

Shrinking, but Happy? The Impact of Social Capital on Subjective Well-Being in Rural Japan

Introduction

This interdisciplinary project aims to clarify the impact of social capital on subjective well-being (SWB) in rural areas suffering from demographic decline and the problems associated with it. Assuming that social capital is linked to SWB especially in rural areas, we will mainly focus on social networks, political participation and sense of community in this study. We will analyse under what circumstances these factors contribute positively or negatively to SWB and how they are influenced by individual differences such as personality, life circumstances or in-migration. After conducting qualitative research, a questionnaire will be constructed containing the elements mentioned above. This PhD-team will be working at the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna and the Department of Community Sociology, as well as the Center for Policy Studies at Kumamoto University.

Research on SWB has been mainly concentrating on international surveys (such as Eurostat 2015, OECD 2017) or national happiness surveys (such as Gallup Healthways 2017, Hakuhôdô 2014). Due to their sampling techniques, regional differences of SWB or aspects of rural well-being often cannot be inferred from the data. In addition, comparative research tends to draw different conclusions based on different understandings of what is “rural” or “urban”. Some authors suggest higher ratings of happiness in urban (cf. Easterlin et al. 2011, Spellerberg et al. 2007, Witters 2010), while others observe higher values in rural areas (cf. Berry/Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011, Henkel 2015, Sander 2011).

Sociological studies indicate a strong connection between SWB and social embeddedness (cf. Blanchflower/Oswald 2000, Easterlin 2003, Helliwell/Putnam 2004) or SWB and social capital (cf. Helliwell/Putnam 2004, Yip et al. 2007) which in turn are seen as characteristic of rural communities (cf. Ziersch et al 2009). However, vague conceptualisations and unidimensional operationalisations of SWB limit the generalisability of findings (cf. Holthus/Manzenreiter 2017b, Ponocny et al. 2016). Considering recent public and academic debates on shrinking areas in rural Japan (cf. Masuda 2014, Odagiri 2016), we argue that especially in rural areas, research on social capital and SWB on the countryside is a salient issue in happiness research.

We adopt a research design that questions universal conceptions of well-being and accounts for country-specific (cf. Uchida 2013) and interindividual differences (cf. Ponocny et al. 2016) likewise. We combine four disciplines (Psychology, Political Science, Japanese Studies, Sociology) and two different methodological approaches (qualitative, quantitative) to address the complexity of the concept of SWB. Four PhD theses will result from this project: Sebastian Polak-Rottmann (Japanese Studies, Political Science) focuses on how notions of political participation as a form of social capital are connected to SWB of citizens. Antonia Miserka's (Japanese Studies, Community Sociology) thesis will be about the sense of community as a potential predictor of SWB and the role of in-migration for this relationship. Both projects work qualitatively including participant observation and semi-structured interviews of the rural population.

Taking into account first insights from the fieldwork data, Hundsdorfer and Askitis will engage in the development of a quantitative survey that measures social capital, its drivers and a multi-dimensional and 'culturally sensitive' concept of SWB. This survey is geared towards a regional comparison within Japan to observe the effect of structural differences. Dionyssios Askitis (Psychology, Japanese Studies) will focus on the interdependence between personality and social capital on rural well-being. Stefan Hundsdorfer (Sociology), on the other hand, will conduct a network analysis of social relations within the respondents' families, circles of friends and civil society. He aims to clarify the relationship between social capital and SWB by addressing these networks.

All of the members will be involved in the process of conceptualisation of the research design and interpretation of the data. Thus, questions that deal with political participation, migration, social capital and well-being will all be included in the survey. Its findings will be part of the theses of Miserka and Polak-Rottmann as a first outline of the connection of the respective factors. We argue that this kind of interdisciplinary cooperation in all steps of the research and its integration of different methods allows to work towards a greater understanding of the role of social relationships for the SWB in rural Japan. Implications that might be drawn from this project can thus also be of relevance for studies in other regions of the world.

In the following section, we will provide an overview on the current state of research on the topic and what research questions we derived from it. Additionally,

we will discuss the ways of cooperation and will briefly introduce the four PhD-projects.

The decline of rural areas in Japan

Research on rurality is often linked to normative understandings of what the ideal countryside should look like: Top-down evaluations of how rural areas should ‘catch up’ with the metropolitan centres are simultaneously accompanied with the nostalgic image of a traditional landscape and way of life that in fact is neither present in the city nor in the countryside anymore (Kelly 1990:222).

In Japanese research, classifications that use demographic indicators depict a rather dark image of the future of Japan’s countryside. While *kasō chiiki* or “areas of depopulation” is a common term to define shrinking regions, Ōno Akira’s *genkai shūraku* (“regions on the borderline [of existence]”) gained significant attention in society and academia likewise. For Ōno, *genkai shūraku* are regions where more than 50% of the population are 65 years or older (Ohno 2009). After passing this threshold, these villages struggle to maintain their community activities and become stuck in a downward spiral (Lützel 2018:19). Publications of the former minister Masuda Hiroya on the “vanishing of the regions” *chihō shōmetsu* (Masuda 2014) further polarised the discussion about the situation of rural communities and were subject of strong criticism, prominently coming from community sociologists. They claimed that Masuda’s reports, rather than helping these regions, further stigmatised or demoralised them (Odagiri 2014). Other studies suggest using a different approach to better understand the situation in the countryside, as many of the out-migrants still frequently return to their hometowns to assist their families (Tokuno 2015).

