

## Social Capital

Dialogue

### Soichiro Fukutake and Tadao Ando

## Showing the world a way to make communities more sustainable

Benesse Art Site Naoshima lights the way forward with 30 years of success

Benesse Art Site Naoshima has grown in collaboration with residents of several islands in Japan's Seto Inland Sea, particularly the island of Naoshima. Tadao Ando, a leading architect who has been deeply involved in this project, and Soichiro Fukutake, honorary advisor to Benesse Holdings, shared their views on the significance of the project's activities and their hopes for the future.

### Looking back on the creation of an island of contemporary art

**Fukutake** The island of Naoshima is where my father originally wanted to establish a campsite for children. Unfortunately he passed away right at the time he was about to get started, so I returned from Tokyo to our home in Okayama to carry out his dying wish. As I went ahead with the project, my bonds with the island residents and surrounding Seto Inland Sea grew deeper, and my desire to do more for the island became stronger. Fortunately, we contacted your architectural firm for assistance. Over 30 years have passed since then.

**Ando** At first, I was very surprised when you told me of your



#### Soichiro Fukutake

Honorary advisor to Benesse Holdings, Inc., chairman of the Fukutake Foundation, and managing director of the Setouchi Triennale

Born in Okayama Prefecture in 1945, Soichiro Fukutake has served as president, chairman, and representative director of Benesse Holdings. In 1988, he announced the plan to create Naoshima Cultural Village, and in 1995, he renamed the company he led, Fukutake Publishing, as Benesse Corporation to incorporate the word *benesse*, meaning "well-being" in Latin.

desire to build an art gallery in Naoshima. That's because the Seto Inland Sea was regarded as practically dead at that time, unlike its status now as one of the most beautiful inland seas in the world. Factories emitted sulfur dioxide gases and illegally dumped waste in the sea, so the islands were unattended and produced very little. Access to the islands was also limited, and the islanders were



The Chichu Art Museum  
(photo courtesy of Seiichi Ohsawa)

not very active. I remember telling you repeatedly that your requests would be rather difficult, but you responded every time by telling me to continue anyway. That



### About Benesse Art Site Naoshima

Benesse Art Site Naoshima is the general term for the artistic activities organized on the islands of Naoshima, Teshima, and Inujima in the Seto Inland Sea by Benesse Holdings and the Fukutake Foundation. These activities create unique and special places by showcasing contemporary art and architecture against the backdrop of the natural beauty of the Seto Inland Sea and the traditional culture of the islands.



**Tadao Ando**

Architect

Born in Osaka in 1941, Tadao Ando studied architecture independently and established Tadao Ando Architect & Associates in 1969. His best known works include the Church of Light, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, and Chichu Art Museum.



*Pumpkin* by Yayoi Kusama, exhibited in 1994 © YAYOI KUSAMA

intrigued me, and my enthusiasm gradually increased. Many well-known art galleries in modern times were built because of the strong passion and courage of their founders, and I imagined that was also the case with your Naoshima project.

**Fukutake** I was driven by my rebelliousness towards society. I enjoyed my time living in Tokyo from the time I went to university there until I reached the age of 40, but my involvement in the Naoshima project completely changed my life. Tokyo represented

the excesses of modernization and urbanization, but I only became aware of that after coming to Naoshima. In a sense, our modern society constantly destroys what exists and replaces it with something new, resulting in a decadent culture. Instead of that, I came to see the need for changing our approach by making use of what we already have and creating things we don't have. The Seto Inland Sea was the first area of Japan to be designated as a national park, even before Mount Fuji. In such a beautiful area, factories had been constructed, toxic pollution was illegally dumped, and people suffering from Hansen's disease were banished from society. Those actions were disgraceful in my mind. Had I been an artist, I would have expressed my feelings

- 1987** Opening of the first campground for visitors on the the island of Naoshima
- 1992** Opening of the Benesse House Museum
- 1998** Commencement of the Art House Project
- 2004** Opening of the Chichu Art Museum
- 2008** Opening of the Inujima Seirensho Art Museum
- 2009** Exhibitions held in Venice and Paris
- 2010** Openings of the Lee Ufan Museum, Les Archives du Cœur, Storm House, and Teshima Art Museum  
Inaugural Setouchi Triennale 2010 held (and again in 2013 and 2016)

- 2011** Twentieth anniversary event held
- 2012** Lectures and seminars held in Paris
- 2013** Openings of the Ando Museum, Teshima Yokoo House, and Miyanoura Gallery 6
- 2015** Symposium held in New York
- 2016** Openings of the Teshima 8 Million Lab and Teshima Seawall House  
La Forêt des Murmures and Needle Factory exhibitions held

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through art, but since I wasn't an artist, I tried to get local people to work with me and create something completely new in Naoshima. Of course, you were a central figure among them.

