

Joint research by Okayama University and Benesse Holdings, Inc.

Setouchi Sustainability and Well-being Research Project

Final Report - Digest Edition

This pamphlet is the digest edition of the final report from the “Setouchi Sustainability & Well-being Research Project,” a joint research project conducted by Okayama University and Benesse Holdings, Inc. Centering on the three islands of Naoshima, Inujima, and Teshima over the course of three years, from Fiscal Year 2020 to 2022, this project aims to analyze changes in the region and residents’ wellbeing that were brought about by the “Naoshima Method” and “Public Welfare Capitalism” of the Benesse Art Site Naoshima (BASN), to investigate the mechanisms of those changes, and compile the results for academic purposes. This digest edition was produced to provide an overview of the results to all those who cooperated with this research project. The complete report can be downloaded from the following QR code.



Using both domestic and international data, Specially Appointed Professor Tsuru analyzed what factors influence people's subjective well-being from the perspective of empirical economics. From the perspective of social innovation, Associate Professor Aoo analyzed how the BASN and Setouchi Triennale (Art Setouchi) may become a model for other countries and regions. Professor Nishida summarized the issues in art management from the perspective of business administration, faced by museums and regions. Conducting a survey

for the residents of Naoshima Town, Professor Yorifuji's laboratory in the School of Medicine drew on social epidemiology to examine how “social capital” (i.e. the value of social relationships) affects people's health and level of happiness. We express our deepest gratitude to all the residents of Naoshima Island for their cooperation.

Owing to the tremendous efforts of BASN and Art Setouchi as well as the residents and others involved, Naoshima and the surrounding islands have undergone significant changes over the last 30 years. In this rich natural environment, contemporary art has acted as a catalyst for the preservation of what Soichiro Fukutake, Honorary Advisor to Benesse Holdings Inc., terms a "happy community," which we can say is now growing anew. This research project is an attempt to explain these peoples' happiness (wellbeing) and reveal methods for sustaining it (sustainability) into the future.

1. General Remarks - Makino Hirofumi, President, Okayama University

In 2019, on the 70th anniversary of the foundation of Okayama University, we formulated the “Okayama University Long-term Vision 2030” and the “Okayama University Vision 2.0 (2019-2021).” As a research university closely involved in the investigation of wellbeing and sustainability, in our “Long-term Vision 2030” we aim to realize "The Formation of International College Town Okayama," rich in sustainability and inclusivity, and through human resource development and social transformation in collaboration with diverse stakeholders, to create new value for the region and the world. Therefore, in our “Okayama University Vision 2.0 (2019-2021)” we position our institution as a “research university dedicated to facilitating the SDGs, the continuous production of new value, from Okayama to the world!”

Okayama University's intentions for the SDGs are directed toward the creation of novel social transformations that promote sustainability and wellbeing. This is not something that can be obtained by science and technology alone; education, culture, and the arts are also necessary. It is precisely because we are now 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 technologies and innovation that we believe this goal cannot be achieved without probing deeply into the value of being human and what it means to live well. We aim to demonstrate to the world our process of inheriting regional history and culture, and designing initiatives to solve social issues in collaboration with local communities, and by transmitting this vision from Okayama to the entire world, becoming a research university that continues to create new value for the region and the globe. From this perspective, I believe the research project

described herein plays an important role in realizing the “Okayama University Vision 2.0.”

2. Analysis of Regional Wellbeing and the Development of Indicators — Masao Tsuru, Specially Appointed Professor

Wellbeing is certainly a measure of human happiness, however, it is also a subjective evaluation that considers a variety of elements of ordinary life, and therefore something that is difficult to objectively measure. The key to measuring wellbeing is “social capital,” the connection between culture, nature, and people, the shared societal value. The natural environment and all that comes from it are indispensable to the fulfillment of human livelihood; however, this cannot be privately owned or traded on the market. The challenge in measuring wellbeing is deciding how to capture the value of goods and capital that are not traded on the market.

In addition to organizing existing wellbeing indicators, such as the OECD's methods, this study examined the concept of shared social capital and resource allocation, determining that improvements in regional wellbeing can be achieved through the accumulation of long-term shared social capital in tandem with the establishment of economic infrastructure. This enriches people's lives and, in a broader sense, helps build a prosperous local community.

