



### International conference at the DIJ

#### *Work-Related Diversity*

On November 30th and December 1st 2017, the DIJ hosted the conference “From Flexible Rigidities to Embracing Diversity? – Work-Related Diversity and Its Implications for Japan and Beyond”, kindly supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. International experts convened to discuss work-related diversity in Japan in a comparative and multidisciplinary perspective.

The conference was organized by a multidisciplinary DIJ research team as part of the research focus on “Work-related Diversity in Japan: New Risks and Opportunities for Whom?”. Its aim was to develop a better understanding of factors which influence processes of increasing diversity and the resulting risks and chances.

After a short introduction, the first panel examined different approaches to efficient multinational team management. The studies presented showed that certain personality traits of team leaders and members such as tolerance for ambiguity and cultural intelligence have a prominent positive impact on team performance. Adding to the academic perspective, the panel ended with a practitioner’s report on multinational team management in a Japanese company.

The second panel analyzed how different aspects of the relationship between work and workers, as well as traditional gender roles are depicted in Japanese and German media. In particular, it dealt with the question of how media and literature negotiate the topic of diversity with regard to individual life histories, social stereotypes, and ideals, and in doing so both highlight and scrutinize the influence of existing structures.

The second day of the conference shifted the focus to the interplay of legal and political programs intended to enhance diversity on the one side and actual changes in the working environment on the other side. The panel had a particular focus on the scope and effects of political changes with regard to gender equality, which can be understood as an important dimension of diversity. A striking discrepancy between public statements of intent in political programs, the resulting laws, their practical implementation, and the ultimate outcomes was shown at the level of the European Union, as well as for individual countries such as Germany and Japan.



Phoebe Holdgrün, Deputy Director of the DIJ with Senior Research Fellows Tobias Söldner, Steffen Heinrich, and Ronald Saladin (from left)

The final panel addressed the question of whether structural reforms within the Japanese and German labor markets are substantial or just superficial. As an example, the panel looked at the public services sector in Japan, which is characterized by legislative regulations conducive to non-regular forms of employment, and a high ratio of female workers. Similar to Germany, the series of labor market reforms initiated throughout the past decades did not result in significant improvements for underprivileged groups. However, results indicated that the increasing participation of women and non-regular employees in labor unions might lay the groundwork for future improvements.

The conference concluded with a public DIJ Forum with two keynote lectures by Andrea D. Bührmann (Georg-August-University of Goettingen) and Mieko Takenobu (Wako University). With her concept Reflexive Diversity Research, Prof. Bührmann presented a theoretical research approach, whereas Prof. Takenobu focused on Japan’s traditional forms of employment and their dependence on domestic support by women.

Building on their fruitful discussions, the invited speakers explored options for future research collaborations during the following public reception.

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**Eva Küpper** participated in DIJ’s internship programme from October to December.

**Tobias Söldner** is a Senior Research Fellow at DIJ and an expert in cross-cultural research methods and psychology.  
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## Local Anti-Nuclear Movements in Japan

The construction of a nuclear power plant is always a fiercely contested issue, especially for the affected local communities. During a DIJ Study Group in July 2017, scholarship holder Tina Hügel presented her field research findings on the diverging cases of two small towns in Niigata and Aomori prefectures.

The focus was on local political negotiation processes ahead of a planned settlement of nuclear facilities in two small towns with very different outcomes.

In the town of Maki, which is a part of Niigata City today, plans for a nuclear power plant were thwarted by a citizen referendum in 1996 – the first time ever this strategy was adopted successfully in Japan. The small town of Rokkasho in Aomori prefecture, on the other hand, hosts one of the largest nuclear centers comprised of several nuclear facilities since 1992.

Hügel described in detail the disputes and negotiations in the two towns

over the period of several decades. Furthermore, she identified commonalities and variances in the specific local conditions and the interplay of local and national politics. As in other countries, economically disadvantaged and underpopulated areas were selected for construction. However, a closer look at the local level reveals differences, e.g. in the economic situation of both communities, their distance from or interconnectedness with larger urban conglomerations, and the openness of local politics to the involvement of outside actors like social movements.

The multifaceted crowd of guests consisting of researchers, students, professionals, and anti-nuclear activists engaged in a lively discussion of the presented findings. They exchanged opinions on other cases of ‘nuclear villages’ and the possibilities and constraints of social movements in Japan. Another topic of great interest to many of the attendees was Japanese nuclear policy in comparison to other countries. S.G.

