).

The interest in representations is related to the cultural turn in the 1980s to 1990s in rural studies in connection with the economic shift from production to post-production, as its impact on development was noted by authors like Halfacree (1993), Jones (1995), Marsden (1999), Pratt (1996). According to researchers, with cultural turn an increased attention was given to “representations of the countryside and how they are created, circulated and consumed, and also how they may influence material actions”(Fish & Phillips, 1997, p. 1 in Morris & Evans, 2001, p. 2). The cultural turn can be viewed as an increase in “a heightened reflexivity toward the role of language, meaning and representations in the constitution of “reality” and knowledge of reality” (Barnett 1998 p. 381). With the “cultural turn” rural research reached a more humanistic dimension (Wang & Liu, 2021) and therefore found it important to analyse the meaning in representations of „rurality” to see what kind of “reality” they represent.

One of the most common understandings of “rurality” is through spatial depiction and geographical definitions this means rural as encompassing development scale, size of agricultural production, settlement size and the closeness to the city and is formed from an urban perspective (Woods 2015). Halfacree (2006, p. 47) points out that defining rural space

based solely on its locality, as often done in policy-making, can limit the understanding of the rural to certain aspects, such as agricultural production, low population density, physical inaccessibility, and consumption behaviour.

In addition, the spatial or economic definition, “rurality” is often done in contrast to “urban”, in terms of the growth of cities and decline in the countryside. The authors note that understanding from a modernist perspective of “rural” was linked with a clear distinction between rural-urban which extended to the conceptual understanding of “rural” as opposite to “urban”. In this “rural” came to be recognized as a place for leisure, associated with nature, fresh air, purity, and national identity, and the countryside came to be associated with nostalgia. (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993, p. 416-417) In addition, with the shift to multifunctionality, rural space came to be increasingly impacted by consumer demands, as Duenckmann (2010, p. 286) emphasizes that rural has become a site of consumption, moving from the “site of the production of food and fibres/.../to be replaced by other economic sectors like tourism, the marketing of local and alternative food or leisure activities”. Noting too, that “constructions of “rurality” are increasingly done from the urban perspective, but rural regions can use them at selling these constructions or images for further development, the author notes.

Woods (2015) suggests that the constructions of “rurality” includes both urban and rural perspectives, adding that media representations are influencing this process and, in some cases, overshadowing the real experiences people have of rural places, highlighting that rural and urban areas are not as distinct as they used to be.

To add to this, cultural factors, for instance changing attitudes towards the environment, nature, and sustainability, have influenced the depiction of „rurality“ (Evans et al., 2002). In some cases, from the picturesque or romantic (see Ryan & Tileva 2022) to a more environmentally conscious or sustainable one, where rural areas are understood in terms of environmental protection in the context of the extensive use of agriculture (Evans et al. 2002, Marsden, 2003)

In terms of representations of “rurality”, it is often done in terms of the „rural idyll,” which is idealized and commodified in popular culture by urban middle-class imagination, as noted by Bell (2006, p. 149-151) as idealized concept of the "rural idyll" creates an "exclusive and exclusionary place", contributing to rural-urban dichotomies and overlooking rural heterogeneity, as seen in advertising, television, and literature. However, this idealized image is often met with the reality of depopulation (Bell, 2006, p. 149-150), e.g., the

"hollowing out of villages" and other challenges faced by rural areas. When the contemporary rural space is more defined by the needs and priorities of industrial agriculture than the romanticized ideals of rural life often portrayed in popular culture (Halfacree, 2014).

As the above indicates, the discourse surrounding rural spaces is a complex and multifaceted one, shaped by economic changes, competitiveness, globalisation and both urban and rural perspectives, by which the boundaries between urban and rural spaces blur (Woods, 2007).

With economic changes, globalization, and demographic challenges, rural areas have in some cases lost their previous positive image and are often seen as peripheral² or in terms of decline. The negative associations of peripheries and peripheralization are often related to people leaving for urban areas, lack of necessary infrastructure and resources, and difficulties in getting support for local development from various levels of government (Bürk, 2013). For instance, in Japan the peripheralization process can be associated with depopulation and for policy-makers key to de-peripheralization seems to lie in repopulation and rural revitalization (Reiher 2020, p. 231). Perceptions of peripheral or rural regions affect their development; as often depicted as "forgotten or remote" or "exotified" and "romanticized" from a central perspective (Balogh (2015, p. 219) as such portrayals may make these peripheral areas more appealing to people from the central areas, they can also perpetuate outdated stereotypes that hinder their development potential, further stressing that "spatial discourses are not only shaped by locational factors but also by images".

The reality of "rurality" has evolved, especially with the diversification of the economy being from mainly related to agricultural production to a space entailing both production and consumption activities among others. In this, the term "rurality" is shaped by cultural and contextual factors, such as historical traditions, economic structures, and political ideologies. However, with the shift towards multifunctionality, rural areas have become increasingly impacted by consumer demands, including tourism, marketing of local food, and leisure activities and what is rural is often constructed from an urban perspective. Similarly, media representations have influenced the constructions of it, however with increasing mobility rural and urban areas are not as distinct as they used to be whether this is represented as that or not. As such, it is essential to take a nuanced and context-specific approach to the study of rural places, recognizing the complex interplay of economic, social,

² To be classified as peripheralized, a region must exhibit a significant decrease in population, either by at least 50% in the last 50 years or an average annual decline of 1% since the year 2000 (Noorkõiv and Loodla 2012 p. 5).

cultural factors that shape these landscapes, and the experiences of those who call them home to point out the often-stereotypical images in place marketing or to highlight the possibilities that these representations can entail.

1.3. Rural change in Japan and Hokkaido

This sub-chapter aims to provide a general understanding of the agricultural changes and the interpretations of “rurality” in rural Japan and Hokkaido. As Hokkaido is strongly connected to agricultural production, the overview can give coverage on this topic, because the thesis focuses on the current representations in the context of the rural change the more recent situation of agriculture and “rurality” is also given emphasize. The rationale behind this is that as in Europe and North America, change in production to post-production has happened this is also the case in Japan as seen for example the OECD (2009, 2019) reports on Japan. After WWII, agriculture in Japan's economy has been declining rapidly. Previously, it had dominated the economy until the 1940s. In 1960, it accounted for only 9% and decreased to 1.1% of GDP and 4% of total employment by 2005, resulting in an almost 80% reduction of agricultural workers. This trend has continued, and in 2019, employment in agriculture decreased further to 3.4%, mainly consisting of part-time farmers. In the food and agricultural sector together, employment is 5,3%, whereas most of the employment in rural areas is not from agriculture but from the service industry. (OECD, 2009, 2019)

The 2019 report highlights that most of Japan's agricultural workers are over 65 years old, in contrast to the European Union where the percentage of workers over 65 is 31%. Based on MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fishery) data Satake, (2022) brings out that the “total number of farms has fallen by almost half, from 2 million to 1.1 million” from the period of 2005 to 2020. Additionally, Japan's agricultural production decreased annually by 1.4% between 1984 and 2010, mainly due to increased imports and decreased domestic food consumption. The shift away from rice is also notable, with rice production decreasing from 43% in 1964 to 17% in 2015, while livestock and vegetable production increased to 35% and 27%, respectively, reflecting changes in the Japanese diet towards more meat and dairy consumption. (OECD 2019) However, in the 21st century, Japan has seen an increase in corporate farms, from 8 700 in 2005 to 18 857 in 2015. Despite the presence of many small-scale operations, most of the farms in Japan are small 1,6 hectares on average (in Hokkaido they are 14 times larger) in comparison with 16 ha in the EU (Jentzsch 2021, p. 6), the farm structure in Japan has become heavily polarized, with the top 3% of commercial farms cultivating almost half of the total farmland. (OECD 2019)

A change in overall agriculture in Japan is also reflected in the number of commercial farm household workers which has decreased by more than 50% since the 1990s, the latter is also related to the overall decrease in the working-age population since 1995 that is seen “to contract further by 41% over the next four decades” (OECD 2009, 2019). Similarly, the use of farmland has decreased from the 1960s by 51% mainly other sectors like industry, infrastructure and urban development are increasingly the users of land. Further highlighting, Japan’s population decline, and an ageing workforce have contributed to a decrease in agricultural labour and abandonment of farmland has risen sharply since the 1990s. (Satake 2022)

It is important to point out for background information and to show the contrast with Hokkaido’s agriculture, that, during the post-war era, Japan implemented policies to maintain a dominant agricultural production structure of small-scale household farms engaged in part-time rice farming, while prohibiting large-scale industrial farming operations, which is seen to be related to the dominance of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party catering to electorally overrepresented rural votes, but the small-scale farming supported by subsidies turned out to be ineffective, and from the early 1990s Japan needed liberalization, with the joining of the WTO in 1994 ending the isolation of Japan’s agricultural sector from the global. (Jentzsch, 2021, p. 3-6)

In addition, even the OECD 2009 report notice the cultural importance of rice in Japanese rural society as “agriculture /.../ helped shape the cultural landscape, such that for many Japanese, the rice paddy is an important part of an attractive landscape” (p. 11). While Japan no longer depends on rice paddy for its survival, its place in the cultural landscape seems secure. The Japanese feel strongly about preserving the physical, cultural, and traditional aspects of agriculture, and have expended considerable resources to do so” the report points out (OECD 2009, p. 11), for further references see (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1994). However, as discussed below, a closer look at Hokkaido’s agricultural structure shows – rice is not a dominant agricultural product and neither is the small-size part-time employed farms, so the cultural notions of “„rurality“” and “rural idyll” (Schnell, 2005) that associated with the crop are not so easily extendable to this part of Japan that “commonly considered marginal in the context of Japan” (Hansen, 2020, p. 27).

In conclusion, Japan's agriculture has undergone significant structural changes concerning fast industrialization and urbanization in the post-WWII that resulted in the “conversion of the economy away from agriculture” by the 1980s (OECD 2009, p. 12), with a

more recent increase in corporate farms and a decline in small-scale operations. The decline in the value of agricultural production since 1990 and the reduction in farm households and workers have also contributed to a decrease in Japan's agricultural GDP and share in employment. The shift away from rice production towards livestock, vegetable, and fruit production reflects changes in the Japanese diet, with an increase in the consumption of meat and dairy.

