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Introduction

My hometown is in the mountainous area of southern Osaka Prefecture, in a rural area surrounded by lush mountains below 1,000 meters which flourished as a post town along the Koya Highway from Kyoto to Koyasan. The culture of *Shugendo* [修験道] (Japanese mountain asceticism) and pilgrimages to sacred places remains there. As a child, I remember playing in the grounds of shrines and temples and hiking to nearby low mountains to enjoy nature.

I taught mainly two courses: ecotourism and regional creation at the Graduate School of International Media, Communication and Tourism Studies of Hokkaido University for five years from 2016 to 2021. After retiring from Hokkaido University three years ago, I am now the representative director of the non-profit organization Walk Lab Sapporo.

My research themes

My research themes are mainly two. First, I learned about regional ecological planning which is a future planning that aims at the sustainable development of local communities based on the premise of preserving local biodiversity, maintaining scenic beauty, and preventing natural disasters. I gained a deeper understanding of human happiness and the beauty of living in natural ecosystems.

The other theme, which was also the research topic of my Ph.D. thesis, was ecotourism and the preservation and inheritance of the lifestyle and culture of a small chiefdom in the Northwest Province of the Republic of Cameroon in Africa, with a population of several tens of thousands.

Comparing modernized life in Japan with life in rural Cameroon, which has not benefited much from modernization, I realized that while Japan has a strong sense of material wealth, people's spiritual wealth and sense of happiness are not necessarily proportional to it. Experiencing the rural culture in Cameroon makes me truly feel that the creation of tourism is a regional creation. Particularly I am convinced that moving from car-centered regional development to regional development where people can enjoy

walking and cycling and have diverse experiences will lead to regional revitalization and the creation of new tourism.

Based on this experience, I retired from the university and am working as a private citizen, engaging in NPO activities that aim to "encourage both residents and tourists to walk the streets of the city, take an interest in Sapporo, help it grow, develop an attachment to it, and help create a city that people can be proud of."

About the Sapporo Round Walk Concept

Background of the Proposal

For two years, starting in 2017, the Center for Advanced Tourism Studies at Hokkaido University hosted a tourism creation study group on the theme of "New Development through Extended Stay and Interactions with Locals in Walking Tourism".

Then, for another two years, starting in 2019, the "Study Group on the Implementation of Extended Stay and Interactions with Locals in Walking Tourism in Sapporo through Industry-Government-Academia Collaboration" continued with the cooperation of the Tourism-MICE Promotion Department, Bureau of

