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# Ecotourism in Japan

*Stakeholders' roles in the revitalisation of rural communities  
through ecotourism*

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## **Abbreviations**

**JES** - Japan Ecotourism Society

**TIES** - The International Ecotourism Society

**UNWTO** - the United Nations' specialized agency World Tourism Organization

**UNEP** - United Nations' Environment Program

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# Abstract

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**Title:** Ecotourism in Japan: Stakeholders' roles in the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism

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**Background and problem:** With the problematic demographics of the rural communities in Japan there is a need to reflect different ways to overcome this issue. Ecotourism has two main purposes: nature conservation and contribution to the local communities. Therefore, it can provide an interesting way to revitalise the rural areas and attract younger generations to stay in them.

**Purpose:** The purpose is to identify the different stakeholders, their interests and power, with the help of Stakeholder theory in the mission of uniting ecotourism and revitalisation of the rural areas in Japan.

**Method:** The empirical data of this qualitative research has been gathered through secondary data collection found in scientific journals, articles, white papers, statistics and web pages. These findings were then analysed and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework to reach relevant conclusions.

**Results and conclusions:** In our conclusions we outlined the government and ecotourism organisations as the key stakeholders in order to implement ecotourism and help the revitalisation of the rural communities. However, to get more knowledge, there should be conducted further research which takes other impacting matters in to consideration.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Revitalisation, Rural communities, Stakeholder theory, Japan

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors and contributes with 10 per cent to the world's GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015). Tourism has become one of the key drivers in the international business through increasing globalisation (UNWTO, 2015). In 2014 over 1.1 billion people worldwide made international travels (The World Bank, 2016a) and the tourism industry rendered revenues exceeding 1.4 trillion US dollars (The World Bank, 2016b). Furthermore, in many developing countries the tourism industry represents one of the main export industries, like in the Maldives, where international tourism made up 79.5 per cent of total exports in 2014 (The World Bank, 2016c; UNWTO, 2015). The tourism sector has many economic benefits such as employment generation, contribution to government revenues and local economies, and infrastructure development. Even though tourism has its advantages, it also has its downsides. Some of the biggest disadvantages of a badly managed tourism concern the negative impacts it can have on the natural and cultural environment, like ecological disruption and commodification, which can hinder the life of the local people (Andrew, 2016).

Tourism is also an industry that can be strongly affected by crisis or disasters with natural or human origins. Natural disasters are usually not foreseeable, and it is therefore hard to be prepared for them (Laws et al, 2006). The Great East Japan Earthquake is an example of a natural disaster that had a negative impact to the tourism industry in Japan, especially in the rural areas around Tohoku that still have not recovered their touristic potential. In the long run, after the recovery phase, there are possibilities for crisis and disasters to have also positive effects by transforming actions into more innovative and better solutions. Ecotourism is often paid emphasised attention to after this kind of catastrophes because it can improve the community livelihood after a crisis or a disaster. A well-managed tourism can play a major role in sustainable development. Many places that have experienced disasters can be revitalised through tourism, which brings money to reconstruction and draws further attention to the area.

### 1.1.1 What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism with an emphasis on uniting conservation, communities and interpretation. It is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015). Awareness is an essential part of ecotourism as it stimulates the protection of natural environment and sophisticates both tourists and hosts through different perspectives and points of view. Furthermore, ecotourism can be both a prevention and a recovery tool for nature and community issues. For instance, countries like Australia and New Zealand have well-developed ecotourism policies as their tourism industries are highly depending upon their natural attractions. Ecotourism helps to maintain the health of their ecosystems and ensures constant tourism revenues. Correspondingly, in many developing countries, ecotourism can be seen as a solution to improve the harmful mass tourism system. Tourism brings huge economic income but in the case of some developing countries, it has not always been the local people who have benefitted from it but instead the multinational resort chains. This has been changing with the help of ecotourism and locals' involvement in the decision-making, like in Botswana where they have focused on high-end safari tourism regulated by the government which ended up with direct financial benefits to the local companies (Lew, 2011).

The main advantages of ecotourism are that by managing nature in a more sustainable way it preserves the biodiversity and natural resources better for the future and gives the local people an opportunity to get economic profits and control. It also creates jobs in rural areas, and tourists can enjoy the natural beauty and learn about the cultural heritage. Furthermore, ecotourism does not require large investments or capital outlays, making it easier for the rural communities to utilise this kind of tourism, and compared to mass tourism, ecotourism brings the local communities significantly higher revenues (Wood, 2002). To put it shortly "...ecotourism is tourism and recreation that is both nature-based and sustainable..." (Lindberg et al, 1997). It involves travel to natural destinations, often remote inhabited or uninhabited areas, but it is wider than the concept of nature-based tourism with its strive to minimise the damage that tourism causes. It has always been about *uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel* (TIES, 2015).



Ecotourism is not a simple concept to implement and it confronts with major challenges. “Greenwashing” is a concept where an organisation is using more of their resources on marketing themselves as “green” or environmentally friendly than on actually being so (Greenwashing index, 2016). For example, some organisations are marketing themselves as eco-friendly even though they do not recycle. That is why international standards for the eco labels are needed. Such examples are programs using environment management system (EMS) including ISO 14001 (International Organization for standardization). TIES points out the serious problem in ecotourism today:

“The term ecotourism is more widely recognized and used, but it is also abused, as it is not sufficiently anchored to the definition. The ecotourism community, therefore, continues to face significant challenges in awareness building and education and actively working against greenwashing within the tourism industry” (TIES, 2007: 3)

Furthermore, as the globalisation of the tourism industry has increased, big transnational companies are involved in the competition. This means, in contrast to ecotourism, that the tourism revenues will not benefit the local communities because the profits are gained by the multinational corporations.

## 1.2 Problem Discussion

The demographics of rural communities in Japan have changed as many young people have moved to bigger cities and the remaining population is aging. Another common issue in many rural communities in Japan is that less women than men are staying there. The Japan Policy Council has calculated that 896 municipalities are expected to lose more than 50 per cent of their young female population by 2040. This decline has even a multiple effect on the survival of these communities as women are a crucial part in population growth (Tadashi, 2014). Japan is known for the discrimination of women with employment opportunities. This changed some when the Act on Securing, Etc. of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment was enacted in 1986, guaranteeing women would get to work and study with the same conditions as men. This started a continuous migration of especially young women from the rural areas into the cities due to the higher education and employment possibilities (Hayashi, 2014).

As the population in rural communities declines, it becomes harder and harder to keep the communities going. The aging population in the rural communities in Japan is becoming a severe problem as many small farms are on the verge of disappearing as over 64 per cent of working farmers are aged over 65 years and finding young successors has become difficult (Assmann, 2016). It is also becoming harder for the elderly to pass on their traditional knowledge, like farming, as there are not many young people to pass it on to. And though some young people still live in the rural communities, very few of them are interested in learning this kind of traditional knowledge (Kudo et al, 2015). The changing demographics of rural communities, along with low revenues, are already affecting the agricultural sector, for instance in 2012 only 232,500 people were employed in the agricultural sector in rural communities (MAFF, 2012a). Of these 57 per cent had temporary employment and over one third of the businesses had annual sales of less than 1 million yen (MAFF, 2012b).

The farms are not the only parts of the rural communities that are affected negatively by the population decline and aging population but also schools are faced with major challenges. According to a study by Wilhelm (2016), schools in some communities have as few as nine students, and the school facilities are often used for other purposes than education too in order to maintain them and get an income.

Many rural communities in the Tohoku area have not only experienced a decline in their population due to the urbanisation but also because of the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Around 18,000 were killed or are still considered missing (Hasegawa, 2013) and about 470,000 had to evacuate the areas struck by the disaster (Tohoku Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2015). Many villages in the disaster struck areas have experienced severe declines in their population, an example being Onagawa in the Miyagi prefecture, which has lost over half of its population since the 1960s, reaching a population of about 6,800 in 2015. Many of the previous inhabitants of villages like Onagawa were evacuated during the 2011 disaster and later decided to not return to their home towns. This has resulted in several villages in the Tohoku area finding themselves heavily under-populated (O'Dwyer, 2016).

Japan has had some focus on ecotourism since the 90's (Frid, 2008), but it was not until after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 that Japan began dealing with tourism with a

higher focus on sustainability (UNWTO, 2014). As many people moved away from the Tohoku region without moving back, ecotourism in Japan has expanded its interpretation from nature-based focus and plays a significant role in energising communities today. The general urbanisation has evoked many people, especially the younger generation, to willingly leave the rural areas, which are now lacking vitality. According to a survey in 2006 by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 62,273 communities in Japan were considered to be "under-populated" and 4.2 per cent of them (2,634 communities) were expected to die out in the near future. The abandoned villages are struggling with major challenges including illegal garbage and scrap (dumping), deforestation and loss of farms and properties (Ecotourism Japan, 2010).

As described before, rural communities in Japan are today facing a variety of challenges, threatening to leave them completely abandoned. If these challenges are not paid attention to there can be serious consequences for Japan as a whole including lack of food production, contaminated drinking water and destruction of beautiful landscapes. These problems arise as people leave the rural areas and there are no longer enough people to take care of the essential procedures needed to tend to for example the paddy fields, which can lead to toxicated soil. In the worst cases these fields cannot be used for food production anymore. In Japan, the self-sufficiency is low at a rate of 40 per cent and losing food import capacity would mean further economic losses (Ecotourism Japan, 2010).

With the rural communities getting worse and worse the more time goes, it has become an urgent issue that Japan has to deal with. Resolving these problems can be time-consuming for the ones responsible for planning the revitalisation strategy as they do not only have to analyse the problems that are causing the current depopulation of the rural communities but also need to find and analyse the different stakeholders that are of interest in such a strategy. Through a study about the roles of different stakeholders in ecotourism and revitalisation of rural communities, we believe that this research could help future researchers to create a theoretical model about what actions should be expected from the stakeholders in order to successfully implement ecotourism as a tool for revitalisation. Furthermore, if such a theoretical model is created, it could become a tool for not only Japan but also for other countries struggling with similar depopulation problems in their rural communities.

## 1.3 Purpose

As Japan suffers from under-populated communities and rural villages becoming abandoned, there are several different stakeholders, such as governments and inhabitants of rural communities, that find it more and more important to revitalise these parts. These different stakeholders can all contribute in various ways to reach the goal of revitalising the rural communities. Furthermore ecotourism can be a solution to help this problem involving different stakeholders. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to identify the roles of the different stakeholders, their interests and power, with the help of Stakeholder theory in the mission of uniting ecotourism and revitalisation of the rural areas in Japan.

By focusing on identifying the *roles* of the different ecotourism stakeholders in Japan, our research could contribute to the future creation of a more general theoretic model. A model like this could later be used for further research regarding using ecotourism as a tool for revitalisation of rural communities.

## 1.4 Research Question

- "What are the different stakeholders' roles in the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism in Japan?"

## 2 Theoretical framework

*In the theoretical framework chapter, we will introduce the theories used in this thesis. First we will describe the Stakeholder theory, which has been the main part of our theoretical framework including the term “stakeholder” and Stakeholder Analysis. Secondly we will tell about the Institutional theory that we have used as a side theory, and lastly we have written about earlier research considering ecotourism that has been a helpful framework guiding in our research.*

### 2.1 Stakeholder theory

#### 2.1.1 Definition of a stakeholder and the idea behind Stakeholder theory

A stakeholder can be any person, group or organisation that is affected by or affects in a specific industry. The stakeholders can vary in different contexts, for instance, typical stakeholders of a corporation usually include owners, employees, suppliers, stockholders, local communities and customers (Freeman, 1984). Though stakeholders can take on many different forms, there are four main groups of stakeholders; governments, non-governmental organisations (NGO), communities and the private sectors (Kivits, 2011).

Stakeholder theory can be summarised as follows; *if the stakeholders will affect or be affected by the business, they should be included in the business as well.* This does not always implicate bigger profits but it is more sustainable and improves the stakeholder value in moral and ethical aspects. The idea of Stakeholder theory is that “people will protect what they receive value from” (Honey, 2008: 14) which is why the participation of all the stakeholders is important. The value can come from economic benefits but it can also come from other things people consider valuable like being able to relax in the beautiful nature. A wider participation of all the stakeholders can be a preventive way to avoid conflicts or other externalities such as problematic issues concerning local communities and nature conservation in the tourism industry. It is important that the interests of all the stakeholders are identified and understood in the development process. Each of the stakeholders has potential to influence the decision making but they do not

have to be equally considered. Some affecting factors are time, available resources and leadership (Byrd, 2007).