When we focus on Hokkaido the agricultural change shows distinct characteristics. The northernmost region of Japan is a primary food production region of Japan as the total cultivated land area (1,144,000 ha) that makes up 26% of the total cultivated land and (AHJ, 2020) Hokkaido's agricultural output accounts for 14% of all national production, a 10% rise during the 1990s (Satake 2022). Natural conditions (land mass, suitable temperature, and length of daylight) of Hokkaido are more suitable for large-scale lowland farming and dairy farming (NARO, 2017). Hokkaido's agriculture is characterized by its low dependence on rice production and high dependence on farm crops and dairy production as the region produces 40% of the major farm crops and dairy products in Japan (OECD 2009). Business farms³ make up more than 70, 9% of commercial farm households in Hokkaido compared to only 19, 2% in the rest of Japan (AHJ 2020).

Still, even Japan's largest agricultural region has undergone significant changes in recent years, resulting in some decline in its agricultural sector. The number of commercial farm households decreased by 50% from 1990 to 2005, and its agricultural output has declined relative to the rest of the economy. These changes have led to a decrease in agriculture's share of the total Gross Prefectural Product from 7.5% in 1980 to 3.6% in 2005. While Hokkaido's transformation reflects the broader changes taking place in Japan's economy, it has also raised concerns about the multifunctionality of agriculture and its impact on rural communities. (Yamamoto, 2009)

However, the OECD, 2009 report brings out that since 1965 the average farm size in Hokkaido has become four times bigger and the report connects this to the limited availability of non-farm employment. When the rest of Japan has seen a decline in agricultural production, Hokkaido has gained importance in the last 15 years as the average size per farm in Hokkaido is 30.2 hectares (61% increase from 2005 to 2020) which makes it fourteen

³ „Business farm indicates a farm household whose principal income source is agriculture and which contains a person under 65 years old who is engaged in farm work for 60 days or more in a year” (AHJ 2020 p. 2)

times larger than the average farm in Japan (2.2 hectares) (Satake, 2022) As food and agricultural sector are larger in Hokkaido, they generate 7% of GDP (average of Japan 3, 4%) and 10% (average 5,3%) of employment, the food manufacturing sector it creates half of employment in the manufacturing sector of Hokkaido (OECD, 2019). As about 70% of the farmers in Hokkaido are full-time farmers, most farming households there are engaged in full-time, large-scale farming as opposed to the average farmhouse household in Japan (NARO, 2017) where small-scale and part-time is prevalent.

The economic theory of supporting oneself on agricultural income alone has worked in Hokkaido, where farm households have been able to remain self-sufficient in farming. However, small-scale farming in other parts of Japan has been maintained through off-farm employment. (Yamamoto, 2009) Table 1 shows the difference in characteristics between Hokkaido and Japan's agriculture.

Table 1 *Main differences between Japan's average and Hokkaido in rural characteristics*

Region	Farm-size (ha)	Employment	Cultivated land (thousand)	Agricultural production share of GDP	Per centage of persons employed in primary industry (2010 to 2020)	Farmers under 65 years old
Hokkaido	28,5- 30, 2 ha	Full-time	1,147.0 hectares (share 26.0%)	7%	7,2% 6,7%	58.7%
Japan	2,2 ha (average)	Part-time	4,397.0 (total)	3, 4%	6,0% 5,5% (mean)	28.5%

Sources: Made by the author from sources NARO, 2017, Satake, 2022, Agroberichten Buitenland, 2020, AHJ, 2020, Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2022.

On one hand, Hokkaido's demographic will be challenged by the decline and ageing population. The region that makes up over 20% of Japan's land area is the least densely populated region and it has only 4% of Japan's population (125,382,653 total). The population is expected to decrease from 5.5 million in 2010 to 4.2 million in 2040 and 78% of Hokkaido's municipalities are classified as cities that "might disappear" due to depopulation, this trend has severely affected cities that were once hubs of the coalmining and fishing industries. (Yamazaki, 2015)

On the other hand, as being one of the few regions that have high food self-sufficiency rate and because of the climate suitable for production even in the context of future climate change, Hokkaido's agricultural importance will likely rise in the future for the whole of Japan. Eventually, the country's northern regions may be able to enhance agricultural production as the temperature rises that of the existing main agricultural production areas (OECD 2019). As Japan's average food self-sufficiency rate is targeted to rise from the current (2021) 38% to 45% by 2030 (Nippon, 2022), the northernmost prefecture had a food self-sufficiency rate of 206% in 2017 (AHJ 2020). Not to mention the prefectures' importance, the times of crisis s in the Indio-Pacific or pandemics, when the trade routes could be harder to maintain, and the import of food could be harder. As Japan depends on almost 60% of its calorie intake from imports, whereas on a value basis, the self-sufficiency ratio is 67% (OECD 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to retain and attract inhabitants in not only the agricultural sector of Hokkaido but for other supporting sectors that will help to maintain strong communities.

Hokkaido's economy is closely linked to agriculture and production. To sustain the environment and biodiversity, as well as offer recreational and educational opportunities to urban residents, the concept of multifunctionality of agriculture is seen to be useful. The multifunctionality approach of agriculture, which stresses the significance of factors beyond production, is increasingly crucial in Hokkaido and the rest of Japan, as agriculture and rural areas are perceived as providers of ecological protection and other services, such as tourism and recreation, to urban residents, although these benefits can be hindered by the decline in both production and community (Yamamoto, 2009).

In terms of place marketing in tourism, the strongest association of international travelers from Asia have with Hokkaido is its winter climate (snow, skiing, and cold), in addition, there is a shift towards independent travelers visiting both rural and urban areas, with shopping and hot springs being popular spots, whereas they have been of decreasing interest as an overall tourism destination (Higuchi 2017, p. 4). The region's image also relates to Hokkaido-made food (dairy products, sweets, fruits, vegetables), which is seen to be a promising category for future development in terms of tourism, the landscapes (agricultural landscapes, night-views, flower gardens, mountains, and forests), and with relaxing holiday destination. (Higuchi, 2017, p. 75-76, 87)

In summary, we can see that the agricultural changes in the region have distinct characteristics. As the region is the primary food production region of Japan, with natural

conditions suitable for large-scale lowland farming and dairy farming. Hokkaido's agriculture is characterized by full-time, large-scale farming, and it produces 40% of the major farm crops and dairy products in Japan. However, Hokkaido's agricultural sector has undergone significant changes in recent years, resulting in a decline in some areas. The number of commercial farm households has decreased, and its agricultural output has declined relative to the rest of the economy. While Hokkaido's transformation reflects broader changes taking place in Japan's economy, Hokkaido's agriculture plays part of the region's economy, generating 7% of GDP and 10% of employment. The food and agricultural sector are more extensive in Hokkaido than in other regions of Japan. Still, Hokkaido's demographic is challenged by declining and ageing population, and the region's municipalities face the possibility of “disappearing” due to depopulation. Nevertheless, Hokkaido's agricultural importance is likely to rise in the future, as it is one of the few regions with a high food self-sufficiency rate and a climate suitable for production, even in the context of future climate change. Eventually, Japan's northernmost region may be able to enhance agricultural production as the temperature rises, displacing the existing main agricultural production areas.

2. Methodology

2.1. The text corpus

The source to study rural “place image”, are place promotion channels on Instagram and the town's homepage. In this, the research makes a difference between “visual images” created for increasing visitations by DMOs (in essence a destination image) and by images used on the town's homepage that should express the overall “brand” of the place. By this, it is meant that the town's home page should not be just for attracting visitors via place promotion, but also for expressing place identity that is aimed at various target groups. The twofold approach lets the research take an inclusive approach to studying rural place images. The place images can mainly be conceptualised as being destination images, thus made to attract potential visitors and with the theory above seen as “projected image” by mostly official channels (“DMO”s and municipal homepage), thus contributing to the “that visitors” can attain from before the visit.

In the context of Japan DMO's (Destination Management Organizations) are a rather new concept, even if authors have pointed out the outdatedness (Hall & Veer, 2016) of DMOs, they were advised by the Japanese government in 2015 under the name Registered

DMO Candidate Program in Japan for local municipalities to use to improve the coordination for the management of increasing tourism. (Nagai et al., 2018). As this research focuses on rural place with small population peripheral locations, which means that the closest to Western DMOs is chosen – on Instagram biratori_kanko (2023) (“観光” (*kankō*) – tourism in Japanese), which is Biratori town’s official tourism account on Instagram. Nagai et. al (2018, p. 6-8) point out that the broad definition of Western DMO encompasses the Japanese *Kanko Kyokai* (Tourism Association) “which are often semi-public organizations that commonly rely on government funding”.

Instagram posts are seen to be comprised of visual image(s) and descriptive text (including #hashtags). Therefore, what the post represents is important for this research. For example, a picture of traditional small-scale agricultural activities done by locals with the description of “Spring planting for summer harvest” – is categorized as “farmscape”. From the homepage, both text (as slogans or descriptions) and visual images are looked at.

Biratori town’s official homepage was chosen as a second textual corpus as it could potentially represent a second view that encompasses the town’s local identity and reflects the place image aimed at various target groups like locals, visitors and possibly even investors. This might allow the examination of how local stakeholders represent their town and how these representations reflect the “rurality”. This approach can yield a more nuanced understanding of how (rural) places are depicted on social media for visitors (Arefieva et al., 2021) and on the town's homepage (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut 2013), for both visitors and locals.

Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut (2013, p. 13) rationalize using homepages as a case study because they are not only used for informational purposes but also for marketing and branding purposes. This makes them a rich source of information on target groups, unique selling points, and how the municipality views itself in a place marketing context. The use of homepages for marketing and branding purposes is justified by the fact that they are often the first point of contact for potential visitors, who are seeking information on major events, services, and tourist activities (Rauhut Kompaniets & Rauhut 2013).

The research focuses on mainly the visual material that reflects the “visual place image” to a potential consumer that has never visited the place (the attention aspect), but also on the “brand” part of the place image that includes in addition visual and textual (slogans) aspects. The “reputation part” of the place image is not analyzed as it needs to focus more on people's perspectives (via interviews) and discursive media analysis of the place than what

the images of places represent. Visual materials, whether in print or in a digital form, provide wealth of information for studying the ways in which places are represented and place images on brochures and websites, as well as on social media (Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, and Pinterest), can be analysed using many different techniques (Mauri & Marsanasco, 2020).

The gathered data is understood as a text corpus, a collection of textual data that will be analysed in the research, for example, textual data can be interview transcripts, written documents, (social) media posts, or any other form of text-based data that is relevant to the research question (Gerring, 2006). The construction of a text corpus provides the raw material for analysis and ensures that the research is grounded in relevant textual data. The period in which the data is chosen is from 2020 to 2022 to get a sample that reflects a longer period than, for example, one year that could be influenced by events that have an impact on how the content is posted or what is posted. As the case study is interested in rural areas in Hokkaido, Japan accessing the place marketing materials is difficult, the longer period also helps to gain more data for the text corpus. In addition, the social media account(s) of the local tourist management association or the accounts that act similarly are established only since 2020 which sets limits to the social media sample size and distributing duration.

