

Joint research by Okayama University and Benesse Holdings, Inc.

Setouchi Sustainability and Well-being Research Project

General Summary of Final Report

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## **1. Introduction**

This article provides an overview of our report on the Setouchi Sustainability and Well-Being Research Project (referred to below as “the research”), a joint research project between Okayama University and Benesse Holdings, Inc. This overview includes the background and history, and describes my thoughts on this research as the representative of the research. Please read it as an introduction before reading the reports on each field that follow.

## **2. Research Background**

### **1) Okayama University Vision and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Since I became the president of the Okayama university, I set forth the Makino Vision of “becoming a successful academic town that flexibly surpasses all standards,” and worked with various partners throughout the university to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the fiscal year 2019, on the 70th anniversary of our establishment, we formulated the "Okayama University Long-Term Vision 2030" and "Okayama University Vision 2.0 (2019-2021).” The Long-Term Vision 2030 pictures our future as a research university that pursues sustainability and well-being,<sup>1</sup> and aims to create new value for the region and the world by fostering human resources and transforming society through collaboration with various stakeholders to realize “the creation of Okayama as an international academic town,” rich in sustainability and inclusivity.

As a result, in December 2017, we hosted the first RCE World Conference for the Achievement of SDGs. We also received a special award from the Japanese government, the first Japan SDGs Award, and received high recognition from in and out of Japan, which included forging partnerships with multiple international organizations.

### **2) The Land and Sustainability of Okayama**

Behind this achievement is the history of Okayama and the Seto Inland Sea, which has nurtured it and where unprecedented social changes have been fostered to solve the social issues of each era. Some examples are the Shizutani School, the oldest existing public school for commoners in Japan; the Tsuyama School of Western Learning, which led the modernization of Japan; Hokoku Yamada’s financial and educational reconstruction of the Bicchu-Matsuyama Domain; and the establishment of the Ohara Shonokai Agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> Well-being: a concept in which individual rights and self-realization are guaranteed as goals of society, and people are in a state of physical, mental, and social well-being (from the WHO Charter, 1946).

Research Institute and the Kurashiki Institute for Science of Labor by Magosaburo Ohara. We believe that the “genes for solving social issues” have been passed down in the region of Okayama, which we see in the form of the Saisei adviser system for poverty alleviation by Governor Shinichi Kasai, the Takahashi River Basin League by Soichiro Ohara, and the Setouchi Triennale, led by Soichiro Fukutake, which aims to “restore the sea.”



Photo 1: From Naoshima: Otsuchi Island and ferry.

Photo by the author.

By inheriting and expressing the “genes for solving social issues” in the Okayama region, Okayama University’s SDGs aim to create a new social transformation that pursues sustainability and well-being to realize a society where no one is left behind. This cannot be achieved by science and technology alone; it should also be supported by education, culture, and the arts. Now that we are moving toward the realization of Society 5.0, a future society in which people’s lives and society as a whole are optimized through digital transformation and innovation, we believe that we cannot solve this problem without accounting for the value of being human and the definition of an abundant life. In addition to carrying on our region’s history and culture, we aim to become a research university that promotes SDGs and continues to create new value for the region and the world by disseminating the process of designing initiatives to solve social issues in partnership with the local community and demonstrating it globally from Okayama. SDGs are rooted in the history and culture of the region and serve as “bridges” that connect “the way it is now” with “the way it should be,” for various issues (Figure 1).

