

# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE SATOYAMA FUTURE: PRESERVING AND REVITALIZING TRADITIONAL SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES

## 持続可能な里山の未来へ：伝統的な社会生態学的景観の保全と再生

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### INTRODUCTION

This project explores how to preserve and revitalize socio-ecological production landscapes (SEPLs) in peri-urban Japan through community-based approaches that bridge landscape preservation and sustainable agriculture. Focusing on the Itabashidani area in Higashihiroshima, the study brings together interdisciplinary perspectives from rural sociology, agri-food studies, cultural geography, and heritage studies to examine the complex dynamics shaping land use, livelihoods, and local engagement.



THE PERI-URBAN SATOYAMA LANDSCAPE OF ITABASHIDANI, HIGASHIHIROSHIMA

Itabashidani is a case of landscape in transition, a Satoyama environment marked by the threat of urbanization and farmland abandonment, but also by efforts to sustain place-based education and farming. One of the key local actors, Sazanami Kindergarten, is trying to develop an agriculture and landscape preservation method that links environmental education, biodiversity restoration, and a CSA-inspired rice distribution model. The aim of this project is to explore the feasibility of such a vision by engaging with a range of local stakeholders, especially farmers, to understand their perspectives, constraints, and motivations. Through fieldwork, interviews, stakeholder meetings, and comparative case study analysis, the project seeks to clarify both opportunities and limitations for regenerative approaches grounded in lived realities. Ultimately, the research aims to inform future collaboration and co-design of sustainable food systems and landscape stewardship in Itabashidani and beyond.

### METHODOLOGY

Multiple interviews with Sazanami Kindergarten representative; Interviews with local farmers; Participation in a local stakeholder meeting (Nov 2024); Comparative case studies (rice-fish system in China, value-added organic farming in Japan)

### RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

The project revealed both the potential and challenges of aligning idealistic visions of landscape stewardship with the everyday realities of farming in a peri-urban Satoyama context. Fieldwork and the stakeholder meeting with local farmers exposed significant barriers: aging, labor shortages, financial risk, and low interest in organic or alternative methods. While there was some openness to direct sales or branding, most farmers were cautious, citing lack of support systems and concerns about feasibility. These voices underscored the importance of understanding both material and emotional dimensions of farming: while many farmers continue out of a sense of duty to their land and family legacy, they also express significant frustration, fatigue, and uncertainty about the future. One of the most important outcomes of this project so far is the recognition, through an interdisciplinary lens, of the complex dynamics at play in efforts to preserve landscapes and promote sustainable agriculture vis-a-vis local stakeholders' actual engagement level and interest. The findings show that successful landscape preservation must navigate emotional, economic, and institutional dimensions.

#### **Future Research:**

Building on this year's findings, the next phase will involve implementing a survey with Sazanami Kindergarten guardians to assess consumer-side interest and expectations, conducting follow-up interviews with farmers, and initiating focused dialogue with local government actors. These steps aim to co-develop realistic, community-driven strategies for sustainable land use and local food systems, while continuing to examine the intersections between rural livelihoods, environmental stewardship, and socio-cultural values.