Measures to address the structural implications resulting from the continuous out-migration and aging have been implemented since the 1960s with little success (Matanle et al. 2011:24). However, since debates on local governance (Foljanty-Jost et al. 2013:49) and decentralisation (Hüstebeck 2014:59) have been intensifying, several reforms successively provided the regions with more responsibilities, while not effectively making them autonomous (Honma 2007). With the developing local social movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Avenell 2010:149) and activities of *machizukuri* (“community development”) and *mura okoshi* (“revitalisation of the villages”), demographic matters become firmly linked to participation activities and

well-being alike. Incentives that try to stimulate social capital or social networks underline the importance of social relationships in revitalisation policies (Tsutsumi 2011, Ueno 2005). Present day revitalisation programs frequently try to establish ties between bureaucratic institutions and grassroots movements.

Happiness and Rural Well-being

Objective data on the economic and social situation in rural Japan point towards a decline of structural conditions of quality of life. However, “objective” data itself is not sufficient to reflect the well-being of a region in its entirety. Despite recurring criticisms (cf. Veenhoven/Hagerty 2006), Easterlin’s widely-cited work was able to demonstrate that well-being and economic prosperity are not as directly and positively related as was previously taken for granted (cf. Diener/Suh 1997, Easterlin 1974). As a result, the scientific focus of studies on well-being has shifted towards the assessment of subjective ratings of well-being (Stiglitz 2010). This realignment of well-being research is reflected in the use of subjective “happiness” or “well-being” scales in large-scale international comparative studies such as the *Gallup World Happiness Report*, the *OECD Better Life Index* (2017) and domestic studies such as the *Local Happiness Report* (Hakuhôdô 2014).

While there is no universal consensus on a definition and measurement of “happiness” or “well-being”, there do exist various approaches on how to assess well-being on an individual level and how to aggregate it to the social sphere. The primarily hedonistic concept of “Subjective Well-being” according to Diener et al. is likely one of the most-employed constructs in happiness research. SWB is based on the assumption that the validity of objective social indicators on well-being is limited because humans perceive identical conditions differently according to their individual, i.e. subjective, expectations, values and experiences (Diener et al. 1999:277). Diener’s SWB is composed of the cognitive evaluation of one’s life with regards to *life satisfaction* and the rating of one’s balance of positive and negative emotions in the form of affect balance (Diener 1984:543, Diener et al. 1999:277). We do not limit our use of the term SWB to Diener’s conception of well-being but see SWB as a general term encompassing all constructs of well-being that are assessed on an individual level via self-report (see Chapter Operationalisation). Alongside other conceptions of well-being with an euro-american tradition such as Eudaimonia

(Ryff 1989) with a focus on self-realisation, recently we have seen a rise of scientific well-being concepts from an East-Asian background.

While emotions such as “happiness” were long considered to be universal, i.e. biologically determined and cross-culturally valid, approaches that look at the impact of “cultural” factors on well-being have gained momentum particularly in the field of Cultural Psychology in recent years (Uchida et al. 2004:224, Uchida/Ogihara 2012:355). The universal aspirations of many euro-american well-being concepts can be challenged on the basis of their focus on self-realisation, the maximisation of happiness, and the independence of the self. All of which do not seem to be entirely compatible with many East-Asian conceptions of well-being that have been found to be determined more by emotional support, interpersonal harmony and an equilibrium of positive and negative emotions (Hitokoto/Uchida 2015:212, Markus/Kitayama 1991:224, Uchida/Ogihara 2012:356, 360, see also Kitayama et al. 2006, Kwan et al. 1997, Lu/Gilmour 2004, Suh et al. 1998, Uchida 2013, Uchida et al. 2004, Uchida/Kitayama 2009). Striving to get a grasp on this “collectivist” aspect of well-being, Hitokoto and Uchida designed the “Interdependent Happiness Scale”. Made up of the elements relationship orientation, calmness or mental balance and norm orientation, their scale has been validated in cross-cultural research and is going to find application in inter-regional comparisons as well.

Structural deficits that are assessed objectively, are not necessarily reflected in subjective ratings of well-being. The available scientific literature on rural communities does not present an uniform picture, but points towards a complex relationship between the structural conditions of rural regions and SWB: While some studies found a reduced well-being in rural areas when compared to more urban environments (cf. Easterlin et al. 2011, Spellerberg et al. 2007, Witters 2010), most studies show elevated well-being in rural or small-town communities (cf. Berry/Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011, Cramer et al. 2004, Fassio et al. 2013, Gattino et al. 2013, Henkel 2015, Manzenreiter 2018, Sander 2011).