### 2.1.2 Stakeholder Analysis

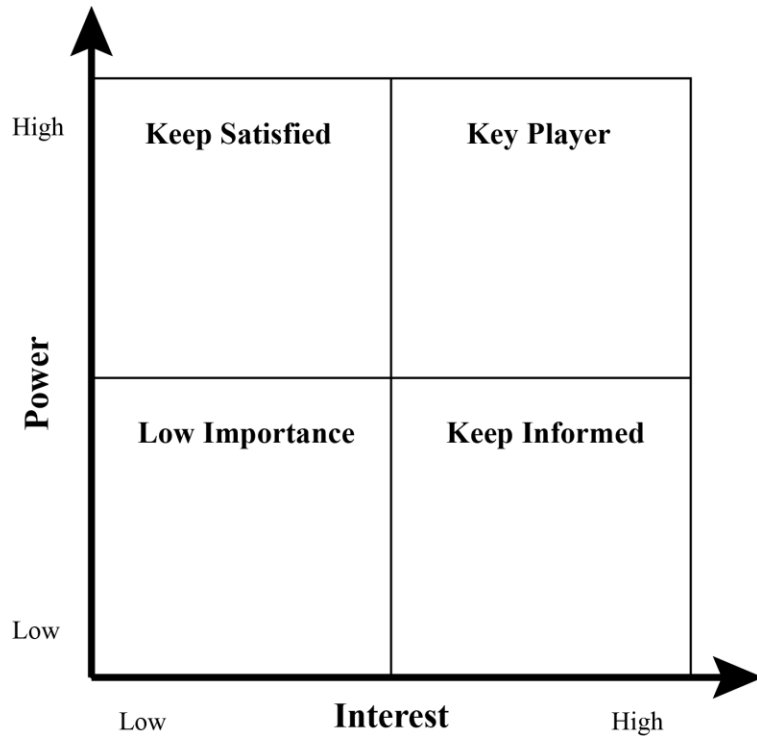
Stakeholder Analysis is a way to identify important stakeholders for a project. In *Stakeholder analysis: a review* Brugha and Varvasovszky states that:

“Stakeholder analysis aims to evaluate and understand stakeholders [...] or to determine their relevance to a project or policy. In carrying out the analysis, questions are asked about the position, interest, influence, interrelations, networks and other characteristics of stakeholders, with reference to their past, present positions and future potential”(Brugha and Varvasovszky, 2000: 239)

The analysis includes three steps (Thompson, 2002):

1. Identifying relevant stakeholders
2. Prioritising the stakeholders
3. Understanding the stakeholders

In the first step all stakeholders that affect or will be affected by a project are identified. There is no one way to identify these stakeholders and researchers have suggested different ways to identify these like through brainstorming, choosing from generic stakeholder lists or asking people from the organisation which the Stakeholder Analysis is made for (Jepsen and Eskerod, 2009). When the stakeholders that are relevant for the project have been identified they need to be prioritised. This is done in step two, where the stakeholders are analysed and categorised by their power and interest in the project. In this step also the stakeholders’ possible influence over the project and how much they themselves will be affected by the project should be identified (Thompson, 2002). A tool that can be used to do such an analysis is Mendelow’s Power-Interest Matrix, shown in Figure 1, which sorts stakeholders by their power and interest (Johnson et al, 2005).



**Figure 1.** Authors' adaption of Mendelow's Power-Interest grid from Johnson et al (2005).

Johnson et al. define the interest of the stakeholders as "...the extent to which they [the stakeholders] are likely to show interest in supporting or opposing a particular strategy." (2005; 181) and power as "...the ability of individuals or groups to persuade, induce or coerce others into following certain courses of action." (2005: 185). Furthermore, power can be divided into three different kinds; normative, which is power that is derived from symbols of status or respect, utilitarian, which is based on the use of material, like goods and services, as well as money, to exercise control and coercive power which is power that is based on force, restraints or other physical resources (Mitchell et al, 1997; Etzioni, 1964).

The stakeholders are classified based on their level of power and interest, and then plotted against the matrix in Figure 1 to determine the importance of each stakeholder in relation to the project. Stakeholders with both high power and high interest are the key players in the project, having the highest importance, while stakeholders with low power and low interest have the lowest importance. Stakeholders that have high interest in the project but low power can become important supporters in the project and should be kept informed, while stakeholders with high power but low interest are generally not very active in the project. However, stakeholders with a high level of power but low level of interest can become

problematic in a project strategy if they suddenly were to become key players, due to a growth in their level of interest, as this would lead managers of the project to have to change the strategy. In order to avoid such a problem, this kind of stakeholders should be kept satisfied so that their interests will not change. (Johnson et al, 2005).

The level of power and interest a stakeholder has can change as the project goes on which should be considered when plotting the stakeholders in the matrix. Furthermore, managers of the project should consider whether there are any repositions of stakeholders that should be actively sought to be achieved during the project. Actively repositioning a stakeholder can be an important strategy for the project to be successful if a manager thinks a key player has too much influence or power in the project or if they feel that there are too few key players (Johnson et al, 2005).

The last step, after all stakeholders have been sorted by their power and interest in the project, is to gain more knowledge about these stakeholders in order to be able to understand them better. This step is focused on finding what motivates the stakeholders and further analysing their interest in the project. Even though the last step is about getting a better understanding of the stakeholders, it is also about finding how the stakeholders can best be engaged in the project (Thompson, 2002).

## 2.2 Institutional theory

According to Hodgson, institutions are “systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions.” (Hodgson, 2006: 2). Institutions therefore form the code of conduct which the society follows. A few examples of institutions are languages, laws and firms. Institutions are created with the goal of reducing uncertainty (North, 1990), something they can do by working as guidelines for human behaviour through specifying rules about what kind of behaviour or actions should be expected. These rules can be both legal rules and unwritten rules stemming from norms and culture. The unwritten rules are shared through tacit knowledge between members that belong to the same community. Legal rules, such as laws, are only seen as rules as long as the community does not ignore them. As rules are created and accepted by the community, these will eventually lead to



habits starting to grow among the members. These habits will in turn make the institution more powerful and long lasting (Hodgson, 2006).

Later studies in Institutional theory have found that there are in fact two types of institutions that need to be differentiated from each other; formal and informal institutions. The first type, formal institutions, is institutions constituting of written official documentation, like written laws. Furthermore, formal institutions are managed by the government, which is responsible for forming and changing the institutions as well as carrying out sanctions if the norms and rules in the formal institutions are breached. The second type of institutions, informal institutions, does not have any official documentation, like the formal institutions, but are rather norms and often unwritten rules, which are socially accepted and have been created through individuals' beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, as these institutions are based on beliefs and attitudes, they usually take very long time to change. Breaking the rules of an informal institution will not result in a punishment carried out by the state, like fines or prison, instead, a person breaking these rules may be punished through social exclusion (Lauth, 2015).

### 2.3 Earlier research about ecotourism

Ecotourism has many definitions depending on who you ask and from where they are. These definitions can be very different from each other, either putting a high responsibility on the tourists to create and keep a sustainable environment or putting a low responsibility on them. Definitions that are putting less responsibility on the tourists are sometimes called passive ecotourism. This type of ecotourism seeks to minimise environmental damage, while definitions that put a high responsibility on the tourists, also called active ecotourism, emphasise that the tourists should participate more in maintaining a sustainable environment (Orams, 1995).

As the goal of this thesis is to find how ecotourism can help the revitalisation of rural communities, we will focus on a definition of ecotourism that combines both passive and active ecotourism. We believe that human contribution is important in order to create incentives for the re-population of rural communities. This contribution could be in the form of revenues from tourists coming to experience the nature or visiting cultural places

like shrines and temples, but it could also be through active participation in activities that aim at passing on knowledge of the life and work in the rural communities. However, for the rural communities to be able to render revenues and attract tourists through their nature and environment, they also need to make sure this nature is preserved, which is where the passive ecotourism becomes important. By focusing simply on observing the nature this type of ecotourism has a smaller impact on the environment.

In order to be consistent throughout the thesis, we will follow the United Nation's World Tourism Organization's, UNWTO's, definition of ecotourism. Furthermore, we believe that their definitions include a good combination of passive and active ecotourism that matches with what we think is needed to revitalise the rural communities. UNWTO created the ecotourism framework in 2002 naming it as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) and has defined the forms of ecotourism by the following characteristics (UNWTO, 2002):

1. All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
2. It contains educational and interpretation features.
3. It is generally, but not exclusively organised by specialised tour operators for small groups. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small, locally owned businesses.
4. It minimises negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.
5. It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by: generating economic benefits for host communities, organisations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes; providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities; and increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.

“Correct” ecotourism is said to have seven different functions. These functions include that it involves travel to natural destinations, minimises impact, builds environmental awareness, provides direct financial benefits for conservation, provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people, respects local culture and supports human rights and democratic movement (Honey, 2008). Ecotourism does not include mass consumption, dumping and all-inclusive resorts separated from locals. Ecotourists need to adapt instead of the locals and they need to be sensitive when it comes to the political environment and

social climate as well. Awareness is a crucial part of the ecotourism process for both the locals and the visitors. This is vital in order for both tourists and other stakeholders to respect and learn about the local culture as well as to support human rights and democratic movements. A successful ecotourism provides direct financial benefits for the conservation of the environment and for the local community. Compared to mass tourism, ecotourism brings the local communities significantly higher revenues (UNEP, 2011). Therefore, it can be viewed as an essential tool for rural development given that the local community has control both economically and politically (Honey, 2008).

One purpose of ecotourism is to contribute to conservation and local development. The UN General Assembly appointed ecotourism as a key to eradicate poverty and protect environment in 2012 because the role of ecotourism is essential by bringing many positive impacts in multiple dimensions including education, employment possibilities, income generation, fight against poverty and hunger and preservation of natural and cultural heritage. According to the UNWTO General-Secretary Taleb Rifai, encouraging the development and importance of ecotourism will lead to a fairer and more sustainable future for all (UNWTO, 2013).

Some problematic issues that are related to tourism include rising greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, waste management, adverse effects on biodiversity, increased conflicts with local communities and threats to cultural integrity (UNEP, 2011). According to UNEP these adverse effects can be reduced by ecotourism. However, ecotourism could also cause new issues if it is not properly implemented and managed as the natural areas are turned into tourist attractions. In such a scenario, ecotourism can become a threat to the nature and also to the local economy if these communities suddenly are transformed exclusively into a tourism economy that can destroy the local agriculture industry in exchange. Therefore, it is important to find a balance with ecotourism and include the local lifestyle as a part of it. Ecotourism can be a great funding source but *depending* on it economically is not a clever idea because of its touristic character of instability affected by, for instance, different seasons and natural catastrophes.

When it comes to disasters, such as earthquakes, ecotourism has not been an unfamiliar concept in the recovery process in the past either. Already in 2005, a catastrophic

earthquake in Pakistan caused the death of 76,000 people and had a negative impact on the tourism in the popular Kaghan Valley with an average of 180,000 visitors per year (Rana, 2008). The Ecotourism Society Pakistan (ESP) tried to use the attention of the situation and made it into an opportunity to promote and encourage tourists to support the local community that suffered from the disaster, through ecotourism. ESP emphasised the importance of local cultures and customs indicating that the tourism revenues should go to the local community (Ecoclub, 2005). The strong publicity had a positive impact according to the occupancy rates of hotels, rising from 35 per cent right after the disaster to 90 per cent. Another proof of the effectivity of the promotion was concluded by asking the tourists as many of them said that they had been attracted by the advertisement. The estimation is that overall the promotion activities had a direct economic impact of \$11 million (Rana, 2008).

Planeterra, a non-profit organisation, has assisted the disaster recovery processes of the empowerment of local communities through tourism in places including Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 and the rural areas in Peru and Thailand, which were affected by floods in 2010 and 2011. Their Emergency and Response Preparedness program gave a chance to the travellers to invest in the “Help Now Fund”, which then contributes to monetary and food donations, and the rebuilding of the communities (TIES, 2013). Also Chile has applied ecotourism as a recovery tool after the earthquake in 2010, which destroyed 200,000 houses. According to the WWF, ecotourism serves new sources of employment, providing the locals help and hope after the disaster (WWF, 2012).