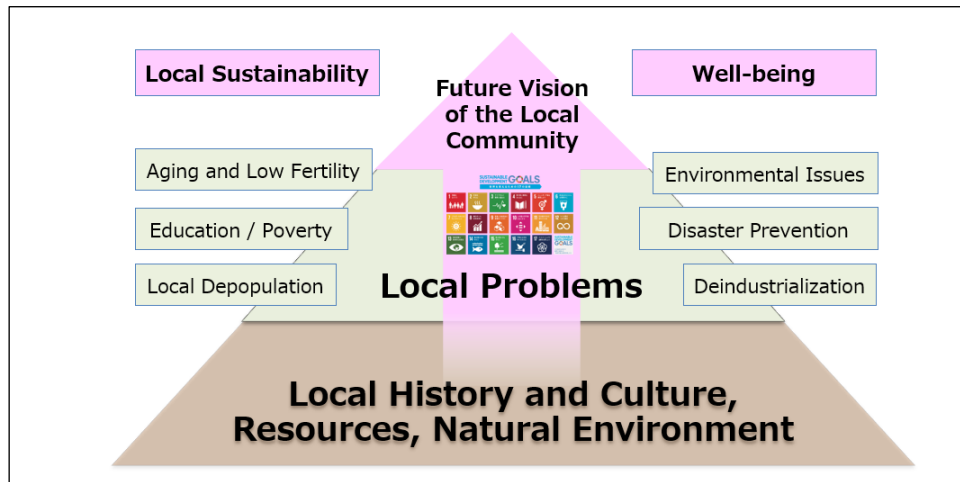


Figure 1: SDGs as bridges that connect “the way it is now” with “the way it should be”

Created by the author.

### 3) The History and Significance of Area Studies

Established after World War II as a regional national university, Okayama University has pursued the well-being of local communities through its involvement in comprehensive area studies long before the establishment of the SDGs. Founded in 1947, the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan established the Okayama Field Station in Minamikata, Kita-ku, Okayama in March 1950. It was based on the idea of Professor Robert B. Hall, its first director, that Setouchi has long been rich in intellectual tradition and is blessed by its geographical location. The published results, which includes “Village Japan,” are now classics in Japanese studies and are valuable materials that describe the lives in Japanese villages before the period of high economic growth.

In February 1950, the Setouchi Research Institute was established under the chairmanship of Governor Nishioka, who was then governor of the prefecture, and was later led by Sumio Taniguchi (history) who was to become the sixth president of Okayama University. The core members of the University included Hiroshi Negishi (medicine), Ryoji Ura (anthropology), Toshio Kitamura and Hiroshi Ishida (geography), and Shun Fujii (archeology).<sup>2</sup> The Setouchi Research Institute partners with the University of Michigan and conducts its own

<sup>2</sup> In his lecture at the inaugural general meeting, Keizo Shibusawa, who has a deep connection with the folklore of the Seto Inland Sea, spoke about his hopes for comprehensive surveys provided by the University of Michigan (“Setouchi Research Vol. 1” edited by the Setouchi Research Institute [Setouchi Research Institute] (1982).

village surveys (Kitaike, Tanoura, and Tomimura) using the comprehensive village survey methods learned through this partnership. Through research conducted by American researchers, exchanges between the two universities have supported the training of researchers from Japan and the United States.

Although the Okayama field station was closed in 1955, American researchers continued to conduct additional surveys of Niike and Takashima until the 1970s, which became a record of the changes in postwar Japanese society. For example, the sea around Takashima, once an island floating on the sea, has been reclaimed and urbanized as the Mizushima industrial area developed. While residents became affluent, they suffered from environmental pollution, such as the oil spill at the Mitsubishi Oil Mizushima Refinery, and lost their fishing rights. Many years have passed since, and apart from some urban areas, most areas are now facing problems due to an aging population and depopulation.

Okayama University currently aims to be a university that creates “science for the benefit of society” by setting SDGs and cooperating with society. To this end, it is once again necessary to have a “comprehensive” perspective that transcends academic disciplines and looks at regional issues and potential. The significant achievements of the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan and the partnering Japanese researchers paved the way for a potential new era of Japanese studies that seeks to solve local social issues, such as aging populations, and pursue the well-being of residents. We hope that this will provide valuable knowledge that will benefit the world, including countries in Asia and Europe, whose populations are also aging.