Biratori town's official tourism account on Instagram has been active since the 25th of September 2020. There was initial 27 posts on the @biratori_kanko Instagram account (April 2013), 5 posts were from 2023, 2 were doubles of the same image and thus were withdrawn, 2 were eliminated from the data set as they consisted of QR codes and 6 were irrelevant to the research topic, in total 15 posts were eliminated. Thus 12 (N=12) posts were collected. Therefore, to get a larger set of data, the data was collected using data crawling. With the example from Egger et al. (2022) only public data with the hashtag #平取町 (Biratori-cho), was collected via Instagram with the online data crawling software Phantombuster. This hashtag was selected because it was the most popular and helps to avoid the confusion that for example, #びらとり (Biratori) could bring, as Biratori towns name is often mispronounced as „Hiratori”, and users might use the hashtag #ひらとり (Hiratori).

The data crawling with the #平取町 resulted in 5000 (N=5000) posts. For selecting the posts made to promote the town in place marketing terms, the following steps were done usernames containing Hokkaido, *kankō* (tourism), Biratori and possible tourism-related usernames (like @hokkaidolikers) were left in the data, other usernames indicating personal accounts were removed. The publishing period was set to contain the period 2017-2022,

among the data only photos were selected, and videos and carousel posts were left out. After these steps, the number of posts was 250 (N=250).

This was followed by hand-selecting photos that could be considered as place promotion. Restaurants, cafes, and businesses in Biratori were eliminated as they focused on promoting their business rather than the town. Accounts that had a specific focus on heritage culture, mainly promoting Nibutani village, not the whole town, and posted pictures mainly according to the theme were also eliminated from the data set. Double posts and posts that related to cancellation due to COVID-19 were removed.

The carousel posts were then added to the data set, as many of the tourism accounts posts were in that form, in the data set as these posts had one theme. This left 25 posts, to which 12 posts made by @biratori_kanko were added the final data consists of 37 posts (N=37) that could directly relate to place promotion and these posts are posted in the period from 2020 to 2022. All the accounts were created within the period from 2020 to 2022. From the town's home page many sections (“観光向けメニュー”/Menu for tourists) that was intended for tourists was looked at, because other sub-sections on the home page like the Town's-man menu had mainly textual information about living in the town, and the daily procedures, like health and disaster prevention. From the selected sub-page of the home page, a data set from 29 sub-pages and a separate section was selected, although there were two pages dedicated to tourists they were not fitting to the analyses as they provided information about eating places and accommodations. In addition, a section with 12 sub-pages that provided information about famous local places was left out, because it could not be analysed in terms of the codes and categories established. The final data set from the home page resulted in 17 different sub-pages and sections that were further analysed. This process is seen in Figure 3.

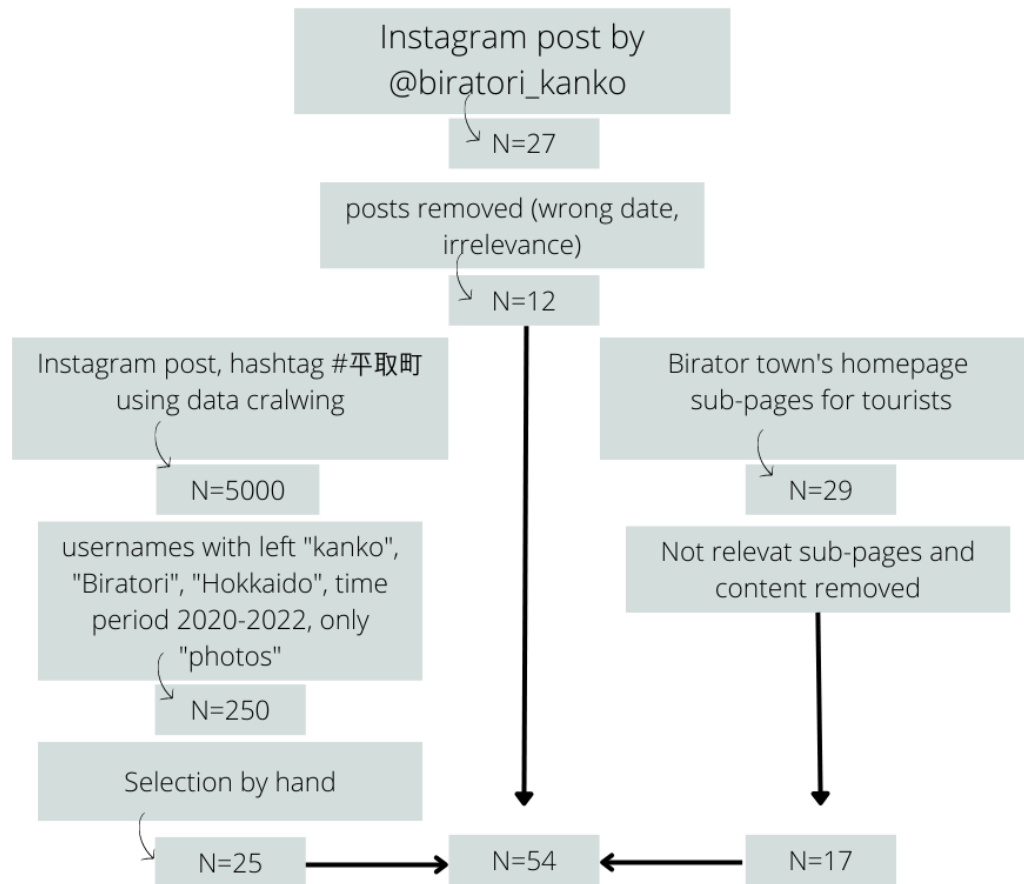


Figure 3. Process of data collection

Source: Made by the author

2.2. Analytical framework

Visual images can be transformed into analyzable representations by applying a coding process (Krippendorff 2004), which should result in reflecting the main idea they carry. In this context, the "coding process" refers to the act of organizing or categorizing data (in this case, pictures, and text) based on certain criteria or characteristics: codes. The goal of this process is to categorize the datasets so that the results accurately reflect the categories. The categories chosen must not overlap with each other (mutually exclusive) and must include all possible options (exhaustive) so that the results are complete and free from any confusion or ambiguity.

For encoding the data, a manual approach using Excel was employed. This was necessary to interpret the content of the image (sign), rather than simply detecting the object (signifier). The image was examined alongside the accompanying text, and additional information was researched as needed for clarification.

When dealing with larger data sets like social media images by DMOs or created by users machine learning (Arefieva et al., 2021) or more precisely deep learning can be used, for instance, Vaino (2017, p. 42) analysed signifiers of perceived and projected online destination images using deep learning methods utilized deep learning to examine signifiers of perceived and projected online destination images, noting that although deep learning offers an overview of the signifiers in photos, additional metadata such as location coordinates or post descriptions can be incorporated to determine the meanings and content carried by the photos.

For this research, it is important the latter – to determine what meaning the post or content (visual image and text) carries. For the analysis, the process of coding and data, which is done according to the pre-defined categories and codes, that has been derived from the theoretical framework, is implemented. The goal of the analysis is to identify patterns and themes within the data that are consistent with the theoretical framework, and to draw conclusions based on these findings (Mayring, 2015).

2.3. Content analysis

Content analysis is a systematic and controlled approach to studying and analysing information within its communication context (Mayring, 2000). For this research, the method of deductive content analysis is chosen as a research method and is used to analyse data: visual images and text. The advantages of deductive content analysis are consistency and rigour in the analysis process as it allows us to test and confirm pre-existing theories or concepts, while also providing a structured approach to analysing the data (Mayring, 2000).

The deductive content analysis involves using a pre-existing theoretical framework or a set of predetermined categories based on the literature for analysing. In this research mixed method is used. The pre-defined set of codes is derived from a literature review on rural change and the conceptualization of “rurality” by Bell (2006) and nuance is added from research by Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen (2010). The author of the thesis aims to identify patterns, themes, and relationships with the help of codes within the data that are consistent with the theoretical framework.

According to (Krippendorff, 2004), the process of coding involves interpreting and describing observations using analytical language. The initial step is to create a comprehensive list of attributes related to different sub-categories to later analyse them in terms of rural change as follows: "productive", “mixed” and "post-productive/multifunctional".

First, the pre-determined categories that are relevant to the research question were chosen. For this, the author used David Bell's (2006) lists of categories of different types of "rural idyll" as a starting point. Bell's "rural idyll" was used because the representation of "rurality" in place promotion is its essence made to shed a positive light on unique attributes of places. Nevertheless, the research is not claiming to study "rural idyll", but the categories are used for structuring the different notions of "rurality" that emerge from analysing place marketing materials. Still, it is worth mentioning that the place image representations on social media often offer an idyllic notion of „rurality“ (Amerani & Partalidou, 2020). These categories allow for analysing rural place images structurally while the researcher will keep in mind the peculiarities of Japan's and Hokkaido's "rurality".⁴

For creating the coding categorization (see Appendix A) Bell's (2006, p. 150) three different types of -scapes and one additional type is used, pastoral farm-scape (productive), natural wild-scape (mixed) active sports-scape (post-productive) and an additional category of local food-related "gastro-scape" (post-productive/multifunctional), as doing so allows the categorization of the place images according to the main idea of the picture and text. Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen (2010) utilized Bell's formulation to examine the representations of the "rural" in discourses and media, revealing that these categories of rural landscape enable researchers to investigate not only the "idyllic images" and omissions but also provide a framework for examining both traditional and modern representations of rural. As technological advancements have impacted rural cultural space, it has become a mixture of vernacular and modern elements (Wang & Liu, 2021). Thus, it is crucial to see if place images reflect it, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the rural images distributed via social media that influence the users' views on contemporary „rurality“ (Amerani & Partalidou, 2020). This is important especially in the context of place images promoted via place marketing and branding, that in essence try to conceive a positive and attractive image of places.

⁴ By which is meant that Western notions of „rurality“ are necessarily not applicable in the same way to Japanese context. But for example, in case of Hokkaido the "pastoral landscape" can be used as the agricultural production is also related to similar fields as in Northern-Europe or North America. In case of Japan's main island "pastoral" would not be a preferred category because even if the rural places are related to practices like rice cultivation and "„rurality“" itself is often rooted in nostalgia and Japan's mainland traditions ("real Japan") that offer security in now internationalized world (Creighton, 1997).

