

Preface

Otaru University of Commerce will commemorate its 100th anniversary in 2011. As part of the celebrations we will host an International Symposium on the theme of "Globalism and Regional Economies". During the international symposium, we want to especially deepen the discussion on the economy and future directions of the prefecture of Hokkaido. Thus, when we use the term "regional economy" we are not thinking of large regions such as the EU or East Asia but rather of smaller economic entities, such as prefectures or states.

In preparation for the international symposium, we held a pre-symposium in Sapporo on December 10, 2010. The purpose of this pre-symposium was to share an awareness among our panelists of the issues that need to be addressed in order to make the 100th anniversary international symposium a successful one.

Hokkaido has its own weakness. It takes up about one-quarter of Japan's land area, but only accounts for about 5 percent of the Japanese population. Primary industries such as agriculture and fisheries and tertiary industries such as service industries account for most of Hokkaido's industry, and the development of manufacturing industries (secondary sector) has been slow when compared to the main island of Honshu.

Amid Japan's aging population and low birth rate, rural economies are on the decline, and Hokkaido is no exception to this phenomenon. Originally, Hokkaido has had few industries to drive its economy and Hokkaido has tended to rely for a great part on public works projects. The Japanese government's deteriorating finances and subsequent cutbacks on public works have had a big impact on Hokkaido's economy.

Currently, Hokkaido's prefectural government is thinking of "health", "environment" and "international" as the three future growth areas of Hokkaido's economy. Among these, the "health" area includes for example food safety. The "environment" area includes the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies. The "international" area includes the reception of overseas tourists and the promotion of export of products produced in Hokkaido.

On the other hand, as part of globalization, trade liberalization –e.g. in the form of FTAs - is progressing. Particularly agriculture -one of the major industries in Hokkaido- may be negatively affected by FTAs. Because of this, Japan's FTA negotiations with Australia are not making any progress.

The panelists from our sister universities focused their presentations as much as possible on giving guidelines for Hokkaido's further economic development from the perspective of their own fields of specialization and/or on providing examples of economic revitalization efforts in their own regions.