### **3. Background and Research Overview**

#### **1) A Conversation about Well-being with Soichiro Fukutake, Emeritus Advisor of Benesse Holdings, Inc.**

The Setouchi Sustainability and Well-being Research Project had its origin in October 2019 when I visited Soichiro Fukutake, Emeritus Advisor of Benesse Holdings, Inc., to ask for support for Okayama University’s Setouchi SDG research. First, Soichiro Fukutake talked about Hirofumi Uzawa's idea of social common capital, and then showed me his father's portrait. He spoke passionately about how he followed his father's wishes by establishing a contemporary art site on Naoshima to bring smiles to the older people on the island. I said that this would be a great opportunity for Okayama University, as an SDG research university, to study well-being, and pledged that Okayama University would perform an academic study on well-being at Benesse Art Site Naoshima (BASN) in Naoshima, Inujima and Teshima. In response, then Benesse President Tamotsu Adachi visited the university in January 2020 to discuss the project, and the joint research between Okayama University and Benesse Holdings

was scheduled to start in April of the same year.

## 2) Research Outline

The purpose of this research project was to analyze the changes that BASN's "Naoshima method" and "Public interest capitalism" brought to the well-being of local communities and residents between 2020 to 2022, focusing on the three islands of Naoshima, Inujima, and Teshima, to study their mechanisms and to publish the results as academic papers.

To this end, we agreed to form a cross-disciplinary research team across the university to work on this project. Specially Appointed Professor Tsuru used domestic and international data to analyze the factors that affect the subjective well-being of people from an empirical economics perspective. Associate Professor Aoo analyzed how BASN and the Setouchi Triennale (Setogei) can serve as models of social innovation for other countries and regions. From a business administration perspective, Professor Nishita described the points at issue when managing art in museums or in the community. Following this, Professor Yorifuji of the Graduate School of Medicine, Dentistry, and Pharmaceutical Sciences, through a questionnaire survey of all residents of Naoshima-cho, examined how social capital affects people's health and well-being from the perspective of social epidemiology.

## 4. Research Results

The project was dealt a blow by the COVID-19 epidemic from the very beginning, and it was not possible to proceed with field surveys as expected. However, the research team at our university, with the help of the community's residents, people at Benesse Holdings, Fukutake Foundation, Naoshima Cultural Village, and other related parties pursued their research diligently, and did not let anything stop them. We held an interim report meeting in March 2022, and a meeting to deliver the final reports from all areas during the Setogei in October 2022. In addition, many achievements in each field were already published as academic papers and books, and at the time of writing this report, some of them had been submitted to academic journals (Table 1).

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|---|--|
| 1 | Nishita, Y. (2021) <i>Investment in Communities and Arts and Culture</i> . Okayama: University Education Press. (in Japanese)  |
| 2 | Aoo K. (2021) "The Role of Civil Society Sector in the Development of Art-Driven Regional Social Innovation: The Case of Benesse Art Site Naoshima and Art Setouchi" <i>Sustainability</i> , Vol.13(24), article number 14061. |
| 3 | Tsuru M. (2022) "The Impact of Income and Consumption on Subjective Well-being:  |

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|---|--|
|   | A Cross Sectional Analysis by Japan's Prefectures and Age Groups" <i>Dynamics of Civilizations</i> , Vol.1, pp. 40-66.   |
| 4 | Aoo, K. (2022) "How Do Historical and Cultural Contexts Affect Social Innovation Initiatives and Local Ecosystems? Cases from Okayama, Japan," <i>The Japan Social Innovation Review</i> , Vol.2, pp.3-14.   |
| 5 | Miyaji C., Takao S., Habu H., Matsumoto N., Aoo K., Nishita Y., Tsuru M., and Yorifuji T. (forthcoming) "Does Participation in the Setouchi Triennale Foster Social Capital? A Cross-Sectional Study" (submitted to <i>Acta Medica Okayama</i> ).              |
| 6 | Habu H., Takao S., Miyaji C., Matsumoto N., Aoo K., Nishita Y., Tsuru M., and Yorifuji T. (forthcoming) "Participation in the Setouchi Triennale and the Health of Residents in Naoshima: A Cross-Sectional Study" (submitted to <i>Acta Medica Okayama</i> ). |
| 7 | Tsuru M., and Aoo K. (forthcoming) "How is Subjective Well-being Being Affected by Different Factors, and Groups: Income Threshold Induces Asymmetric Effects" (submitted to <i>/Dynamics/</i> ).  |

Table 1: Books and Papers Resulting from the Research Project.

Created by the author.

This report summarizes the results of these activities. The following are the abstracts from four areas.

