

ESD Linking Communities and the Future: Informal and Community-Based Learning in Kodomokai (Children's Associations)

1. Background

- In Japan, the completion rate of compulsory education is almost **100%**.
- Therefore, **informal learning** serves not as a supplement to schooling but as a **platform for awareness and behavioral change** toward a sustainable society.
- Kodomokai* (Children's Associations) are community organizations, operated by parent volunteers, that provide learning opportunities through seasonal events, disaster prevention, and cultural activities.
- From an international perspective, Kodomokai activities can be understood as both **informal** and **community-based learning**.

3. Purpose

- To re-evaluate the role of Kodomokai as a site for ESD (Education for Sustainable Development).
- To explore practical methods for revitalizing Kodomokai as informal and community-based learning environments.

Typical Kodomokai:
Organizations with broad and general purposes.

⇒ Purpose unclear.

Motivation to join is low.



Clarifies the purpose.

Anticipating higher motivation to join.



5. Practices and Activities

Art, Nature & Environment: Experiential Learning Program

This program offers hands-on learning on Naoshima, Inujima, and Teshima—venues of the Setouchi Triennale. Participants will explore not only the art, but also the stories behind the islands' revival. Learn why art was chosen as a tool to rejuvenate these once-declining islands.



Setouchi Triennale Challenge!

Experience art on Naoshima alongside wheelchair users. Explore the challenges they face in venues that are not fully accessible, and learn how everyone can enjoy art together. Note: During the Spring Triennale, many "House Project" artworks were not wheelchair-accessible.



Sai-Kodomokai Free Space & Sai-Halo.Win

Held to foster community connections, Sai-Kodomokai Free Space provides a "third place" beyond home and school for all children. Sai-Halo.Win is a seasonal event where local children can enjoy activities together, experience intergenerational exchange, and learn about regional traditions.



7. Discussion

- Increasing membership indicates that Kodomokai still meet essential community needs.
- Even in a society with strong formal education, informal and community-based learning remains crucial.
- Kodomokai act as hubs connecting learning and community building.
- However, participation growth is linked less to program content and more to:
 - Reduced burdens on parents
⇒ **Proposal:** Establish a separate management organization
 - Open, accessible events increasing community recognition and participation

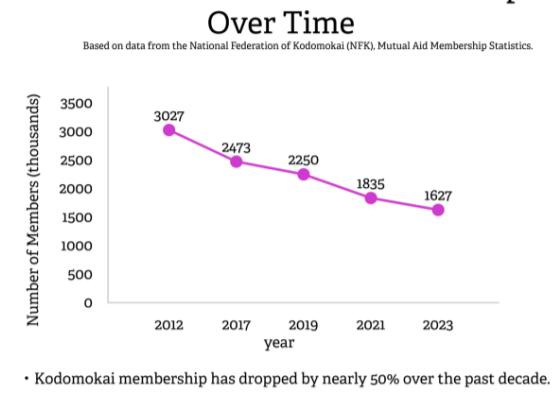
2. Issue

- Due to declining birthrates, increased dual-income households, and heavier burdens on organizers, many Kodomokai have been shrinking or dissolving.

Children's activities often serve as an important gateway for families to engage with the local community.

Community connections through children are declining.

Decline in Kodomokai Membership Over Time



- The loss of these learning spaces may undermine local resilience and progress toward a sustainable society.

4. Sai-Kodomokai (Sai Children's Associations)

- Aiming to create an environment where both children and adults can practice ESD through shared experiences.
- Promotes inclusive participation, engaging children and parents from diverse backgrounds (single-parent, disability, etc.).
- Operates as a fee-free, low-burden model—anyone can join without formal membership or roles.
- Focuses on community welfare and well-being through collective learning and local action.

See what's happening on Instagram – and follow us!
(Content in Japanese)



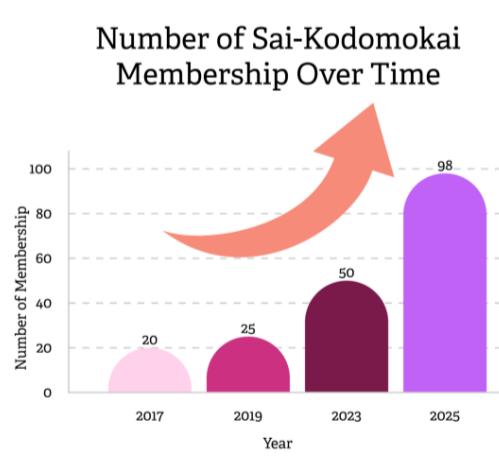
6. Findings

- Children's reflections show deeper awareness of community, environment, and cooperation.

"I was amazed that the people of Teshima are working hard to ensure that waste problems are not left for our generation or our children. At the Teshima Yokoo Museum, I was a little scared at first, but I enjoyed discovering connections between the artworks."



- Membership increased from 20 to 98



- More activities were organized

Year	Main Activities	Key Features / New Elements	Learning Focus (ESD Perspective)
~2019	Mainly fun and seasonal events	Activities were limited within the Kodomokai community	Community belonging Developing local identity through shared play and events
2020	Began environmental learning programs	Transferred from typical Kodomokai events to hands-on experiences	Environmental awareness Understanding the nature through experiential learning
2021	Started "Sai Kodomokai Free Space" and "Sai-Halo.Win"	Open to everyone, focusing on community connection	Inclusive participation - Creating spaces where all generations can join and connect
2024	Launched "Art x Nature x Environment" program with focus on SDGs	Collaboration with partners to involve the local community	Creative play and learning Linking local culture, environment, and sustainability
2025	Participated in Okinawa SDG Fair and RCE Conference	Activities in public outreach and external partnerships	Global citizenship - Sharing best practices and values with wider society

Timeline of activities

8. Conclusions

- Kodomokai activities do not target specific SDGs, but contribute across multiple goals.
- In particular, they strongly support:
 - Place-based identity formation
 - Inclusive participation
 - Intergenerational learning and knowledge transfer
 - Community resilience and environmental stewardship
- Sai-Kodomokai demonstrates a sustainable model through activity diversification and collaborative problem-solving.
- To counter nationwide decline, continued support from local governments and communities is indispensable.