## 2.4 Theories in relation with ecotourism

### 2.4.1 Stakeholder definition and theory applied to the tourism industry

Tourism involves various stakeholders such as the visitors, natural areas and their managers, communities, businesses, governments and non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, specifying ecotourism stakeholder groups depends primarily on small- and medium-sized local businesses, communities and non-governmental organisations, governments, local authorities, fragile and remote destinations, international development agencies, infrastructure and group tours or independent travellers. All these stakeholders affect the

implementation of ecotourism concept through regulations, financing, transport, supply and demand (Wood, 2002).

In the tourism industry, there can be made a distinction between stakeholder groups by dividing the present users and the future users. This already implicates that in order to serve both of the groups as good as possible, sustainable tourism development is essential (Agüera, 2013). Sustainable tourism development is defined by the UNWTO in the following way: *"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"* (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). To develop sustainable tourism, it is required to approach with the Stakeholder theory. Stakeholder involvement has the real effect in sustainable tourism development as without it the sustainability concept would only be a marketing tool (Byrd, 2007).

Ecotourism is a part of sustainable tourism. The ideology behind the Stakeholder theory can be used in ecotourism as a strengthening mechanism. It can be seen as a market-based approach demonstrated with the assumption that when the local communities get profits from ecotourism, they have more incentives to conserve the natural attractions that tourists come to see (Fletcher, 2009). To illustrate this, in Kenya it is calculated that protecting elephants brings 76 times better economic value. Hunters, who kill elephants because of their ivory, usually get \$21,000 for an elephant in the black market but by attracting ecotourists a living elephant can produce \$1.6 million for its local community (Platt, 2014). At the same time, as stakeholders get better economic value by forbidding hunting, the policy is also making the world better by protecting the endangered animals. This same ideology can be applied to Japan, for instance in relation to the whale protection.

However, it is not always the case that the local community engages itself in the conservation. There have been studies that show mixed results inside the local communities for both more careful conservation and against it due to the increased income. That is why, there have been speculations about the real impact of Stakeholder theory, and it has been claimed that the conservation mainly depends on non-economic issues including cultural, ethical and aesthetic aspects (Fletcher, 2009). Therefore, in order to engage the locals in

ecotourism, they should also experience the value of their natural resources to have motivation for their conservation.

Stakeholder theory can be used as a helpful framework in the development process of ecotourism but there is no commonly applicable and working idea because the Stakeholder theory is depending upon the specific area where the development will take place. In addition the government plays a big role and separates the stakeholder policies compared to in other countries. That is why also ecotourism is different in diverse parts of the world (Byrd, 2007). In this thesis we will concentrate on the application of Stakeholder theory and ecotourism development in Japan.

#### 2.4.2 Institutional theory applied to ecotourism

According to Ross and Wall (1999), in order for ecotourism to be well implemented a positive relationship between tourism, resources and people needs to be developed. They further state that the development of such a relationship is “unlikely to occur without implementation of effective policies, management strategies, and involvement of a wide range of organisations, including NGOs and, in developing areas, conservation and development assistance agencies” (Ross and Wall, 1999: 129). In their article Ross and Wall give several examples of factors that can influence the success of ecotourism, ranging from policies to the duties of protected area employees. In Table 1 is a summary of some of these factors.

Policies	Management Strategies	Protected Area Employee Duties
Entrance fee policies	Tourist management	Park patrolling
Taxes		Fee collection
Regulations and restrictions of protected areas		
Requirement of employee training		
Budgets		
Punishment		

**Table 1.** Authors’ summary of Ross and Wall’s table “Some factors that may influence the success of ecotourism” (Ross and Wall, 1999: 130)

In order to have a successful implementation of ecotourism through the kind of factors as the ones in Table 1, there need to be institutions that can influence those types of factors. Furthermore, we believe that as the success of the implementation is depending on the relationship between tourism, resources and people, different institutions, both formal and informal, will come into contact with each other. The factors, especially the policies in Table 1, need to be well managed by institutions that are accepted by both the population in local communities as well as by the tourism industry.

## 2.5 Summary of the theoretical framework

As ecotourism is about involving different stakeholders, we believe that the Stakeholder theory can help us understand the empirical material and answer our research question. In order to find what roles the different stakeholders have in the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism, we will make a Stakeholder Analysis following the three steps of identifying, prioritising and understanding relevant stakeholders, explained in this chapter. The stakeholders will be identified in the empirical chapter while the analysis chapter will focus on the second and third steps of the Stakeholder Analysis. In the analysis, we will plot the stakeholders against Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix to define how high power and interest they have regarding revitalisation of rural communities in Japan and ecotourism. After this, we will analyse their power and interest in more detail as well as their motives. Furthermore, we believe that the Institutional theory will allow a better understanding of the different stakeholders' actions and roles in ecotourism and the revitalisation of rural communities, which will help us go through step three of the Stakeholder Analysis. For the help of using these theories in our research analysis, we have also taken the earlier research of ecotourism in consideration and as a helping example in the theoretical framework. There is not yet a lot of research about ecotourism in Japan but other countries' ecotourism examples give some guidelines.

## 3 Method

*In the method chapter, we will tell about the methodology that we have used in this research including the approach, strategy, method and data collection of this research. We*

*will also discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the methods we have used as well as the different sources and their reliability. After telling about how we have collected the data, we will explain how we have analysed the data we used, in order for it to be coherent. In the end of this chapter we will also clarify the limitations we had set in this study.*

### **3.1 Research approach**

When conducting a research there are two commonly used research approaches; deductive and inductive. The first is often used in quantitative research and aims to prove or disprove a hypothesis, while the latter is more common in qualitative research and focuses on moving from specific observations to a more generalised theory creation (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Gabriel, 2013). As our main purpose in this thesis has been to identify the roles of different stakeholders in the revitalisation of rural communities in Japan through ecotourism, and to create a base for future research and studies about how revitalisation through ecotourism can be used by different stakeholders to revitalise rural communities, we have used the inductive research approach. The inductive approach suits the purpose of our thesis better as we do not have a clear hypothesis about the different stakeholders related to ecotourism in Japan, that we want to prove or disprove, and the Stakeholder theory has no earlier research about this particular case either.

### **3.2 Research strategy and research method**

#### **3.2.1 Qualitative strategy and desk research**

In order to be able to better decode the situation of ecotourism in Japan, we have applied a qualitative research as this strategy is about interpreting information through social and cultural contexts and with a deeper understanding (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2010; Bryman and Bell, 2015). Furthermore, we have also decided to use desk research as our research method. Desk research is a study that does not involve fieldwork, like holding interviews with relevant respondents, but instead focuses on the collection and analysis of secondary data like previous research or statistics (Hague, n.d.).



### 3.2.2 Justification of choice of research strategy and research method

Our research have been about finding underlying reasons for what is happening in the rural communities and motives for stakeholders to participate in the revitalisation of these communities through ecotourism and not to try to measure anything, which supports the qualitative research method explained by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2010) and Bryman and Bell (2015). Also, our inductive research approach further supports our choice of using a qualitative research strategy.

Due to the time frame and the number of stakeholders we had to research, we concluded that the best way for us to answer our research question was to focus on desk research. As we have not had a specific focus on one stakeholder but instead wanted to gather information and data about several of them, holding qualitative interviews with enough respondents from every stakeholder group would not have been possible for us in the time frame given in this thesis. However, by using desk research we were able to go through previous qualitative research about ecotourism and rural communities in Japan, as well as studies about some of the stakeholders, and gather data that way. Desk research do have some drawbacks though as the amount and the type of data we were able to obtain have been limited to what has been researched previously and information about anything that has not been widely researched before, has not been possible to use. Furthermore, the desk research, like mentioned by Hague (n.d.), limits the researcher very much to secondary data sources, making us miss the benefits of primary sources. Though primary data could have given us some deeper insights about local attitudes or subjects that have not been researched yet, a desk research has still been useful as it is based on previous research material (Hague, n.d.), which has provided us with an understanding of what other researchers have found in different aspects. In this thesis, we have collected and summarised these different aspects into one solid research.

## 3.3 Data collection

### 3.3.1 Empirical sources

To collect information for our desk research, we have focused on secondary data collection, in compliance with Hague's (n.d.) description of desk research. This has been done by gathering data and information from scientific journals and articles, white papers and statistics from the Japanese government and various web pages. To find relevant statistics on tourism and the tourism industry in Japan we have mainly searched the web pages of the Japanese government, like the page for Japan Tourism Agency, for their published white papers. This way we have been able to retrieve new statistics and information that is based on large samples, which according to Saunders et al (2009) gives the statistics a higher accuracy and reliability. When we have searched for other information and data about, for example, the different stakeholders and their attitudes our first choices of data sources have been scientific journals and articles as we believe these sources give more objective information compared to for example blogs or online newspapers. To search for this type of literature and articles we have used the services provided by Gothenburg University' university library and Google Scholar. In order to find sources that are relevant to our research our main keywords in our searches have been ecotourism, rural tourism and revitalisation.

As explained previously in this chapter, relying on only secondary sources and data have both advantages and disadvantages which we have had to take into consideration. Some of the disadvantages, for example, could have been avoided by collecting primary data through interviews. The research in this field is still limited and there have been times when we have not been able to find the information we have needed from the scientific journals and articles being available. By holding interviews this problem could have been avoided as interviews is a tool which will allow a researcher to gather data that are in line with their research question (Saunders et al, 2009). As we knew about the benefits of holding interviews we were interesting in conducting some, but due to the time frame given to us in this thesis, as well as some changes that we made in our research question, we were unable to find and contact respondents that could have been relevant to our research question. Our

solution, when sources like scientific journals have not been enough to give us the information we needed to answer our research question, have been to turn web pages and as a last resort to non-scientific articles. A few examples of such sources are the official websites of the different ecotourism organisations and online news media like Japan Times and The Economist. Though we were unable to hold interviews, we do not believe this have had a great impact on the outcome of our thesis, as we believe that we would have still had to do some sort of desk research in order to find objective research and information about the ecotourism industry, the state of the rural communities and the different stakeholders. Furthermore, holding interviews with all the stakeholders in this thesis would not have been possible within the time frame of this thesis and it is possible that we would not have been able get an interview with some stakeholders, like the Japanese government or the rural communities, even if we had the time, which further supports the use of secondary sources and data.

### 3.3.2 Source criticism and justification of used sources

Secondary data comes with both advantages and disadvantages. According to Saunders et al (2009) collecting secondary data can be more time efficient and allow the researcher access to data based on large samples, like government surveys and statistics. However, secondary data can also be hard to access and since the researches have been conducted by someone else it is important for us as researchers to evaluate the reliability of these sources. According to Stewart and Kamins (1993), researchers who use secondary sources need to question the sources in six different aspects;

1. Who wrote it, and
2. for what purpose?
3. When was the information gathered,
4. how was it gathered, and
5. what information was gathered?
6. Is the information consistent with information from other sources?

The author and the purpose can have a great impact on the information that is given in an article as some authors can be considered more credible than others and the purpose can

affect what information is disclosed to the reader. Depending on the author and purpose, the information can be both biased and of low quality, resulting in unreliable data. The quality of data can also be verified by checking how the information was gathered, for example, the respondents of an interview can influence the relevance of the information. Also *when* the information was gathered can have an influence on the relevance of the information, and both the timing and the purpose of the study can affect the gathered information, making it important for the information to be verified. Another way to verify the reliability of information is by checking if different sources are providing the same information or if there is a difference in the information given by different sources (Stewart and Kamins, 1993). A method related to this is triangulation, which involves gathering information from several different sources and comparing the information given by each source (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

To make sure the information we have gathered from our sources has been reliable we have evaluated the sources through Stewart and Kamins' (1993) six questions. We have also used triangulation which has enabled us to ensure the information we gathered has been consistent in several sources and that different perspectives have been taken into consideration.

When we have retrieved data from web pages, like Spirit of Japan and the ecotourism organisations' official web pages, extra consideration has been taken into account about the purpose of the web page and the information it has. As explained by Stewart and Kamins (1993), the purpose of the text, can have a great influence on what information the authors of the text have found and choose to disclose to the reader. Because of this, we have been critical about the information given, for example, on the ecotourism organisations' web pages. We have been aware that the information provided in these sources might be one-sided as well as exaggerated. Furthermore, it is possible that the organisations have an interest to show Japan and the ecotourism sector in the most positive perspective, and exclude information that can hurt their image or Japan's reputation. However, because the amount of information about some of the stakeholders, like the ecotourism organisations, has been limited we have had to retrieve information about them from their own web pages. By using the triangulation again (Bryman and Bell, 2015), we have been able to control

whether some of the information on these web pages could be biased and we have not been found anything that we believe would have a great impact on the outcome of this thesis.