Nationwide cross-sectional studies with representative samples and case studies on rural well-being for instance may arrive at very different results, particularly when they rely on divergent typologies of social environment and diversely structured study regions. While a cross-prefectural study on rural well-being shows no significant differences (Ōsaka Gasu CEL Enerugī Bunka Kenkyūsho n.d.) research on the local level such as the *Aggregated Kumamoto Happiness Index*

(AKH 2015) reveals heightened SWB in structurally disadvantaged rural regions of Kumamoto when compared to more urban wards. In the context of this project, we aim to clarify what impact social capital in rural communities might have on this phenomenon.

Social Capital and its influence on rural subjective well-being

The term of social capital has been widely used both in social, as well as political and economic sciences for over 35 years. Bourdieu defines it as individual resources, that can be accessed via personal social networks: “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1983:191). Putnam (2000:20), on one hand, understands social capital as integrative forces like social cohesion and mutual trust, so it may benefit the individual as well as the whole network. On the other hand, Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a relational concept: Social capital exists within the relationships among individuals. Therefore, it is neither a public nor a private good (Franzen/Pointer 2007:8). Regarding to Coleman, social capital can be accessed via relationships that can exist between individuals, but also between individuals and groups or organisations. However, if social capital is defined as the property of a group or collective, it is hard to distinguish it from other collective goods like culture, norms or trust (Lin 2001: 9-10).

To avoid this obscuration of the term, we use a definition of social capital, that concentrates on the individual and for the time being leaves out the collective level. We follow the network theory of social capital (cf. Flap 2002, Lin 2001, Van der Gaag/Snijders 2004), that offers a clear definition of social capital. Social Capital is made empirically measurable by Flap (2002), by defining it using the following three components: (1) the individuals existing within the networks, (2) the resources embedded within the networks and (3) the actual availability of resources for a certain individual.

Lin describes social capital as „investment in social relations with expected returns“ (Lin 2001: 6) and thus further illustrates the analogy to financial capital. However, in contrary to financial capital, social capital is distinguished by its expectation of reciprocity (Portes/Landolt 1996), a duty to repay the bill. Other than

during an economic exchange, neither the time of returning a favour, nor the currency in which this debt is being settled, is defined (Portes 1998:7).

Lin offers four explanations of how resources embedded in social networks can raise the “profit”: (1) through information, (2) through influence on several persons relevant for the individual, (3) through social credentials an individual can reach via its connections and (4) through the confirmation an individual gets, such as the strengthening of identity or the recognition of the legitimacy of an individual claim to certain resources (Lin 2001:7). These four “profit enhancing” functions of social capital can be expressive as well as instrumental. Closed, dense networks, that are characterised by expressive actions, enable the protection and reproduction of resources, while open, loose networks enable the search for resources through instrumental actions (Lin 2001: 10).

One term that belongs to the expressional level is the concept of sense of community (cf. Davidson/Cotter 1991, Sarason 1974), which is common especially in psychological research. This concept intersects with social capital and makes up a cognitive, intrapsychological subset of social capital (Perkins/Long 2002).

Lin (1999) understands SWB as well as physical and mental health as return of expressive actions. Therefore it can be derived that especially expressive functions of social capital have a direct effect on SWB. Returns of instrumental actions, such as power, prestige or wealth, however, have an indirect effect on SWB. One central argument of Portes (1998:5) and Lin (2001:9) is, that social capital has to be measured separated from its effects, in order to avoid resulting in a tautological concept and therefore losing its significance. Such an “outcome” of social capital is SWB (Lin 2001:22).

Social capital in its different operationalisations could already be proven to have positive effects on an individual level, for instance on physical and mental health (cf. Araya 2006, Helliwell/Putnam 2004, Song 2011). Especially for the relationship between social capital and SWB numerous references exist (cf. Han 2015, Han et al. 2013, Helliwell/Putnam 2004, Leung et al. 2011, Yuan 2016). While higher social capital was measured in rural areas (cf. Ziersch et al. 2009), the direct relationship with rural well-being has not yet been a central object of social science research. This need for further research has also been acknowledged in the academic community (Lützeler 2016:164). Another aspect is, that social capital - as will be

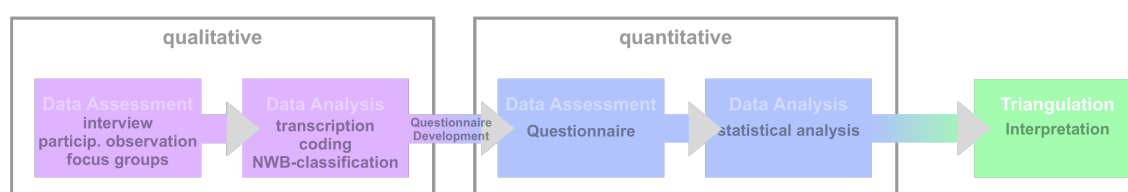
outlined later in the section of operationalisation - up until now has been examined in different and barely comparable ways (Van der Gaag/Snijders 2004).

Methods

To address the complexity of the concept of well-being, Gordon Matthews (2012) suggests an interdisciplinary cooperation with a diverse set of methods. We support his statement by combining individual (personality psychology) with sociocultural (network analysis, political participation, sense of community) aspects.