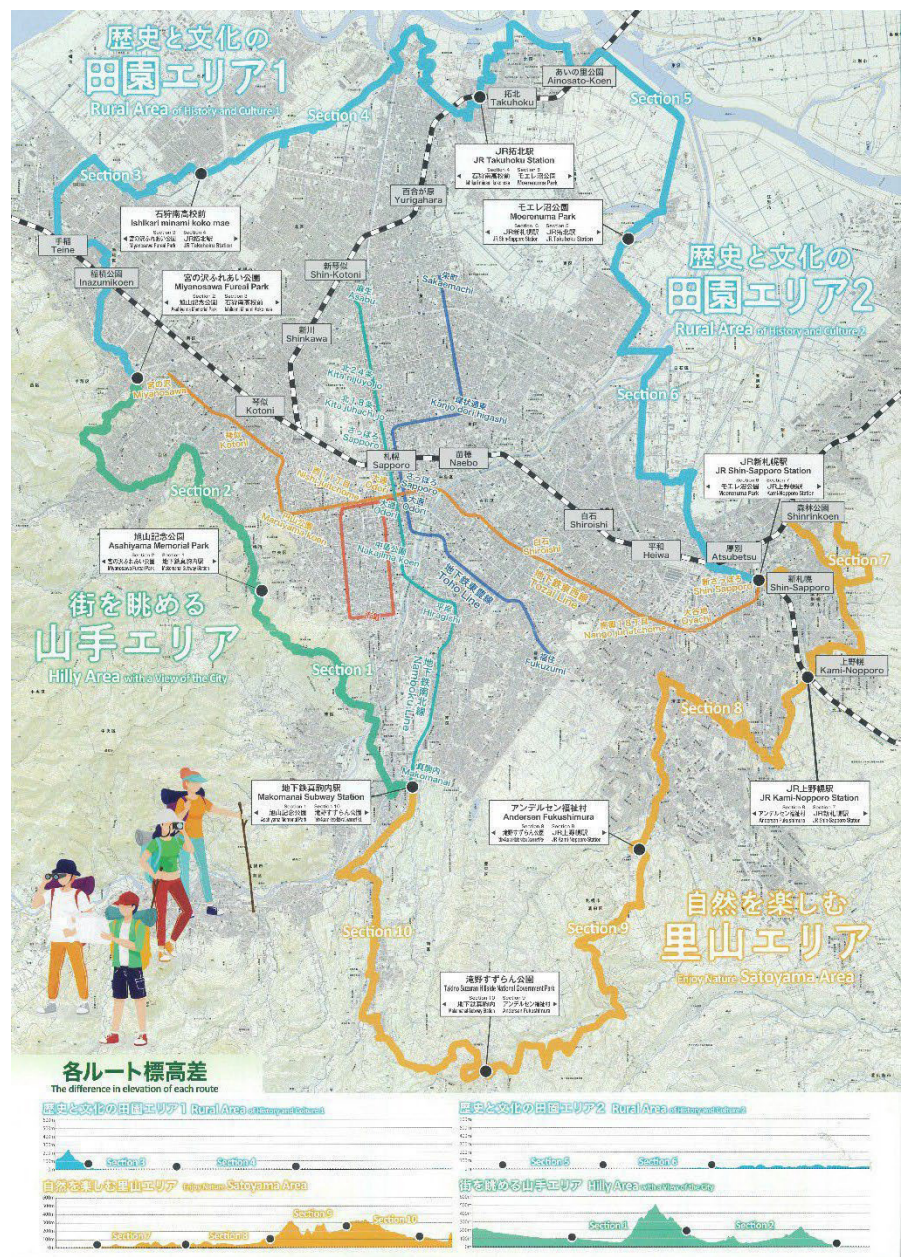


Figure 1: The route, divided into four larger sections, surrounding Sapporo City (Sapporo Round Walk, 2023)

Economy and Tourism of the city of Sapporo, the Sapporo Tourist Association, and the Eco Network in the private sector, a pioneer of walking tourism in Sapporo.

The specific outcomes of these study groups have been, as one of the concrete results of these study groups, we have come up with a proposal for a 140-km circular walking route around the city of Sapporo, called “Sapporo Round Walk” (Sapporo r-w, online).