For our research, we have preferred the most recent information in our data collection. However, because there still is a limited amount of research about ecotourism and its contribution to the revitalisation of rural communities, as well as ecotourism in Japan, we have sometimes gathered information from older research. Because the world is very different today in terms of technologies, mindsets and globalisation in comparison with the 90s and earlier, we are aware that some of the older research data may not be completely applicable on today's society. Despite this, we believe that it is possible to learn a lot from the older researches and that they can still serve as guidelines for the tourism industry in rural communities. By using triangulation, we have found that sometimes both newer and older data have supported each other, giving source reliability (Bryman and Bell, 2015). So to clarify, as we have not much contradictory information, between old and new research about ecotourism and the situation of the rural communities in Japan, we have perceived the information as reliable.

When we have used online news media, increased attention has been paid to questions one, two and six of Stewart and Kamins'(1993) six questions, as news media is more prone to risks of disinformation or dilution of relevant information (Rigodanzo and Pastre, 2015). One example of an online news media we have used in this thesis is Japan Times which is Japan's largest English-language newspaper with articles about a variety of fields including politics, economy, culture and sports. The authors of the articles in this type of media do not have to be researchers, and might not have an objective view, which has made it important for us to approach the information given in sources like the Japan Times critically. Japanese media might write on behalf of its country and illustrate different parts of Japan and its society in a more positive way than the reality, even though the corruption ranking of Japan is 18 in the world indicating that the corruption level is not that high (Transparency International, 2016). It can still be possible that the authors base some of their views and perspectives on certain events, Japanese culture, norms and values which could result in articles that explain an event in a very different way than a non-Japanese author would. When reading Japanese media, it is good to be aware about the affirmation of

Japanese indirectness. This does not usually mean that Japanese people directly lie but sometimes according to earlier actions, they do not tell the whole truth. However, we believe that this does not apply that much to the official newspapers as they are also telling about this cultural problem of nondisclosure (Arudou, 2011). When retrieving information from Japan Times we have been thinking of the factors described here and critically analysed the data before using it in our thesis.

### 3.4 Method for analysing the collected data

According to Saunders et al (2009) there are several ways and methods to analyse qualitative data, however a qualitative analysis “...generally involves one or more of: summarising data, categorising data and structuring data using narrative to recognise relationships, develop and test propositions...” (Saunders et al, 2009: 516). The summarisation of data includes finding keywords and condensing large amounts of data into shorter texts, figures or tables whereas categorisation of data includes grouping data into different categories to find relationships and structuring data through narrative is about ordering the data into a recounting story that follows a narrative structure. Which of these processes that will be used when analysing data depends on what kind of analytical procedure is used in the analysis. As we have an inductive research approach, we decided to have an inductively based analytical procedure.

#### 3.4.1 Template analysis

There are several different procedures to analyse qualitative data and for this thesis we have chosen to use template analysis. According to Saunders et al (2009) “A template is essentially a list of the codes or categories that represent the themes revealed from the data that have been collected.”(2009: 505). These codes and categories can be predefined and then reformed during the research making this kind of analysis to combine both deductive and inductive approaches, even though it is an inductively based analytical procedure. Our research approach has been inductive because a completely inductively based analytical procedure, like the grounded theory similar to the template analysis, would not have been appropriate as we wanted to use the predefined Stakeholder Analysis as our base template to categorise and analyse the stakeholders. Procedures, like the grounded theory, do not

allow the use of these predefined templates or categories. Furthermore, by categorising data, the template analysis aims to identify relationships, patterns and themes and this is appropriate for our research as it involves identifying of the different stakeholders' roles (Saunders et al, 2009).

### 3.5 Limitations

When making the Stakeholder Analysis, there are many stakeholders that can influence or be affected by a project and therefore needed to be taken into account. However, due to the time frame of this thesis we have limited the number of stakeholders we investigated to six groups. This has been done in order to be able to make a more thorough analysis of each stakeholder, as well as to have the time to find enough data about them.

## 4 Empirical Findings

*In this empirical findings chapter we will first describe both the general and eco-related tourism in Japan. Secondly we will identify and go through six different stakeholders relevant in the revitalisation through ecotourism in Japan. Finally, a short review of institutions in Japan is necessary as it will be taken into consideration in our analysis chapter. After all this information, we will make a summary of this chapter in the end to include the main points of the empirical findings and continue to the analysis.*

### 4.1 Tourism in Japan

#### 4.1.1 A general overview

In 1998 Japan's travel and tourism sector's contribution to Japan's GDP reached its peak at 9.7 per cent. Since then its contribution was declining until hitting 7.1 per cent in 2011. By 2015 however, the travel and tourism's share in GDP had risen to 7.9 per cent, after standing still on 7.1 per cent for two years, and is expected to continue increasing (Knoema, 2016). Every year millions of people travel to and in Japan. However, the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 caused a drop in the number of foreign tourists travelling to Japan in 2011. Even then, the following year the number of foreign tourists began going up again, and has increased tremendously since. Between the years 2012 and 2015, the number more than doubled, going from 8,358,105 tourists to 19,737,400 (JNTO, 2012; 2015). When looking at Japanese tourists travelling abroad, the number went up after the earthquake but, since 2012 the number of Japanese tourists travelling abroad has been declining. According to a report from JTA (2015), the initial decline was a result of both the appreciation of the yen and the historical issues in the Japan-China and Japan-Korea relations. In 2016 awarded Japan the number two spot on Lonely Planet's top ten best travel destinations (Lonely Planet, 2016).

Even though Japan is a modern and industrialised country today, it has thousand years of history that can still be seen in its preserved traditions. Japan has in total 19 UNESCO World Heritage sites 15 of which are cultural and four which are natural (UNESCO, 2016). Some of the most popular attractions in Japan, according to Planetware, are Mount Fuji, the



modern city of Tokyo, the traditional city of Kyoto, the island shrine of Itsukushima and the historic temple city of Nara (Dearsley, 2016). Many popular attractions are related to the natural and cultural heritage. Japanese tourism offers diversity and emphasises cultural and educational purposes in its tourism attractions, just like the principles of ecotourism do. By visiting various tourist spots, travellers have an opportunity to experience Japan. Japanese people are known for their hospitality and sensitivity. It is clear that they are persistent to preserve their traditions but at the same time, they are eager to learn new things, which is reflected in their tourism industry (Kwok and Leung, 2008).

Some tourists in Japan visit only the densely populated cities of Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima and perceive Japan as a heavily urbanised country even though less than ten per cent of Japan is industrial and inhabited area while almost 70 per cent consists of forested mountains and hills. The infrastructure in the cities in Japan is advanced, their trains are some of the fastest in the world and they offer special Japan Rail Passes for tourists for reduced train travel prices (Japan Rail Pass, 2016). The difficulty with visiting the rural area is that the transportation there is much weaker compared to the transportation between the urban cities, with more bus services than railways (Brasor, 2013).

#### 4.1.2 Ecotourism

Ecotourism in Japan includes the protection of nature but is mainly focused on revitalising the rural communities (Gayler, 2014). The initiation of this movement began in the 1970s when the attractiveness of big cities appealed to most of the younger generations leading them to abandon the rural communities. The industrialisation in Japan was very fast due to the strong post-war economic growth and has challenged the traditional values rapidly. The urbanised population might sometimes later feel the need for simple values again, so it is essential not to forget these values and therefore focus on preserving them. The impact of this overwhelming transformation from traditional to a modern lifestyle has already led to some returns to the rurality like in the case of the people from the town of Shibakawa (Nagata, 2008).

The vast nature and rich culture of Japan have created space for different types of natural ecotourism activities, like going to hot springs, mountain climbing and hiking, skiing,

whale and dolphin watching, scuba diving and snorkelling, river rafting, and visiting ancient forests, temples and shrines (Spirit of Japan Travel, 2016). Many of these activities are popular tourism activities among the Japanese people, and some activities, like skiing and mountain climbing, have made it into the top 20 most popular tourism activities in Japan (Japan Productivity Center, 2015). Furthermore, the cultural ecotourism activities in Japan include, for instance, the traditional tea ceremony, different festivals and performances (Spirit of Japan Travel, 2016).

Many places of natural beauty are protected as national parks. The first national parks in Japan were established in 1931 and today, there are 31 national parks in Japan covering different environments. This wide range includes islands, forests, mountains, volcanoes, underwater grounds and hot springs. Visitors in the national parks are allowed to go hiking, mountain climbing, boating, snorkelling, diving and also whale and dolphin watching. Sanriku Recovery National Park is especially focusing on the Sanriku Coast region that suffered the worst damage and loss of life due to the tsunami in 2011 (Japan Guide, 2016).

Accommodation is one of the most important sectors in ecotourism as it allows the ecotourists to actualise their stay in contact with the nature in an eco-friendly way. In Japan this sector is carried out mostly by ecolodge organisations, like Japan Ecolodge Association, which is further explained in the next section. Ecolodges are small- or medium-sized accommodations, often individually owned, located in natural areas and follow sustainable practices. A checklist of such practices, divided into six different areas such as Reduction of Wastes and Recycling and Saving Energy and Water, called the Ecolodge Guidelines Checklist was created by Japan Ecolodge Association in order to be able to certify accommodations as ecolodges (TIES, 2006).

One type of accommodation that often is classified as eco-friendly is what is called *farmstay*. The concept of farmstays is that families will rent out rooms at their farms to tourists, both domestic and foreign, and let them experience life and work at farms in rural communities in Japan (Inside Japan, 2016). Activities on these farms can include planting and harvesting crops, wood chopping, fishing and cooking (Inkarusipe, 2016; Nouka Minshuku Kajika, n.d; Shodoshima Cosmoynn Yuukien, n.d).

## 4.2 The different ecotourism stakeholders

As we explained about the ideology of Stakeholder theory earlier in this thesis, we have identified different stakeholders or stakeholder groups that we believe are the most affecting or affected by the topic of ecotourism in the rural areas in Japan. We limited the number of stakeholders to six that can be clearly classified. Our choice of which stakeholders we would study was based on the four main stakeholder groups mentioned by Kivits (2011) and the ecotourism stakeholder groups explained by Wood (2002), previously discussed in our theory chapter. After looking at the four main stakeholder groups and the ecotourism stakeholder groups, we chose to study the following six stakeholders; the Japanese government, ecotourism organisations, tour operators, tourist information centres the rural communities and tourists. We present them in this chronological order by following the logical sequence from macro to micro stakeholders.

### 4.2.1 The Japanese government

The Japanese government has a variety of motives and reasons to participate in the revitalisation of rural communities as the rapid urbanisation in Japan is not only creating problems in the rural communities but also in the cities. For example, the Capital Metropolitan Area of Tokyo is expanding enormously (Flüchter, 2008), increasing the demand for water and energy supply. Another big issue is waste that is double in the cities compared to less populated areas. Decentralisation of the population should be important for the government from many aspects including economic, environmental and social environments. However, the local people in the communities claim that only a little has been done by the government to support the local communities such as providing low interest loans and maintaining the infrastructure (Hays, 2013).

By using ecotourism as a tool to revitalise the rural communities, the government becomes an important actor as many stakeholders are affected by the government and need support in order for the ecotourism to be well implemented. This support can come in many forms, it can for instance be protection of natural areas through policies or development of tourism infrastructure (Wood, 2002). It can also be monetary funding and subsidies or common regulations. Furthermore, the Japanese government has declared that the strategy that Japan

is pursuing to overcome the national problems such as the declining population, is to make Japan into a tourism nation. To reach this goal the government has created a Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan, which states what kind of responsibilities the whole government has including the Japan Tourism Agency, explained in the next section, and the measures it should take to fulfil these responsibilities. According to this plan the government is responsible for creating sustainable tourism areas as well as the protection, cultivation and development of tourism resources related to culture, historic landscapes and nature (MLIT, 2012).

The government as a stakeholder can include both national and local governments as well as only certain parts of the government (Wood, 2002). One such part of the Japanese government, that is of interest when speaking about the revitalisation of rural communities and ecotourism, is the Japan Tourism Agency, which is a sub-organisation of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. The Japan Tourism Agency was created in 2008 and is working with developing the Japanese tourism industry. According to the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan the Japan Tourism Agency is responsible for the:

1. Creation of attractive tourist areas that are favored by people inside and outside the country (branding of tourist regions, broad cooperation among multiple areas, etc.)
2. Implementation of Visit Japan promotions by All Japan
3. Enhancement of international competitiveness in the MICE field, including international conferences, etc.
4. Promotion of time-off reforms (JTA, 2013)

The plan further states a variety of measures the Japan Tourism Agency should take in order to fulfil its four responsibilities. One of these measures is to improve the tourism environment for foreign tourists by building a foreign tourist information centre network and certifying the centres that have the necessary resources to accept and help foreign tourists (MLIT, 2012).

The UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifa, has described the Japanese government's involvement in tourism in the following way: "Japan's remarkable tourism results are the result of the solid and cohesive efforts of the Japanese government to position Japan as a distinguished tourism nation." (UNWTO, 2014). Despite the natural catastrophe in 2011,

tourism has had a great growing trend and shows the importance of the Japanese government's engagement in the tourism industry. The cooperation between Japan and the UNWTO was an essential part of the recovery after the disaster. In the beginning, the UNWTO dedicated its immediate support to Japan's tourism and later on Japanese tourism policies have followed the guidelines of the UNWTO (UNWTO, 2011).

In April 2008 a law was implemented that requires the ecotourism projects to be certified by the government which then will also support them. This gives better control over real and fake ecotourism projects, which is important as, for instance, fake ecotours could damage the nature (Nagata, 2008). Fake ecotourism projects are commercialised as ecological when in fact that is not the case, like greenwashing, explained before in the introduction of this thesis.

#### 4.2.2 Ecotourism organisations

Apart from the government there exists a variety of other organisations that are working with the promotion and development of ecotourism in Japan. These ecotourism organisations can have very different agendas and do therefore not always work towards the exact same goals. However, what they do have in common is their wish to spread ecotourism throughout Japan in different ways. Three examples of significant ecotourism organisations in Japan, that are also members in TIES, are Japan Ecotourism Society, Japan Ecotourism Center and Japan Ecolodge Association (TIES, 2014a).

##### *Japan Ecotourism Society*

Japan Ecotourism Society (JES) was founded in 1998 in cooperation with TIES and is one of the world's oldest and largest ecotourism organisations (Frid, 2008). It promotes the principles of ecotourism and responsible travel. The goals of JES are to help the development of healthy communities and to encourage people to travel more eco-consciously (JES, 2016).

JES has organised forums and workshops in Tokyo and other parts of the country. In addition they organise National Ecotourism Symposium for Students annually, which helps students and young professionals to become actively engaged in the fields of conservation and community-based tourism (TIES, 2011). JES publishes "Eco Tourism" magazine in

Japan and supports active people in ecotourism for instance by research on demand or ecotour guidelines. JES is connected with the international ecotourism organisations through TIES (JES, 2016).

#### *Japan Ecotourism Center*

Japan Ecotourism Center is a non-profit organisation with the mission to promote ecotourism by supporting local communities and tour operators. Japan Ecotourism Center offers tourists ecotours, and they also run their own website dedicated to providing tourists with information and tips about ecotours as well as promoting ecotourism and motivating people to learn more about it (Japan Ecotourism Center, 2010). Japan Ecotourism Center is also involved in and offering a variety of other activities. They offer different kinds of education programs for future ecotour guides and coordinators, and they also hold seminars, visit different events or exhibitions to hold guest presentations and conduct research on ecotourism together with nationwide researchers (Japan Ecotourism Center, n.d.).

Japan Ecotourism Center is not only working to spread knowledge about ecotourism among tourists but also among organisations and local governments in Japan. They offer support and consulting on how to promote and market ecotourism for the organisations and local governments that are interested in ecotourism, and help them to create business plans (Japan Ecotourism Center, 2010).

#### *Japan Ecolodge Association*

Japan Ecolodge Association (ECOLA) is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting and spreading information about sustainable accommodations in Japan. In 2008 they introduced a registration and certification system for ecolodges (ECOLA, 2016), that was approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in 2012 (GSTC, 2016). Since then they have used GSTC's criteria of ecolodges to offer a checklist with 148 items based on GSTC's Environmentally Sustainable Accommodations International Standard (ESAIS) in order to raise awareness of nature conservation and benefit local economies. Their practices include energy conservation through renewable sources and recycling, and networking with environmentally-friendly accommodation facilities (ECOLA, 2016).

### 4.2.3 Domestic, inbound and outbound tour operators

Another kind of organisations that operate in the tourism industry are tour operators. As we saw in the previous section, ecotourism organisations can serve as tour operators, like Japan Ecotourism Center, but they do not necessarily have to. Tour operators likewise do not have to be ecotourism organisations or have an ecotourism focus, though they are responsible for controlling that their tour packages comply with sustainability or ecotourism objectives (Wood, 2002). Some of the responsibilities that tour operators have, according to TIES guidelines, are to prepare the tourists with information and educational material about the local culture and nature of their destination, help the tourists to minimise environmental impact and contribute to the conservation of the local communities and nature (TIES, 1993).

The main purpose of tour operators is to put together and offer tour or travel packages to travellers and tourists. Such a package can include accommodation, transportation to and from the destination country or city as well as between tourist sites, and other services like catering and entertainment (Smith and Stewart, 2014). There are several different types of tour operators but the ones we will be focusing on in this thesis are; domestic, inbound and outbound operators.

Domestic tour operators offer domestic tours or trips to the residents within the country in which they themselves reside, for example an operator in Japan offering tours to Kyoto to the people residing in Japan (Ali, 2015). These tour operators are responsible for tailoring packages that appeal to the domestic market (Smith and Stewart, 2014).

Outbound tour operators resemble the domestic tour operators. The outbound operators, a lot like the domestic, offer their services to the residents of the same country as they themselves are residing. However, unlike the domestic tour operators, the outbound ones are sending travellers to a different country. An outbound tour operator could, for example, reside in the UK and offer the residents in UK trips to Japan (Travel Business Academy, 2015).

Outbound tour operators are responsible for providing their customers with traveller insurance and information prior to the trip, as well as booking flights if they have in-house travel agents. These operators also manage the marketing and sales of the tour packages

and according to Wood, outbound tour operators are “...the ecotourism industry’s dominant marketing and sales organisations.” (Wood, 2002: 34). Though the outbound tour operators will prepare tour packages, it is seldom them who handle the tours in the destination country. Instead these are often managed by an inbound operator in that country with which the outbound tour operator has a contract with (Wood, 2002).

The inbound tour operators, unlike the outbound operators, receive travellers from other countries than where the business itself operates in. An example of such a business would be a tour operator that is residing and operating in Japan but receiving tourists from countries like the US, Germany and China (Travel Business Academy, 2015). The inbound tour operators, as they often receive tourists sent by an outbound operator, are primarily responsible for the actual tours and for the quality of the tours making sure the activities, restaurants and accommodations, that the tourists visit, support the local communities as well as the nature conservation. Furthermore, it is important for the inbound tour operators to collaborate and work together with the local communities in order to ensure that these communities are enabled to benefit from the tourism (Wood, 2002).

#### 4.2.4 Tourist information centres

A place where tourists can get information about, for example, different tourist attractions or cities are tourist information centres. These centres can be situated at a variety of locations throughout a country and can often be found at airports, by large train stations and close to landmarks. The information provided at a tourist information centre can come in very different forms, it can be maps, pamphlets and brochures promoting different accommodations, restaurants and activities or the tourist can get information from the working staff (Fesenmaier, Vogt and Stewart, 1993).

Studies have shown that the information provided at this kind of centre can influence a tourist’s travel behaviour. One such study was conducted in Indiana, in the United States. According to this study 92 per cent of the surveyed respondents had felt that they were influenced in some degree by the information that they had obtained at the centre they visited. The study further showed that a majority of travellers who had indicated a high



influence of the information were on their way to a different state than Indiana (Fesenmaier, Vogt and Stewart, 1993).

Tourist information centres do not only offer information but also a variety of other services, like the Kyoto Tourist Information Centre that also sells transportation passes and tickets, help tourists make hotel, restaurant and tour reservations and offer baggage storage services (Kyoto Tourist Information Center, n.d.).

#### 4.2.5 The rural communities in Japan

As the rural communities will be affected by the revitalisation, as well as by ecotourism, they are an important stakeholder group in the revitalisation through ecotourism. In order for the implementation of ecotourism in the rural communities to be successful, it is important to involve the local communities in the implementation of ecotourism. The communities need to be informed of the benefits of ecotourism as well as the negative impacts it can have. Furthermore, by engaging the rural communities in the ecotourism projects and giving them the chance to review and accept a project beforehand, some of the negative impacts that ecotourism can have on the community can be avoided (Wood, 2002).

Many communities are losing transportation facilities because of the lack of passengers, schools and stores are closing and health care is moved far away. For farmers, it is becoming too expensive to deliver their products to the cities because of the lack of public transportation. There are villages that are full of abandoned houses. In Hokkaido, some towns have auctioned schools and given away land areas to people who promised to move there and register as residents (Hays, 2013).

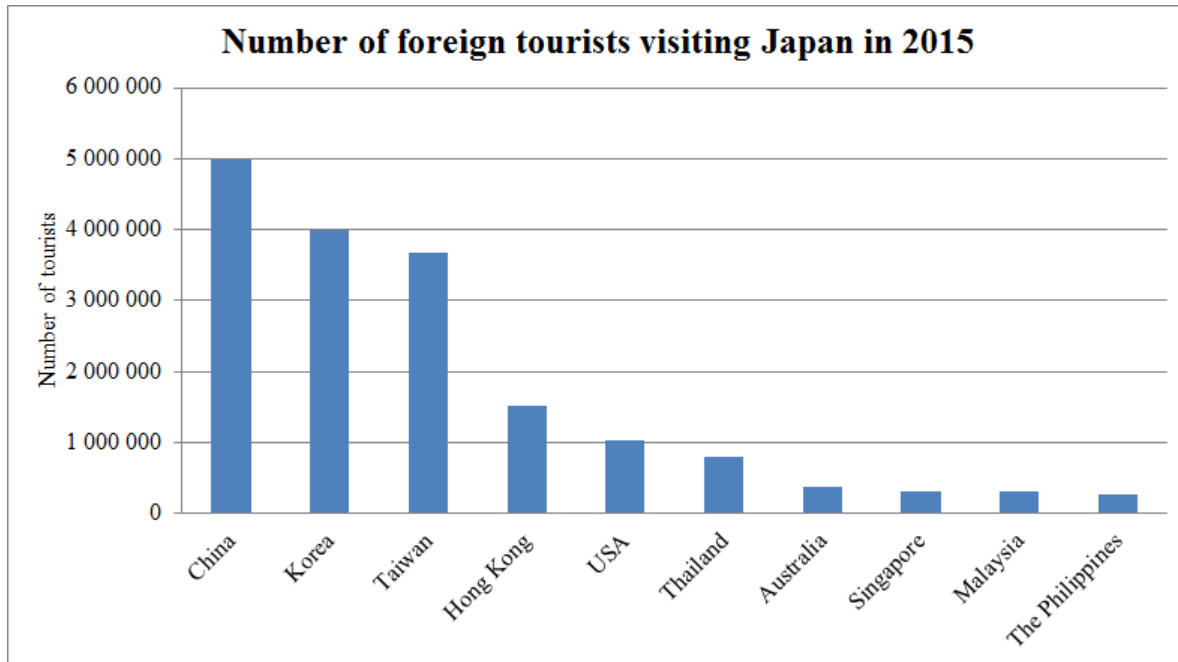
Women's role in rural communities was mentioned in the introduction part earlier in this thesis and is problematic as women are needed in order to continue the life in the communities. Today the number of women aged between 30 and 34 is much lower than then the men in the same age in many rural communities. This gap is not only created because women move to urban cities to work or study but also because many of the women leave the communities as they marry men who live in urban areas. The men often stay in the rural communities as they take over the family household but then have trouble finding a partner as few women are willing to move to the rural communities (Wilhelm, 2016).

Young women move to cities to study and often get an internationally high average level of education according to OECD. However, it is not utilised to its full potential. This is seen in the statistics of female labour participation which is only 63 per cent. Further on 70 per cent of women stop working for a decade or more after having their first child (The Economist, 2014). Moreover, unlike some men, the young women, who move to study, are usually not willing to return to the rural community after studying because they feel the gender equality is better in urban areas (Hayashi, 2014). The women, who live in the rural communities, have to struggle more with inequalities than women in the urban areas.