3. Analysis

3.1. The case of Hokkaido's Biratori town

For the case study location, a small rural municipality in Hokkaido called Biratori has been chosen, as it allows to explore productive and multifunctional notions of “rurality”. On one hand, the town, which was established in 1954 (Biratori home page, 2023), is known for its agricultural production of tomatoes, and *wagyu* beef cattle, on the other hand, it is home to the indigenous Ainu of Hokkaido whose culture is one of the unique attraction points of Hokkaido for tourist. The town has a considerable Ainu population, accounting for 30% of the total population that descends from the indigenous Ainu and has implemented Ainu-related administrative measures and associated activities as the area around the Saru river, that runs beside the town, is Japan's third Important Cultural Landscape. The initiatives to preserve cultural landscapes with the Ainu as cultural properties enhance the value of local landscapes and have major significance to landscape preservation and utilization. (Yoshihara & Inoue, 2018, p. 109-110)

Currently, the town's population is 4,553 people (as of 2023), which is a decrease of 18.8% from 2013. There are 2,399 households in Biratori, which is an 8.95% decrease from 2013 (Biratori home page 2023, Biratori Town, 2021). Biratori's population peaked at 13,000 people in 1960 and has been in decline ever since (Biratori Town 2019). The town is in the north-western part of the Hidaka sub-prefecture and its natural characteristics are the Saru river, mountains, and agricultural land, in total making up an area of 743.09 km². The population density is 7.1 persons per km², which is significantly lower than the average population density of Hokkaido (63/km²) and Japan (326.20/km²). Residential land only makes up 2.90 km², and most of the land is covered by forest. (Biratori home page 2023)

Biratori has a cultivated area of 3,977 ha, employment by industry is divided as follows: primary industry (1,021), secondary industry (422), and tertiary industry (1,380). (Biratori home page 2023) Agriculture is the main industry in the town, with a focus on growing tomatoes, rice, and cucumbers. By percentage, the tertiary industry accounts for 47% of jobs and the primary industry accounts for 36% (agriculture included). (Biratori Town, 2021) The local speciality production of tomatoes started in 1971 (Suzuki, n.d.) by 6 farms and since 2016 the town is the number one tomato producer in Hokkaido (Japan Crops, 2023). The most noticeable reduction from the 1980s to the early 21st century in Biratori is in rice production and increase in tomato production, also milk and meat production has risen (Suzuki n/a), which is following the data that shows the diversification of the Japanese diet

and reduction of rice consumption (OECD 2019). Also, the shift to more industrial and large-scale production is seen in the tomato production example brought out by Suzuki.

However, the town is facing serious problems related to sustaining both agriculture and tourism due to an ageing and a declining population that relates also to a lack of successors, especially in agriculture (Usman et al., 2021). In addition, there are infrastructural problems that contribute to the marginalization of the small town as the Vision for Biratori Town's Tourism Promotion report (2019) reveals that the opening of the new route on Dōtō Expressway in 2011 has reduced the town's importance as a transit point and is expected to further decrease the number of visitors. However, a new expressway was opened in 2006 to Hidaka-Tomikawa IC, which has reduced travel time from Sapporo (the capital of Hokkaido) to about 1.5 hours and from New Chitose Airport (the main airport in Hokkaido) to about one hour. Nonetheless, the public transportation system in the area is limited, and there are only intercity or local buses running from JR Tomikawa Station, as the train line nearest to Biratori was discontinued in 1986. Due to the infrequency of these buses, it has become difficult to use public transportation for sightseeing in the area (Biratori Town 2019). The number of tourists visiting Biratori has been circa 160,000 per year since 2001 and has seen some decrease in the period up to 2014, when a new relaxation facility (*onsen*) opened in the town, which rose the number of tourists has around 200,000 per year (Biratori Town, 2019p. 2-5). Vision for Biratori Tourism Promotion report further brings out that before the opening of the new *onsen* visitors made day trips to the town, but it is expected that overnight stays would increase. The report mentions that the Ainu tourist facilities have seen some decrease in popularity, except for the Nibutani Ainu Museum. Stating that town's events draw varying numbers of visitors, with the largest being the Sarugawa Festival, which attracts around 15,000 people. The Lily of the Valley festival, which used to attract over 10,000 people, has seen a decline in recent years, with attendance now around 5,500 people. Other events draw less than a thousand visitors. The report concludes that the town is still not very known as a tourist place in Hokkaido and outside of it and that the use of regional cooperation DMO for tourism has not been fully utilized. It is brought out that the town is not aiming for mass tourism that creates products based on the market, but rather wants to utilize traditional culture and livelihood as an extension to shift from a production-oriented to a customer-oriented approach, tourist arrival-oriented, attracting the type of tourism (Biratori Town, 2019).

3.2. Results

First, the analysis will bring out the numerical data focusing on frequency and prevalence (for a detailed overview see Appendix B) which is followed by examples from each category and discussion.

The study analysed two data sets of place marketing images related to Biratori town, destination images on Instagram and content on the town's homepage that was mainly aimed for tourists, the detailed results are presented in Appendix B Results. The results of the two data sets are brought out separately followed by examples and discussion based on the whole data set.

The data analysis, based on a dataset of 37 (N=37) on Instagram and 17 (N=17) home page contents, with a total of 54 (N=54), was categorized into four main categories, namely "wild-scape," "adventure-scape," "gastro-scape," and "farm-scape." The "wild-scape" category includes images that feature natural landscapes, positive aspects of nature (fresh air, silence, peace), and escapism, which were most prevalent codes and some traditional consumption activities such as fishing. The second most represented category, "adventure-scape" includes images that focus on recreational and tourism activities, depict changes in the use of rural space, and urban values in rural areas. The third category, "gastro-scape" focuses on local food and drink production and consumption, while the least represented "farm-scape" category is related to traditional and natural values, in contrast to urban, cooperation and support, roots, and in occasional present utopian view of rural society. For the distribution see Figure 4. The data also includes content that does not fit into any category or entail several categories. From the data coding and analysing the **research question** was answered – the rural economic diversification (rural change from productive to multifunctional) is mirrored in the images of “rurality” portrayed in the place images online (on DMOs social media and the towns home page), as best exemplified in the adventure-scape and the dualism of production and consumption is exemplified in the gastro-scape category.

Wild-scape: From a dataset of 37 place (N=37) place promotion images on Instagram, 14 posts were categorized as natural “**wild-scape**”, featuring keywords such as "visual landscape", “positive”, "escapism", "romantic view", “wilderness”; whereas “traditional consumption activities” like gathering or fishing were not prevalent, neither as “negative images” like waste or desolation. From a set of 17 (N=17) home page contents 3 cases of content categorized as natural “wild-scape”, featuring keywords such as "wilderness", "visual

landscape", "positive", "escapism", "romantic view" and "traditional consumption activities" like fishing. Overall, the data set of 54 shows that **31.48%** can be seen as a mixed category of "wild-scape", there were some notions of a traditional view of „rurality” nevertheless, place images depict a positive space where to escape and do not indicate a space where more labour-intensive agricultural activities take place.

Adventure-scape: The data analysis shows that from the first data set of 37 (N=37) place promotion images on Instagram, 8 posts were categorized as "**adventure-scape**". The most common keywords associated with this category were "changes in using rural landscape"/environment, "recreational activities" & "tourism activities", and "active". From the second data set of 17 (N=17) on the homepage, 6 cases of content could be categorized as adventure-scape. The most common keywords associated with this category were "changes in using rural landscape/environment", "recreational activities" & "tourism activities", "urban values to rural areas" and "relaxing". Overall, the data set of 54 shows that **25.9%** can be seen as a post-productive category of adventure scape, where rural space is in some cases consumable for urban visitors or offers a space where to relax or have an adventure.

Gastro-scape: The first dataset consists of 37 (N=37) place promotion images, out of which 8 were categorized as "**gastro-scape**". The most common keywords associated with this category were "production and consumption of local food and drink," "local food as a tourist attraction," and "use of fresh" and "locally sourced ingredients." The second dataset includes 17 (N=17) cases of content from the municipality's homepage, out of which only 2 could be sufficiently categorized as "gastro-scape", however, it should be noted that the town's mascot was used in more occasions than two, and in its essence, the mascot carries the place brand that is related to "gastro-scape". The most common keywords associated with this category were the same as in the Instagram dataset. Overall, **18.5%** of the data whole set 54 (N=54) was categorized as "gastro-scape." This category is brought out as an addition due to the widespread use of local speciality products in Japan and home-town tax (ふるさと納税, *furusato nōzei*) that will be explained below.

Farm-scape: In the first data set of 37 (N=37) place promotion images on Instagram, only 2 posts were categorized as "farm-scapes". The most common codes associated were related to "amenity values of natural environment", "traditional values of social environment", "contrast to urban", "mutual cooperation and support", and "roots". "Food security", "nostalgia", "ideal society" and "utopian", were not attributed as meaning in the images. In the second data set of 17 (N=17), still a small part, 4, of content items were

categorized as “farm-scape” from the home page, and the most common keywords associated with this category were related to “natural” and “traditional” values, “contrast to urban”, “mutual cooperation and support”, “roots”, “nostalgia”, and “utopian”. Food security was mentioned in one content item, while childhood and ideal society were not attributed as meaning in the images. From the overall data set of 54 (N=11), only **11,1%** can be seen in terms of being to some length productivist “farm-scape”.

Other: From the 37 Instagram posts (N=37), there were six (N=5) posts that did not fit into any category, but were more related to heritage, both Ainu (a post about Nibutani Ainu museum – an exhibition inside the museum, not related to agriculture or „rurality“ per se), Japanese traditions but not fitting to the categories, place promotion via town’s mascot or popular culture (see examples Figure 11). From the homepage data set of 17 (N=17), there were 2 (N=2) sections or sub-pages that could be categorised as both wild-scape or adventure-scapes. A post about the magnificent mountain and the possibility of climbing it indicating both wilderness and adventure scape, a post about the event, where there are both categories of “wild-scape” and “adventure scape” present. From the overall data set of 54 (N=54), the other category makes up 13%.

