Overview: The Educational Capabilities of Geoparks: From Education to Learning

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Activities in Japan’s geoparks are becoming more popular every day. Many of the papers in this special issue include statements about 43 geoparks in Japan—statements that can signify surprises and hope for geoparks. Geopark activities have been underway since the 2008 certification of seven geoparks in Japan. The geosciences, specializing in regional and academic communities, have also held many symposia, and there are hopes of approaches in addition to trial and error on the part of local communities, local governments, and researchers concerning geopark activities.

The Journal of Geography (Chigaku Zasshi) featured a special issue on “Geoparks and Regional Development” in 2011, which included many papers with the theme of the “effects of geoparks on regional development.” The papers in that issue explained the geopark concept through such topics as philosophy and background, geotourism, geocotourism, regional diversity, university activities, protecting and conserving the natural environment, civic consciousness and activities, geostory, geodiversity, and guiding tours (Kikuchi et al., 2011). After that special issue, the journal also published papers on attracting visitors from the perspectives of business economics, working situation of tour guides, and range of academic coverage of the geosciences provided by geoparks (Ito et al., 2015; Isono, 2015; Ogata, 2015). Thus, this journal has published papers related to geoparks, although there have been few papers about education in geoparks.

This special issue focuses on education at geoparks, so that many authors engaging in educational activities can present case studies, as well as their own viewpoints. The issue was triggered by the symposium “Educational Capability in the Geopark: What and How Do We Educate for Surviving in Fluctuating Earth” held during the meeting of the Association of Japanese Geographers in 2015. At the symposium, researchers debated the role of the geopark as a place for learning about the natural environment of a region, and they found the importance of re-examinations and peer relationships between residents and researchers (Miyahara et al., 2015). This basic concept of geoparks for education can be seen in the papers of this issue as well; the subtitle of this issue “From Education to Learning” was added accordingly.

Teaching and the overall educational situation in Japan is also changing. To take university education as an example, education needs efforts towards active learning. Japan’s government defines active learning as follows: “It is not education done by one-way lectures or talks from teachers to students, but rather a way of joining and being actively involved in learning for the students. Active learning cultivates students’ varied abilities, including cognition, ethics, social competence, culture and knowledge” (Central Council for Education, 2012, p. 37). As a result, the government is moving it forward. This educational policy of Japan is not only for university students but also for children, junior-high and high-school students and adults. Places and opportunities are needed for learning actively and voluntarily. Therefore, Oike (2016) also maintains in this issue that “education” can be important but “learning” can be much more important.

Oike (2016) introduces a brief summary of a

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geopark pedigree and eight geoparks in Japan, and captures the history of the Japanese archipelago with the metaphor of a "fluctuating belt." He explains how human lives and cultures using a bountiful land in a fluctuating belt can be part of a learning experience at geoparks in Japan. This paper also discusses some systems related to geoscience resources in geoparks, and how geoparks relate to natural disasters. Oike (2016) also points out that geoparks need awareness and inquiries about academic diversity. However, his comment in the paper is directly related to the title and concept of this special issue. He says "the word 'education' is transitive and means to 'educate and cultivate,' but the word 'learning' is intransitive and means to 'learn and study.'" The educational role of geoparks can be better expressed by this "learning." His expression encompasses the actual conditions and status of education in Japan's geoparks. The paper also introduces case studies on educational activities for children provided by tour guides.

Takenouchi (2016) discusses the educational features of a geopark, focusing on the educational program at the Itoigawa UNESCO Global Geopark. His paper informs us that the success factors for carrying out educational activities in this geopark are the "decision to implement the policy" and the "provision of tools." Indeed, the City Board of Education of Itoigawa City supervises an integrated education system that promotes educational activities in this geopark. The "Itoigawa geo-study" is intended to be a tool for managing the system. Takenouchi (2016) points out reasons for the popularity of these educational activities. These reasons are a good understanding by the Board of Education, timing, good involvement with local residents, good understanding of teachers and schools and of their requirements, and close cooperation with the government. The cases and opinions about educational activities in the paper offer many references for educators. Takenouchi (2016) also lays out cases of social education activities and their effects on regional development.