Despite the women's employment difficulties, women are an important labour group in the tourism industry in Japan. According to a report by MLIT (2015) 57.5 per cent of the people employed in the tourism industry in Japan were women in 2012. When looking at in what businesses in the tourism industry women have the highest employment rate, the two businesses stands out the most are retail and food & drinks services, where 65.1 per cent respectively 62.7 per cent of the employees are women.

#### 4.2.6 The tourists

Every year millions of people from all over the world travel to Japan and they create an important stakeholder group for ecotourism as they render revenues for both the tourism and ecotourism sectors. Figure 2 shows the ten countries from which the highest amount of tourists visiting Japan were from in 2015, the three countries standing out the most being China, Korea and Taiwan.



**Figure 2.** Number of tourists visiting Japan in 2015. Source: Author's calculation from JNTO (2016) data.

The Chinese tourists do not only make out the largest tourist group in Japan, they were also, according to a survey by Japan Tourism Agency (JTA), the foreign tourists that spent the highest amount of money per person on their travels that same year, spending over 280,000 yen per person (JTA, 2015). The Chinese tourists spend an average of a bit over 169,000 yen per person on shopping in Japan. Most of the money was spent on different electronic goods, like video cameras, cosmetics and food items (JTA, 2015). Furthermore, Japanese health and food products are seen as much safer compared to the products made in China, and therefore Chinese tourists want to store as many products back home as they can (Tan, 2016).

The continued strengthening of the Chinese market has allowed more Chinese inhabitants to travel (Fuggle, 2015) and Japan's close proximity with China, can make the Chinese tourists an opportunity to increase tourism in the rural areas as well. Though the Chinese tourists can be a resource in the revitalisation of rural communities in Japan through their tourism, there is also a risk of engaging them in ecotourism with the current attitudes. According to Harris (2008), the ethic valuation among the Chinese about nature and the environment were low. Harris further says that though many say they do care for the

environment few Chinese will choose to do even small acts, like not littering, to care for the environment and he states that “The environment is seldom people’s [the Chinese’s] first priority” (Harris, 2008: 175). Furthermore Hedlund (2011) found a relationship between tourists’ values, environmental concern and intentions to engage in ecotourism. However she also states that “...intentions are not in perfect correlation with actual behaviour.” (Hedlund, 2011: 286), further explaining that even though the tourists’ intention may have been to engage in environmentally friendly tourism, it is not certain they actually do so during their travels. Some behaviour of the Chinese tourists, such as littering and being noisy, have already arisen dissatisfaction. One example that got publicity was the occasion of some Chinese tourists climbing on the famous cherry trees during their blossom time in Osaka (Xie, 2016).

As mentioned previously in this thesis the number of Japanese tourists going abroad has declined and the same time the number of Japanese tourists doing day and overnight trips domestically has increased (JTA, 2015). Going on domestic travels has been the most popular way for Japanese people to spend their leisure time for the past four years. 26.4 per cent of the people, who had travelled in their free time, had been to the Tokyo prefecture, which was the most popular place to travel to. The second most popular places to travel to were the Shiga and Kyoto prefectures to where 19.9 per cent had travelled (Japan Productivity Center, 2015). When it comes to the rural areas, they also have a special interest among the domestic tourists. According to Kelly (1986), many Japanese rural communities are stuck in a state between modernisation and sentimentalisation. The source of this is the nature of the Japanese tourism, as the domestic tourists often search for nostalgia and the historical Japan when they set out on their travels (Siegenthaler, 1999). Because of this, the countryside began being marketed in travel posters and television specials as a place that still holds onto old traditions and lifestyle (Kelly, 1986). Some rural communities have transformed their rural industries into tourist attractions, and in order to appeal the urban tourists are marketing the communities through the word *furusato*. The literal translation of *furusato* is ‘old village’ but the meaning of the word is closer to home or hometown, and the word has become a symbol, mostly among inhabitants in urban areas, for the nostalgia and culture that used to exist before the urbanisation and westernisation of Japan.

In addition to the categorisation of tourists into domestic and foreign, there are also different types of tourists depending on the purpose of their travel. There can be tourists travelling on purpose of business, education, religion, health, leisure, sport, culture and nature (Hotel and Resort Insider, 2007). Responsible travellers, who are interested in social, economic and environmental sustainability, are defined as ecotourists. Many of them participate in voluntourism activities which include for instance living in host families and helping the family or teaching in local schools for free (Projects Abroad, 2016). Ecotourists are seeking to minimise the carbon footprint of their travel and giving back to the communities by planning and choosing wisely and consciously. Authentic local experiences are valued highly. Ecotourists can be from all ages or statuses (TIES, 2014b).

Some of the current social tourism trends in 2016 are pointing out in favour to ecotourism. These include the tourists' will to discover untouched and unique places, and the desire of cultural immersion (Fuggle, 2015; Speight, 2016). Holidays are not only about wellness anymore, instead many tourists seek to learn something during their trips and aim for self-improvement. Other social influences on tourism are individualism, experimental, safety consciousness, good service and social and environmental concern. Tourism plays more and more proactive role in awareness rising and it is a universal education all the tourists can participate. Tourism is not only about consumption, it is rather seen as an investment. However, tourism is undergoing rapid changes and therefore tourism managers must have the current knowledge and adaptive capabilities (Dwyer et al., 2008).

Social networking is part of travelling today and the importance of it can be demonstrated by the popularity of for instance AirBnb and Couchsurfing. Above all, social media is a powerful tool when targeting ecotourists. Travelers, who tell stories about their journeys, can have a huge impact in engaging other people by their unique, individual experiences. This phenomenon then turns into destination marketing (TIES, 2014c).

### 4.3 Institutions in Japan

Just like in any other society and community, different institutions exist in the Japanese society. Traditionally, communities in Japan are built around households or families, these do not only include the core family members but can be made up of other relatives and

even non-relatives as well. The institutions, or households, can often exist through several generations, as headship of the household is succeeded, usually to the eldest son. This institutional structure can still today be found in the modern Japan, though mostly among farmers, temple priests or families with other traditional occupations, like traditional arts and crafts, where the techniques are passed down to the next generations (Suzuki, 2012; Traphagan, 2008).

The Japanese society is highly group-conscious, meaning that people belong to several different groups, with the family being the most important one. A few other examples of groups are work teams and school circles. These groups can have different norms and rules and often close their doors to outsiders (Suzuki, 2012). Even Japanese politics is dominated by the informal institutions. After the war, many formal institutions were established but they are not that distinctive. Some of the formal institutions have not worked as expected or needed, and therefore informal institutions need to compensate more (Curtis, 1999). As a country with a strong national culture, there exist many unwritten rules and tacit knowledge about how you should behave and act in different situations. The institutions in Japanese society often encourage silence and the hiding one's true feelings in order to avoid confrontations (Suzuki, 2012).

#### 4.4 Summary of the empirical findings

The empirical findings of ecotourism in Japan and the different stakeholders, the Japanese government, ecotourism organisations, tour operators, tourist information centres, rural communities and tourists are needed in order to conduct our analysis in the next chapter. When we reviewed the tourism in Japan, we can see that it has a growing trend since 2012 for both domestic and foreign tourists. Japanese cities are popular to visit but in addition many tourism attractions in Japan are related to the cultural and natural attractions like ecotourism too. Ecotourism started in Japan already in the 1970s and has already established some stable concepts like natural parks and ecolodges or farmstay for accommodation.

The relevant stakeholders in the focus group of this thesis have been identified, with the help of Stakeholder theory, as the Japanese government, ecotourism organisations,

domestic, inbound and outbound tour operators, tourist information centres, rural communities and the tourists. We have gathered information about their characters and earlier actions to help our analysis in the next chapter. The last subject in this chapter was about the institutions in Japan, as they can also affect the stakeholders' behaviour and should be taken into account when analysing.

## 5 Analysis

*In this chapter we will be analysing our empirical findings by using our theories in relation to the stakeholders we defined in the previous chapter. We will focus on prioritising and understanding the roles of the different stakeholders by analysing the data about each of them with the help of the Stakeholder Analysis. To further understand some of the stakeholders regarding to why they act in certain ways or how they work, we will be using Institutional theory as a supplemental tool in the Stakeholder Analysis when we believe it is needed. In the end of this chapter we will make a summary of our analysis with the help of Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix.*

### 5.1 The roles of the different stakeholders

The stakeholders that we took up in our empirical findings have different roles in the revitalisation through ecotourism in Japan according to their levels of power, resources and interests. As a result deciding which roles each of the stakeholders has, can become difficult without understanding what kind of, and how much, power the stakeholders have, what resources they are possessing, and how high their interest in ecotourism and revitalisation of the rural communities is as well as why they have an interest. In order to find out about the roles of the different stakeholders, we will use the Stakeholder Analysis, as the aim of that framework is to identify stakeholders that are important for a project (Brugha and Varvasovszky, 2000). The first step; identifying the relevant stakeholders, in the Stakeholder Analysis was done in the previous chapter. In that step we identified six stakeholders that are relevant for the revitalisation of rural communities in Japan through ecotourism. Our analysis of each stakeholder will therefore start with the second step; prioritising the stakeholders. In order to decide the importance of each stakeholder, we will use Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005), discussed about in our theory chapter. Through this matrix we can classify the importance of the stakeholders in regards to their power and interest, and then analyse what their roles are as such stakeholders. Above all, we will try to find out which stakeholders are the key stakeholders in the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism as these have both high influence and interest.



After we have decided the stakeholders' importance, we will move on to step three of the Stakeholder Analysis; understanding of the stakeholders. To understand them, we will be analysing them with the help of our empirical findings and apply the Institutional theory to better understand how the formal and informal institutions, discussed by Lauth (2015), may affect the stakeholders to act in certain ways. The existence of informal institutions can especially influence the government, rural communities and tourists whereas the other stakeholders will not be that affected by these institutions.

### 5.1.1 The Government's role

The Japanese government is one of the stakeholders we identified as relevant in the first step of the Stakeholder Analysis in the previous chapter and so the next step is to prioritise this stakeholder. Following Thompson's (2002) explanation of the second step, this prioritisation happens through analysing the power and the interest of the government in the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism.

The government has undoubtedly high power, which comes from its ability to establish and change laws and regulations. This complies with Lauth's (2015) statement that formal institutions, like laws, are regulated by the government. The laws set by the government are mandatory to follow and have a great impact. According to the Stakeholder Analysis, Mitchell et al (1997) and Etzioni (1964), this kind of power is coercive power. As Ross and Wall (1999) stated in their article, policies are important factors for the successful implementation of ecotourism. Therefore, for ecotourism to be well implemented in Japan, especially in the rural communities, the government needs to utilise their power to create and regulate such policies that support the implementation of ecotourism in the rural communities. Several of the policies that they mentioned, like taxes and budgets, are regulated by the government. In continuation, the government gets money, for instance from the taxes, and due to the income, the government also gets, what Mitchell et al (1997) and Etzioni (1964) calls, utilitarian power as it can provide material and money further. Through policies, the government can also help with the utilitarian power by making sure that the rural communities in Japan will benefit from ecotourism, for example by creating policies that require a certain share of the tourism revenues to go directly to the rural communities' economies. Finally, as the government represents the country, it has also

normative power (Mitchell et al, 1997; Etzioni, 1964). As we can see, the government obtains all the forms of power that are defined in the Stakeholder Analysis, making its power the highest among these stakeholders.

Regarding the government's interest in the revitalisation of rural communities, we found out in our empirical findings that the government has several motives to participate in projects that aim to revitalise rural communities verifying that they have a high interest. These motives include the disadvantages of the depopulation in the rural communities (Assmann, 2016; Wilhelm, 2016) and in contrast the problems in the urban areas (Flüchter, 2008). With both a high power and a high interest, the government should be considered as a key player in revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism when we view the government through Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005).

As the government holds the key player position, it has a high importance in projects concerning the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism. By knowing the importance of this stakeholder, we can move onto the third step of the Stakeholder Analysis. According to Thompson's (2002) this step is about further analysing the stakeholder and its interest and motives to participate in the project. As we stated in the paragraph above, the government has several reasons for wanting to revitalise the rural communities (Wood, 2002; MLIT, 2012). The interest in ecotourism comes mostly from the interest of the revitalisation as ecotourism can be a tool to achieve that. The problems of the depopulation in rural communities and the urbanisation have caused a stronger interest for the government to revitalise the rural communities. Furthermore, the Japanese government has a liability to create and support sustainable tourism in Japan (MLIT, 2012; JTA, 2013), which gives them more reasons to participate in projects concerning the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism.

