

Chapter 5

Drama Off-Screen: A Multi-stakeholder Perspective on Film Tourism in Relation to the Japanese Morning Drama (*Asadora*)

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Abstract This chapter is dedicated to tourism induced by the Japanese morning drama (*asadora*), a very popular genre since the early 1960s. Based on a review of Western and Japanese theories of audience participation and film tourism as well as on field research on the filming location of one recent *asadora*, we investigate the phenomenon of film tourism from a multi-stakeholder perspective, thereby considering the following participants: the fans as active audience, the media producers and their marketing strategies and the local communities which provide the filming locations and implement strategies for the development of film tourism. For the latter, we suggest to differentiate more clearly between the distinct parties involved. Through this more nuanced view, it becomes clear why the planning and organisation of film tourism can become a double-edged sword. General insights on the opportunities and risks of film tourism make this case study relevant also beyond the Japanese context.

Keywords Japan • Drama series • Audience participation • Local communities • Rural revitalisation • *Asadora*

5.1 Introduction

Now, let's set out on the journey, without fear,
Even if these are only small steps.
The places you're meant to see,
The people you're meant to meet
Are waiting for you.

(*Marezora*, opening song of the morning drama *Mare*, 2015)

The Japanese morning drama (*renzoku terebi shōsetsu*, short: *asadora*) is an enormously successful product: it has been attracting people of all ages since the

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beginning of the 1960s and today still reaches the highest audience ratings on Japanese television. For many people, the *asadora* has become a habitual element of daily life; shown during breakfast, they offer a topic of discussion throughout the rest of the day. Although this series format has long been of relevance to tourism, very little attention has been paid to it in the English language research on film tourism, whereas anime tourism in Japan has been treated in various studies (e.g. Okamoto 2015; Suzuki 2011; Yamamura 2015). Seaton (2015) has done research on the so-called *Taiga dorama*, a very popular historical series format, and notes that it is “routinely assumed that Taiga dramas will induce tourism booms” (p. 83). The same holds true for the *asadora* format: due to its great presence in everyday life and the character of its content, it is very suitable for stimulating viewers to travel.

The *asadora*, produced like the *Taiga dorama* by the state-run broadcaster NHK, usually tells the life story of a female protagonist over 6 months and is being broadcast from Monday to Saturday from 8:00 to 8:15 a.m. The *asadora* has long been regarded as a typical “housewife” TV format, but the audience has recently become more diverse, with the highest audience ratings for women over 50 and men over 60 (Hoshi et al. 2017, p. 90). On average, audience ratings of *asadora* nowadays are around 20%, which is very high compared to other TV shows in Japan. Recent studies show that watching *asadora* has become habitualised to such a degree that many people even watch it if they do not particularly like the story (Nihei and Sekiguchi 2016). This does not mean that the audience does not care about the content, on the contrary: the interaction of the audience with the series has increased through social media, and it has become more important than ever for NHK to take audience activity into account.

While the *Taiga dorama* is usually shot at historical sites such as battlefields, castles, etc., which are often already oriented towards tourists, *asadora* producers regularly choose rural regions as locations. This carries a special potential to make rather remote areas attractive for tourism and to contribute to regional revitalisation. Because of this potential, the Japanese government has actively promoted film tourism since the late 2000s, using the keyword “contents tourism” (*kontentsu tsūrisumu*) (see also Chap. 16 in this volume). These promotional activities in Japan were inspired by the huge boom in tourism induced by Korean TV series from 2000 onwards, which has attracted both the attention of policy-makers and researchers (Kim et al. 2007; Kim 2012).

Yamamura (2015, p. 77) considers a triangular network of fans, copyright holders and local communities as crucial for film tourism in Japan. Successful negotiations between these three parties are expected to lead to mutual benefits. We adopt Yamamura’s model in our chapter and examine the case of fan activities and film tourism related to *asadora* from a multi-stakeholder perspective—an approach that is still rare in film tourism research. First, we deal with the role of fans as “active audience”; second, we discuss the position of the copyright holders and media producers; and third, we investigate the role of local communities at the filming locations. Although we deal with them in separate chapters, the activities of these three actors are indeed closely linked and interdependent. Since we argue that film tourism can only become prosperous if it is firmly rooted in fan culture, we make

the audience's perspective our starting point. While the first two sections treat the series format in general, the third is based on field research conducted by Timo Thelen at the locations of the *asadora Mare* (2015). We consider this particular case as a “failure story”, which can provide valuable lessons on the opportunities and risks of film tourism.