We chose qualitative methods for this project as their open approach enables us to critically examine our survey data and to ensure a certain level of openness of the whole project (cf. Mayring 2001). On the other hand, introducing quantitative methods increases the reliability and generalisability of our findings (ibid.). By considering different ways to evaluate well-being (SWB, interdependent happiness and our own questions) and using different measurements (interviews, surveys, observation), we aim at improving the construct validity of our research.

Hence, this project is designed on an interdisciplinary basis and encompasses social capital and SWB and their relationship from the perspective of four scientific disciplines. It follows a mixed-methods design, similar to the Sequential Exploratory Design as suggested by Cresswell et al. (2003, Figure 1). Findings of the qualitative research help conceptualising the subsequent survey. For the interpretation of the quantitative results, both approaches will be combined.



(Figure 1: Sequential Exploratory Mixed Methods Design of this project (see also Cresswell et al. 2003))

Research demand and methodological approach

Inconsistent results regarding rural well-being, the conceptual blurring and the range of constructs and operationalisations of well-being limit the conclusions that can be drawn for the perception of happiness (cf. Holthus/Manzenreiter 2017b). This

is furthered by problems in measurement due to individual and ‘cultural’ tendencies in replying to questionnaires (cf. Pavol 2008 for an overview). In addition, relying on quantitative surveys alone, bears the risk of ignoring individual restrictions to well-being (e.g. occurrences in life) and tends to give numeric values too much priority (cf. Ponocny et al. 2016), while research designs concentrating solely on qualitative methods possibly suffer from limited validity (vgl. Mayring 2001). Aggregated indices of well-being have their shortcomings, too. Ponocny et al. (2016) for instance have shown the low information value of numerical self-evaluating indices and point out response tendencies and semantic variability in interpreting well-being constructs and response scales.

Few studies manage to combine both social and individual levels. Therefore, important factors like personality, socioeconomic variables or the embeddedness in social networks are often not considered in surveys on well-being (Manzenreiter 2016a:303). The concentration on one specific survey method, predictor, indicator or level of analysis of well-being alone provides only a limited understanding. In this project, we aim at overcoming these limitations by combining four approaches from different disciplines and their distinctive foci. We will also address the challenge of providing a deeper understanding of the complex concept of well-being: Epidemiological happiness studies usually concentrate on nation- or prefecture-based surveys. This aggregated data understandably contains a low number of samples in less populated areas and seldomly enables a differentiated analysis on the community level. As a result, only few quantitative studies give sufficient insight into the well-being in structural challenged regions (cf. Manzenreiter 2016a).

To capture a broad range of restrictions and drivers of well-being, this project integrates both quantitative data collected by self-evaluation questionnaires and qualitative data gathered through interviews and participatory observation (cf. Ponocny et al. 2016). Further, this study concentrates on domain specific indicators less prone to errors and constructs of well-being outside European and American regions (cf. Uchida/Kitayama 2009).

We understand these considerations as an opportunity to realise an interdisciplinary, multi-methodological analysis of well-being. While still accounting for standard constructs of happiness studies, we also include items on domain specific satisfaction and ‘interdependent happiness’, a construct developed in Japan.

We suggest interpreting these different constructs and predictors of well-being not in isolation, but in relation to each other.

Integration of the different disciplines

All members have different focal points in the implementation of our project. Askitis' background in Psychology not only enables him to introduce the other team members to relevant secondary literature and discourses, but plays an indispensable role in the construction of the quantitative survey. His expertise in psychometry and classical test theory as well as his knowledge of Diener's different concepts of SWB, Uchida's interdependent happiness and Ponocny's concept of "narrated" wellbeing will be a central contribution to the conceptualisation of the survey. He will receive guidance from his co-mentor Prof. Ponocny and his external advisor Prof. Uchida (Kyoto University), both authors and developers of respective concepts and instruments. Askitis' expertise is also of great relevance for the preparation of the qualitative field study. All previous considerations in the construction of the set of questions for the interviews have been debated with all team members, critically examining the instruments' viability in regular meetings, changing the instruments when necessary. Askitis' focus on personality traits is safeguarding the adherence to inter-individual variability for all other team members.

Due to his expertise on quantitative social network analysis, Hundsdoerfer mainly concentrates on the multi-dimensional obtainment of data on rural social capital. Considering ego-centered, personal networks, he draws his attention to personal networks and differentiates between dense, expressive networks of strong ties and rather loose instrumental networks of weaker ties. His background in Sociology is not only securing the quality of the quantitative survey, but will also provide essential contributions to the qualitative field work. He will also cover political participation and (internal) migration background, which will be an important reference point for Polak-Rottmann's and Miserka's inquiries. Askitis will profit from an in-depth analysis of social data, allowing him and Hundsdoerfer to discern the complex interactions of psychological and socio-economical variables.

