

Newsletter No. 6 – November 2020

Dear all,

Is there anything good about Covid-19? Well, there is a bright side to everything. For the Japanese government and declining rural communities, a positive aspect could be the heightened interest among city dwellers in moving to rural areas. While the Japanese government's efforts over the past years to have more urbanites relocate to the countryside were rather fruitless, the corona pandemic has led to a sharp increase in the number of people interested in a countryside life.

According to a government survey, nearly half (49.8%) of the residents in Tokyo and three of its neighboring prefectures hope to live in the countryside in the future – up from 23 % in 2018. In other words, the interest among Kanto's urbanites in a quiet rural life has over doubled in just two years.

One can already see some first results: for the first time in many years, the number of people moving out of Tokyo is surpassing the number of newcomers. In September alone, over 30,000 people moved out of Tokyo, up 12.5% from 2019, while the number of those moving to the capital fell by 11.7% year-on-year.

Part of this is due to more companies allowing telecommuting, which enables people to move to areas with lower rents. But it is not only financial reasons for which especially young urbanites in their 20s and 30s are leaving Tokyo: lots of people are searching for a place closer to nature, more space at home, a garden, or a tighter, less anonymous community.

This is not only happening in Tokyo, but in many cities around the world. According to different media reports, some 400,000 New Yorkers had left the city at some point during the pandemic to reduce the risk of catching the virus. While many have returned to the city, a fair share has moved permanently.

In the UK, the real estate platform *rightmove* saw a sharp rise in inquiries for properties over the past months. Especially houses in the countryside jumped in popularity, with a 126% increase in inquiries for housing in village locations. It is not only Londoners that look for places outside their metropolis; inquiries for village properties from Liverpool's residents spiralled, up 275% year-on-year. Similar developments are also noticeable in Edinburgh and Birmingham, where inquiries roughly doubled compared to 2019.

In the UK, people do not only dream of moving to the countryside, but already buy properties. Nearly two thirds (63%) of new properties in Tandridge in Surrey and Sevenoaks in Kent – two more rural areas in proximity to the capital – were bought by Londoners. Whether the new house owners actually move there or only use it as a second house during the Covid-19 pandemic is not clear; however, this data from *Hamptons International* estate agents clearly reveal that countryside properties – and often also countryside life – have gained immensely in popularity in 2020.

Whether these developments will continue in 2021 and beyond – considering that companies might reduce teleworking options and that vaccines against Covid-19 might be mass-produced soon – is unclear. Also, it remains in the dark whether globally, some of the thousands of small ‘dying’ villages can be saved by this new heightened interest in the countryside, or if people will continue to avoid such remote areas. No one knows what the future holds, but the corona pandemic has, for the first time in many years, propelled a quiet life in less populated areas to centerstage.

My Jean Monnet Module research will deal with some of these aforementioned questions, trying to analyse how villages can gain in popularity more permanently. I will get back to you with some first results next year, once I return to work from my maternity leave.

Stay tuned!

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*Short announcement:*

For those interested in the European Union and in studying in Europe, don't miss the **virtual tour of the EU Delegation in Tokyo on December 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 2.30 pm to 4 pm, organised by Prof. Bungsche**, the Jean Monnet Chair holder at KGU.

The programme is as follows:

- “Current Issues and Challenges in the EU” (English) by Mr. Jacek Kozak, Trade Section  
Q & A session (English)
- “Erasmus+: EU's Support Programme for Studying Abroad” (English) by Mr. Richard Kelner, Press, Public and Cultural Affairs Section  
Q & A session about studying in Europe (English and Japanese)

**For more information as well as to register, please see the links below:**

日本語

<https://www.kwansei.ac.jp/jm/news/detail/4>

英語

<https://global.kwansei.ac.jp/jm/news/detail/7>

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Please stay healthy and safe, and let's keep in touch!

Best regards,

Anna

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