Determinants of Residents' Subjective Well-Being in Japanese Rural Area Using Qualitative and Quantitative Research

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1. INTRODUCTION

In many countries, people and governments have realized the limitation of economic indicators such as GDP as a measurement of real progress of the society. There is a growing interests for alternative indices which include qualitative and non-economic aspects of the quality of life. In such circumstances, improving "happiness" or "well-being" of people is now thought to be the ultimate goal of the society. Since 1980's, psychologists have tried to measure people's well-being and established a new methodology to measure people's "subjective well-being (SWB)", by asking respondents to report their level of happiness. Measurement of SWB has been widely conducted in many disciplines such as sociology and economics to explore the characteristics of and determinants of individual's SWB. However, while many of existing studies focused on how SWB differs between countries and their individual characteristics, less attentions have been paid on regional variation of SWB and its determinants. This study aims to investigate variations of SWB and its determinants targeting at people living in Japanese rural areas by employing both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

2. METHODS

We chose Suzu city, Ishikawa Prefecture as a study area. Firstly, we did interviews with 21 people who lived in the city and asked them when they feel happy or unhappy in their daily life in the city in a semi-structured manner. A series of interviews was recorded and was transcribed for coding and analysis. Next, we added some factors to other factors used in previous studies as a measurement of SWB to make our original questionnaire for quantitative analysis of SWB. The questionnaire was distributed to randomly selected 2,500 individuals living in the city of Suzu, of which 1,182 responded. We employed a multivariate analysis including structural equation modeling to explore 1) how different type of capitals such as built, human, social and natural capital influence on individual SWB and 2) how individual SWB and their determinants differs across regions.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

First, we found some common regional factors influencing on SWB of residents but they have not been used in previous studies for the evaluation of SWB. For example, people feel happy because they can get fresh and delicious local foods and appreciate beautiful natural scenery and peace atmosphere of their city. On the other hand, they are unhappy with gossips by neighbors, remoteness from shops and public facilities, and ongoing trend of depopulation. All of these factors were included in the questionnaire survey along with other factors widely used for the evaluation of SWB.

Second, multiple regression analysis identified that following factors have significant influence on SWB;
-Factors related to built capital: house satisfaction, relative income, satisfaction with child care, distance to nearby shop (neg.)
-Factors related to human capital: healthy diet, frequency of exercise, physical and mental health
-Factors related to social capital: trust in the neighbors, interaction in the community, gossips by neighbors (neg.), self-efficacy
Underlined factors are also identified in the interview survey, and they have significant positive (or negative) influences on residents' SWB, while all factors related to natural capital, interestingly, don't have significant influence. In addition, we conducted a structural equation modeling using above-mentioned three capitals and factors, whose results suggested that human capital has the strongest influence on SWB among others, followed by built and social capital.

4. CONCLUSION

This study extracted some regional factors in the rural area by qualitative research and proved the relationship between these factors and residents' SWB by qualitative research. It may be beneficial information for policymaking by local governments.