## Japan’s rural areas – challenges and policies

Many municipalities outside of Japan’s larger agglomeration are exposed to severe demographic change. One out of eight communities experienced a more than 10 per cent decline in population over the last five years. In one out of seven communities, the share of the 65+ population is 40 per cent or higher.

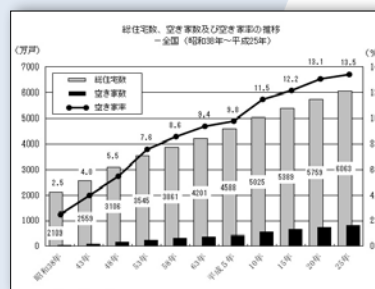
Shrinking and ageing are highly correlated and combine with economic decline to form a vicious circle. The out-migration of young people and the lower demand for local products and services force companies to shut down. This in turn reduces the employment opportunities of the remaining work force, thus inducing more citizens to leave. The economic downturn weakens the local tax base, while

the rising number of older people leads to higher expenditures for elderly care and population decline increases infrastructure maintenance costs, which are already high due to thinly populated areas. Official statistics tend to underestimate the severity of the situation, because the

worst cases vanished during the last wave of municipal mergers. Between 2000 and 2010 the number of municipalities declined from 3230 to 1735. As a consequence, their average size increased to over 70,000 inhabitants. In contrast, the average size of German communities is just about 7,000 inhabitants. Many of the newly created large cities lack a metropolitan centre. Their settlement structure rather resembles that of German countries.



Nuclear reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori



Share of vacant houses relative to the total number (1963 - 2013)

<http://www.stat.go.jp/data/s-sugata>

<sup>1</sup> The following data and calculations are based on 統計でみる市区町村のすがた [Municipal profiles from a statistical point of view]



The Abe administration is trying to tackle the above problems by a variety of measures subsumed under the slogan rural revitalization (地方創生). Given the wide variety in actual conditions across local communities, simple one-size-fits-all solutions will not be effective. Decisions as to what extent settlements need to be consolidated and in what ways this should be done must take local circumstances into account. This equally applies to the realization of potentials for regional development that agriculture and forestry, tourism, renewable energy, digitalisation, regional clusters or the marketing of “a life in the countryside” may be

able to offer. The search for decentralized solutions requires the activation of local knowledge and initiative. However, regional policy-making in Japan has for a long time been undertaken by the central government in a top-down manner, the role of local communities being limited to the passive implementation of centrally designed measures. Over the last fifteen years, administrative and fiscal reforms have expanded the scope of action for municipal governments. Nevertheless, there has in many cases been little change in the traditional perception and understanding of the roles played by local decision makers. *F.W.*



Opening speech at the annual conference of the German Association for Social Science Research on Japan on the subject of "Rural Japan Revisited: Autonomy and Heteronomy in the Peripheries" at the University of Vienna, co-organized by the DIJ

## Do labour market inequalities erode support for democracy?

**In October 2017, a workshop co-organised by the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ), Tokyo, l'École des Hautes Études des Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris, and the Japan German Centre Berlin (JDZB) examined links between labour market inequalities and politics in France, Germany and Japan.**

Recent successes of anti-mainstream politicians and parties in mature democracies are often attributed to growing feelings of political marginalisation and alienation. Academic and public debate has increasingly focussed on the division between labour market insiders (those in secure jobs) and labour market outsiders (the unemployed and those in precarious and insecure employment) as a potential cause for this development. Held at EHESS in Paris on October 6-7, workshop participants discussed whether these structural divisions translate into similar political repercussions in the three countries.

The discussion of the patterns and causes of labour market inequalities identified several important commonalities. In particular, all three countries feature similar structural inequalities, such as the gap between “good” and “bad” jobs. However, there was some disagreement on the main causes for these inequali-

ties. While some saw structural reforms as the main factor driving the process, others pointed to changes in personnel practices of employers or changing values, e.g. with regard to female employment.