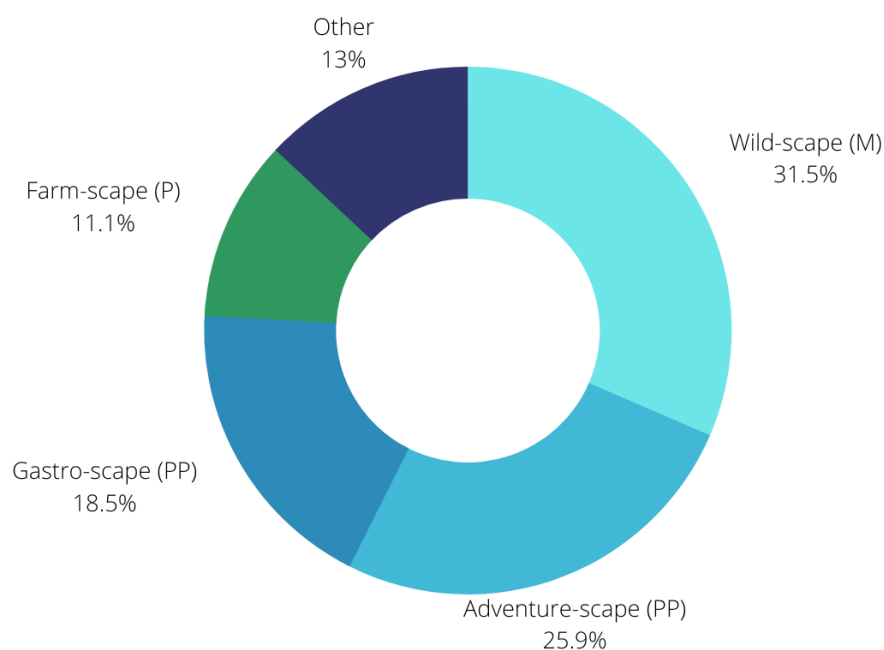


Figure 4. Overall results from N=54

Source: Made by author

P – productive, M – mixed, PP – post-productive/multifunctional

The “wild-scape”

This category highlights the unspoiled nature untouched by human activity, or what Bell (2006 p. 150) refers to as "the wilderness." It conveys a sense of a romanticized way of connecting with nature, and the rural landscape is often seen as a means of escape from urban life and a space for leisure, peace, and spirituality. Such depictions could reinforce the idea that the rural environment serves primarily for the enjoyment and consumption of urbanites, rather than being appreciated for its intrinsic value and the communities that reside within it. It is therefore essential to examine the promotion of an idealized version of rural life, to point to its shortcomings to address the genuine experiences of locals. (Bell, 2006; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010, Olwig 2019) It is a mixed category because it can depict the multifunctionality of rural spaces and the opposite of urban in sense of wilderness and being untamed.



Figure 5. Saru river

Source: Biratori town's official site (2017)



Figure 6. Makaushi frozen waterfall

Source: Instagram account biratori.tozkizemi (2022)

Figures 5 and 6 are exemplifying the visual landscape, wilderness and escapism aspect, the post indicates the positive qualities of nature (romantic view) as the description of Figure 5 brings out the beauty of the town's river, its slow flow and how the place reflects the charm of each season, the homepage also indicates that the river is mentioned in the Ainu oral legends and in this way gives it more historic meaning, but also a possibility of fishing that is in away more than mere element for passive onlookers. (Biratori Town's official site, 2017)

Similarly, Figure 6 focuses on the winter aspects of the space the atmosphere is rather positive and once again the post description brings out the connection with the indigenous Ainu homeplace, however, the background is not discussed further. It should be mentioned that the overall post had five pictures, all reflecting the same aspects. The scenic aspect is stressed with the phrase a spot with picturesque scenery (“絶景スポット”), which means in this context that the place is an excellent scenic landscape for tourists, for example for picture taking (biratori.tozkizemi, 2022). Still a latent indication of an active element (a possibility to hike) is there, but the main focus of the post is on the serene winter landscape. As an innovative element, it is emphasized that the waterfall on occasion is illuminated by artificial light – which makes the area experienceable even in the dark. Indicating that as the climate is cold and the days in winter are short the space is still usable. By which the landscape is made

to be viewed and enjoyed in a relaxed manner in contrast with understanding rural areas as connected with hard labour or dangerous wilderness. A similar theme also emerges from various seasonal posts that depict colourful trees and autumn landscapes that are meant to be enjoyed for their views.

A restoration of nature and preservation theme appeared in the context of the town's annual Lily of the Valley colony (15 ha) viewing event (Figure 7). The text highlights the restoration of natural landscapes and rare flower colonies, that was previously almost destroyed due to over-tourism but are now carefully maintained and thus dedicated walking roads to prevent stepping on the flowers. An urban view of the rural space comes to present as a possible equivalent to the traditional way of the traditional Japanese "sakura viewing" (*hanabi*) in a local setting in the context of the Lily of the Valley viewing party. As in the case of *hanabi* the city people have a rare occasion to enjoy the outside having a picnic when the cherry trees are in bloom. The lily of the valley is further described in terms of an "alpine plant" and the location grows "on the peak of Hidaka Mountains", which gives the colony and by extension the location European quality. Exporting European or North American concepts to Hokkaido is not uncommon as Hokkaido has for example the theme park that went bankrupt in 1997, used now as a city park - Canadian World (in Ashibetsu) – found suitable because of the scenic similarities with Europe, although it represents full Canadian experience (Hendry 2009).



Figure 7. A Lily of the Valley colony

Source: (Biratori town's official site, 2019)

Even though the posts and content consist mainly of natural landscapes the aim of them is to attract tourism and to promote certain uniqueness of the location. A part of the photos describes various promotional activities, such as *jitabi* (“地旅”) trips (localized trips planned by locals to introduce their town to visitors), and event promotion via the use of mascots (for the Lily of the Valley viewing event), or artificial lighting, the place image shows the natural elements of the area are shown in innovative ways.

The posts brought out as examples show the importance of visual landscape in the place image, the positive aspects like fresh air, peace, and a way to escape from the busy urban life, convey a rather romantic view of “untouched” nature that offers a way to (re)-connect with the wilderness/nature. However, it should be noted that many of the posts and content on the homepage indicated a sort of “bounded” wilderness aspect, not in a sense of powerful “mother nature” but a view or space that can be viewed in a relaxed setting or “consumed” for a positive experience, sort of more cultured aspects also emerge— as artificially lighted cherry trees, a park-like lily of the valley viewing spot and illuminated lupines, thus the place image is having a post-productive notion as being curtailed for the viewer. The natural wild-scape representations do not carry images of agriculture (as in terms of crop fields) or productionist values like community traditions or hard labour – rather the landscape is to be enjoyed and admired in distance – a rather post-productivist approach as it indicates that the landscape is consumable. The adventure element is in some cases there, but it is rather salient and is not promoted as extensive hiking or mountain climbing. The main target group of the posts are tourists, but in a few cases, the place image relates to local stakeholders. For example, both target groups are present in the post about the *jitabi* trip that is planned by local people to entertain visitors that look forward to enjoying a localized trip. The last mentioned post brings forward a post-productive use of the location and landscape.

The “adventure scape”

From this category, the post-productivist aspects of rural space come is exemplified. As it allows us to see changes in using landscape, and environment for recreational and tourism activities in comparison with agricultural or productive activities.

In addition, activities like glamping, relaxing and recreation at the *onsen* (usually traditional Japanese hot springs and bathing facilities around them) or having a soccer match on a snowy field, the last is again innovative in terms of using the landscape in winter and is

aimed at both locals and outsiders. Other active uses depict two occasions of “content tourism” (see Graburn and Yamamura 2020) for fans of the popular anime *Golden Kamuy*, related to the Ainu, that relate to a treasure hunt and one mystery-solving activity, these activities are also competitive in contrast to more relaxing *onsen* visit. As part of content tourism, the call for mystery solving is done online, but the town mascot promotes the activity, thus the town shows its local uniqueness and adaptability in difficult situations (COVID-19) via using technology. The technological aspect is also present in the post promoting the *onsen* where there is a call to vote online to choose the best *onsen* in Hokkaido. Even though Bell (2006) focuses on the idea of rural areas are a place to test one’s physical powers in the “great outdoors”, in this case, there were both indications of relaxation (*onsen*), camping and golf (Figure 8 upper left), treasure hunt, horse riding (Figure 8 lower left), show that rural areas can be utilized as a multifunctional sites for creative activities – that necessarily do not have to be so much of a “limit experiences”, like mountain climbing or hiking, nevertheless offering relaxation and activities away from the urban center.

Indeed, the case study focuses on a town, therefore the presence of mountains and rivers was detected, but more as a landscape (wild-scape) than a place to conquer or in the context of a space one’s fears to be defeated. Urban values were seen in posts about promoting the town’s *onsen* whose interior was inviting, modern, and new and the hotel rooms were decorated in Western style instead of traditional Japanese style (Figure 8 right corner). Also, the activity of glamping indicates a certain fashion-relatedness and prestige (Figure 8 upper right). In this the outdoorsy element, exemplified also in the homepage in the section about Niseko eco-land (Biratori Town’s official site 2017) is brought closer and made comfortable for tourists from urban centers, showing the town to move along with the times and trends. The eco-land introduction on the town’s homepage brings out the comfortability of the place with enjoying the outdoors, in addition, other activities like park golf and fishing, also that it is family-friendly and has other aspects that make camping easier (outdoor kitchen, clean flush toilets, showers etc.)



Figure 8. Aspects of adventure-scape

Source: Made by the author from sources (Biratori town's official site, 2017), (biratori_koho_kocho, 2022b, 2022c)

The “gastro-scape”

Refers to the culinary traditions and practices of rural areas, including the production and consumption of local food and drink. In this “space,” the importance is on the use of fresh or/and locally sourced ingredients, traditional methods, recipes, and food can be depicted as having cultural and social significance, for instance in celebrations and community gatherings but the “space” can be used to promote and support local food producers, as well as to attract tourists interested in experiencing the unique culinary traditions of rural areas (Kim, 2015). It is not just a place for agricultural production, as in cases the production or human element is missing altogether from the place image, but a category of value-added products that are promoted in various ways and tied with the place image.

More than using traditional recipes (for example as could be done from Ainu traditions) or local knowledge of food preparation, Biratori town indicates the Western character of their food or Western food (*yōshoku*) – Biratori *wagyu* hamburgers, ham, beef (see Figure 9). From all the posts a reference to the production and consumption of locally sourced food and/or drink was detected, usually in connection to using local food also as a tourist attraction thus reflecting the multifunctionality of the rural space. The food promotion

is in most cases done by the town mascot⁵ to promote the products and often the town.

The town mascot is used for the Hidaka region's (the sub-prefecture where the Biratori is located) specialty products introducing the event in Sapporo, where the mascot image is used for promoting Biratori town's food (see Figure 9). The purpose of the mascot there is attraction (the cute factor), but his overall shape acts as a representation of the unique products of Biratorori town. In rare cases, the packaging of specialty food has Ainu cultural motifs made in collaboration with food producers that might make them distinct from other similar products (see upper left Figure 9). Overall place image in this category is the image of rural areas as a producer of unique products and stresses the specialties of Biratori, the use of a mascot has the potential to work as an attention element among the competitors who also have agriculture as a special product.