When we look at the Japanese government in terms of formal and informal institutions (Curtis, 1999), we can see indicators of a different situation compared to the governments in some other countries. According to Lauth (2015), formal institutions are regulated by governments, implying that most governments are made up by formal institutions. Even so, Curtis' (1999) explanation of the Japanese government shows that many formal institutions in Japan have been exchanged with informal ones. Furthermore, he stated that Japanese

politics have become dominated by these informal institutions rather than the formal ones. This indicates that even though the government has the power to change and create policies and regulations, it may not be able to change them very fast. As discussed in the theory chapter, informal institutions take time to change, and even though the regulations themselves are a part of a formal institution, the government may not be able to affect it immediately because of the informal institutions that also exist inside the government.

### 5.1.2 The ecotourism organisations' role

The second stakeholder that we identified in the first step of the Stakeholder Analysis is the group of ecotourism organisations. Continuing onto the second step and analysing these organisations' power and interest we see that as the ecotourism organisations' main objective is to promote ecotourism (JES, 2016; Japan Ecotourism Center, 2010; ECOLA, 2016), there is an indication that they have a high interest in a project concerning revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism.

When it comes to power, ecotourism organisations have it by being acknowledged organisations (TIES, 2014a) working to promote sustainable tourism and control what information and knowledge they give to other organisations and tourists. That way the ecotourism organisations are in a position where they can both directly and indirectly influence other stakeholders. This kind of power relates normative power, explained by Mitchell et al (1997) and Etzioni (1964). Identifying the influence these organisations can have on other stakeholders is, according to Thompson (2002), also an important factor with the importance of the ecotourism organisations role in the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism. Using the Japan Ecolodge Association's ecolodge criteria (ECOLA, 2016) as an example, we can demonstrate that even though ecolodges do not have to follow the criteria, some still choose to do so. We believe this is due to the fact that Japan Ecolodge Association is an acknowledged ecotourism organisation, and for the ecolodges to become accepted by them means receiving the certification of fulfilling the criteria and legitimacy by the Japan Ecolodge Association. Only the utilitarian power is something that the ecotourism organisations have in a limited amount. Their sources of material and money cannot provide for huge investments unless they are very successful organisations in terms of economy. Despite this, the power that the ecotourism

organisations hold is one of the highest in the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism.

When plotting the ecotourism organisations stakeholder against Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005) we believe that, based on our empirical findings in section 4.3.2 and the discussion above, the ecotourism organisations have a high level of both power and interest. Following the matrix thereafter, they seem to be one of the key players. In the third step of the Stakeholder Analysis, the understanding of ecotourism organisations is important as they make out one of the key players. Their understanding is easier after knowing the advantages of ecotourism, which gives reasons for their motive of working with it. As key players they should be enabled to be part of making the decisions concerning the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism to make sure that their knowledge can be spread to the other stakeholders.

### 5.1.3 The domestic, inbound and outbound tour operators' roles

Our third stakeholder group that was identified in step one in the empirical findings, is the tour operators. As the different tour operators all have their own motives, levels of interests and power to affect the revitalisation of rural communities in Japan through ecotourism, we will consider each type of the tour operators; domestic, inbound and outbound, separately in this Stakeholder Analysis.

#### *Outbound tour operators*

The outbound tour operators are not based in Japan and Japan is not the only country they send travellers to (Travel Business Academy, 2015), therefore they themselves are not depending on the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism in Japan. When taking this into consideration in the second step of the Stakeholder Analysis, to revitalise rural communities through ecotourism may not be of that high interest to these outbound operators. Instead their interest lies in creating appealing tour packages to the customers in their country and in selling these tours to earn good revenues (Travel Business Academy, 2015; Wood, 2002). Through their work of making tour packages, they have power and control over them. Wood's (2002) statement that outbound tour operators are one of the most important businesses in the marketing of ecotourism packages indicates

that they also have a high level of power of marketing in the tourism industry. The power of the outbound tour operators to market and to sell tour packages can affect which attractions tourists will go to when they travel and therefore, the power is almost purely utilitarian power. Based on this power and interest discussion we find that, according to Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005), the outbound tour operators should be classified as “keep satisfied” stakeholder, having higher power but quite low interest.

In step three of the Stakeholder Analysis, we can understand the outbound operators better if we think about them as suppliers. A higher demand among travellers for ecotourism related tour packages would surely increase the interest of the outbound tour operators to offer such tour packages while their interest directly in the revitalisation of rural communities in Japan is unlikely to become much higher. If their interest in ecotourism would increase a lot, problems could even be caused as these operators might use their power to take the ecotourism revenues for themselves without providing these profits with the rural communities.

#### *Inbound tour operators*

Again starting our Stakeholder Analysis with the second step, we know that the inbound tour operators are based and operating in Japan (Travel Business Academy, 2015), and to them any tourism sector that is successful in Japan, is a sector they can utilise in their tour packages to attract more customers and earn higher revenues. This means that if the ecotourism sector in Japan grows, it is profitable to use this sector to attract travellers that are interested in that kind of tourism and travel. When it comes to the inbound tour operators' level of interest in the revitalisation of rural communities in Japan through ecotourism, we believe that they can have a higher interest than the outbound operators. Furthermore, Wood (2002) stated that one of the inbound tour operators' responsibilities is to make sure that the local communities benefit from the tourism. If the inbound tour operators themselves feel like that this is one of their responsibilities, it gives them a reason to have an interest in revitalisation through ecotourism.

Just like the outbound tour operators, the inbound tour operators have a utilitarian power (Mitchell et al, 1997; Etzioni, 1964). If an inbound tour operator is working alone without any contracts with an outbound operator, they have control over the contents of their tour

packages alone. If the inbound tour operator does have a contract with an outbound tour operator, it does not have as much power over the actual tour package as these packages, according to Wood (2002), then usually are created by the outbound tour operator. Though their level of power regarding to the tour packages can shift depending on whether they work with an outbound tour operator or not, they still have the highest power over the actual tours in Japan (Wood, 2002).

According to these levels of power and interest, we can find in Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005) that this stakeholder has just high enough power and interest to make them key players. When we try to understand the inbound tour operators in the third step of the Stakeholder Analysis, we can begin with the same motivation of economic profits as with the outbound operators. In addition, we believe that these tour operators can have the incentives to affect the tourism activities, accommodations or restaurants the tourists visit during their trips due to a feeling of responsibility. As stated by Wood (2002) the inbound tour operators are responsible for the quality of the tours. To have high quality can be motivational for many tour operators as tourists will appreciate it too.

#### *Domestic tour operators*

When analysing the importance of domestic tour operators, step two of the Stakeholder Analysis, the discussion is similar to the second step analysis of both the inbound and the outbound tour operators, as we believe the domestic tour operators can be seen as a combination of these two operators. They are in charge of creating and marketing the tour packages they sell and making sure the activities included have a high standard, giving them a high utilitarian power (Mitchell et al, 1997; Etzioni, 1964) over the tour packages. Furthermore, as they are operating in Japan (Ali, 2015), like the inbound tour operators, they have the same reason as those to be interested in any tourism sector that they can earn revenues from. The further discussion about the domestic tour operators is similar to that of the inbound ones. The only difference is that the domestic operators have the power to affect the activities that the domestic tourists participate in. That means that their utilitarian power is more widely spread.

The domestic tour operators have both a high level of power and a high level of interest regarding the revitalisation of the rural communities in Japan through ecotourism. And just

like the inbound tour operators, they can be classed as key stakeholders in Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005). The motivation helping with their understanding in step three of the Stakeholder Analysis is also similar to the inbound tour operators. As domestic tourists can be more aware about the quality of the matters in their country, the quality perspective can affect even more strongly behind the domestic tour operators view.

#### 5.1.4 The tourist information centres' role

Our next stakeholder that was identified in step one of the Stakeholder Analysis is the tourist information centres. Moving ahead to the second step of the analysis we know that the tourist information centres works with providing information and help to tourists (Fesenmaier, Vogt and Stewart, 1993), and have control over the materials, services and information that tourists can get from them. Following Mitchell et al (1997) and Etzioni's (1964) definitions of the different power types, the tourist information centres, having control over their services and material, therefore have a utilitarian power. We further believe that through the power the tourist information centres have these centres can have an influence on the demand of different types of tourist attractions, and the tourists travel patterns, which is also supported by the results from Fesenmaier, Vogt and Stewart's (1993) study on tourist information centres' influence on tourists' travel pattern. Through the information available at a tourist information centre, these centres can influence where tourists choose to go and what activities they decide to participate in. This power is still not coercive as it is usually provided for free. As tourists are well aware about the existence of tourism information centres, their power is mostly only normative.

Although the tourist information centres have power over the information given to tourists, we do not believe that they have high interest in the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism. Their main objective is to provide information to tourists about tourist attractions in Japan and they are mainly giving information that the tourists are requesting.

As we can see from this discussion the tourist information have power but no real interest in revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism, which makes them a stakeholder that should only be kept satisfied according to Mendelow's Power-Interest

Matrix. We do not believe that there is any need for these centres to become key players as their main objective is to provide tourists with the information that is requested. By further analysing the motives of the tourist information centres, in accordance to the third step of the Stakeholder Analysis, we can create a better understanding of their interest level. Looking back at their purpose, to help tourists, could explain what information the tourist information centres chooses to present and why they choose to present that information and nothing else. This purpose, to us, indicates that they base what they show to the tourists on what the tourists are requesting. Information about ecotourism and tourist attractions in the rural communities in Japan should still be available at these centres but the centres cannot be limited to giving information only about ecotourism. The tourism information centres are services for tourists and therefore do not have specific motives on their own. Their roles depend on the tourists' wishes.

#### 5.1.5 The rural communities' role

The next stakeholder group, that we identified in the empirical findings, is the rural communities. As with the rest of the stakeholders, we will start also this analysis with identifying the importance of the stakeholder, step two of Stakeholder Analysis, through their interest and power. The interest of the rural communities in the revitalisation is one of the biggest among the stakeholders discussed in this thesis, as their future existence is depending on it. Nevertheless, when it comes to power we cannot find anything in our empirical findings that would suggest they would have a significant amount of it. The power these communities have is lacking in all of the aspects given by Mitchell et al (1997) and Etzioni's (1964). As Japan is a hierarchy based country (Suzuki, 2012), and the rural communities probably does not rank very high in this hierarchy, we find it hard to believe they have any normative or coercive power (Mitchell et al, 1997; Etzioni, 1964). In order for them to have normative power, according to Mitchell et al (1997) and Etzioni (1964), these communities would need to have some status or be respected, but as people moves away from these communities, we believe it unlikely that people in Japan consider these communities to have a high status.

Though these communities do not have any coercive or normative power, they do have some control over the resources in their communities, giving them some utilitarian power.



For instance, the rural communities can control for what purposes the buildings in their communities should be used, as Wilhelm (2016) gives an examples of regarding school buildings. However, even then, we believe their power is very low, as some of the nature in their communities may not be regulated or managed by them, but local governments (Ross and Wall, 1999).

After these speculations, when we view the rural communities' actual power and interest through Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005), this stakeholder is to be considered a "keep informed" stakeholder, with a high interest but almost no power. However, that the rural communities should only be considered as a "keep informed" stakeholders does not comply with the statements by Wood (2002) and Ross and Wall (1999). They claim that in order for ecotourism to become well implemented in the rural communities, it is important that the communities themselves are involved in the decision-making, and that functioning relationships between these communities and other stakeholders are developed. It is important to enable the rural communities to be more involved in the revitalisation and ecotourism projects in their communities for the revitalisation through ecotourism to become successful. We therefore believe that the rural communities should be made into key players in the Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix.

As Japan is built on many informal institutions (Curtis, 1999), and therefore also the rural communities have many institutions, the third step in the Stakeholder Analysis becomes extra important in order for us to understand these communities. As explained by Suzuki (2012) and Traphagan (2008), some traditional institutions seem to still exist among farmers, suggesting that also the rural communities are still following these institutions. With some of these institutions having values that may not support gender equality, like the households' succession order (Suzuki, 2012; Traphagan, 2008), we believe the informal institutions that exist in the rural communities could be one reason women chooses to move away from these communities. The institutions are mostly informal institutions with no written rules, which also mean that, if we follow Lauth (2015) definitions of an informal institution, they are quite hard to change. The reason behind this might be related to what Hodgson (2006) said in his article about habits making institutions stronger and longer lasting. If the habits and institutions that Lauth and Hodgson speak of are to be changed, it

is important that the inhabitants of the rural communities challenge the ‘this is how we have always done’ mindset. Changing informal institutions can be both difficult and take time but we believe that through ecotourism the rural communities could bring back women and also potentially speed up the change of the institutions, as young people from the urban cities bring the norms and values from the institutions they are used to. Furthermore, as we saw in our empirical findings, women have the highest share of employment in the tourism industry (MLIT, 2015), indicating that this sector might be popular among women in Japan. With this industry being popular among women, we believe the rural communities could be able to attract more women through ecotourism.