5.2 *Asadora* and the Active Audience

Enthusiastic *asadora* spectators certainly cannot be compared to Star Trek fans, whom Henry Jenkins used in his classic *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992) as an example of the great productive power of fandom. With their relatively short time span, and sequels being the exception, Japanese series have less potential for long-term loyalty. However, the success of *asadora* cannot be reduced to the effects of short-term commercial strategies alone, but it is also rooted in the practices of the audience. Audience ratings are an important indicator for the success of a series; however, according to Takō, they alone do not indicate how popular an *asadora* really is. For example, the series *Chiritotechnin* (2007/08), with its below average audience ratings of 15.9%, has produced particularly passionate fans, and a Rakugo boom occurred because of how the protagonist of the series practices this traditional humorous storytelling art.

A classic example of the power of *asadora* to stimulate audience participation is the series *Oshin* (1983/84), which reached record audience ratings of 52.6% on average and spawned the buzzword “oshindrome”, which described the enthusiasm for this media product. The series tells the story of a poor peasant girl, who experiences World War II and the harsh reality of the post-war era, until she finally becomes the owner of a supermarket chain. The heroine Oshin became a role model for many people, as well as a symbol of the development of the Japanese nation in the twentieth century. Nationwide, people exchanged ideas about *Oshin* in fan meetings and created fan magazines, and NHK received a large quantity of fan mail. The series, however, was also controversial: In September 1983, there was a discussion meeting of women in Kyōto, who were annoyed by *Oshin*'s ideal image of the all-enduring woman (“Zakkichō” 1983).

Talking about the *asadora* and other small performative acts in everyday life—that is, acts designated by Fiske (1992, p. 37–39) as the “enunciative productivity” of fans—is still quite common in the context of *asadora*: According to a survey on *Amachan* (2013) conducted by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute (Nihei and Sekiguchi 2014, p. 18), 39% of the audience talk about the series with their families, and 30% exchange their ideas about it with friends and acquaintances. Another popular activity is the repetition of words and slogans from the series (11%), and 2% said they had visited the region in which the series is set. This kind of performative participation was also crucial for the enjoyment of *Oshin*: for instance, during the broadcasting of the series, eating rice with radish (*daikonmeshi*) became a popular custom among families. This dish expresses the poverty of

Oshin's family in the series and stands for a simple but honourable life. Shefner-Rogers et al. (1998) state that *Oshin*'s success is rooted in its power to induce a particularly high degree of such audience interaction.

As Kelly (2004) points out, an important part of being a fan is the desire for intimacy with the object of interest. Because of their daily presence and their function as a relaxed, ritualised start to everyday life, *asadora* offer an excellent framework for the development of intimacy with the figures and content of the series. *Asadora* producer Yaguchi even declares: "If things go well, audience and programme can become completely one" (Takō 2012, p. 290). Such an intensive reception is also referred to as "para-social interaction", which means that the viewer feels a seemingly immediate relationship to the fictional characters, "as if they were in the circle of one's peers" (Horton and Wohl 1956, p. 215). In many cases, the fictional counterpart is perceived and treated like a "real" person—usually only playfully, in a "willing suspension of disbelief" but sometimes also with bizarre consequences: Yūko Tanaka, for example, the actress who played Oshin, received parcels with rice from many viewers, because Oshin was so poor in the series (Shefner-Rogers et al. 1998, p. 10).

What also contributes to the success of the *asadora* is that by experiencing the stories simultaneously, the viewers feel connected in a kind of (national) "imagined community" (Anderson 2006). Hansen (2016) regards the NHK morning programme as a "secular morning ritual", a "repeated activity that defines them and sustains them as we, Japanese" (p. 15). Due to the digitisation and diversification of the programme, this feeling might have become weaker over the last few years, but at the same time, the Internet and social media offer countless new possibilities for the audience to participate. The NHK study on *Amachan* (Nihei and Sekiguchi 2014) also clearly confirms the significance of the Internet for the reception of a series. A small, but extremely committed part of the *asadora* audience shows an increased presence on the Internet, exchanges opinions, publishes fan works, and thereby influences the public's perception of the series. Twitter is especially important: during the broadcast of *Amachan*, over 6 million tweets were posted under the hashtag #Amachan (Nihei and Sekiguchi 2014, p. 24), ranging from simple comments to elaborate drawings by professional illustrators. This type of audience participation "calls for no fan-communal setting" (Hills 2013, p. 138), and each individual is able to participate spontaneously. Fan activities, however, do not unfold in a completely free and independent space; they are also linked to economic interests. For example, some illustrators use fan art as a catalyst for their business, and for NHK, the world of the series is expanding through social media, creating new market potentials.