In the “gastro-scape” category the use of endogenous resources (local products and local knowledge) and the competitiveness between the places comes out the best, as rural places are developing unique products, marketing them in less or more innovative ways, collaborating with locals and putting in local knowledge – but others with similar products and strategies are doing it too. One of the causes of the extensive marketing via unique local products in Japan rather than tourism activities is the hometown “tax”⁶. To make themselves visible through marketing and other strategies the municipalities put in a considerable amount of funds and sometimes “engage in wasteful competition” (Fukasawa et al., 2020, p. 3). Rauch (2020) explains that the tax program is meant to assist especially small and rural communities that face budgetary constraints due to declining population and outmigration. Stressing that the underlying idea is the notion that the Japanese should feel a connection to these communities, as suggested by the program's name, *furusato*, which connotes a nostalgic imaged hometown (Creighton, 1997) and the emotional satisfaction of supporting it, although it can be argued how nostalgic is the untypical rural Hokkaido in the context of Japan's other

⁵ Authors have brought out that successful place marketing via mascots assists interpersonal communication and allows creative use of place image and unique aspects (local food) (Soltani et al., 2018, e.g. Poopuu, 2018) Soltanin et.al add that, using mascots as part of place marketing has in successful cases resulted in attracting visitors and contributed to the further collaboration of the local government and residents. However, the success stories have inspired many Japanese cities, towns, and villages to use mascots making it a competitive arena.

⁶ The Japanese government started a new tax program in 2008 called *furusato nōzei* (hometown tax) where taxpayers have the option to contribute up to 20% of their tax obligation to a municipality or prefecture of their choice, with a tax deduction available for amounts exceeding ¥2,000 (13, 56 euro). Contributing “¥30,000 to a municipality of their choosing, the *furusato nōzei* formula would allow ¥28,000 to be deducted from their final tax burden”, as Rausch (2020) explains, adding that as a benefit the municipality sends a “thank-you-gift” to the donator and as of 2017 the “contribution exceeded 360 billion yen”, the author notes. The COVID-19 pandemic induced an increase in online shopping showed results when in 2021 the total revenue of hometowns tax increased “to a record breaking ¥830.2 billion” (Nippon 2022a).

rural areas.

Fukasawa et al. (2020) bring out that “competition reduces net revenue by at least 7.5% compared to when the municipalities do not compete for donations” and add that the “tax” may be related to causing further “disparity across Japan” because more competitive municipalities get the most benefits out of the system (Rausch, 2020). On a positive note, tax incentives promote local product development and marketing, benefiting both the community and its residents, as highlighted by Rauch (2017, p. 16), and are a good addition to tourism in off-season or in case of pandemics.

The above offers a compelling example of a neoliberal way of competitiveness as noted by Bristow, (2005) who was critical that often policymakers pursue a "one-size fits all" approach to different regions without the consideration of local differences, so to say “logic of firms” that can be ineffective for regional development. The other important point analysis of this category lets us tackle is that on one hand, the town represents itself as scenic and going along with innovations, on the other the factors like home town tax tie the town to agricultural production, in cases emphasized as being “safe” and grown using less “pesticides” (“安心安全な減農薬” and “虫防除の回数が少ない安心”), that extends to the town's place image. On the one hand, this gives the town a positive place image in terms of food-security and offering unique aspects of their production, on the other the agricultural regions all use similar images (special products, fresh air, nature etc.) and the focus on production and consumption related to agriculture might leave out other groups like the Ainu or other service local stakeholders (service sector) out if it is done not proportionally.



Figure 9. Biratori town's special products

Sources: Made by author images from (biratori_kanko, 2020, Biratori Town's official site, 2017)

The pastoral “farm-scape”

This category emphasizes the picturesque and traditional agricultural landscape, typically associated with small-scale farming, for Bell (2006) it means artisanal practices, and a slower pace of life, it can include fields of crops, farm animals grazing, and small farmhouses but not large-scale or industrial farming. The pastoral farmscape often represents a romanticized view of rural life (traditions, simplicity, and community). In this, the unique cultural traditions of rural areas are emphasized, such as images of traditional craftspeople or local festivals. Furthermore, it acts also as seeing rural areas as the cornerstone of food security of a nation “a bountiful heartland” (Bell, 2006, p. 151; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010).

The posts and homepage depict only partial aspects of the farm-scape category that reflect traditional values and some limited traditional productionist activities (see Figure 10). First, the place promotion posts from local tourism promotion accounts consisted of the amenity values of the natural environment (field of millet, river, mountains), traditional values of the social environment (indigenous culture, connecting with roots in terms of the Ainu) (for an explanation on Ainu and tourism (see Appendix C) and traditional customs (not to confuse with traditions of the Japanese, collaboration), a contrast with urban ways of life (on the point of utopia), community's cooperation and support seen in a community project.

Namely, seen in a post depicting young children taking part in traditional millet harvest and graining activity that results in cooking together a millet-based product (see lower right Figure 10).

The harvesting activity (Icha Iyuta/Harvesting and Pounding grains) is part of the Biratori Regional Ior Revitalization Project, *ior/iwor* refers to the traditional living spaces of indigenous Ainu a space for their “culture, their traditional knowledge, and habitat for animals and plants that are closely related to the Ainu religion” and a space where “people engage in fishing and gathering, and the children learn skills through these activities” (Nakamura, 2008, p. 436-437). The main purpose of the event was to let the participant experience traditional harvesting methods and participate in traditional ceremonies to spread awareness and promote Ainu's cultural heritage. Other than that, the project allowed experience traditional cooking and engage in community-building activities. In addition, the activity helps to overcome the myth of the Ainu as primitive hunter-gatherers (Hudson, 2018) and shows relatedness to agricultural activities. Still, in this way, activities seen in Figure 10 (upper left, upper right, lower right) should not be seen only in negative terms as they facilitate the redefinition of the historical stereotype “of the Ainu as savage beings who live in the forest” (Hiwasaki, 2000), p. 411). In conclusion, the agricultural activity promoted in this post has clear productionist associations, but in this context, rural space is used for the revitalization of indigenous culture not merely a re-enactment of it (e.g., for purposes of tourism). Yet, the main place image emerges in contact with the unique cultural traditions of the Ainu. Consequently, the “farm” or “pastoral” aspect of the landscape is not included, yet a strong community and locality aspect emerges from the joint activities. However, these traditions are not related to the common understanding of nostalgia or rural idyll in the traditional Japanese sense, for example in terms of *furusato* (home village) that entails nostalgia for past (lost) Japan (Creighton, 1997) as the Ainu have been mostly associated with “otherness” and with hunter-gathering activities.

Another post depicts the Ainu people offering prayers and expressing their gratitude to the *kamuy* (deity) for the arrival of the salmon and praying for a bountiful catch (see upper right Figure 10). The event is held annually as a means of passing on the Ainu's spiritual and cultural traditions, as well as knowledge about their traditional fishing tools and methods, to future generations. This approach is seen to preserve and promote the religious and cultural significance of salmon for the indigenous population (Kosaka, 2018). Yet, it is to a length commodified as an activity for tourists, who can view and participate in catching the salmon

with traditional means, thus creating new economic opportunities for the region. As Iwasaki-Goodman and Nomoto, (2001, p. 44) note “Revitalization of the salmon ritual is a process of endogenous effort to creatively preserve traditional culture and establish an ethnic identity as Ainu in the present society”, thus it should not be seen only as simply touristic activity.

Overall, as the “farm-scape” category in this research is related to the indigenous Ainu it’s used as part of the town’s image on social media plays a more latent part⁷, compared to the area of Nibutani village which is, in essence, a cultural cradle of the indigenous Ainu. From the overall 83 (posts from 2020 – 2023 (April) N= 83) posts made by four different town promotion accounts only 6 posts had direct content about the Ainu which is about 7,2% of the total posts.

The usage of Ainu culture entails traditional aspects (heritage, community) but it goes along Bell’s depiction of “farms-scape” only partially – in terms of more artisanal practices (Ainu handicrafts, seen in images used on the homepage), romanticized view or even utopian view of the community (as the indigenous people are rarely depicted in a modern setting), not in terms of small-scale farming and fields of crops or animals grazing – so to say a “pastoral farmscape” that can be seen from some content on Biratori town’s homepage (see Figure 10).

It is pointed out by Raagmaa and Noorkõiv (2013) that a strong sense of identity (in this case Ainu and the Japanese) and emotional connection to a place (Saru River region for Ainu, Biratori town for the Japanese) can be a double-edged sword, as on a positive note it can prevent residents from leaving and motivate them to work for the development of their community (in the case of the Ainu community in Nibutani), but it can also impede progress and development, particularly in cases where there is extreme traditionalism or conflicting identities, a point that needs further research in the context of Biratori town. The key is to strike a balance between preserving the unique character of a place and being open to new ideas and people (Raagmaa and Noorkõiv 2013 p. 57). The latter is possibly a reason why the place image promoted via social media on Biratori town conveys a meaning of multiple identities (the Ainu, Japanese, agricultural and catering to urban gaze) and spaces, as the categories tried to exemplify.

⁷ This is also noted by Nakamura, (2007a p. 163) as Biratori, which is primarily populated by ethnic Japanese, lacks understanding of the significance of Ainu culture, as stated by the staff of the Ainu museum, so the town office does not actively promote it as a defining feature of the town because it is afraid of backlash from Japanese residents who may feel that the town prioritizes its Ainu population over others.



Figure 1. Farm-scape (handicrafts, traditions, pastoral & productive elements)

Sources: Made by author from images (Biratori Town, 2017; biratroi_koho_kocho, 2022, 2022a; Biratori's Town official site, 2018)

Figure 11 represents some images used for place marketing that did not fit into the categories or had multiple meanings. As seen, they represent the museum display of Ainu artefacts or various depictions of the mascot promoting the town in a way that does not relate to the categories (as it is not promoting the landscape, or some activity-related facility).

As “other” was categorized a post by NHK Hokkaido aimed to show different aspects of Biratori that consisted of nine promotional photos with introductory text which seven were about Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, one about Biratori town's mascot, the last photo was a sort of end slide promoting the NHK Hokkaido account. However, the hashtags used were both Biratori and Nibutani and the accompanying text indicated that this post was made to introduce the town. From this Biratori town is associated with Ainu culture and Nibutani village and this unique aspect gains more promotion than the town's mascot which depicts the agricultural and natural elements of Biratori, which is noteworthy because the DMOs use the heritage quite sparsely. From the homepage there were three sections or sub-pages that were not directly any of the mentioned categories, but a mixture of them. A post about the magnificent mountain and the possibility of climbing it (wild-scape & adventure-scape), a post about the event where there are both categories of wild-scape and adventure-scape

present.