Course Selection

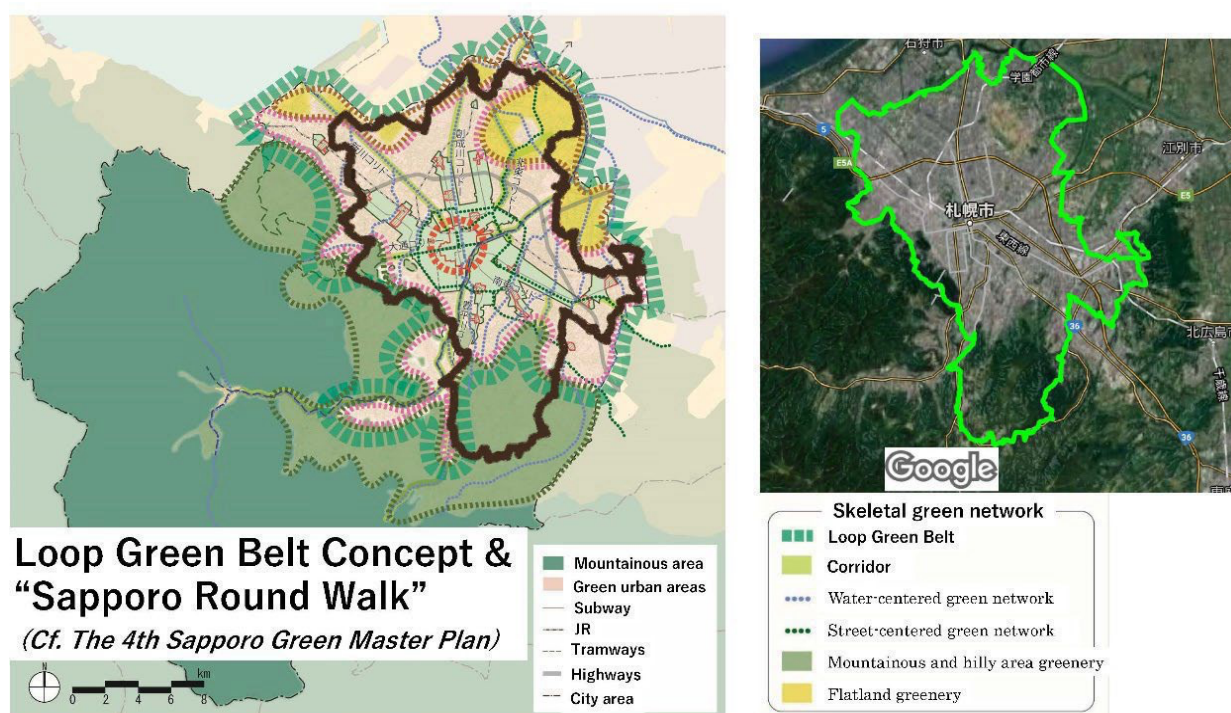


Figure 2: The route, laid upon the Loop Green Belt Concept of Sapporo City (Adapted from 4th Sapporo City Green Master Plan and Google Map, 2019)

The course of the “Sapporo Round Walk” was finally decided by the members of the study group, who gathered information and conducted field surveys. As a result, the course is almost in line with the “Loop Green Belt,” which has been established in Sapporo City’s urban planning since the 1980s. This circular course for walking trail can be roughly divided into three areas: “Rural Area of History and Culture”, “Satoyama Area for Enjoying Nature”, and “Hilly Area for Viewing the City).

This walking course was created with the aim of allowing visitors to fully experience the natural, historical, and cultural attractions of Sapporo, a city of approximately 2 million people. This course is not a new construction, but a combination of existing public roads, city parks, greenways, riverbeds, and nature trails that anyone can freely walk along.

Objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a major transformation in our lifestyle. We believe that it is of great importance to establish, promote, and develop the “Sapporo Round Walk,” a circular walk with themes of health, environment, tourism, interaction, and scenery, and to foster a culture of walking to spread the enjoyment of walking in Sapporo and to create new exchanges. We hope that both citizens and tourists will take an interest in Sapporo, fall in love with the city, become attached to it, and feel proud of it as they walk the streets. We, a non-profit organization, have established the “Sapporo Round Walk Charter:

Sapporo Round Walk Charter

- We must pass on the characteristics that we are proud of and that were created by our ancestors, such as Sapporo's streetscape, living environment, history, culture, and natural resources, to the next generation.
- We should cherish the joy of walking, the views of our ancestors on community building, and the lives of citizens shaped by these thoughts.
- With the goal of reaffirming the resources created through new exchanges, six charters were established.

Six Charters

1. Establishing courses to cultivate lush greenery and water (protection of nature)
2. Establishing courses to study and protect the hometown and teach our pride in it (Hometown Study)
3. Establishing courses to promote health (Health Promotion)
4. Establishing the courses as tourism resources to promote the value of Sapporo (Tourism Resources)
5. Establishing the courses to protect and transmit them in cooperation with citizens (Cooperation with Citizens)
6. Establishing courses familiar to as many people as possible to transmit them to children and grandchildren (Sustainability)

Aiming for implementation

NPO Walk Lab Sapporo was established in September 2020 with the aim of implementing the Sapporo Round Walk and was approved by the Sapporo City Government in December of the same year. Currently, there are about 30 members, 10 of whom are involved in the management of the organization as board members. Many of the board members are members of the study group and graduates of Hokkaido University's graduate school and the certificate program “Destination Manager Training Program.

Over the past four years, we have held briefings on the “Sapporo Round Walk” for a variety of stakeholders (government, citizens, tourists, and private companies) as well as walking events and symposiums for citizens to participate. In addition, with subsidies from the Japan Tourism Agency, we have been disseminating information through our website and creating and selling guide maps, goods, and smartphone map applications. To date, we have held about 10 walking events per year, with about 10 participants per event. We also hold a symposium about once a year, with 50 to 100 people attending.

About the future

We aim to increase the number of members and sponsors through volunteer activities

related to the maintenance and upkeep of the “Sapporo Round Walk” course, hold walking events in each of the 10 wards of Sapporo in cooperation with citizens to raise awareness, and create and sell walking tour products to domestic and foreign tourists visiting Sapporo.

Conclusion

The route that we will walk for two days, today and tomorrow, is part of the Sapporo Round Walk Course. I am very pleased that you have chosen the Sapporo Round Walk Course to hold this walking conference. I hope that everyone will enjoy the walk and that the conference will be very meaningful.

References

Sapporo Round Walk. (2023). Online resource. <https://sapporo-rw.com/en/top/>.