Clearly, local seasonal events such as Art Setouchi are evaluated differently by different people, and their economic impact leaves a gap between those who benefit from them and those who do not. However, while the event is being held, several people from both Japan and worldwide visit the Seto Inland Sea region, providing a short-term economic boost to the area, as measured by input-output analysis. Moreover, if artwork accumulates in the area and interest in regional culture increases, then the richness of residents' cultural livelihood will improve, which is undoubtedly a long-term effect of the accumulation of social common capital.

3. BASN and Setouchi Triennale Art Festival as Social Innovation — Ken Aoo, Associate Professor

This study analyzed whether and in what sense BASN and Art Setouchi are social innovations in the islands of the Seto Inland Sea, where the population is aging and declining, and how they occurred.

First, we re-examined their 30 years history, including the prehistory of BASN and Art Setouchi, which revealed a process of transformation through trial and error, beginning from beach resort development and transitioning into the “art museum” which is Benesse House; thereafter, into “art in the community” that was installed in the natural environment as well as living spaces, such as “House Projects” and so on; and further into “art created alongside

the community” with the commencement of Art Setouchi (Kitagawa Fram's method). We also confirmed that this resulted from the involvement and contributions of a diversity of stakeholders, including government, business, civil society and so on, along with Soichiro Fukutake, who runs both a for-profit company and a public interest corporation, at the center of it all.

Second, we verified that this social innovation developed from historic activities in the area called Okayama from the Edo period and Meiji onward, and clarified that past social innovations are “reference cases” that new social innovators should overcome.

Third, we conducted a field survey of Bilbao, in the Basque Country of Spain, as a similar case of social innovation through art. Beginning with the well-known project to invite a branch of the Guggenheim Museum, examples of social innovation through art in Bilbao also include the Basque government's initiative to transition the city from shipbuilding and steel industries toward "creative industries" and reorganize the transportation network in the Bilbao city center, which combined with the history and culture of the Basque Country, a unique region within Spain, has set in motion a change in the status quo.

The results of our research have led us to believe that BASN and Art Setouchi have undoubtedly been major social innovations in the islands of the Seto Inland Sea, as they have drawn an influx of tourists and a growing immigrant population, the development of new industries such as tourism, and furthermore, have changed the way people inside and outside of Japan "view" the islands. That said, as to whether or not BASN and Art Setouchi can provide a "model for regional revitalization," we believe they offer a multitude of "hints" more so than a "model" to simply be imitated. These hints include: (1) different approaches need to be adopted depending on the historical background of each region and the characteristics of the people involved; (2) both significant investment and the involvement of the local community, in one form or another, are required; and (3) the process is not something that can be conducted in a few years or according to a blueprint drawn in advance — it requires several decades of trial and error at a minimum, and for people to change as a result of these efforts, as well.

4. Research on the Sustainable Management of Cultural Activities and the Arts — Yosuke Nishita, Professor

Facing a multitude of challenges, from population decline and aging to overconcentration in Tokyo, regional revitalization is an urgent issue for Japan. Accordingly, many anticipate that the arts and cultural activities, as unique regional cultural capital, will play a role in fostering regional revitalization. The art festival, which is rightly classified as a form of art project, is developing as ways to approach social and cultural issues through art. The 2022

amendment of the Museums Act added a requirement that efforts be made to contribute to the vitality of the regional community through collaboration and cooperation with various local entities.

Focusing on arts and cultural activities, particularly museums and art festivals, we examined management issues from a regional revitalization perspective. Through interviews with the managers and other stakeholders of art museums and art festivals, we identified challenges faced by management, and through case studies of art museums and art festivals, we conducted exploratory studies on sustainable management. While regional cooperation among diverse organizations has its challenges, including conflicts of interest between them, it cannot be denied that the population is steadily decreasing, making the improvement of regional vitality an urgent issue. It is essential that art museums and art festivals, as cultural resources unique to each region, promote regional cooperation and obtain broad support from non-beneficiaries by disseminating information to help them understand the social value these sustainable arts and cultural activities create.