For the development of film tourism, audience activities online is also of great relevance: Twitter posts often refer to the locations of the *asadora*. Users share their own photos of the filming locations, declare their interest in local food and comment on dialect terms. In the case of *Mare* (2015), fans posted pictures of the morning market of Wajima, the local town hall and of various souvenirs. Even a member of the popular idol group NMB48 shared photos of herself on a salt field in Noto, on which she pretends to work there (Naiki Kokoro 2015). As Kim (2010) explains,

tourists often re-enact certain scenes from a series for such photos, thus intensifying the experience of intimacy with the world of the series. Such pictures often encourage other fans to travel, since “the replication of images of actual pilgrimage sites on the web reinforces precisely their original significance” (Couldry 2003, p. 93). The Twitter activities also show that for audiences, a sense of authenticity is an important factor: people often complain online if the representation of a certain region in a series does not match the local conditions, thus presenting producers with the challenge to pay closer attention to detail.

5.3 Interweaving Place and Story in the Production and Marketing of *Asadora*

Media producers have long realised that they have to take the interests and activities of the audience into account for the purpose of creating a loyal fanbase and new economic resources. Already in the case of *Oshin* (1983/84), producers catered to fan desires on a grand scale: music, merchandise, stage plays as well as book and magazine publications related to the series were marketed. Even *Oshin* toilet paper was available, and *Oshin* merchandise for children was promoted in newspapers using the slogan “Experience the excitement beyond television” (“Terebi ijō” 1984). The *asadora* thus clearly is an example of a comprehensive media mix strategy, which Steinberg (2012) describes for the Japanese anime sector. This strategy creates a material presence for the fictional characters in everyday life and satisfies the viewers’ desire to participate in the world of the series: “The character good functions as a monad or medium through which the consumer can pass into the character’s world” (p. 188).

Tourism was also part of this media mix strategy, especially in the Yamagata Prefecture, where the protagonist grows up in the series. For instance, a large ad in the daily newspaper Yomiuri Shinbun, promoted a tour to “Oshin’s home”, including visits of Sakata City and a hot spring as well as a cherry harvest experience (“‘Oshin’ no furusato” 1983). Such packaged *Oshin* tours were offered by the leading Japanese tourism agencies, which also became beneficiaries of the boom. The city of Sakata, on the other hand, made sure that fans could find fragments of *Oshin*’s world on location and provided for a wide range of different souvenirs. *Asadora* tourism was thus highly professionalised at the time but not an entirely new phenomenon. For instance, after the *asadora Tamayura* (1965/66), wedding trips to Miyazaki Prefecture became fashionable (“Terebi shōsetsu” 1977), and fans of the series *Ohanahan* (1966/67) were enthusiastic about the Meiji-period charms of Ōzu city in Ehime Prefecture (“Meiji būmu” 1966). Initially, this kind of tourism was more an unintended side effect, but local actors soon became aware of its potential and began to actively stimulate it. When local authorities of Tendō learned about NHK’s plans to shoot the series *Ichiban boshi* (1977) in their city, for example, they prepared themselves with PR measures on a large scale (“Terebi shōsetsu” 1977).

Therefore, *asadora* tourism is a phenomenon that first emerged from audience activity and still only works if producers and local stakeholders succeed in stimulating the imagination of the audience. The fans' decision to travel is sparked by their desire for interaction, their longing to have a share in the world of the series. Riley and van Doren (1992) emphasise that a film can create a convincing tourist experience through the "contextual package" (p. 269) of the story. In addition to the visual appeal of a landscape and the connection with popular actors, for example, the "romantic ethos common in film scripts" can be significant. Kim (2012) also notes that an emotional attachment to the content and the (nostalgic) values conveyed in the series may become a very important motivation for film tourism. As Urry and Larsen (2011) point out, the feelings and expectations induced by films or series have a great influence on the general perception of a place so that "film landscapes identify with and represent actual landscapes" and "tourism destinations in part become fantasylands or Mediaworlds" (p. 113). However, this does not mean that film tourists no longer distinguish between the media world and the actual situation on site: Reijnders (2011) stresses that the popularity of media tourism is precisely the result of the tourists' recreation of the "symbolic contrast between imagination and reality" (p. 17). At the filming locations, the fans are thus looking for references and material anchor points for the world of their imagination in order to fill the "geographical blanks" that arise during that process.