Polak-Rottmann's project will be a contribution on understanding the dynamics in the formation of social capital accompanying political participation. Political participation can result in changes within the personal network, be it a change in structure, size or contact intensity. His inductive qualitative research is

able to provide a profound analysis of the subject, focussing on the dynamics of the formation of social capital. Thus it can partially overcome the limitations in causal interpretation owed to the cross-sectional nature of the quantitative data. Furthermore, it can serve as case-study material for the other three projects. In addition, the theoretical background of the local governance approach allows to discern networks shaping decision-making on the community level, enabling the connection of individual-level data with outcomes on a higher order. These findings will not only enhance Hundsdoerfer's quantitative network analysis, but will also provide indispensable information on the participation of internal migrants in local activities and organisations, tackling central aspects of Miserka's research question. Due to these intersections, the results of the political scientific part of the project will allow all other dissertations to profit from this in-depth approach covering the dynamics in the formation of rural social capital. Prof. Sauer's mentoring is connecting the whole project with the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Vienna, where the DOC-team will frequently present its research.

Due to their proficiency in the Japanese language, Miserka, Polak-Rottmann and Askitis will act as coordinators in the Aso region and at the University of Kumamoto. Miserka's specialisation on community sociology with her focus on the demographic development of rural Japan underscores the importance of structural change and its influence on the social relations in the area. Her expertise as a researcher in the Aso region enables her to evaluate the feasibility of both the quantitative and qualitative inquiries. Thanks to her experiences and time spent in the region, she is a key actor for establishing contact and securing the local cooperation necessary for conducting our studies. Her connection to the Kumamoto University is not only functioning as an institutional bond for the project, but also allows us access to the Japanese brand of community research - an imperative for conducting research in rural areas. Japanese community research is especially important for the understanding of local network structures, where participation is not always entirely voluntary. These insights deeply affect all four subprojects. Her co-mentor, Prof. Yamamoto (Kumamoto University) ensures support for our project in Japan, and will integrate all team members in lectures, workshops and conferences on the topic.

All team members are closely cooperating both in the construction of the research design and its implementation in Japan. Their respective expertises are

applied to enhance each others' inquiries, forming an inseparable research unit. Their cooperation ascertains a novel interdisciplinary approach enhancing our knowledge of social capital and SWB in structurally challenged rural regions. The mentors and co-mentors are already closely linked, and are regularly given the opportunity to partake in workshops to exchange ideas and oversee the progress of the project

The Aso-region

Located in the Northeast of Kumamoto Prefecture on the island of Kyûshû, the Aso region consists of seven municipalities located around the Aso volcano, a famous tourist attraction in the area. This project focuses on the three municipalities on the inner side of the crater, namely Aso city, Minami Aso village and Takamori town. Taken together, these municipalities show a population density of approximately 66 inhabitants per km², far below the cut-off point of 500 inhabitants per km², making them "rural" by definition for Japanese areas of the OECD (Manzenreiter 2016a:292-294).

After the Kumamoto Earthquake of 2016, commuting to the prefectural capital, Kumamoto City, became difficult. Tourism is of great importance for the local economy and suffers from the aftermath of the earthquake. Compared to the nation in total, income levels, the local budget, job opportunities and population numbers are below the average, making Aso a typical example for rural areas in Japan. Many hamlets of the regions can be labelled as depopulated areas or *kasochiiki* (Lützel 2016:157, SBMIAC 2017).

Fieldwork in Aso has been part of the Japanese Studies at the University of Vienna since the 1960s (Slawik/Kreiner 1975, Slawik/Linhart 1982). In 2015, Prof. Wolfram Manzenreiter reactivated the project and included approaches of the social sciences mainly concentrating on SWB and demographic change (Holthus/Lützel 2018, Holthus/Manzenreiter 2017a, Lützel 2016, 2018, Lützel/Manzenreiter 2016, Manzenreiter 2016a, 2016b, 2017, Manzenreiter/Holthus 2017a, 2017b, Miserka 2018). He established contacts with Aso's local administration, local networks and cooperations with institutions, such as Kumamoto University, resulting in multiple visits to the region. This project is part of this research on Aso and has access to the networks provided by Prof. Manzenreiter and his colleagues.

Since 2012, a survey on the *Aggregated Kumamoto Happiness* has been conducted by the prefectural government of Kumamoto annually. It shows regional differences of the rural SWB in the prefecture (Nishikori 2014), with Aso City frequently scoring as the happiest municipality within the region.

Operationalisation

The overlap of scientific constructs and approaches between team members are reflected in the operationalisation of the variables of interest:

The studies of Miserka and Polak-Rottmann investigate SWB primarily through qualitative methods. The assessment is modeled after the MODUL-study by Ponocny et al., which was able to reveal restrictions and drivers of well-being based on individual life circumstances that usually go unassessed in quantitative surveys (Ponocny et al. 2015, Ponocny et al. 2016). After transcription the interviews are coded according to the Narrated Well-being (NWB) coding scheme by Ponocny et al. (2016). This external rating complements the self-reported SWB-scales with a relatively “objective” well-being index and therefore contributes to the validity of the study as a whole. In addition, the inclusion of information gathered through interviews with a high degree of openness increases the validity of the quantitative study and offsets possible drawbacks in its self-reported information (Ponocny et al. 2015). The narrative thread is supplemented by lead questions that are adapted to the needs of this study.

