

## **Yamanouchi Municipal Yamanouchi Junior High School — Exploring Issues for Rediscovering and Revitalizing Yamanouchi Town**

Yamanouchi Municipal Yamanouchi Junior High School is located within the Shiga Highland Biosphere Reserve and was registered as a UNESCO Associated School in 2017. The school focuses on local Biosphere Reserve resources, such as Shiga Highland and the popular Shibu Onsen hot spring area, to promote ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) activities. At Yamanouchi Junior High School, ESD activities are structured around the themes of "knowing" for 1st-year students, "comparing" for 2nd-year students, and "disseminating" for 3rd-year students. This three-year approach encourages students to understand their community, compare it with similar regions, and propose ideas for local revitalization. This year, the 1st-year students explored and presented the strengths and challenges of Yamanouchi Town, aiming to identify issues critical for revitalization.

### **Exploring the Biosphere Reserve and Local Attractions**

The 1st-year students, under the theme of "knowing," investigated the Shiga Highland Biosphere Reserve and local hot spring areas. Activities included removing invasive species, trekking, and learning about geothermal hot springs. Through group discussions, students deepened their understanding of these topics. Their findings were presented at the school's cultural festival, highlighting local attractions and challenges, such as the value of hot springs as tourism resources, changing tourism demands, a decrease in visitors, and workforce shortages.

### **Proposals for Regional Revitalization**

Based on their investigations, the students proposed solutions focused on raising awareness of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and enhancing the use of local tourism resources:

- **Improving Awareness of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve:** The students identified the low awareness of the Biosphere Reserve as a critical issue and proposed several solutions. These included distributing pamphlets and posters at tourist destinations, utilizing social media, organizing events, and involving local residents and external participants in these efforts.
- **Attracting More Tourists:** The students addressed regional challenges such as declining tourist numbers and population aging. They suggested increasing the town's appeal through the development and promotion of local specialties, creating recreational spaces to attract younger generations, and organizing engaging activities such as stamp rallies and quiz events for visitors.

### **Outcomes and Future Prospects**

Through these activities, the students rediscovered the strengths of their community while gaining a

deeper understanding of its challenges. Moving forward, they plan to further investigate these issues in Yamanouchi Town and enhance their learning through comparative studies with Kusatsu Town. Their ultimate goal is to contribute to the sustainable future of Yamanouchi Town by making actionable recommendations based on their findings.