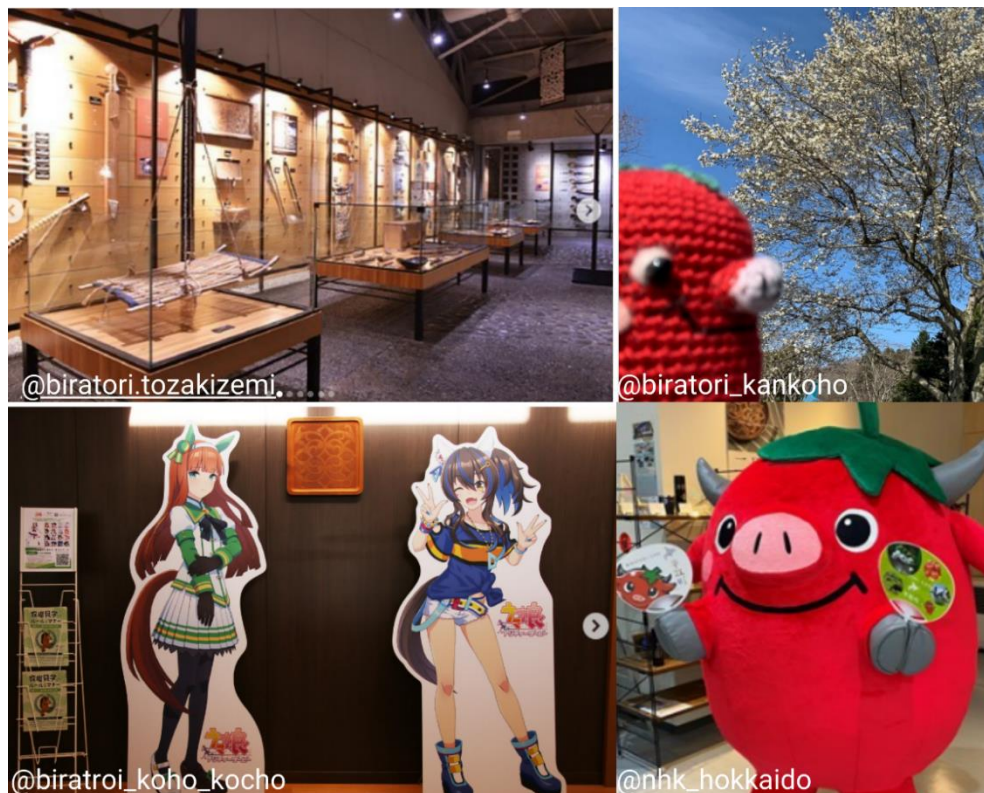


Figure 2. Other place images

Source: Made by the author from images (biratori_kanko, 2021; biratori_koho_kocho, 2022; biratori_tozakizemi, 2022; NHK_Hokkaido, 2022)

Furthermore, the study identified several challenges faced by rural places in terms of place marketing. These challenges include finding ways to represent the diverse range of local stakeholders in the place image without overshadowing one another, competing with other places that have similar selling points, and coordinating marketing efforts to promote a cohesive brand image. In addition, the content that DMOs posted could possibly benefit from collaboration and partnerships among local stakeholders, for example, user-generated content, as well as posting more high-quality content in terms of more effective use of social media and digital marketing, as the posts had small engagement (comments and likes) and few followers. As the larger data set collected showed that a few Biratori's locals had their own social media accounts made in purpose to distribute the town's charm (Instagram see bellatori_furenai, 2023; biratori.kyougikai, 2023; biratori__lab.055, 2023; l_biratori, 2023).

In summary, the research question focuses on exploring whether and how rural economic diversification is reflected in the place images of the small rural town of Biratori. The analysis followed categories that contribute to the place image on the one hand the as

scenic wild scape, which emphasizes the unspoiled nature and as means of escape from urban life and as a space for leisure and enjoyment, not a productive space where agriculture holds the central position or is depicted as part of the landscape. This category reinforces the idea that the rural environment serves as a source of enjoyment and consumption for urbanites that emphasizes the diversification of rural spaces in terms of change from mainly production to post-production or multifunctionality as the space is used for leisure and the emphasis is on more passive “use” of the space. In addition, the diversification was seen also in “adventure scape,” category which showcases the town's use of landscape for recreational and tourism activities, such as glamping, relaxation at hot springs, and engaging in competitive activities like treasure hunts and golfing. These activities that are used for place marketing via place image demonstrate the multifunctionality of rural spaces and their ability to offer relaxation, creative experiences, and outdoor activities away from urban centers. The “gastro-scape” category highlights the culinary traditions and practices of rural areas as in this the productive aspect is latent and the post-productive aspect is more prevalent in terms of offering gastronomic experiences and the quality of the food is important, as opposite for quantity that relates to the production. Biratori town promotes unique local food products in different ways using them in seasonal offers, for gastronomic experiences and as a valued commodity. The use of a mascot is seen in promoting the town's special products, emphasizing the role of the rural space as a producer of unique and high-quality food that is creating services around the production sector (as the food is offered in small restaurants in the town or in local specialty shops) further diversifying the economy. Lastly, the “pastoral farm-scape” category aims to portray the picturesque and traditional agricultural landscape associated with small-scale farming. In the town’s place image, however it reflects traditions, heritage, indigenous Ainu culture and community cooperation. A small portion of data set showed the images of idyllic pastoral landscape, but even in this case it was brought out that the scenery is “poetic” (“詩情豊かな放牧風景”) and even the smell of Lilys reaches the ranch as a possible way to make it more appealing to the urbanites (see Biratori Town, 2017). Overall, the place image of Biratori reflects a combination of these categories with the overall depiction of multifunctionality of rural space. The use of social media and town promotion via a home page helps to convey the multifaceted nature of the town, catering to both tourists and to a length involving local stakeholders.

Conclusion

The main aim of the research was to answer the question of whether and how rural economic diversification is reflected in the place images of the small rural town Biratori, the analysis revealed that the place image of Biratori represents both idyllic notions of "rurality", but the overall place images depict multifunctionality of the rural space instead of focusing on traditional small-scale agricultural or more productive elements on its place image. The research question arose in the light of considering larger processes of change in rural societies and diversifying economies of rural places that offer multifunctional use of the rural space which is often overshadowed in place images of rural areas that focus on similar unique selling points in terms of nature and "rural idyll".

The theoretical framework of the research was related to place marketing and the challenges and opportunities that rural places face in promoting themselves to tourists. Further, the importance of creating an authentic and unique destination image (projected image), as well as the need to overcome stereotypes and stigmas associated with rural or peripheral places was discussed, and how place marketing via social media and home pages can facilitate this. From this, it was stressed not to overlook the idyll and urban gaze, as they might reflect different perspectives (attraction factors) and perpetuate stereotypes that (urban) tourists and marketers may have of rural areas which can differ from the place image (retention aspects) held by local stakeholders. To better illustrate the complexity and multidimensionality of rural space the "triple model of rural space" (Halfacree 2006) was brought out in connection to the research in terms of "representational space" in this case for attracting visitors via destination image.

For the case study research, a small rural town that is related to agricultural production Biratori in Hokkaido was chosen as the town offers a way to see whether and how the diversification of the rural economy is depicted in place images, as the town's economy is related to the service sector and primary sector, but it also allows to tackle the representations of different stakeholders (the indigenous Ainu, the Japanese, the producers, and the consumers). To conduct the analysis, a deductive case study was performed using categories defined by Bell (2006). The study focused on examining 54 place images (consisting of visual images and text) that were primarily posted on Instagram between 2020 and 2022. These images were sourced from accounts that can be considered analogous to DMOs (Destination Management Organizations) and the official home pages of towns.

The research found out that production aspects of the place images were latent and sparsely used and romanticized visual beauty of the landscape, depicted as tamed instead of wild, offering an escape from urban life (wild-scape) and relaxation and outdoor activities that reflected a change in using rural landscape (adventure-scape) were the most prominent aspects of place images. In addition, not unique to Japan, but still prominent in the place images, was using local agricultural products for attracting visitors or for “tax” money (gastro-scape). It was noted that locally produced goods can help to differentiate a destination and appeal to tourists seeking various gastronomic experiences, however, the competitiveness factor of it needs to be further researched. An interesting find was that the producers were rarely seen from the place images, and this extends also to the actual production aspect which goes along with Halfacree’s (2014) notion that often the rural life in popular culture, this case in place marketing, is romanticized although the contemporary rural space is more defined by the needs and priorities of industrial agriculture. The category that was least represented in the study, which was associated with the “productive” and traditional rural space (farm-scape), primarily focused on elements such as community, cooperation, and the preservation of heritage related to Ainu culture (such as re-enacted traditions and handicrafts). However, there was relatively less emphasis on small-scale agriculture and actual food production within this category.

The research contributes to filling research gaps in the field of place marketing and place marketing research in the Asian context, as it focuses on rural areas in Japan. The study also highlights the unique history, agriculture, and culture of Hokkaido, making it an important case study for understanding rural economic diversification and highlighting the diversity of rural spaces and heterogeneity of “rurality” in Japan. By examining the place images presented in place marketing materials, the study contributes to the understanding of how rural areas are being commodified and marketed for consumption for urban audiences but also shows the possibilities of how rural stakeholders can benefit from this.

The research has several strengths. First, the researcher possesses a strong background knowledge not only of Japanese culture but also of the indigenous Ainu culture. This expertise allows for a multi-stakeholder perspective in analyzing the representations. Second, the research highlighted the growing importance of social media in promoting rural places and the challenges and possibilities to overcome stereotypes of “rurality” and rural places. However, the research also has some limitations. The sample size of place images analyzed in the case study was small, the analysis was limited to a specific time frame and to the

destination images, which may not be representative of the overall representation of rural spaces in place images. The research also focuses on one unique and specific rural area in Hokkaido, Japan, which limits its generalizability to other rural areas in different contexts. For future studies, an inductive approach could also be beneficial as the deductive analysis was found to be in cases limiting.

Further research could focus on the representation of “rurality” in place images in other regions of Japan to compare the findings with the present study or use a longer time and larger data set to explore the place image of Biratori with a post-colonial approach. Additionally, future research could benefit from interviews with local stakeholders to see a more whole some picture of the place image and place marketing.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A.