In his analysis of social capital Polak-Rottmann follows the sensitive approach of qualitative studies by amongst others Holdgrün (2017), Martin (2011) and Steinhoff (2017) in assessing political participation, based on the high level of suspicion regarding political activism in the target group. A detailed analysis of political participation as an aspect of the studied phenomenon increases the understanding of the formation of local social networks and the embedded social capital, benefiting the quantitative survey of networks. His inductive approach in the early stages of the project allows adjusting the quantitative questionnaires to suit the local circumstances (such as the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake with the ensuing structural challenges or the unofficial local political movements). Since Polak-Rottmann will investigate participation as a process, he will gather information not only via interviews but also gain an inside view of political activities through participant observation in order to assess the social interactions during the activities.

In addition, this research design includes focus group discussions in line with Martin (2011). After transcription and coding, the results of all three methodological approaches are analysed and contrasted with findings from the quantitative study on participation.

Miserka's project on social capital and SWB is complemented by questions drawn from studies on sense of community (Davidson/Cotter 1991, McMillan/Chavis 1986, Pretty et al. 1996, Prezza 1998) as well as internal migration (Nowok 2013, Switek 2016, Yamamoto 2004, Yamamoto/Miserka 2018). The goal is to take into account the relation between an individual's personal relationship to a local community (migration background) and their subjective sense of community. To assess this phenomenon beyond the level of self-evaluation in interviews, Miserka will complement the findings of her interviews with participant observation in the immediate neighbourhood of her interviewees. This approach is essential for assessing interactions between locals and is realised by participating in community activities (such as cleaning activities or festival preparations). Hundsdoerfer particularly benefits from Miserka's input and is able to adapt his instruments to the regional, i.e. Japanese context. Further overlap between these projects can be found in the assessment of two ego-centred networks in face-to-face interviews. Findings of this qualitative, network analytic investigation will be integrated into the analysis of both projects and therefore also generate meaningful context information for Polak-Rottmann's study. They are specifically interested in the local component of social capital, the social networks of people within their place of residence.

In addition to interviewing with lead questions, the interviewees receive a one page questionnaire that assesses sociodemographic information as well as two general questions on SWB that serve as test items for the quantitative survey.

The sample selection for the narrative interviews is oriented toward a theoretical sampling: No prior definition of the target sample but constant adjustment during the research process. The degree of participation and the migration background provide possible categorisations of potential interviewees. Accordingly, contrasting positions of active political participants with more passive persons, specifically internal migrants might provide promising insights into motives and predictors of participation. The number of cases is raised until theoretical saturation is accomplished. By presenting extreme cases, the range of opinions in the study region is reflected, which otherwise would disappear among the aggregated

data. The study region is centred around the Aso region with its various communities, which puts the emphasis on establishing contacts and gaining access to the field, drawing on a “convenience sample” (cf. Flick 2016:166) and successively determining the sample through theory development rather than setting a fixed number of cases.

Besides the additional assessment of quantitative items that are already gathered by qualitative means such as participation and migration background, Askitis and Hundsdoerfer focus particularly on network analysis, the dependent variable SWB and their interaction with personality. To determine the strength of this association, a full survey of two wards with differing degrees of rurality is planned. The typological categorisation of those wards is based on sociodemographic markers such as population density, economic structure and administrative classification. For reasons of validity, well-being is assessed not only qualitatively-exploratively (see above) but also quantitatively with the Likert scales of standard well-being scales such as the *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985). In addition, well-being is assessed via the external coding of the NWB (Ponocny et al. 2016) as well as the Japanese well-being conception underlying the *Interdependent Happiness Scale* (Hitokoto/Uchida 2015) that is assessed in order to factor in regional characteristics of well-being.

Additionally, a questionnaire is generated in reference to Miserka's and Polak-Rottman's findings and Manzenreiter and Holthus' qualitative methodological research on the free-form assessment of SWB (Holthus/Manzenreiter 2017a, Manzenreiter 2016a, 2016b, Manzenreiter/Holthus 2017a, 2017b) that attempts to close most gaps of traditional well-being measurement instruments. A first draft with supervisor and team-input proposes the assessment of satisfaction with particular focus on life domains, the additional rating of individual relevance of the domains for the respondents' satisfaction, therefore enabling the weighting and aggregating of domains into a global satisfaction score. Contrary to common global satisfaction scales, this enables an open, concrete and transparent assessment of satisfaction that takes interindividual and “cultural” nuances more strongly into consideration.

At the same time the traditional assessment of standard indices of satisfaction and happiness such as SWLS (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79) remains sensible in the scope of this study to have a means of comparison. Sociodemographic variables are

assessed in addition to the qualitative study. This is to control for effects of age, sex, education, financial status, place of birth etc.

Social capital is often divided and assessed in subcategories such as trust, networks or resources that are available through networks. Since secondary analyses are frequent, these dimensions are regularly assessed with only a few variables (cf. Awaworyi-Churchill/Mishra 2017, Litwin/Stoeck 2013, Osaki 2017) and not in a network analytical sense. In economic and sociological studies (cf. Helliwell/Putnam 2004, Shibuya 2016) as well as in psychologically-epidemiologically-oriented studies (cf. Tsuno/Yamazaki 2012, Ziersch et al. 2009) this pattern is noticeable. Particularly when the connection between social capital and SWB is the object of interest, a comprehensive operationalisation is advised. Instrumental as well as emotional resources influence SWB.