Following this discussion, the links between labour market inequalities and political consequences were addressed in more detail. The participants discussed whether support for the proposal of French reform of labour contracts could be explained with an underlying insider-outsider conflict. An in-depth analysis suggested that this was not a sufficient explanation and that other attributes had to be taken into account. The comparison of Germany and Japan, two countries with strikingly similar patterns of labour market inequalities, confirmed this point. Despite these structural similarities the political consequences for policy preferences of voters and policy were quite different. This suggests that institutional differences with regard to systems of redistribution as well as the tax system appear to play a decisive role in this context. The discussion also took up the point on how marginalised workers could be better integrated politically. It was suggested that social dialogue of various forms may be better suited than legal changes. *S.H.*



Workshop participants in October 2017

<https://dij.tokyo/workshop-ehess-2017>

More information about the workshop as well as a full programme is available on our website.

## Recent publications

Peter Backhaus (ed.)

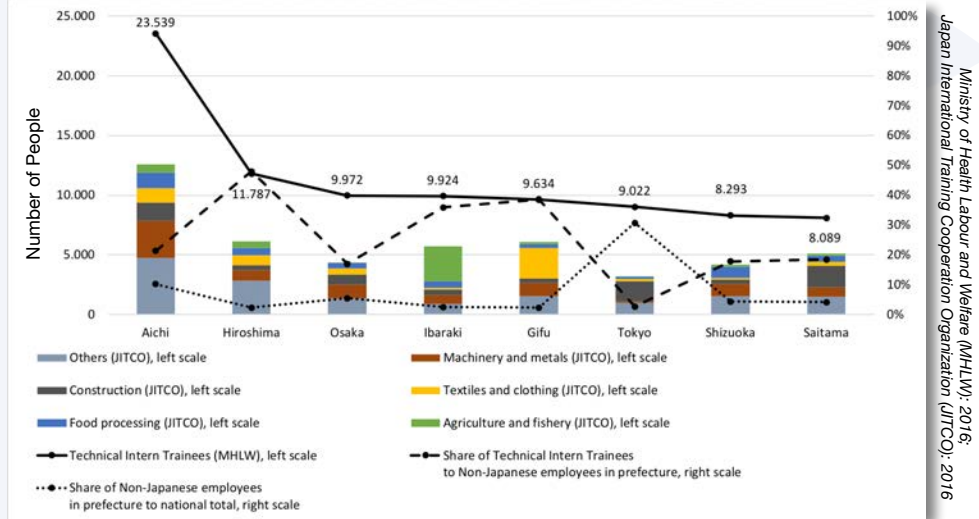


*Care Communication.  
Making a home in a  
Japanese eldercare facility*

Oxon: Routledge, 2017,  
188 pages.

► [dij.tokyo/care-communication](http://dij.tokyo/care-communication)

## Non-Japanese employees in Japan



Since the global financial crisis the number of Non-Japanese employees working in Japan is rising again. Especially the number of so called Technical Intern Trainees, who from November 2017 are permitted to work for up to five years in Japan, has risen significantly.

Remarkably Trainees also work in those prefectures where only few other Non-Japanese are employed. In Tokyo, where in 2015 30% of all Non-Japanese employees were concentrated, Trainees accounted for merely 3.7%. In Hiroshima, where only 2.3% of all Non-Japanese workers were employed, Trainees constituted more than half of them. *D.K.*

## Staff News



**Sonja Ganseforth** has received her doctorate from the University of Leipzig and the DFG graduate school “Critical Junctures of Globalization” with a dissertation on Japanese development politics in the Middle East. Before, she has studied Arab Studies, Japanese Studies and German as a Foreign Language in Leipzig, Kyoto and Damascus. At DIJ she is conducting research on Japanese fisheries in the context of major global transformations.

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**Isaac Gagné** is a Senior Research Fellow and the Managing Editor of the DIJ’s journal Contemporary Japan since June 2017. He received his PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Yale University and has worked at Waseda University Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and The University of Hong Kong. His current research is on the localization of global mental health care in Japan, with a focus on the localization of globalized mental health care in Japan.

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**Picture Credits:** Page 1 {Tobias Söldner, Steffen Heinrich, Ronald Saladin, Phoebe Holdgrün} Sven Eichelberg. Page 2 {Nuclear reprocessing plant in Rokkasho} CC BY-SA 3.0 | wikimedia/Nife, {Statistic} Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Page 3 {Dietmar Schwank} University of Vienna, {Workshop participants in Paris} EHESS. Page 4 {Statistics} Daniel Kremers.

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