In order to make tourism a promising part of a media mix strategy, producers have to stimulate the imagination of the audience and their desire to search for the reference points of their imaginary world. When producing *asadora*, a crucial point is usually a coherent representation of rural Japan; this representation is linked to nostalgia, tradition and Japanese national identity through the story (see also Chap. 9 in this volume). This kind of portrayal of the countryside is connected to the "hometown" (*furusato*) discourse, a concept which conveys similar connotations to the German word *Heimat* ("native place"). Since the 1970s, this trope of "hometown" has become a dominant and stable representation of an idealised rural lifestyle in Japan, which frequently appears in consumer culture and tourism (Creighton 1997). In the production of *asadora*, therefore, a whole arsenal of popular stereotypes may be used, which are associated with certain emotions and longings.

NHK combines beautiful shots of landscapes with the presentation of local handicraft and traditions, e.g. the production of lacquerware and local festivals in *Mare*. A voice-over narrator occasionally comments on such sequences, which is reminiscent of tourism videos. Local landmarks, such as bridges, prominent buildings or rocks, which have the potential to become the anchor points of the fans' imagination on site, are regularly shown throughout the whole series. In addition, local food or dishes can play an important role in *asadora*. In Japan, "local food" has been associated with "nostalgia, nature, sustainable agriculture" (Rath 2015, p. 146) since the 1970s and is marketed as a delicacy. In the series, the characters regularly consume such specialities, like a handmade sea salt in *Mare* or a stew dish (*mamebujiru*) in *Amachan*; this provides tourists the opportunity of a culinary interaction if they visit the region. The regional identity is also present in *asadora* through the local dialect, which is presented in a simplified form, so that the national audience can understand

it. Since the mid-1970s, NHK has engaged dialect consultants for *asadora* production (Tanaka 2014, p. 24–25), a fact that is regularly mentioned in *asadora* paratexts such as documentaries and contributes to an overall impression of authenticity. Local artisans and farmers also regularly act as consultants, and classical media such as breakfast television, daily newspapers or magazines are used to give the region more visibility in connection with the series.

Recently, the Internet is increasingly used for a successful interweaving of story and place. NHK not only conducts extensive research on the *asadora*'s impact on social media but also wants to influence the development of online discussions, gain presence for their content on a wide range of platforms, and to utilise user-generated content to expand the narrative universe of the series. For instance, NHK creates special websites with information on the *asadora* filming locations. The series *Hiyokko* (2017), which is partly set in Ibaraki Prefecture, features a website with Ibaraki news, an Ibaraki blog and messages from the actors. The main actress Kasumi Arimura enthuses about the landscape, the friendliness of the people and the food: “When, after a long time, I was standing there, in a place where you have nothing in mind but nature, my heart has really opened up” (NHK 2017). The main actresses also have their own blogs, Twitter and Instagram accounts, which contribute to the expansion of the *asadora* universe and make the actress and the main character more tangible for the fans. Here, idyllic photos and descriptions of the locations also spark the audience’s interest to travel. The popular stars as “influencers” guarantee a particularly great response: A photo of Kasumi Arimura in a rural setting in Ibaraki with an enthusiastic comment about her grandpa from the series, gained almost 114,000 likes and over 360 comments on Twitter (Arimura 2017).