In our research project social capital shall therefore, as Lin (2001: 12) suggested, be measured parallel to its roots in social networks. The position of an individual within the network, the contacts in the network as well as the available resources via the network are meaningful to the assessment of social capital. The actual operationalisation of the social capital concept follows the suggestions of Van der Gaag und Snijders (2005). With the help of name, position and resource generators as well as name interpreters the scale of the network, the diversity and actual accessibility and its embedded resources, as well as contacts to people in prestigious positions shall be quantified. Particularly the latter play a role in the formation of local political networks. This multidimensional approach gathers a wider range of information and allows for a differentiated look at the relationship between single aspects of social capital and SWB.

By means of network analytical items Hundsdorfer and Askitis also assess those aspects of social capital quantitatively that are gathered in the qualitative part. This includes items on trust, sense of community, reciprocity, participation and emotional support which are developed as a team from the findings of the qualitative pre-tests.

The assessment of personality traits that are of relevance for accessing and benefiting from social capital (i.e. extraversion) is conducted with the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) 10-item catalogue on extraversion (Cronbachs alpha = .87) as part of the quantitative study. The underlying Big Five personality factor model has been replicated in Japan (cf. McCrae/Costa 1997).

Project I: Rural Social Networks, Social Capital and Well-Being

This project examines the connection between different types of respondents' social capital and their subjective well-being (SWB). Psychological and epidemiological research concerned with urban-rural differences indicates stronger correlations between social capital and factors enhancing mental well-being (Tsuno/Yamazaki 2012, Ziersch et al. 2009). Helliwell and Putnam's findings (2004) suggest a direct connection between social embeddedness, resp. social capital and SWB, but as most SWB-studies, they are relying on representative studies on the national level (Easterlin 2003, Blanchflower/Oswald 2000). These studies don't allow for major conclusions on regional differences. They are neither differentiating between different types of social capital, nor are they using network sociology to operationalise it. Social capital is often equated with trust or other collective goods, leading to increased obfuscation of the term. It further results in ambiguous findings concerning the correlation of social embeddedness within the community and SWB (Dolan et al. 2008, Crider et al. 2001).

A differentiation between expressive and instrumental social capital can be derived from Lin's network theory of social capital (Lin 2001). Networks characterised by strong emotional cohesion (e.g. family networks, close friends) show tighter connections, higher density and closure (Lin 2001: 10) than networks of a stronger instrumental character (e.g. neighbourhood organisations, civic organisations). Internal migrants are expected to have fewer close ties than long-time residents¹, engagement in neighbourhood associations (or, e.g. preparations for festive events within the community) might be able to compensate this expected lack of close, expressive networks.

Second, high social capital is not necessarily to be equated with higher SWB. Expressive networks require constant emotional investment, which can easily exceed the respondents' utility. This applies especially in cases where relations are non-reciprocal², or when the responsibilities towards the network members put a severe strain on the respondents. Third, strong, emotional ties are necessarily exclusive,

¹ This is dependent on several factors, such as length of residency, prior residency (return migrants) and the existence of ties in the community before migration.

² Reciprocity can be hard to grasp, since it may stretch out over a long period of time, especially in family relations across the generational divide. A relation may seem non-reciprocal at first glance, but turns out to be reciprocal in the long run (e.g. children taking care of their elders, when their elders are in need).

which can lead to the exclusion of internal migrants, a consequence referring to a rather „dark side of social capital“ (Portes/Landolt 1998, Takagi et al. 2013).

The aim of this project is to test whether the respondents' emotional and/or instrumental social capital can be mobilised³ and whether it is connected with their SWB. Furthermore the conditions of a positive correlation between social capital and SWB have to be tested. During the research process a typology of social networks will be created, integrating socioeconomic and psychological data of the respondents.

Project II: A “Happiness Capital”? The Interaction of Social Capital and Personality on Well-being in a Rural Japanese Community (Dionyssios Askitis)

According to objective data, rural communities in Japan are faced with accelerating structural and demographic decline in recent decades. While there is mixed evidence regarding the level of happiness of rural residents over those living in urban areas, these structural deficits don't translate into low subjective well-being in rural communities such as the small-town of Aso, Kumamoto.

Meanwhile, the major effects of social resources on well-being and their predominance in these communities has been repeatedly demonstrated. However, few studies have attempted to directly link findings on these associations with the apparent persistence of rural happiness. Happiness research has long relied in part on epidemiological studies without differentiation of small-scale environments, vague rural-urban typologies and universal happiness concepts with little regard for regional and inter-individual variations in the conception, perception and measurement of happiness. One particular factor that has been largely overlooked in social science research is personality, specifically the factor extraversion which regulates much of social behavior and has been shown to predict well-being by itself and by interacting with other predictors.

