

# Shrinking but Happy? The Impact of Social Capital on Subjective Well-Being in Rural Japan (DOC-team)

Dionyssios Askitis, Stefan Hundsdorfer, Antonia Miserka, Sebastian Polak-Rottmann  
University of Vienna, Dept. of East Asian Studies

Funded by the  ÖAW  
Austrian Academy of Sciences

## Abstract

This project is funded by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW, DOC-team-Fellowship) and investigates the impact of social capital on subjective well-being in rural Japan. Previous happiness research has often relied on a simplified understanding of the complex term of well-being. Using a multi-method approach while combining four scientific perspectives (Japanese studies, sociology, psychology, political science), this interdisciplinary team project integrates the dimensions of political participation, sense of community, personality and social networks in rural environments. Thus, by combining individual with social level factors, a differentiated understanding of well-being is rendered possible.

## Research Questions

This study explores the topic by asking,

- (1) What is the impact of social capital on subjective well-being in rural areas suffering from demographic decline and associated problems?
- (2) How does political participation, sense of community, the embeddedness in social networks and personality affect different measures of well-being?

## Expectations

- ❖ Social capital has a significant impact on subjective well-being in rural areas
- ❖ Individual factors such as personality (e.g. extraversion) moderate the relationship between social capital and well-being.
- ❖ Through the interdisciplinary approach an understanding of subjective well-being that integrates quantitative measurable data and qualitative views of well-being can be formed.

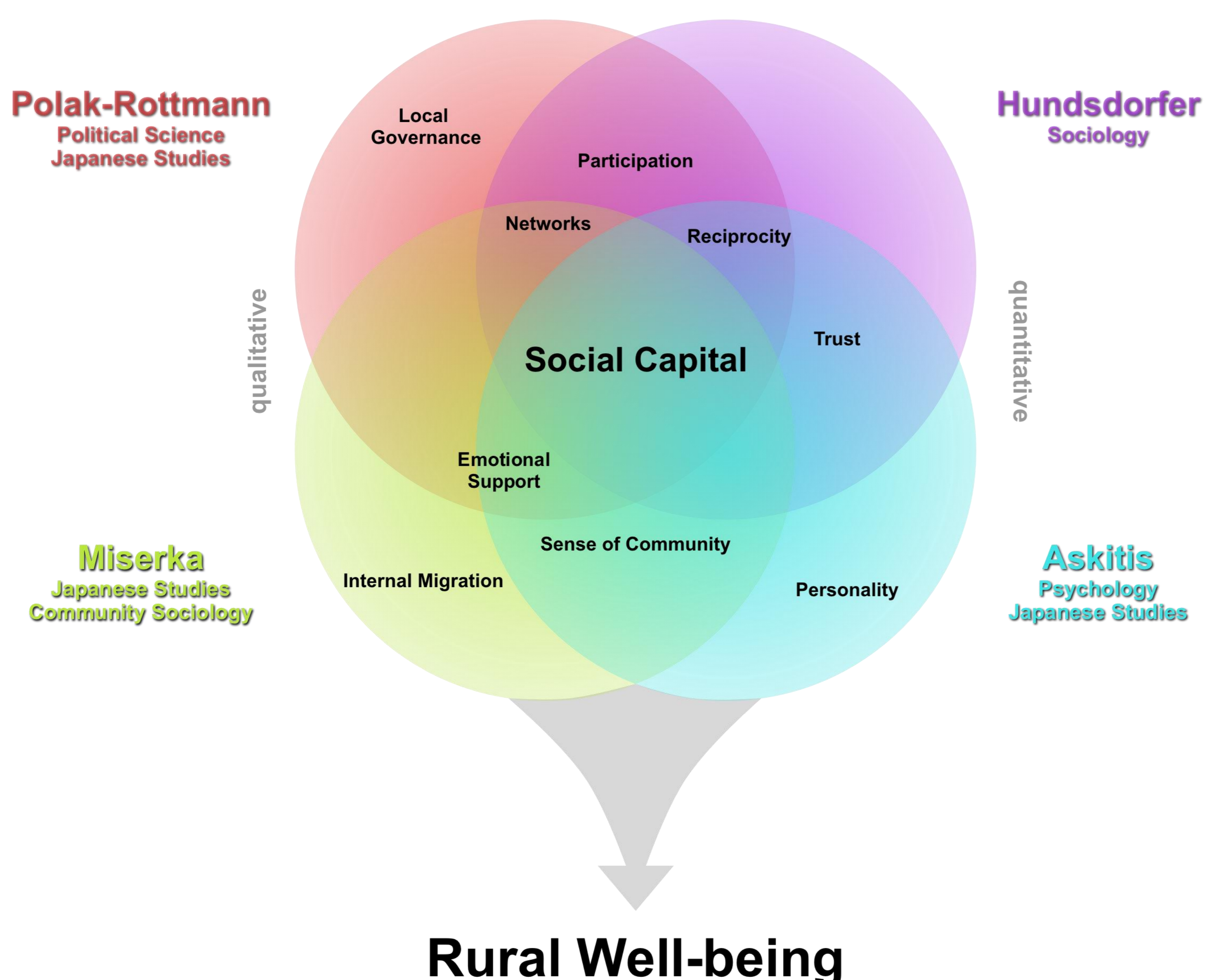


Fig 1: Interdisciplinary approach to the assessment of social capital

## Methods

- ❖ Research in Aso, Minami-Aso and Takamori (Kumamoto-Pref.)
- ❖ Quantitative survey (Askitis, Hundsdorfer):
  - ❖ Well-being: subjective well-being, interdependent happiness
  - ❖ Social capital: network analysis, sense of community, political participation
  - ❖ Personality
- ❖ Qualitative research:
  - ❖ Participant observation (Miserka)
  - ❖ Face-to-face interviews (Miserka, Polak-Rottmann)
  - ❖ Focus group discussions (Polak-Rottmann)