## 1) Analysis of Regional Well-being and the Development of Indicators

(Specially Appointed Professor Masao Tsuru)

We analyzed the indicators of regional well-being. What are the conditions of life that make people feel well off? It is not necessarily expressed simply as an objective numerical value, but it is something that people perceive intuitively. The degree of happiness people feel is called well-being, but it is a subjective assessment that takes various aspects of life into account and is very difficult to measure objectively. It is essential to understand the components of well-being in order to measure it.

The key to measuring well-being is social capital, such as culture, nature, and human connections, or social capital. The natural environment is indispensable for people's sense of prosperity, but it is not privately owned and there is no market transaction. In measuring well-being, the challenge is to interpret goods and capital that are not traded in the market. In this study, we summarized existing well-being indicators such as the OECD framework and examined the concepts of social capital and resource allocation.

We also conducted an empirical analysis using Japanese statistics to determine what factors really affect the well-being of Japanese people. Well-being varies not only by region, but also by gender and age. The subjective level of life satisfaction differs by age, but we may also find differences in the social environment from generation to generation. Since the economic situation is thought to be connected to basic life satisfaction, the impact of other factors on well-being was examined based on the economic situation.

Information on life satisfaction was obtained from the individual data of the 2019 and 2020 Survey on Satisfaction and Quality of Life conducted by the Cabinet Office. Statistics on income and consumption were obtained from the 2019 National Survey of Family Income by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. These two surveys were compared by prefecture, gender, and age group, and the relationship between subjective life satisfaction and objective economic indicators was analyzed.

The results show that the level of well-being of local people depends not only on economic conditions such as income and consumption, but also on other factors, such as social common capital or social capital. Relationships with nature, people, and cultural and social environments related to the living environment also affect well-being. The analysis also confirmed a significant difference among age groups. Therefore, the difference in well-being by region tends to depend on the economic situation and the age composition of the population.

From these observations, we found that regional well-being can be improved by long-term accumulation of social capital as well as economic infrastructure. This will enrich people's lives and lead to the building of a prosperous local community in a wider sense. The evaluation of temporary regional events such as the Setouchi Triennale will vary from person to person. The economic effect differs between those who benefit from it and those who do not. However, many people from Japan and abroad visit the Setouchi area during these events, and the region experiences a short-term economic effect according to an input-output analysis. Additionally, if the accumulation of art works leads to increased interest in culture in the region, then this will likely improve the cultural life of the residents. This is the accumulation of social common capital, which is truly a long-term effect.

## **2) Benesse Art Site Naoshima and Setouchi Triennale as "Social Innovation"**

(Associate Professor Ken Aoo)

Social innovation refers to (1) the work of solving social issues and/or creating social value, and (2) the process of changing people's values, behavioral patterns, norms, and relationships as society changes. In modern Japan, this includes individual projects such as "regional revitalization," and brings about larger questions of what values to base the transformation of



industry and society upon as they were previously structured around modern manufacturing.

In this research, we analyzed the significance of Benesse Art Site Naoshima (BASN) and the Setouchi Triennale (Setogei) in social innovation and the process they follow in the islands of the Seto Inland Sea, which has an aging population and is experiencing depopulation.

First, we examined the history of the area spanning more than 30 years, including the early history of BASN and Setogei. We investigated the process of transition from resort development to the Benesse House “art museum” to House Museum projects providing “art in the community” that enters the natural environment and local community, and beyond that to “art created alongside the community” starting with Setogei (Fram Kitagawa's method). This is due to the involvement and contributions of a wide range of stakeholders, including the government (Naoshima Town and later Kagawa Prefecture), corporations (Benesse and related companies), and civil society (Fram Kitagawa and the Fukutake Foundation, etc.). We learned that Soichiro Fukutake, who has led both for-profit corporations and public-interest corporations, is at the core of the structure.

Second, we studied the development of this social innovation in terms of the historical activities of Okayama, including the Shizutani School and the “*Shaso-ho*” (revolving credit system promoted by Nagatada Tsuda), the Meiji period (the social projects of Magosaburo Ohara and Soichiro Ohara), and others. We demonstrate that past social innovation will become a “new normal” and “reference cases” as stepping stones for new social innovators to leap over.