5.4 Local Communities in the Context of *Asadora* Tourism

The third party related to film tourism is the local community that provides the filming location. Frost (2006) argues: “It is important to understand that film-induced tourism rarely just happens. Rather it needs to be developed, promoted and managed if it is to have any long-term impact” (p. 77). The starting points are often bottom-up movements initiated by the desires of fans which then lead to planning concepts by local communities in collaboration with the media producers and copyright holders (Yamamura 2015). Beeton (2005) also emphasises the important role of local communities in the planning of film tourism instead of top-down approaches. Our previously mentioned examples of early film tourism related to *asadora* in Japan, such as in the case of *Oshin*, were also initiated by fan activities and then recognised by local stakeholders for local planning. However, since film tourism has become a popular subject in regional development, national or local governments have become involved in the strategic planning of fan pilgrimage. In Japan, the governmental attention for film tourism can be regarded as part of a general offensive in inbound tourism and the international promotion of “Cool Japan” soft power (Seaton and Yamamura 2015, p. 6). Furthermore, as a means to revitalise the

highly over-aged and depopulated countryside of Japan, regional planners and policy-makers also regard film tourism as a new economic resource for structurally weak regions.

A prominent case of regional revitalisation is the *asadora Amachan* (2013), set in Iwate Prefecture, where the March 2011 tsunami devastated its coastal areas. At the first presentation of *Amachan* in June 2012, NHK's scriptwriter Kankurō Kudō expressed the hope that this *asadora* might help to revitalise the region and to restore its public image (NHK 2012). Due to the popularity of *Amachan*, the number of visitors to Iwate Prefecture saw a dramatic increase of 86% in 2013, a number which remained rather stable throughout 2014 (Tajima 2015, p. 25). Furthermore, with the intention to continue this positive legacy of the *asadora*, many projects such as street art and concerts related to *Amachan* were held locally. However, investigating the case of *Amachan*, Tajima (2015) expresses his doubts regarding the sustainability of the inflow of tourists over the next decade—a fundamental issue of film tourism. In addition, he states that not all locals were happy about the sudden influx of tourists and the reidentification of their hometown, newly perceived as only the home of *Amachan*. Jang (2016) mentions that even in the 1970s, when film tourism was yet a minor phenomenon in Japan, tensions between local communities and visiting fans have occurred (p. 86).

Such a phenomenon raises the question: who exactly are the so-called local communities that negotiate film tourism activities? We believe that a further separation of the term is necessary. For the case of the *asadora Mare*, which we have investigated during fieldwork stays from 2015 to 2017, we propose to split up four levels of the so-called local community that became involved in film tourism and should be considered in the analysis: (1) the Prefectural Office, (2) the Mare Promotion Council (Mare suishin kyōgi kai), (3) the Wajima City Tourist Office and Tourist Association (Wajima-shi kankōka/kankō kyōkai) and (4) local people. Although there are complex interrelations between these four levels, which are difficult to investigate in detail, there is a clear hierarchy of power and a general tendency of top-down decision-making.

5.4.1 *The Prefectural Office*

The *asadora Mare* is set in Ishikawa Prefecture located in the central part of Japan's main island Honshū on the coast of the Sea of Japan. Most of the filming took place in locations belonging to Wajima City (ca. 27,000 inhabitants), an over-aged and depopulated municipality on the Noto Peninsula. The Prefectural Office expected an increased inflow of tourists during the broadcast of *Mare* due to the great attention that a new *asadora* generally receives. Instead of bottom-up movements initiated by fans, the planning of film tourism appears as part of the prefecture's general strategy for tourism development. This is evidenced by the fact that *Mare*'s broadcast started just 2 weeks after the opening of a new bullet train (Hokuriku Shinkansen) track from Tōkyō to Kanazawa City, the prefecture's capital and economic centre.



Fig. 5.1 Mare melody road sign on display at a parking area (Source: Authors 2017)

Most tourists must first transfer to Kanazawa City in order to reach the filming locations in Wajima City (the small airport of Wajima with only two flight connections per day is only a minor option). Most tourists go from Kanazawa City by highway bus or (rental) car to Wajima City; the trip takes about 2 h.

Arguably the best-known project of the Prefectural Office in regards to promoting tourism through *Mare* can be seen just prior to arriving in Wajima City. The last section of the highway was rebuilt into a melody road (the longest in Japan at 1.2 km in length), in which the depth and spacing of the grooves combine to play *Mare*'s opening theme song as they are driven over (Fig. 5.1). Melody roads (also known as musical or singing roads) are a rather new phenomenon in Japan, with the first one being established in 2004 (Yoshino et al. 2008). There are also melody roads in other countries such as China, Mexico or Denmark; but in Japan, they are probably

most prominent with around 30 melody roads all over the country playing melodies ranging from local folksongs to theme songs of anime movies. In case of Noto, the construction costs were officially also declared as a measure for accident prevention and infrastructure improvements; however, many of the local people we interviewed expressed doubt regarding the necessity of this prestigious project (locals rumour that the construction costs were around 42 million Yen / 350,000 Euro). Augé (1995) defined highways as non-places without story; however, by transforming this highway section into a melody road, it became a place related to the fictive universe of the *asadora*. The visitors do not merely drive into Wajima City anymore; they are unavoidably reminded that they are entering the imaginative world of *Mare*.

