



## Message from the Director-General

The Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN) was established in April 2001 to conduct integrated research in the field of global environmental studies. In 2004, RIHN became one of the original members of the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU), as an Inter-University Research Institute Corporation.

Environmental degradation can be understood as an imbalance in interactions between human beings and natural systems. Our mission is therefore to conduct solution-oriented research aimed at exploring how interactions between humanity and nature ought to be. RIHN conducts interdisciplinary research spanning the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, and transdisciplinary research that involves collaboration with various stakeholders in society.

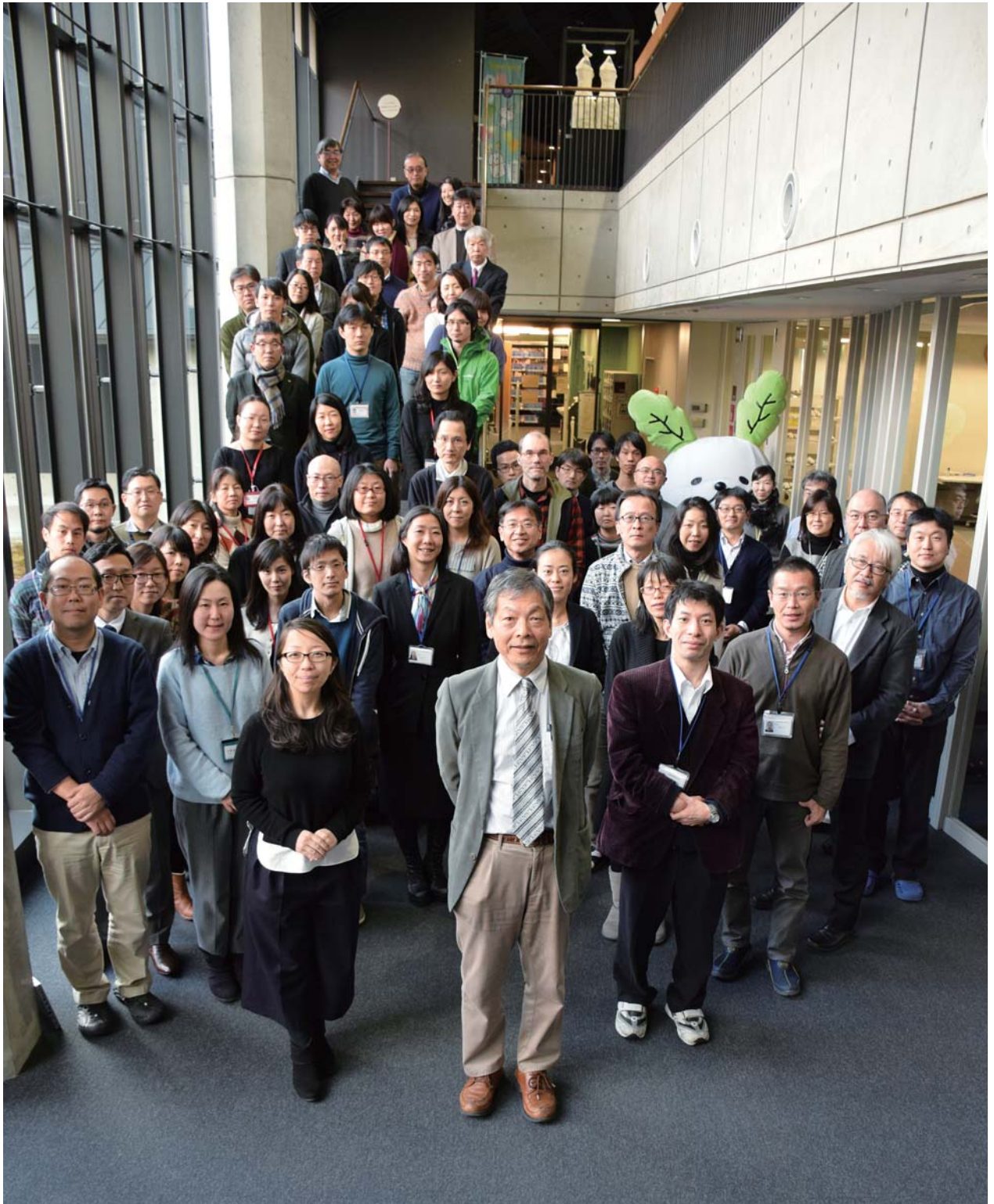
Since its establishment, RIHN researchers have formulated creative projects to address social needs in diverse fields of environmental interaction. For instance, under RIHN's Phase II Medium-Term Plan and targets, the Futurability Initiatives were formulated in 2011 in order to advance from "science for science" to design-science. The RIHN Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Studies was published in the same year, providing a single point of access to the diverse research outcomes of RIHN's first decade. The institute also promoted a network-based Global Environmental Repository in