Third, we conducted field research in Bilbao in the Basque region of Spain, which offers a similar example of social innovation through art, and compared it with BASN and Setogei. We thus discovered that Bilbao has not limited itself to the well-known project of being invited to be a branch museum of the Guggenheim Museum, but has also undertaken the transformation of the city centered in shipbuilding and steel industries into “creative industries” under the leadership of the governing body of the Basque Autonomous Community of Spain. It has accordingly undertaken urban improvements, such as the transportation infrastructure in the center of Bilbao city. This, combined with the history and culture of the Basque region, which is unique within Spain, led to changes in the status quo.

According to our research results, BASN and Setogei sparked an influx of tourists and migrants, the development of new industries such as tourism, and even changed the way both residents and outsiders view Naoshima-cho and the other islands of Setouchi.

As to whether BASN and Setogei can be “models for regional revitalization” for other countries and regions, I believe that they provide many hints, rather than a model to imitate. Some of the hints include: (1) Different approaches are required, depending on the historical background of each region and the characteristics of the entities involved. (2) Significant

investment and some form of involvement by local residents are required. (3) The process is not something that can be completed in a few years or according to a blueprint laid out in advance but requires at least decades of trial and error and must result in changes to people.

### **3) Sustainable Management of Artistic and Cultural Activities**

(Professor Yosuke Nishita)

Regional revitalization is an urgent issue for Japan, which faces challenges such as population decline, an aging population, and overconcentration of the population in Tokyo. As cultural capitals are unique to each region, artistic and cultural activities are expected to play a role in regional revitalization. Art festivals, classified as art projects, are developed with the aim of taking an artistic approach to social and cultural issues. In addition, the Museum Law was revised in 2022, adding an obligation to make efforts to help improve regional vitality by partnering and cooperating with various entities in the region.

This research focused on art and cultural activities, especially museums and art festivals, and examined management issues from the perspective of regional revitalization. We gained an understanding of management issues through interviews with the management of museums and art festivals and their stakeholders, and we conducted exploratory studies of sustainable management from case studies of museums and art festivals.

Management in arts and cultural activities involves connecting the creators and recipients of art and culture by collaborating and connecting with the creativity of artists, the local community focused on visitors who enjoy culture and the arts, and the resources that support them. This is a gift to be managed sustainably, but museums and art festivals have a management problem in that they cannot cover the project costs from operating revenue (admission fees and sales of goods) alone. In Japan, the national government, local governments, and companies provide support. In Europe and the United States, most of the income for these organizations comes from donations. For sustainable management, support from not only beneficiaries such as visitors but also non-beneficiaries is indispensable.

Furthermore, private companies can evaluate their businesses based on quantitative indicators such as sales, revenue, and return on equity (ROE), but it is very hard for art festivals and museums, whose goal is not profit, to use quantitative evaluation indicators. The issue is how to evaluate the social value created by art festivals and art museums. Consequently, the information that is publicly available is difficult to understand, and support from non-beneficiaries is difficult to obtain, creating a vicious cycle.

The impact investment proposed by the G8 Taskforce on Social Impact Investment in 2013 is attracting attention. Social impact assessment involves quantitatively and qualitatively grasping the social impact and assessing the value of the relevant business or activity. The

study of such assessments is being promoted in order to strengthen the management capabilities of organizations tasked with resolving social issues. Attempts are being made to create a logic model to visualize and quantify the social value of events such as sports, music, culture, and the arts. These will likely be applied to museums and art festivals.

Since 2000, the awareness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) among private companies has increased, and the SDGs since 2015 have become strategic issues for private companies as well. Amid growing awareness of these social issues, the establishment of a social value evaluation method that clarifies the returns in terms of social investment and the completion of systems for providing information to the public will enable a wide range of non-beneficiaries to invest in the arts and culture, leading to the sustainable management of museums and art festivals.