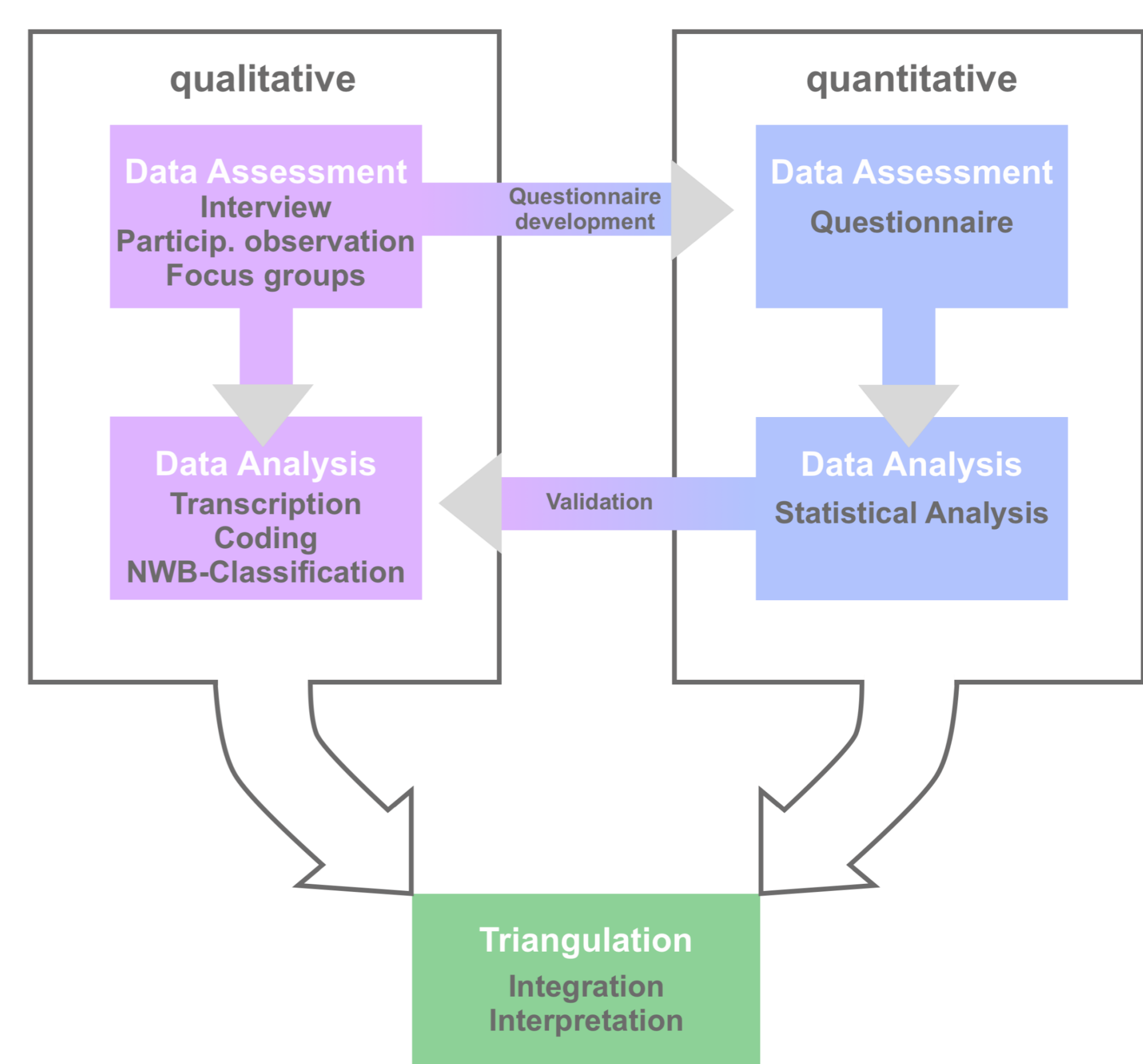


Fig. 2: Multi-method research design with regards to rural well-being

## Timeline

- ❖ 2018: Preparatory field visits (access to field, visit to city hall, first interviews, exchange with Japanese researchers)
- ❖ March 2019: International Workshop at University of Vienna (exchange with experts in the fields of happiness studies, Japanese anthropology, social capital, Japanese community studies)
- ❖ September 2019 – August 2022: Funding by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW DOC-team)
- ❖ March 2020 – March 2021: Main phase for fieldwork in Aso region