**Ando** Although it is commonly believed that contemporary art cannot attract a lot of people, I thought your idea of designing buildings to showcase contemporary art was fantastic. I was also impressed that you only chose serious and uncompromising artists, such as James Turrell, Bruce Nauman, and Walter De Maria.

**Fukutake** My father collected paintings by Yasuo Kuniyoshi, who was born in Okayama. That is how I first became interested in art. When I first saw his paintings, I didn't know what to make of them, but as I looked at them more closely, I gained a sense of what he had intended to express in each work. So, when it was time to collect art for Naoshima, I looked for works that would suit the situation there. Just as I believed Picasso's *Guernica* was so relevant for Spain at the time, I wanted the art to be right for the island. I also thought that each work could send an even stronger message if it was exhibited in the most suitable setting.

### Revitalizing communities through the Naoshima Method

**Ando** When Benesse House Museum opened, about 30,000 people visited in the first year, and it did not take long before 70,000 or 80,000 people were visiting, bringing a lot of energy to the island. Although the residents of the island were not very receptive to having many visitors at first, they began feeling the excitement, and some started talking about opening a restaurant, café, or lodging establishment. I was particularly surprised by how the elderly residents were energized. At that time, I thought things could turn out really well.

**Fukutake** To produce their works, various artists stayed on the island and got to know the local residents. Sometimes when young people visited the island to see the artwork, older residents would tell them about the artists and the meaning of the art, especially when the visitors were puzzled by its meaning. You can imagine how surprised those visitors were to discover such art on the island. With the influx of visitors, a growing number of elderly residents are feeling more alive, freely telling the visitors about the island's history and natural features. Some even renovated their homes to exhibit old items and art collections.

**Ando** I have always thought that people should be open to change and not be afraid of making mistakes. Many of Naoshima's residents had gotten stuck in their ways as they grew older, but then seemed to rediscover their youth. That amazed me, and is one of the greatest things I have ever witnessed in my life. As countries around the world today struggle to revitalize their provincial cities and towns, the revival of Naoshima offers an exemplary model to follow.

**Fukutake** It is simple to do. If you want people to be happy, they should live in a happy community. Religion claims that paradise is in the next world, but I wanted to help create such a community in this world. I became aware of that over the course of using contemporary art to bring joy to people in the community, including the elderly, which is kind of like paradise.

**Ando** One reason why Naoshima attracts international attention is because no other place is like it. Since it is so unique, people come to visit from around the world. It would be great if others would adopt the approach that has been taken on the island. Then more unique places would pop up around the world.



“Benesse’s commitment to well-being originated from the Naoshima project.”



“The islanders felt the excitement and the elderly residents became increasingly active. I was really surprised by that change.”



**Fukutake** I am often asked about Naoshima’s future, but that is quite different from carrying out a company’s business plan, so I cannot give a clear-cut answer. If, as you just implied, people in other areas of Japan and outside the country become interested in applying the Naoshima Method as a way to revitalize their communities, I would be happy to promote it even more.

#### A place for reflecting on well-being and the future

**Fukutake** I changed my company’s name to Benesse when the Naoshima project was underway. It could even be said that Benesse’s commitment to well-being originated from our initiatives in Naoshima, because, in a sense, the project embodied our business pursuits. Things like products, information, and IT are merely resources. The important thing was that our new businesses were increasingly developed from the concept of helping people live better lives.

**Ando** It is important for each person to consider well-being on a personal level. I think the island of Naoshima is a place for doing that. The works of art are permanently exhibited in the same locations. It is said that people will not go to such an art gallery twice, but, in fact, every year there are many people who visit for a second or third time, because they can experience the island differently each time they come. One can engage with the artwork, experience the natural environment and scenery, and interact with the local residents, so there are various aspects that

make each visit different. The island is not very accessible even for people living in Japan, so when visitors come back from places like Paris and New York, I think that all kinds of people are exploring more enriching ways to live.

**Fukutake** Corporations operate according to economic principles, but the important thing is how they give back the wealth created through their business activities to society. Simply paying taxes is one way, but that is not what I mean. Corporations have a social obligation to promote community development and culture, and I believe they should be more committed to that. With the spread of financial capitalism around the world today, it seems impossible to foster societies in which all members are content. The Fukutake Foundation receives dividends from Benesse Holdings as a major shareholder, but instead of simply donating them to the Naoshima project, it serves as the core organization and creates a framework for the project’s activities to continue. That is one means of realizing the concept of public interest capitalism that we advocate.

**Ando** I believe companies are public institutions. Besides generating revenues and profits, if every company gave serious consideration to how to engage with communities as corporate citizens and fulfill their responsibilities, society would most certainly become a better place. I hope the Benesse Group’s employees, too, will experience that in Naoshima, because if they do not personally feel what it’s like to live well, it will be difficult to promote Benesse’s approach to well-being.