Visitors to museums and art festivals do not necessarily get sufficient satisfaction from exhibitions and events alone. Collaboration and cooperation with various entities involved in education, welfare, industry, and tourism are also essential for regional revitalization and the sustainable management of museums and art festivals. The collaboration between the Ohara Museum of Art in Kurashiki City and professional sports in Okayama Prefecture is an example of support for children's education and regional revitalization. In addition, in the northern part of Okayama Prefecture, various collaborations, such as an art festival (Mimasaka Santo Art Temperature) that combines art and hot springs, are underway.

In Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture, the number of tourists increased after the opening of the Hokuriku Shinkansen high-speed rail line, and the facilities at Kenrokuen Garden and the adjacent 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, and Kanazawa Castle Park were all visited by more than 2 million tourists before the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people visit all three facilities. These places create a synergistic effect with the surrounding commercial facilities such as restaurants, and the area functions as the "face" of the area. Meanwhile, in Okayama City, Korakuen Garden has the highest number of visitors, but the number of visitors to nearby art galleries and museums is not large. Partnering to make the most of a region's unique cultural capital has become a management challenge.

Regional cooperation among diverse organizations has several apparent issues, such as a mismatch of interests, but under steady population decline, improving regional vitality is an urgent issue. It is essential for sustainable arts and cultural activities to promote regional cooperation between museums and art festivals, which are cultural resources unique to the region, and obtain a wide range of support from non-beneficiaries by helping them understand the social value created by these organizations by making information available to the public.

#### 4) The Impact of Participation in Art Festivals on Social Capital and the Subjective Health of Residents

(Professor Takashi Yorifuji)

Cultural activities such as art festivals aimed at revitalizing local communities can create social capital and have a positive effect on people's health. However, quantitative research on the impact of art projects such as the Setouchi Triennale on local residents remains insufficient.

This research project focuses on the effects of participation in the Setouchi Triennale activities on the health of residents in Naoshima, one of the main sites for art festivals in Japan. We aimed to study the mechanism of these effects by examining the contribution of community social capital building. Here, we looked at two suppositions: (1) the effect of participation in art festivals on the subjective health of residents and (2) the effect of participation in art festivals on the development of social capital.

##### (1) The impact of participation in art festivals on the subjective health of residents

We evaluated the relationship between participation in the Setouchi Triennale and the health of Naoshima residents from a cross-sectional perspective. A questionnaire was distributed from November 2021 to March 2022 to all residents of Naoshima-Cho aged 20 or older ( $N = 2,588$ ), and the responses from 708 people were analyzed. The association between participation in the festival and subjective health status was analyzed using logistic regression analysis. As a secondary endpoint, Kessler's psychological distress scale score (K6) was analyzed using the same method as the primary endpoint. The group that participated in the festival had an adjusted odds ratio of 1.86 (95% confidence interval: 1.03–3.33) for higher subjective health compared to the group that did not. In addition, the group that participated in art festivals had an adjusted odds ratio of 3.23 (95% confidence interval: 1.19–8.81) for lower mental distress compared to the group that did not participate. Participation in art festival activities was associated with higher subjective health and lower psychological distress. However, the direction of causality could not be confirmed.

##### (2) The effect of participation in art festivals on creation of social capital

We evaluated the association between participation in the Setouchi Triennale and the social capital of Naoshima residents from a cross-sectional perspective. The questionnaire was distributed from November 2021 to March 2022 to all residents of Naoshima-Cho aged 20 or older ( $N = 2,588$ ), and the responses from 708 people were analyzed. Prior to the survey, the Setouchi Triennale had been held four times in Naoshima. The survey was analyzed using various logistic regressions with trend score matching. The ordered logistic regression analysis results showed that the group that participated in the festivals had an

adjusted odds ratio of 3.04 (95% confidence interval: 1.94–4.76) for higher cognitive social capital, and an adjusted odds ratio of 5.58 (95% confidence interval: 3.50–8.89) for higher structural capital compared to the group that had not participated. The conditional ordered logistic regression analysis using trend score matching showed that the group that participated in the festivals had an adjusted odds ratio of 2.91 (95% confidence interval: 1.85–4.60) indicating higher cognitive social capital and an adjusted odds ratio of 4.54 (95% confidence interval: 2.84–7.24) for higher structural capital compared to the group that had not participated. Participation in art festival activities was associated with higher cognitive and structural social capital. However, the direction of causality could not be confirmed.

