

**AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF ARTS AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE  
OF SADO ISLAND,  
Niigata, Japan**

**Blendi Barolli<sup>1</sup>, Arbana Barolli<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Center for Fostering Innovative Leadership, Niigata University,  
blendibarolli@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> Graduate School of Modern Society and Culture, Niigata University,  
arbanabarolli@yahoo.co.jp

**Abstract**

Sado Island is located 45 kilometers west of Niigata City, in the northern part of the Chubu region. Apart from the four main islands, it is the biggest island in Japan, with a coastline of around 227 kilometers and an area of about 857 square kilometers. One of Japan's largest islands, Sado Island has an interesting history. Its culture can be seen in its unique traditional arts and entertainment. Sado's arts and culture are strongly influenced by the culture of Hokuriku and West Japan. This is because in the past nobles and intellectuals were banished here from Kyoto and also because, after the western sea route was opened, the culture of West Japan and the Hokuriku arrived in Sado directly. Sado was from medieval times a frequent place of exile, and many noblemen, samurai, and Buddhist monks were banished there from the capital, mainly as a result of political strife. It thus became a kind of melting pot of culture. The unique arts and culture of Sado, fostered by a harmonious mingling of these disparate elements, is rooted in a cultural soil completely different from that of the Echigo coast, on the Niigata Prefecture mainland. Sado's arts and culture, arriving long ago from other parts of Japan to take hold and develop here, together with the climate and the island's natural features, have made Sado a microcosm of the whole of Japan. According to records from 1741, at that time Sado had a population of 90,334. This had increased to 106,262 by 1872. Population peaked just after the Second World War in 1950 when there were 125,597 people living on the island. The figure of 60,196 of April 1st 2014 shows that Sado is no exception to the phenomenon of rural depopulation. Despite a large number of academic studies, municipal and other government efforts as well as those of private enterprises including the tourism industry, the island faces serious concerns including rapid aging and very low birth rate, youth drain and the decline of tourists.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how the relationship between art and traditional culture on the one hand, and tourism on the other, and the way in which these two aspects in combination have become major drivers of regional attractiveness and competitiveness.

**Keywords:** *tourism, art and culture, local revitalization, Sado Island*