The aim of this project is therefore to investigate the association between social capital and well-being in rural Japan and how this relationship manifests itself when taking into account interindividual differences such as personality traits like extraversion. It is hypothesised that social resources have a larger effect on happiness in areas with rural small-town characteristics as compared to peripheral or urban

³ Certainly this can only be achieved in a hypothetical manner, asking the respondent if he/she has the impression that he/she would be helped out by members of his/her network when confronted with a major obstacle.

regions and that they more than compensate for structural disadvantages in those areas. Furthermore it is expected that the personality factor extraversion will moderate this effect by regulating the need for and well-being drawn from social interaction with the community.

As part of the greater interdisciplinary Aso 2.0 project on regional well-being at the University of Vienna, the small-town of Aso in Kumamoto prefecture with its average rural Japanese economic and demographic structure serves as a case example of all the Japanese communities that experience similar challenges associated with their marginal status. By including instruments sensitive to inter-individual and 'Japanese' constructions of happiness and by contrasting proximal town wards of comparatively rural and urban characteristics with a high sample resolution this project addresses the measurement issues of traditional instruments and sampling. Thus it is hoped that this it will contribute to the understanding of the complex relationship between structural decline, social ties and quality of life in contemporary rural Japan.

Project III: Political participation, local governance and subjective well-being in rural Japan (Sebastian Polak-Rottmann)

Sebastian Polak-Rottmann will conduct a qualitative study on political participation as both a driver and a direct outcome of social capital in the Aso region. Previous research has drawn different conclusions on the relationship between political participation and SWB, mostly resulting from quantitative research designs (cf. Barker/Martin 2011, Dolan et al. 2008, Dorn et al. 2008, Weitz-Shapiro/Winters 2011). Some findings indicate the importance of social relationships (cf. Barker/Martin 2011:11, Flavin/Keane 2012:75, Holdgrün 2017), suggesting the relevance of social capital.

This part of the project aims at understanding how the inhabitants of the Aso region participate politically and how these actions are related to their SWB. To consider different and comparatively more accessible modes of participation in local Japan (cf. Jain 2016, Martin 2011), a broad definition of political participation after Jan van Deth is supported that includes problem-centred activities to support the community (van Deth 2014:349-350). Polak-Rottmann chooses semi-structured interviews, participant observation and focus groups to understand the role of

participation in the making of instrumental and expressive forms of social capital and its connection to other predictors.

Japan is often referred to as a land with a high degree of political alienation and growing social isolation (cf. Hüstebeck 2014:158, Jou/Endo 2017, Klein 2006, Obinger 2015, Yamada 2016). Since the 1960s, civic movements on the local level increasingly took place (cf. Hüstebeck 2014, Tao 2011), partly influencing the emergence of “revolutionary municipalities” (*kakushin jichitai*, Foljanty-Jost/Schmidt 2006, Okada 2017, Shindō/Abe 2016:149) and processes of decentralisation in the 1990s (cf. Hüstebeck 2014). This (de-)volution has been object of discussion, reflecting the growing awareness of *local governance* (cf. Foljanty-Jost et al. 2013, Peters/Pierre 2015, Rhodes 1996). Most of the activities taking place at the local level are connected to the aim of improving the local community (Tsutsumi 2011:210-2011) and are a crucial part of measures of revitalisation and possibly SWB, as this project wants to show.

Project IV: Social capital and sense of community and their relation to SWB of established and new residents of rural areas (Antonia Miserka)

Social capital and sense of community are mostly being regarded separately in the psychological and sociological discourse (cf. Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1988, Colombo et al. 2001, Granovetter 1973, Lin 2001, McMillan/Chavis 1986, Prezza et al. 2009, Putnam 2000). However, the usefulness of their combination is being argued (cf. Pooley 2005) and even realised in some sociological studies (Stanley 2011, Xu et al. 2010, Yetim/Yetim 2014).

Social capital exists within the social relationships of individuals (Coleman 1988:101) and is therefore being referred to as “glue”, that holds single individuals together in groups/social networks (Pooley 2005:73). This embeddedness in a social network enables the individual to access certain material and immaterial resources, such as support from other persons (Hennig 2010:177), which is how social capital can be drawn from social relationships. For the creation of expressive social capital (especially in form of trust), the closure of social networks is useful (Coleman 1988:107, Lin 2001: 10).

These closed social networks, in which social capital is produced, are the origin of a sense of community, which is being defined as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group,

and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan 1976). In such closed networks, a clear distinction between members and outsiders is being made, guaranteeing emotional security within the group (McMillan/Chavis 1986:9) and furthering the development of mutual trust, while making it difficult for outsiders to access the social network of the group. A sense of community in a social network therefore furthers the creation of social capital within it, thus serving as suitable "area" for analysing the relationship between social capital and SWB.

The aim of this contribution is to understand the sense of belonging to a certain neighbourhood (spatial form of sense of community) for established as well as new residents in rural areas and to ascertain how this is related to the individuals SWB. It is being assumed, that the connection to local events (e.g. community activities) and the sense of community increases not only with the length of residence, but that especially the personal relationship to the area (e.g. socialization) plays a key role.

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