5. The Effects of Participating in Art Festivals on Residents' Subjective Health and Social Capital — Takashi Yorifuji, Professor

Cultural activities such as art festivals aimed at revitalizing local communities are widely anticipated to foster social capital and affect people's health. However, there has not yet been sufficient quantitative research on the impact that Art Setouchi and other art projects have on local residents, hence more research is required.

This study examined effects on the health of residents of Naoshima Island from participating in activities at Art Setouchi, one of the major art festivals in Japan; and, as a mechanism for those effects, how that participation contributed to the development of regional social capital.

Our questionnaire was distributed to all the residents of Naoshima aged 20 and above ($N = 2,588$), and the responses from 708 individuals were statistically analyzed. For details on the analytic methods, please refer to the report. The participants were 45.0% male and 53.5% female, with an average age of 61.3 years and an average duration of residence of 45.5 years. Of the respondents, 100 (14.2%) individuals participated in Art Setouchi, while 597 (84.6%) did not.

We used "subjective health" and "mental health" from Kessler's 6-item psychological distress scale as indicators to investigate the "effect of participating in the art festival on the subjective health of the residents." The results revealed that, as compared with the non-participating group, those who participated in the art festival had an adjusted odds ratio of 1.86 for higher subjective health and 3.23 for lower psychological distress. This indicated that

participating in an art festival had a positive impact on the "subjective health" and "mental health" of residents.

Regarding “the impact of participating in art festivals on fostering social capital,” we analyzed the connection between the cognitive dimension, which refers to subjective things such as people's perceptions and values, including trust and reciprocity, as well as the structural dimension of social capital, which refers to the network of relationships between people that can be objectively verified by observing and recording actual behavior, such as their participation in regional groups. The results revealed that participation in art festivals was significantly associated with increase in both cognitive and structural dimensions, indicating that participation in art festivals can help foster both cognitive and structural social capital.

Clearly, there are limitations to this study. First, this was a cross-sectional study, meaning it was conducted at only one point in time; therefore, it is necessary to be careful in verifying these causal relationships. Second, the response rate of the questionnaire was low. Third, the same questionnaire was used to obtain subjective responses from residents about outcomes such as health and social capital from their (non)participation in Art Setouchi, which may have consequently overestimated the relationship between them. Nevertheless, considering that there have been few quantitative studies on the effects of participating in art festivals on residents' health, we believe that this study will provide an important basis for further long-term research in the future.

6. Summary of Research Results

How should we interpret the results of these studies? Owing to the limitations of the research, I believe that there are many parts of the above reports that may be difficult to understand, particularly for those who are not researchers.

Professor Tsuru's research, based on empirical data from Japan and other countries, revealed that while feelings of wellbeing vary by age and region, they are considerably influenced not only by economic factors, but also by social factors such as relationships with other people, and by the surrounding environment, including both nature and culture. Through an analysis and reconstruction of the process and people through which BASN and Art Setouchi were initiated, Dr. Aoo's research revealed that it was rooted in the history and culture of Okayama, yet managed to go “beyond” those roots. In addition, through comparison with a European case study (Bilbao, Spain), it clarified that simply imitating a model is insufficient; it is necessary for projects such as these to have roots in the history and culture of the region. Professor Nishita's research, demonstrates the possibility of managing not only art museums and art festivals but also "regions" from the viewpoint of "management," a

perspective that has until now been lacking in Japan. Finally, by empirically indicating through a large-scale survey of all the residents of the island that participation in the Setouchi Triennale correlates with participants' perceptions about health and social connections, the Yorifuji Lab's research made a contribution of considerable significance. While the data currently available does not prove a causal relationship, it does strongly suggest that the art festival is making a meaningful contribution to the wellbeing of the islanders.

Overall, the results of these studies, each conducted from a different perspective, suggest that the activities of BASN and Art Setouchi, by enabling the participation and interaction of diverse people in and through contemporary art, have significantly contributed to the wellbeing of communities in the region, and by extension, their sustainability. As these research results are so valuable to Okayama University, a research university dedicated to the promotion of the SDGs, the English version of this digest was created to share their value with the world.

Contact: Social Cooperation Division, General Affairs and Planning Department, Okayama University. e-mail: office-agera@adm.okayama-u.ac.jp