5.4.2 *Mare Promotion Council*

In the Noto Peninsula, the Mare Promotion Council was in charge of the touristic activities for *asadora* fans. As a working group established by several local municipalities and the related chamber of commerce, it was a short-lived initiative limited to the fiscal year 2015, when *Mare* was aired; their homepage—as well as NHK's official homepage on *Mare*—disappeared shortly after. A film tourism consultant of the Japan Travel Bureau (Japan's largest and formerly government owned travel agency) served as professional advisor for the council. Financially supported by the Prefectural Office, the council was meant to use the *Mare* content for the promotion of tourism in the Noto region. Such working groups are a common phenomenon in Japan; for example, there was a similar unit established in the case of *Amachan* that even travelled to Kishiwada City in Ōsaka to learn from the local experience of film tourism related to the *asadora* *Carnation* of 2011 (Tajima 2015, p. 21). Based in Kishiwada City, the Asadora Location Network (Asadora butaichi nettowāku) is a project that aims for a mutual support and learning process for the filming locations of *asadora*. In early 2017, eight municipalities which appeared in six *asadora* participated in this network project (Asadora Location Network 2017).

The Mare Promotion Council created an alternative version of the official *Mare* logo, which was permitted by NHK for promotional items such as flags (Fig. 5.2) or posters. Yamamura (2015) argues that copyright issues are crucial in film tourism. Depending on the media producers/copyright holders' will to collaborate with local governments or initiatives, media content related goods and activities can become overwhelming or rather limited in number, and in some cases, generally forbidden. Couldry (2003) mentions the important aspect that media institutions are usually located at the centre, i.e. in metropolitan areas and therefore distant from the marginal communities that become mediatised (p. 81). Thus, it is no surprise that NHK has its own related company that produces most goods exclusively, and that the broadcaster seems rather unwilling to license products made by other (e.g. rural-based) companies. The difficult issue of copyright becomes even more apparent when looking on the package of official NHK souvenirs such as sweets. Instead of a photo of the *Mare* actress, the package only shows a female shadow or a comic



Fig. 5.2 *Mare* flag with the logo of the Mare Promotion Council in Wajima City and the NHK official logo at a souvenir shop in Kanazawa City (Source: Authors 2015)

figure in allusion of the *asadora* heroine to avoid licence payments to the actress and her agency. In the end, most copyright holders such as NHK prioritise their own business and have no particular agenda towards supporting local communities in their development of film tourism projects.

Besides promotional items and a homepage with a large focus on local information, the Mare Promotion Council organised a stamp and a twitter photo rally. For the stamp rally, fans were meant to visit three places in Noto where they could stamp a postcard which should be sent back in exchange for a gift. Such stamp rallies are a common practice at tourist destinations and also appear in the domain of film tourism (e.g. Yamamura 2015, p. 68). In case of the twitter photo rally, fans were encouraged to take pictures of five filming locations with an integrated *Mare* sticker. These photos were then posted on twitter using a special hashtag (#notosutanpurarī; written in Japanese), and the best one hundred of which were promised a gift. However, it appears that only 11 individuals participated in this one-year-long event. This case demonstrates the extent in which regional planner's expectations differ from actual audience engagement in promotional activities.