#### 5.1.6 The tourists’ roles

The last stakeholder group that we identified in the first step of the Stakeholder Analysis was the tourists. Tourists make out an important stakeholder group as without them there will not be any tourism to begin with. When analysing these in the second step of the Stakeholder Analysis, we can therefore see that the tourists have a lot of potential power when it comes to revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism in Japan, but their interest is not that obvious. This power is almost purely utilitarian power as tourists use money at the place of their travel. They can control whether they choose to participate in a certain tourism activity or not and which activities, accommodations and restaurants will get their money. However, they cannot control exactly what activities are offered or how is the quality of these operations that decreases their power a bit. The interest of the tourists is also depending on the tour operators and other tourism activity suppliers, like the tourists information centres (Fesenmaier, Vogt and Stewart, 1993). Therefore, it depends how high the interest of the tourists in the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism is. Applying this analysis on Mendelow’s Power-Interest Matrix (Johnson et al, 2005) we find that with the high power and low interest, the tourists can be classified as “keep satisfied” stakeholders.

Moving on to the third step in the Stakeholder Analysis, we can see that tourists are a special stakeholder group as they can affect ecotourism both positively and negatively. As described earlier they are the ones who can create revenues for the businesses in the ecotourism industry. At the same time, they can also cause a strain on the environment and

nature (Harris, 2008; Hedlund, 2011), if they do not have knowledge or are not aware of how their tourism pattern can affect this. To avoid this, building awareness among tourists before they participate in ecotourism activities is important, which is in accordance with the ecotourism principles (TIES, 2015; UNWTO, 2002). A group of tourists that could become such a burden to the nature and environment are tourists that hold onto similar values as the values Harris (2008) explained the Chinese tourists occasionally have. Learning about the local manners abroad is a prerequisite in ecotourism due to the idea of respecting the local people and the nature (Honey, 2008; UNWTO, 2002). Furthermore, as Chinese tourists could offer a huge supply of tourists but for that to be beneficial in the aspects of ecotourism, their attitudes must also be similar to its mindset.

In the third step of the Stakeholder Analysis, we need to understand the main motives of the tourists. Tourists can have desires of several things during their travels. Some tourists want to learn something, some to experience, to exercise sports and so on. What they want is to get good service for the purpose of their travels. With badly managed activities, the tourists would not be satisfied and they would be unwilling to participate in them. The important thing is to offer attracting products and services that will keep the tourists' interests to purchase them. In the first phase, this interest can be arisen through marketing and education about the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism.

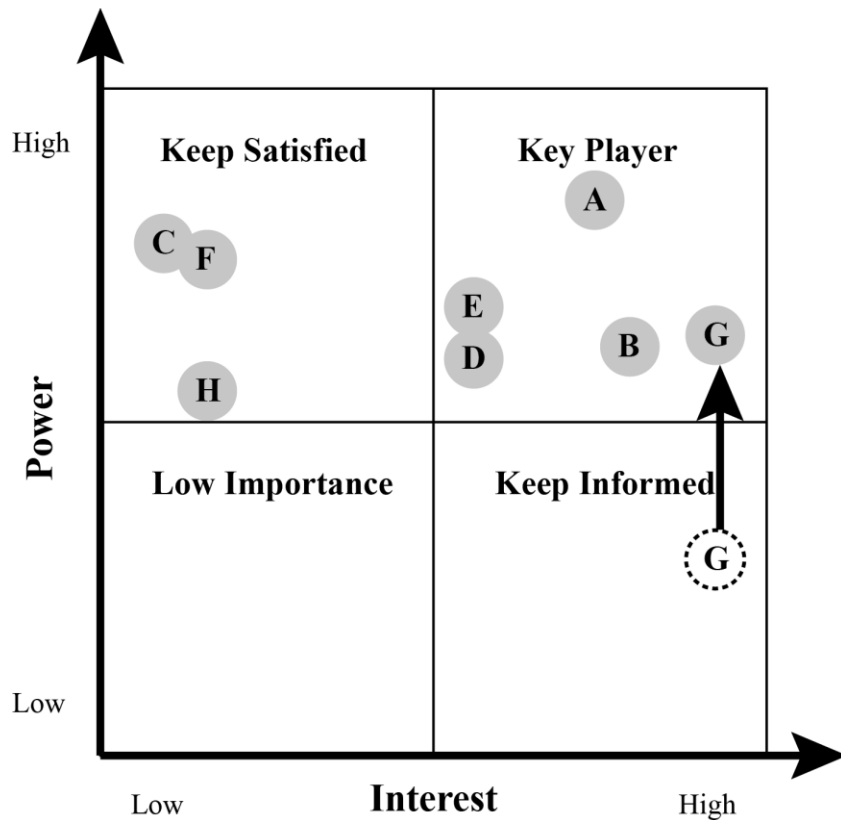
The important thing with the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism concerns about targeting the right tourists that are ready to learn and live in the local way with respect and care for the environmental effects. As usually with marketing, pictures and videos are worth thousands of words and attract people. Marketing that touches emotions help travellers build deeper connections with people and the destination (TIES, 2014b). Even the *furusato* concept could work well together with the values of ecotourism. As ecotourism includes letting tourists to get the chance to learn and experience traditional cultures (UNWTO, 2002) and the concept of *furusato* includes the urban inhabitants' wish to be able to experience the traditional and nostalgic Japan (Siegenthaler, 1999; Kelly, 1986), these two concepts would seem to be a good match, and could be used together to create an attractive ecotourism sector in the rural communities. It should be noted though that, as the concept of *furusato* was created by the Japanese people, we believe this concept

will be more appealing to the domestic tourists than to the foreign. To be able to appeal to feelings, modern marketing, such as blogging, are probably more personalised and effective ways to target ecotourists than the traditional marketing. That makes the tourists' role even more important as they can increase the interest among new tourists by telling about their own experiences.

Tourists can bring viability to the local communities so more people would like to live there so it is important to increase their interest. Also, the domestic tourists should be informed about the problems in the rural areas and encouraged to travel to these areas. Furthermore, the visiting ecotourists can even contribute to the problems of the local communities by assisting voluntourism as mentioned in the empirical findings. With ecotourism, tourists' awareness increases and at the same time they can also learn something valuable from the locals through cultural exchange.

## 5.2 Summary of the analysis

In this thesis we have identified six stakeholders that we have then analysed through the Stakeholder Analysis in this chapter. One of these stakeholder groups, tour operators, was divided into three stakeholder parts: domestic, inbound and outbound. From our discussion, we have been able to plot the stakeholders against Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix, which can be seen in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The different stakeholders plotted against Mendelow's Power-Interest Matrix.

Each letter in the matrix represents one of the stakeholders;

- A = The Japanese government
- B = Ecotourism organisations
- C = Outbound tour operators
- D = Inbound tour operators
- E = Domestic tour operators
- F = Tourist information centres
- G = Rural communities
- H = Tourists

By plotting these stakeholders against the matrix, we have been able identify the importance of the stakeholders. As can be seen in Figure 3, four out of the eight stakeholders, the government, ecotourism organisations, inbound tour operators and domestic tour operators, have the highest importance as these were all classified as key stakeholders, or key players. The rural communities are a special case, which currently is

not in a key player position. However based on the empirics and our analysis, and which can be seen in Figure 3, we believe that the rural communities should be made into a key player, as this is the most important stakeholder in the revitalisation of the rural communities. The other stakeholders have lower importance but should not be forgotten as they have power that is of interest in the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism, especially the tourists. They are a source of power for also tour operators that in turn have the power of offering activities for ecotourism.

## **6 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

To answer our research question, we have now gone through the stakeholders in the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism in Japan and prioritised them with the help of Stakeholder Analysis according to the power and interest of each stakeholder. Starting with the key stakeholders, we concluded that the most important ones right now are the government and the ecotourism organisations. Their role is to promote and support the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism by forming the ecotourism industry. They are the ones that can start to solve the problem in the beginning. The government is able to set up formal institutions in the form of policies and laws that could make it easier for local communities to engage themselves in ecotourism as a way to revitalise their communities. The ecotourism organisations are able to spread knowledge and information about ecotourism, its benefits as well as potential risks with it, to other stakeholders and the society as a whole. We believe that it is especially important that these organisations provide the rural communities with information, as this will create awareness about the possibilities of ecotourism there and help the revitalisation of these communities through ecotourism.

The inbound and domestic tour operators' roles are almost the same as each other, the only difference being what kind of tourists, foreign or domestic, they are focusing on. Both tour operators are responsible for making sure that the revenues from the ecotourism attractions in the rural communities goes to these communities and that the tourists understand, comply and adjust to the rules, policies and culture in the rural communities to avoid the negative impacts the tourists could have on the nature and culture of these communities. As these tour operators have some power over the creation of tour packages, especially domestic tour operators, they should use their resources to make ecotour packages in order to encourage the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism.

The rural communities are currently not in a position, where they have much power to affect the revitalisation through ecotourism. As we showed in Figure 3 we believe that the rural communities should have a bigger role than they have now. They will not only be

affected by ecotourism and the revitalisation but they should also be able contribute in it as the people in these communities want to keep their services, schools and convenient life. That is why they should be a part of the decision-making of ecotourism projects that are related to their communities. Women's role in turn could challenge the old institutions and support change in these institutions. Modern changes could further open up the communities towards a stronger gender equality.

The three remaining stakeholders have lower priorities but they also hold some opportunities to affect the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism. The outbound tour operators can market and sell appealing ecotourism activities to Japan. Even if the tour packages are not ecotours, they can attract tourists to Japan and the tourists can decide to participate in ecotourism activities in rural areas through some other agencies or on their own. That way the role of the outbound tour operators can indirectly contribute to the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism without expecting that their interest would grow high enough to make them key stakeholders. The tourist information centres' role as a stakeholder group is to give information for tourists about ecotours and other ecotourism activities or products in rural communities and therefore their impact is similar to the outbound tour operators with indirectly guiding the tourists to ecotourism in the rural areas.

The tourists' role is essential in order to bring revenues to the rural communities by engaging in ecotourism activities in these communities. They are the last stakeholder to be engaged in the mission of revitalising the rural communities through ecotourism and in order to do that, their interest must be fostered due to their potentially high power for the revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism.

## 6.2 Recommendations

To conclude the underlying idea, the expanding and strengthening of the tourism industry in the rural areas could bring a continuous source of revenues as it is a growing sector. As the rural communities do not have that much popular tourism yet, it would be better for these communities to begin with ecotourism instead of mass tourism due to the advantages of ecotourism, explained in this thesis. The revenues from the ecotourism could improve



services and transportation among other things, and create more employment opportunities, that can help to attract people to move to these communities. Here are some further recommendations about this topic.

### 6.2.1 Recommendations for future research

After our findings in this thesis, we recommend scholars and researchers to further research the roles of stakeholders that we have not taken up in this thesis. Furthermore, due to the limitations of our research, there are parts of our research that need to be further studied in order to complete a theoretical model of stakeholders' roles in the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism. As we discussed in our analysis, there are indicators that the Japanese government may not have as much power as we had thought due to the informal institutions' existence. Further studies about the Japanese government and its role in the revitalisation of rural communities through ecotourism could show if these institutions have a significant impact on the government's power to influence the implementation of ecotourism in rural communities. If it does, this could implicate that a general theoretic model of stakeholders' roles in the revitalisation of rural communities through would not be applicable on Japan. To get more specific information, we recommend also investigation through primary data collection, like making surveys or interviewing the different stakeholders.

### 6.2.2 Recommendations for the stakeholders

In the end we can see that the Stakeholder Analysis often links the different stakeholders' activities together creating interdependency between them. This way they can also contribute to each other. For instance, ecotourism organisations increase the awareness about ecotourism among tourists and the government needs to support the local people in their revitalisation initiatives through ecotourism. Multi-stakeholder partnerships with the common goal of revitalisation through ecotourism could have the most efficient impact on achieving success for revitalisation of the rural communities through ecotourism. Therefore, we recommend teamwork between the different stakeholders and stakeholder groups.

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