support of its role as an Inter-University Research Institute Corporation. Following an external review of research activities and organizational structures, in fiscal year 2014 we reformed the ways in which we conduct and promote research projects. At this time we also began collaborating in the international research platform Future Earth, which aims to realize a sustainable global society through integration of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary environmental studies. In fiscal year 2015 RIHN was appointed as the Regional Center for Future Earth in Asia.

Fiscal year 2016 marks the beginning of our Phase III Medium-Term Plan. We have launched a new set of Research Programs, a Core Program, and the RIHN Center in order to organically integrate and support the Research Programs. With a new structure in place, we are determined to pursue our mission even more vigorously through enhanced collaboration within our institute, across our diverse research community, and with society in general.

安成 哲三  
YASUNARI Tetsuzo

Director-General  
Research Institute for Humanity and Nature





Above: TANAKA Naoko, Round rainbow, New Zealand  
Below: ASANO Satoshi, Windbreak, Hokkaido, Japan

## RIHN's Mission

For several decades, researchers from many academic disciplines have attempted to find solutions to the environmental problems that now confront human communities at all scales. Despite extensive research in individual disciplines, however, the essential character of many environmental problems remains unknown. There is therefore need not for additional partial descriptions of discrete environmental problems, but for holistic understandings of the underlying causes of these problems, and integrated approaches to their solutions.

RIHN research is characterized by the belief that environmental problems stem from problems in human culture. RIHN research projects therefore are designed to examine not only the diverse range of cultures that currently inhabit the Earth but also past patterns of cultural and environmental change. In addition to conducting high quality basic research, our aim is to enable discussion of diverse perspectives on nature and of their potential relevance to the future.

For over ten years the RIHN research community has discussed the concept of *futurability* (or *sustainable future*), a translation of a Japanese concept that combines the ideographs “future” and “potential”. This idea invites us to consider the kinds of interactions between human beings and nature—some ancient and some entirely new—that various societies and communities might seek. We hope it will continue to stimulate discussion of what should be done to address environmental problems at their roots, so that

future generations will not inherit the same patterns of use and degradation that now characterize our global society.

The idea that environmental problems stem from problems in human culture inevitably leads to the conclusion that environmental research needs to consider the concept of values in various human societies and cultures. Anthropogenic environmental impact is now predominant on a global scale, and the current period of Earth history is being called the “Anthropocene”. Humankind is becoming increasingly conscious of its dependence on finite resources and of the many negative consequences of continued degradation of our biosphere. We have also progressively come to understand that a number of critical environmental problems cannot be separated from social inequity, especially in terms of people’s access to natural resources and their benefits. RIHN is now conducting solution-oriented environmental research projects based on new forms of transdisciplinary knowledge production.

Exposing different value systems in such contexts can lead to social conflicts, but true resolution of socio-environmental issues is a challenge shared by humanity in general. It requires forthright dialogue and exchange between peoples of the world. The term *futurability* thus also indicates our sincere aspiration to establish integrated global environmental studies as a new holistic approach to a sustainable future for human beings on our planet Earth.