Evaluation of transition of Initiative-based FS to FR

Title of the Project	**Re-evaluating Advantages of Small-Scale Economies: Finding Alternative Strategies to Overcome Vulnerability in Large-Scale Economies**
Project Leader	**HABU Junko**

General advice and comments of PEC:

The project mainly consists of the past archaeological studies on small-scale economies with a strong international framework. However, PEC found it difficult to see any clear and convincing hypothesis on how the research on small-scale economies can be linked with improvement of vulnerability in large-scale economies on the basis of RIHN's philosophy focusing on environment. It is again difficult to find any rational reasoning behind the selection of case studies and sites. Clear vision, including the title, and a rather integrative methodology are other main conditions required to proceed to the next stage. Despite these insufficiencies and missing link with contemporary issues and strategies that this institute aims to advance in terms of transdisciplinary interactions, there is a certain potential on investigating the past archaeological studies with this project. PEC strongly recommends narrowing down the research theme with more precise and relevant case studies and scaling down the time-scale and financial scope of the project before the start of full research implementation.

Reply:

As stated in the proposal, this project uses three defining characteristics of a small-scale economy and society: 1) its goals are not limited to the pursuit of short-term efficiency and profits; 2) locally-based production is emphasized over aiming for active participation in, and possibly domination of, the world market; and 3) information about the producers is readily available to consumers. In other words, what is at issue is less the size of the entire system, but the size of the individual unit for determining the production, circulation and consumption strategies. To emphasize this point, we have changed the project title. Our project is particularly interested in the interrelationships between the size of the production/circulation/consumption unit, the breadth of subsistence diversity, and the long-term sustainability of cultures and societies.

Our main hypothesis is that, all other things being equal, highly specialized and low diversity subsistence strategies can support a larger population for a short period, but make the system more vulnerable in the long-run. We believe that the most robust test of this hypothesis is to use data from both the past and the present. There is excellent precedent for archaeological and historical analysis to throw new and valuable light upon actions and behaviors in the present. This is especially true in the case of archaeology, which can address issues of contemporary importance from a deep time perspective – assessing resilience and vulnerability over many millennia. Other factors, including climate change, mobility of people, goods and information and technological developments, will also be taken into consideration.

The core of our methodology consists of 1) biochemical analyses of material culture, faunal/floral remains, and soil/water, 2) spatial analysis of the distribution and size of settlements and production/circulation/consumption units, 3) ethnographic interviews and participant observations, and 4) simulation and formal/informal modeling in the fields of historical ecology and agroecology. Given that our project will be only for three years, our main geographic focus will be on Japan and California/Northwest Coast of North America, where project members have already conducted substantial amounts of preliminary research. Many environmental similarities as well as historical, social and cultural parallels make these regions particularly suitable for comparative studies. Our archaeological subprojects will focus on assessing the long-term sustainability and vulnerability of early to middle Holocene subsistence strategies in these two regions and compare prehistoric examples to modern data of production and distribution within existing small-scale economies. In this way, we hope to identify common elements that can contribute to resilience and sustainability at all economic levels.