## **5) What Do We Learn from these Results?**

Determining how to understand the results of this kind of academic research might not be straightforward, especially for people who are not researchers, but I interpret the results this way. Based on empirical data from Japan, Professor Tsuru's research revealed that even though the feeling of well-being varies by age and region, it is greatly influenced not only by economic factors, but also by social factors such as connections with other people or by the surrounding natural and cultural environment. Dr. Aoo's research analyzes and reconstructs the process and people involved in BASN/Setogei. He shows that it is rooted in Okayama's history and culture and that it "goes beyond", and he also compares it with a case in Europe (Bilbao, Spain). The research shows that this "model" must be rooted in the history and culture of each region, rather than simply being imitated by others. Professor Nishita's research speaks of the possibility of managing art not only as a museum or art festival, but also as a "community" from the perspective of "managing" art, which is a concept that was previously lacking in Japan. Finally, the research conducted by Professor Yorifuji's laboratory, based on a large-scale survey of the entire population of the island, is significant in that it revealed empirically that participation in the Setouchi Triennale correlates with participants' perceptions of health and social connections. Although the data currently available do not prove a causal relationship, we can conclude that art festivals have great potential to contribute to the well-being of island residents.

To sum up, these results suggest from various perspectives that the activities of BASN and Setogei, which made possible the participation and interaction of diverse people through contemporary art, have greatly contributed to the well-being of people and communities, and ultimately, their sustainability. These research achievements could only be possible at Okayama University, a comprehensive university with a background in interdisciplinary area studies.

## 5. The Significance of this Research: Conclusions

### 1) Well-being in Costa Rica

In November 2022, I was visiting Costa Rica in the middle of the excitement of “Costa Rica vs. Japan” at the Soccer World Cup. San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, is a sister city of Okayama. I was invited to the Earth Charter International Conference held at the United Nations University for Peace in the San Jose suburbs.

At the Board of Governors meeting, which is an assembly of thought leaders from around the world, I introduced Okayama University’s SDGs initiatives, mentioning that Okayama City was one of the world's first of seven Regional Centers of Expertise (RCE) for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and that Okayama University was Asia's first UNESCO Chair on ESD. The university received the first Japan SDGs Award in 2019, gave a lecture at a high-level political forum at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, concluded an agreement with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and in 2022 was designated as the first International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Collaborating Center in the field of neutron medicine for cancer treatment, which is the peaceful use of nuclear technology (Photo 2). The participants greatly appreciated the fact that our university has flexibly “transformed” the university organization and worked on the SDGs in partnership with local and international organizations.



Photo 2: Presentation at the United Nations University for Peace in Costa Rica.

Photo by Miki Harada.

The main theme of the conference was "well-being for the entire planet." At the end of the conference, participants said that the developmental integration of “dreams and hopes for the next generation” into the “Earth Charter,” which has a long history, could provide inspiration

for new “transformations.” This was my second visit to Costa Rica following the one from 2019, and people seemed to be very cheerful and happy going around the city. I was worried that Latin America would not be safe, but I was relieved.

According to the latest version of the Happy Planet Index<sup>3</sup> published every three or four years by the New Economics Foundation think tank, Costa Rica has been at the top of the list for more than ten years. Unfortunately, Japan ranked 57th out of 152 countries. The Happy Planet Index is a ranking format that shows the “sustainable happiness of a country” based on factors such as the degree of satisfaction with people's lives and environmental impact. It is attracting attention as a new index to help us live a human life, replacing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which evaluates economic value. Why has Costa Rica come to be called the happiest country in the world? The answer can be found in the government-led environmental policies, the peace-loving national character, and people's ways of living that can coexist with abundant nature.

Costa Rica is one of the most biologically diverse countries on the planet, with more than 30% of its land covered by national parks and nature preserves. I was able to observe many kinds of birds, butterflies, and plants in the natural forest of the United Nations University for Peace.

## 2) The Seto Inland Sea Islands

Visiting Costa Rica reminded me of the happy faces of the people on the islands in Seto Inland National Park, the first national park in Japan. I was born and raised in Okayama, and as a child, I looked forward to going to the islands of Setouchi to swim during summer vacation.