5.4.3 *Wajima City Tourist Office and Tourist Association*

The Wajima City Tourist Office belongs to the Wajima City Office, i.e. the local government, while the Wajima Tourist Association is a private organisation primarily focused on local hot spring tourism. However, both institutions appear to be connected in their activities, following similar goals such as an increase of tourists including *Mare* fans. From April to December 2015, the Tourist Association

organised a three times daily minibus tour from Wajima City to a filming location in the city's outskirts that served as *Mare's* village, during which local volunteers offered visitors 30-minute guided tours to well-known places from the production. Following the cessation of this tour programme, the Tourist Association has offered maps of the filming locations and model courses on their homepage. The Tourism Office also prints maps for fan pilgrimage (Fig. 5.3), which are available at the Tourist Guide Centre at the former Wajima station. As the local public transport is limited, a car is necessary to visit most spots outside of the city's centre. The narrative of the *asadora* created a misleading fictional landscape, where all iconic spots seem rather nearby. Looking on the real map, however, there are distances of more than 60 km; a phenomenon that Frost (2006) named "local dissonance" (p. 71). Baudrillard (1988) argues that once territory preceded maps but that in the postmodern age maps precede the territory and its landscape (p. 166). In case of film tourism, media producers rearrange features of an existing landscape into a fictional map, which fans are then supposed to recreate through their travels. Within the fans' reproduction of these maps of "places of the imagination" (Reijnders 2011), the boundaries between the fictional world of the media content and the existing landscape seem to vanish into what Urry and Larsen (2011) call the "mediatised gaze" (p. 115). By posting their tourist experiences on social media, the fans' pilgrimage photos might coincidentally become evidence for the authenticity of the local places appearing in a film production.

In contrast to the Prefectural Office and the short-lived Mare Promotion Council, the Wajima Tourist Office is the most important actor that still aims to continue the *asadora's* legacy to attract fans. In June 2016, the Wajima Drama Memorial House (Wajima dorama kinenkan) was established. It contains original interiors of the film set (Fig. 5.4) and a place where visitors can buy a small selection of souvenirs, some of which are licensed NHK goods, (e.g. key holders, cups, spoons etc.) but most are locally produced foods with only a loose relation to *Mare's* world. Located next to Wajima's morning market, the arguably most famous tourist attraction, one might expect that many visitors of the Drama Memorial House do not come particularly as *Mare* fans but rather as regular visitors. A basic problem of the data associated with film tourism is that it is ambiguous; one particular media content and its active fandom cannot be considered as the sole causal mechanism for the inflow of tourists, a plethora of other factors could also be influential. Likewise, in the case of *Mare*, it is difficult to say whether the increased number of visitors to Wajima City in 2015 (plus ca. 30%; Wajima 2017) is a result of the *asadora's* broadcast or rather the impact of a greater regional tourism strategy such as the new bullet train track and its promotion in national mass media, for example.



Fig. 5.3 Mare location map of the Wajima Tourist Office (Source: Authors 2017)



Fig. 5.4 Inside the Wajima Drama Memorial House (Source: Authors 2017)

5.4.4 Local People

The locals of Wajima City were involved in the production of the *asadora* from the beginning; some handcraft men served as experts and dozens of residents participated as extras during the filming of local festivals (see also Chap.11 in this volume). The careful integration and consideration of the local identity guaranteed their collaboration and positive feedback:

“They filmed parts of *Mare* inside my family’s house. The filming crew were very friendly. It was great fun for us.” (Female, 18, high school student, interviewed in April 2015)

Many small shops in Wajima City began to display *Mare* posters in their windows, even if they were not selling related souvenirs. The national attention of the *asadora* and the region had a feel good effect on many locals who were proud of their apparently authentic representation on national television. For instance, the annual abalone festival 2015 (a commercial event of the local fishermen union) used the *Mare* opening song in an endless loop as background music.

However, as the *asadora*’s broadcast succeeded, a rather conservative and old-fashioned gender ideal became more obvious in the narrative. The heroine Mare gives up her ambitious dream of an international career as pastry chef for devoting her life to her husband and fulfilling the social expectations of being housewife and mother. This development not only irritated parts of the audience but also locals in Wajima City:

“Normally, *asadora* show modern and progressive types of women. *Mare*, however, was different, and that’s the reason why many people don’t like it anymore.” (Male, 58, farmer, interviewed in October 2016)

According to a survey of NHK (Nihei and Sekiguchi 2016), many viewers state that they felt attracted by the series’ representation of the rural landscape, the local dialect and handicraft (37%) as well as the filming locations (36%), while they complained about the flow of the narrative (26%), the script (23%) and the heroine’s character (16%) (p. 34). If the audience does not enjoy the story, then the often mentioned short lifespan of film tourism becomes inevitably even shorter. This may explain why the legacy of *Oshin* and *Amachan*, for example, seems rather long-lasting, while *Mare*’s traces were rapidly disappearing:

“Everybody has already forgotten about *Mare*; it’s normal when the next *asadora* starts, the craze is over.” (Male, 60, journalist and consultant, interviewed in March 2017)

Despite this supposed normative phenomenon of forgetting one *asadora* for the next, *Mare* reappeared in the news headlines in August 2016. One of the main actors, whose character was well received by the viewers, was accused of rape. Not only did this scandal eliminate plans for a future television rerun of the *asadora* and the sale of its DVD/Blu-ray stock, its cultural legacy has now taken on a negative outlook:

“You had better to stop talking to local people about *Mare*, that’s embarrassing for them [because of the scandal].” (Female, 26, PhD student and local researcher, interviewed in October 2016)

This quote exemplifies how, for the local community, *Mare*’s legacy has become detrimental. Some policy-makers such as the governor of Ishikawa Prefecture, who mentioned *Mare* as great success for the prefecture at a public speech in October 2016, try to keep the positive image alive; yet it is undeniable that this scandal has had a negative impact for film tourism in Wajima City:

“When the Drama Memorial House was opened in summer 2016, about 700 people per day visited this place on weekends or holidays. Recently, there are not more than 150 visitors on such days. Although the winter season is less attractive for tourists, that scandal is probably also an important reason.” (Female, 40, staff of the Wajima Drama Memorial House, interviewed in March 2017)

The Drama Memorial House, along with the melody road, remains as inevitable *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989) of an *asadora* that left an ambiguous legacy for the locals of Wajima City. Hence, through the case study of *Mare*, this analysis illustrates the limitations of using film tourism as a predictable measure for rural revitalisation.

5.5 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to reconsider the multi-stakeholder perspective in film tourism. As the case study of *Mare* illustrates, the triangular network of participants in the phenomenon of film tourism as described by Yamamura has to be further investigated. What is called “local community” actually includes various parties with differing interests, such as the local government, film tourism working groups, tourist offices and associations and local people. Although these parties vary in many aspects, e.g. in their influence, approach and means, they are following the common belief that film tourism can contribute to the economic revitalisation of their region. In case of Japan, the interrelations between them are difficult to investigate, as they represent different levels of power, and types of institutions or organisation; however, one can expect that there is a general tendency to top-down decision-making as most projects depend on the support of the local governments. The disparity of financial power between the different parties is evident: the local government can rebuild a highway section, while the local tourist association recently only provides maps of the filming locations. Furthermore, local working groups in charge of film tourism, such as the Mare Promotion Council, are increasingly reliant upon various translocal connections (with tourist advisors in the capital Tōkyō, or networks of film tourism communities as seen in the case of Kishiwada City, for example). Thus, the network and actions of stakeholders categorised as local communities are indeed very complex and deserve more attention in the study of film tourism.

Carefully implemented bottom-up oriented measures and activities appear to have a more valuable outcome than top-down prestige projects. In fact, the mere interpretation of film tourism as a strategic planning option for local governments bears many risks, in particular for the local community. Although increases of tourist visits to filming locations appears to be a quasi-automatic effect of popular mass media content such as *asadora*, there are developments and events that might endanger this economic resource, such as an unpopular progression of the storyline or scandals related to the production or cast of the series. Previous studies have shown that the film tourism rush often remains rather short-lived in Japan, thus limiting the efficiency of film tourism for sustainable long-term regional development (Seaton 2015; Suzuki 2011). Additionally, for the local communities, possible negative outcomes of film tourism are frequently discussed in research, such as pollution, heavy traffic, or even increased crime rates due to unregulated tourists’ activities (Riley and Van Doren 1992; Beeton 2005; Yoon et al. 2015).

In the case of *Mare*, the final blow given by the rape scandal was unpredictable for all parties, but it was clear before the scandal that the various interest groups had already failed in making Noto a “place of imagination”: the orientation towards tourism was partly too obvious in the series, the characters apparently induced little desire for intimacy or interaction, and the “tourist experience” offered on location was rather limited. Therefore, we conclude that any projects aiming at promoting film tourism have to take fan activity and the audience’s desire for stimulating

content seriously. Only if the imagination is inspired to go on a journey, will fans set out to explore the world of a series on location. It is only if they are able to discover fragments of their imaginary worlds that the fan experience will spread across the digital landscape to become a widely shared passion and a benefit for all parties.

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