Yuhora et al. (2016) report on educational programs at Muroto High School in the Muroto UNESCO Global Geopark. They emphasize the importance of a "geographical perspective" on educational programs and examine their effectiveness as well as their problems. Geo-studies in this school are not one-way education, such as teaching provided by teachers, but rather a form of learning, such as learning from local residents along with students and teachers, with support from teachers. Students in the music curriculum study local traditional performing arts and try to transmit information about the arts themselves. This program produces educational effects not only for the students, but also local residents. Yuhora et al. (2016) point out that features of "geographical perspectives," as one of the field studies, support these educational or learning effects. However, the paper notes some problems for education in this area, and naturalizing outsiders and re-examining the geopark can be a form of medicine for these problems.

Educational activities at geoparks do not occur only in schools. Kurihara (2016) describes activities at a museum in Mikasa Geopark. The Mikasa City Museum has educational programs for junior-high and high-school students. The aim is to cultivate a scientific understanding by experiencing fossil research. The museum also prepares guidebooks and guideboards, operates geotours, holds round-table talks, has created a logo for the Mikasa Geopark together with the university, and revamps geostories. These activities represent how the museum is engaged in the operations of the geopark. Kurihara (2016) points out the role of the scientific check function and the interpretation and transmission of museum information as roles of curators at this geopark. The paper focuses on the significance of museums within geoparks.

There have been many successes with individual cases; however, there are problems with cases when taking a higher and more global perspective of geoparks. Niina and Matsubara (2016) compare management systems and researcher commitments for educational activities at San'in Kai-gan Geopark in Japan and Lesvos Geopark in Greece. University researchers engage in educational activities inside and outside our own uni-
versities at San'in Kaigan Geopark. The universities have educational programs connected with this geopark, and researchers also create walking maps of the park with local residents. By way of comparison, museum researchers are the main actors at the Lesvos Geopark. They conduct educational activities and community renovations. Niina and Matsubara (2016) point out that these activities are infected by the management system of each geopark. They add that interpersonal networking, nurturing residents who support geoparks, the moral positioning of researchers in the area, and mutual learning are key points for developing educational activities in geoparks.

Education and learning at geoparks are not only for children, junior-high and high-school students, and university students, but also adults in the local area. From thinking extensively about education and learning at geoparks, educational effects may be valid for people outside geoparks. For example, they may be valid for tourists visiting geoparks. Koike and Kikuchi (2016) survey evaluations and interpretations of tourism resources by university students who visited Izu-Oshima Geopark. As a result of their visits, students prefer places with viewpoints and elegant interpretations of tour guides. They also assign importance to "experience" in their preferences. "Experience" motivates an interest in geoscience resources such as geological formations and conditions. Experience with educational activities in many geoparks has recently been put into practice, so this paper presents typical aspects of geotours with tour guides and interpretations of tours.

However, tourism in geoparks is regarded to be an important factor for regional development; Arima et al. (2016) also note the significance of geoparks for tourism education. In particular, they report on educational programs at Teikyo University covering Hakone Geopark and examine their effects. After the programs, students who specialize in tourism studies improve their opinions of tourism resources, which change to include geoscience resources, communication skills for performing tour planning and operating tours, and techniques for negotiating with local suppli-

ers. Arima et al. (2016) offer a clear understanding of tourism education by local residents and local suppliers, and how human networking at this geopark has supported the achievements of these educational programs. This paper shows that the objectives of education or learning at geoparks concern not only geosciences such as geology, geography, and community studies, but also other academic studies.

The papers in this special issue represent many types of educational and learning activity conducted at geoparks in Japan. However, what is the ideal overall concept of education in Japan's geoparks? Kohmoto (2016) discusses the geopark education situation in Japan from the perspective of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). He specifically compares Global Action Programs in ESD and the current state of educational activities in geoparks in Japan, and lays out a concrete agenda for Japan's geoparks. He notes that education in geoparks and ESD involve similar concepts, and offers a gradual model of geopark education in Japan. The paper concludes on a decisive note with a discussion on the necessity for innovation in organizational operations and learning content for the future of education in the geoparks of Japan.

Although each paper in this special issue presents unique cases and viewpoints, a common challenge emerges for the future of education in Japan's geoparks. This overview steers clear of specifying it. Please read the papers of this special issue, and discover this common challenge. Beyond the papers themselves, images related to the papers are included. These were captured by photographers who are in many cases also the authors of the papers. The pictorials depict major activities in geopark lands and lives related to their activities, and they are the objectives of education and learning by everyone from children to adults. The geopark should repay the learning and pleasure provided as a public mission. I hope that this special issue will contribute to the development of learning, not educating, in geoparks.

References


* Title etc. translated by T.A.