Since the 1990s, when Benesse House was built in Naoshima, I often visited for retreats. At first, there were few visitors, but the number of overseas tourists has increased gradually. The number of shops run by young people has also increased in recent years.

On my first visit to Inujima, I went with an acquaintance, and since then I have visited Inujima with guests from overseas. However, the elementary school is already closed, and every time I visit, there are more vacant houses. Some people I had come to know also moved away from the island. A friend of mine, who has a business in Saidaiji, visits Inujima once a week to provide visiting medical care. He recently lamented that the number of patients who visit the clinic has decreased.

According to the Basic Resident Register, the populations of Naoshima, Teshima, and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ideasforgood.jp/2021/11/10/happy-planet-index/#:~:text=2021%E5%B9%B410%E6%9C%88%E6%9C%AB%E3%81%AB,%E3%82%92%E3%82%82%E3%81%9F%E3%82%89%E3%81%99%E3%81%AE%E3%81%A0%E3%82%8D%E3%81%86%E3%81%8B%E3%80%82>

Inujima decreased by about three-quarters from 1995 and 2020, less than half in Teshima, and more than half in Inujima. The housing projects such as “Kadoya” and “Go-o Shrine” developed in Naoshima involved islanders, so the islanders' understanding of contemporary art deepened and they began to cooperate with the project. The number of tourists possibly increased to make use of local resources and communicate them to the world, and along with them, young people also started migrating to the area. Conversely, we have the case of the Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum, which preserves and restores the remains of a former copper refinery in Inujima. My observations are that it was hard to get the few remaining local residents involved, the ferry schedule was inconvenient, and it failed to hold back the progress of depopulation.

This is not just the case with Inujima. With the support of the Hashimoto Foundation, a research team led by Senior Vice President Masaru Kaga of Okayama University conducted a survey of mountain villages<sup>4</sup> in northern Okayama. The survey showed that compared to seventy years ago, the aging of the population and population decline have become more serious, and livelihoods in the region have been hollowing out. At a time when Japan is facing this difficult situation nationwide, the changes in Naoshima and some of the islands of the Seto Inland Sea has offered great hope.

### **3) Changes in the Islands and the Significance of this Research**

The changes in the islands, of which Naoshima is representative, achieved through the hard work of residents and related people over thirty years, though BASN and Setogai, have been significant. Needless to mention, Naoshima, which has established a reputation as an international tourist destination and Ogijima, where Setogei is held, are experiencing a kind of “miracle” in which the younger generation and migrants from overseas are increasing, and elementary and junior high schools that had been once closed down are resuming. Within this rich natural environment, it can be said that the happy community envisioned by Soichiro Fukutake has been maintained and is growing anew, with contemporary art as a catalyst.

This research was able to shed light on the happiness (well-being) of those people, and develop sustainable methodologies to achieve these results. At the United Nations University for Peace, “Planetary Well-Being,” which refers to happiness for both humans and nature, was a topic of discussion and so we can say that our research topic had global foresight. In addition, I heard that when the researchers in this research met with overseas researchers, many researchers from Asia and Europe showed great interest, stating, “Rural regeneration

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Kaga M. and Aoo K. (2022), *Re-visiting "Livelihood in a Mountainous Village": 70 years of Oh hamlet, Northern Okayama.* (in Japanese). Okayama: Kibito Publishing.



through art in non-urban areas is extremely rare and very interesting." We believe that this opens new possibilities for "a well-being centered society" in Japan, which experienced continued economic growth due to population growth and industrialization. Also, like Costa Rica, which does not have an army, I think a well-being centered society will be linked to a vision of a future where the people of Asia and beyond are connected through the love of art and nature and people-to-people exchanges.

It is a great honor for Okayama University, as a multi-disciplinary university, to be able to take part in this pioneering research thanks to the efforts of Mr. Fukutake and many others. I would like to conclude this report by expressing my gratitude to all those involved, and by wishing that the results of this research will be beneficial to the islands of the Setouchi, which raised me, and to the people who live there.



Photo 3: Scenery in Naoshima.

Photo by the author.