Coding table

Main Category	Sub-Category	Codes
Productive	The pastoral “farm-scape”	amenity values of natural environment, traditional values of social environment, contrast to urban, utopian, ideal society, mutual cooperation and support, nostalgic, childhood, roots, food security
Mixed	The natural “wild-scape”	wilderness, visual landscape, escapism, traditional consumption fishing & hunting, romantic view, negative (waste, desolation), positive (fresh air, peace, silence)
Post-productive/ Multifunctional	The sporting “adventure-scape”	recreational activities & tourism activities, changes in using rural environment, relaxing, active, competitive, technological, prestige, fashion-related, urban values to rural areas
Post-productive/ Multifunctional	The local food “gastro-scape”	local unique culinary traditions and practices, production and consumption of local food and drink, use of fresh, locally sourced ingredients, traditional methods and recipes, the cultural and social significance of food, promotion and support of local food producers, local food as a tourist attraction

Source: Made by author based on Bell 2006, Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010, Olwig 2019, Kim, 2015

APPENDIX B.**Results**

Category	Data Set	N	Keyword/Code	Frequency
Farm-scape (P)	Instagram posts (N=37)	2	Amenity values of natural environment	2
			Traditional values of the social environment	2
			Contrast to urban	2
			Mutual cooperation and support	2
			Roots	2
			Childhood	1
			Food security	0
			Nostalgic	0
			Ideal society	0
			Utopian	0
Farm-scape (P)	Homepage content (N=17)	4	Amenity values of natural environment	4
			Traditional values of the social environment	4
			Contrast to urban	4
			Mutual cooperation and support	3
			Roots	3
			Nostalgic	3
			Utopian	3
			Food security	1
			Childhood	0
			Ideal society	0
	Overall (N=54)	6 (11,1%)		
Wild-scape (M)	Instagram posts (N=37)	14	Visual landscape	14
			Positive	11
			Escapism	10
			Romantic view	8
			Wilderness	8
			Traditional consumption (tradition)	1

			Negative	0
Wild-scape (M)	Homepage Content (N=17)	3	Wilderness	3
			Visual landscape	3
			Positive	3
			Escapism	3
			Traditional consumption activities	2
			Romantic view	2
			Negative	0
	Overall (N=54)	17 (31,48%)		
Adventure-scape (PP)	Instagram posts (N=37)	8	Changes in using rural landscape/environment	8
			Recreational activities & tourism activities	7
			Active	6
			Competitive	5
			Technological	3
			Urban values to rural areas	3
			Relaxing	3
			Prestige	2
			Fashion-related	1
Adventure-scape (PP)	Homepage Content (N=17)	6	Changes in using rural landscape/environment	6
			Recreational activities & tourism activities	6
			Urban values to rural areas	6
			Relaxing	6
			Active	4
			Competitive	3
			Fashion-related	3
			Technological	2
			Prestige	2
	Overall (N=54)	14 (25, 9%)		
Gastro-scape (PP)	Instagram posts (N=37)	8	Production and consumption of local food and drink	8
			Local food as a tourist attraction	7
			Use of fresh	5

			Locally sourced ingredients	6
			Local unique culinary traditions and practices	4
			Direct promotion and support of local food producers	3
			Cultural element of food	1
			Traditional methods and recipes	0
Gastro-scape (PP)	Homepage Content (N=17)	2	Production and consumption of local food and drink	2
			Local food as a tourist attraction	2
			Use of fresh	2
			Locally sourced ingredients	2
			Local unique culinary traditions and practices	2
			Direct promotion and support of local food producers	2
			Cultural element of food	1
			Traditional methods and recipes	0
	Overall (N=54)	10 (18, 5%)		
Other	Instagram posts (N=37)	5	Ainu heritage, Japanese heritage, place promotion	
Other	Homepage content (N=17)	2	Wild-scape, Adventure-scape, other	
	Overall (N=54)	7 (13%)		
Overview:				
Category	Instagram (N=37)	Home Page (N=17)	Total (N=54)	
Wild-scape	14 (37.8%)	3 (17.6%)	17 (31.5%)	
Adventure-scape	8 (21.6%)	6 (35.3%)	14 (25.9%)	
Gastro-scape	8 (21.6%)	2 (11.8%)	10 (18.5%)	
Farm-scape	2 (5.4%)	4 (23.5%)	6 (11.1%)	

Source: Made by author

Appendix C.

Additional notes

Notes on the indigenous Ainu and tourism.

In the 20th century, the indigenous Ainu culture has been predominantly museum and tourism based which means that their depiction in tourism and media is often related to historic practices, not contemporary life. (Hiwasaki, 2000 p. 398) has noted that travel agencies have a long history of putting forward an image of Hokkaido as deeply connected to earth and nature, which the Ainu are often part as a prop “along with the mountains, rivers, waterfalls, foxes, deer and bears” and the author calls it “naturalisation of the Ainu”. The commodification of Ainu culture began in the 1950s – 1960s with the “Ainu boom” which resulted in an integration of their culture, seen as cultural villages, into Hokkaido tourism. In the case of Biratori, the author notes that we are dealing with bit different Ainu community in the Nibutani village, which is more than a “village fabricated for tourists”, although the author continues that already in the early 21st century it was becoming a tourist destination attracting almost 20,00 visitors during summer (Hiwasaki 2000 p. 398). However, Nakamura (2007) brought out that as the Ainu culture in Nibutani is often represented as traditional in contrast to the contemporary practises this has influenced both outsiders and insiders’ understandings of the Ainu, as outsiders expect to experience the “traditional” and locals, especially youth, has lacked interest in the culture of the Ainu because of it.

Nibutani village is the place with the largest population of Ainu in Hokkaido, with about 80% of the approximately 500 inhabitants (Hiwasaki 2000 p. 400, Robson, 2010) Overall, the statistics from 2017 show that 13,118 Ainu live in different municipalities of Hokkaido (KANTEI, 2023). These promotional posts show that rather than mere museumification and commodification of the Ainu culture can be practised outside of conventional tourism attractions and passed on to the younger generation and those interested in the Ainu culture. However, these activities still reflect the traditional and historic aspects of the Ainu culture and can be seen as part of the discourse that denies the Ainu their modern identity (Powell, 2022 p. 20).

Resümee

KOHAKUVAND MITMEKESISTUVA MAJANDUSEGA MAAPIIRKONDADE KOHATURUNDUSES

Elsa-Maria Poopuu

Käesolev uurimus keskendus sellele, kas ja kuidas maapiirkondade majanduslik mitmekesistumine kajastub kohaturunduse kontekstis kohakuvandis Hokkaido saare väikelinna Biratori näitel. Uuringu tulemused näitasid, et kuigi Biratori kohakuvandis kajastusid peamiselt maapiirkonna idüllilised aspektid, oli seal näha maamajanduse mitmekesistumist ja multifunktsionaalseid kasutusvõimalusi mitte traditsioonilist väiketalupidamist või tootmisega seotud elemente, mis kinnitab varasemaid teooriaid.

Uurimuse teoreetiline raamistik keskendus kohaturunduse kontekstis kohakuvandile ning väljakutsetele ja võimalustele, millega maapiirkonnad kohakuvandit kasutades silmitsi seisavad. Toodi esile teoreetiline raamistik maapiirkondade majanduse muutusest produktiivsest post-produktiivseks, siinkohal toodi välja, et muutust iseloomustab paremini käsitus maapiirkonna muutumisest multifunktsionaalseks. Ühtlasi seoti teooria “maalisuse” (“rurality”) tähenduse selgitamise ning erinevate tahkude välja toomisega. Töö teooria lõpetati ülevaatega Jaapani ja Hokkaido maamajanduse muutumisest tänapäevases kontekstis.

Töö metoodikana kasutati deduktiivset juhtumiuuringu meetodit, järgides Bell (2006) püstitatud raamistikku, mille alusel loodi neli kategooriat vastavate koodidega, mida kasutati Biratori linna sihtkoha kuvandit edastavate Instagrami kontode (N=37) ja Biratori linna kodulehe (N=17) kohakuvandit väljendavate postituste analüüsimisel. Tulemused näitasid, et kohakuvandi kõige silmapaistvamad aspektid olid idüllilised ja romantiseeritud maastikud, mida kujutati kui võimalust puhata linnakeskkonnast (n.ö metsik maastik), ning erinevad aktiivset puhkust pakkuvad tegevused (aktiivne maastik), mis väljendasid maapiirkonna multifunktsionaalset kasutust. Kohakuvandi analüüsist tulenevalt viitasid enam esinenud kategooriad maamajanduse mitmekesistumisele. Lisaks kajastus kuvandis kohalike põllumajandustoodete rohkus, kus rõhutati atraktiivsust (kvaliteet, “puhtus, keskkond”) külastajate ligimeelitamisel (n.ö kulinaarne maastik) ja kohaliku majanduse toetamisel, kuid tootmisprotsessi, tootmispaikade ja talupidamisega seotud elemendid olid kuvandis harva esindatud. Kõige rohkem produktiivsusega seotud kategoorias (n.ö talu maastik) tuli esile

kohakuvand, mis keskendus traditsioonidele, kogukonnale, koostööle ja Ainu kultuuripärandi säilitamisele, kuid mitte idüllilisele kuvandile põllumajandusest või väiketalupidamistest.

Uurimus aitas kaasa kohaturunduse ja maapiirkondade majandusliku mitmekesistamise mõistmisele Aasia kontekstis, kuna nii maakohtade kohaturundust kui ka kohaturundust Aasia kontekstis on seni vähe uuritud. Kuna uurimus keskendus Hokkaido väikelinnale, aitab see mõista Jaapani mõistes põllumajandusliku piirkonna kohakuvandit, tuues välja mitmekesisuse Jaapani maapiirkondade hulgas, näidates "maalisuse" ("rurality") heterogeensust ja viidates vajadusele kaasata kohalikud huvigrupid kohakuvandi loomeprotsessi. Uuringu teoreetiline osa rõhutas ka sotsiaalmeedia rolli maapiirkondade edendamisel ja sellega kaasnevaid väljakutseid, mis uurimuse käigus kinnitust leidsid.

Töö puudusena võib märkida, et kohakuvandi analüüs põhines väikesel valimil ning keskendus lühikesele ajaperioodile ja peamiselt sihtkoha kuvandile. Lisaks uuris see unikaalse ajaloo ja kultuurikeskkonnaga piirkonda Jaapanis, mistõttu on uurimistulemuste laiem rakendusala piiratud. Seega on tulevikus soovitatav keskenduda laiemale kohakuvandile ning kasutada suuremat valimit. Uurija peab oluliseks edasiseks Biratori linna kohakuvandi uurimist postkoloniaalsest teooriast lähtudes.

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PLACE IMAGES IN THE PLACE MARKETING OF DIVERSIFYING RURAL
ECONOMIES: HOKKAIDO, BIRATORI,

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Elsa-Maria Poopuu

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