The Artistic Interpretation of Driftwood

North Coast and Guanyinshan National Scenic Area, Taiwan
North Coast & Guanyinshan National Scenic Area Headquarters, Tourism Administration, MOTC
Regional Areas (including counties, regions, provinces)
Visitor Experience & Destination Management

Summary of Good Practice Story

Taiwan's North Coast and Guanyinshan National Scenic Area faces thousands of tons of driftwood dumped by annual typhoons, historically disposed of through costly, carbon-intensive incineration that damaged the area's renowned coastal scenery. The Northguan Administration reframed the debris as a "memory container" for local culture, introducing a Categorization and Diversion strategy that auctioned valuable timber and mulched the rest for trails, while the 2025 Formosa North Coast Arts Festival invited 12 contemporary artists to turn driftwood into land art, local youth team "Wave in Jinshan" recorded elderly residents' stories as podcasts, and 450 students from 13 schools painted driftwood fish for the "Drifting Fish Schooling" project. This repurposed roughly 250 tons of driftwood into 1,000 bags of trail mulch and 20 rest platforms plus 8 land art installations, while the festival drew 133,457 visitors with 75.9% reporting high satisfaction. The lesson: storytelling turns cold environmental statistics into emotional resonance, and involving schools and youth teams converts a community from passive bystanders into active guardians of their land.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

The story unfolds in Taiwan's North Coast and Guanyinshan National Scenic Area (Northguan), a 13,081-hectare destination spanning a 52km coastline renowned for its Yehliu Geopark and diverse ecosystems.

This stunning landscape faces a recurring challenge: annual typhoons deposit thousands of tons of driftwood, creating environmental burdens that threaten the natural scenery and ecosystems.

The project thrives on community collaboration, involving contemporary artists, local youth teams like "Wave in Jinshan," and 450 students from 13 local schools.

By treating driftwood as a "memory container" rather than waste, Northguan transforms storm debris into cultural landmarks.

This distinctive setting allows the community to evolve from bystanders into guardians, proving that sustainability is a shared journey of rebirth.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

The North Coast annually faces a mounting crisis: thousands of tons of driftwood deposited by typhoons, such as the devastating 2024 storms.

For years, these materials were treated as mere waste, damaging the internationally renowned coastal landscape.

The destination reached a critical turning point when the economic and environmental costs of traditional disposal became unbearable.

Relying on incineration was not only expensive but also emitted significant carbon, directly clashing with global sustainability goals.

This was the moment of realization: continuing to view these natural materials solely as an environmental burden was a failure of imagination and duty.

Shifting from a mindset of "disposal" to "rebirth," the community realized that storm debris could be a "memory container" for local culture rather than landfill fodder.

The tension between natural destruction and the desire for sustainable tourism birthed a new vision—transforming environmental burdens into "artistic materials" that honor the cycle of life.

The Vision: What you set out to do

The Northguan Administration envisioned transforming recurring typhoon debris from an environmental "burden" into a profound "cultural asset".

Motivated by the mounting crisis of thousands of tons of driftwood and the high carbon footprint of traditional incineration, The Northguan Administration acted to align with the national "Salute to the Ocean" policy

We set out to achieve a dual goal: resource recycling and artistic empowerment.

By inviting artists to collaborate with schools and communities, we aimed to turn "marine waste" into a medium for environmental education and regional branding.

The motivation was clear: the community needed to transition from merely "cleaning up" to "creating anew".

By treating driftwood as a “memory container” for local history, we sought to foster deep emotional resonance and pride, ensuring that the North Coast’s future is defined by a resilient, sustainable symbiosis between nature and its people.

The Journey: How change happened

The journey began by redefining "marine waste" as a "memory container"
. After typhoons dumped thousands of tons of wood along the coast
, Northguan shifted from incineration to a "Categorization and Diversion" strategy
. While valuable timber was auctioned, the rest met the jaw crusher to become mulch for trails.
Collaboration was the project's "secret sauce." The 2025 Formosa North Coast Arts Festival turned the shoreline into an open-air museum through the work of 12 contemporary artists
. Strategic partnerships with local youth teams like "Wave in Jinshan" led to podcasts documenting elderly residents' stories
, while the "Drifting Fish Schooling" project engaged 450 students from 13 local schools to paint driftwood, rooting SDG 14 and 15 values in the youth.
After a rainstorm, a rainbow appeared perfectly framed within Li Kuei-chih’s Aqueous Seed installation. It symbolized the "cycle of life" the project aimed to portray. By integrating industrial tools with human creativity, Northguan repurposed 250 tons of waste into 20 rest platforms and 8 land art installations. This journey proved that sustainability is about creating a deep emotional connection between the land and its people.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

The breakthrough of this initiative lies in transforming an environmental burden into a profound cultural beacon. Environmentally, the project successfully reduced the incineration of approximately 250 tons of driftwood, repurposing it into 1,000 bags of mulch for trails and 20 functional rest platforms.
Socially and emotionally, through the "Drifting Fish" program, 450 students from 13 local schools painted driftwood to reflect marine life, fostering a deep sense of pride and environmental stewardship in the youth.
Visitors felt this shift personally; the 2025 Arts Festival attracted 133,457 attendees, with 75.9% reporting they were "very satisfied" with the experience.
People no longer see storm debris as "waste" but as "memory containers" that tell a story of resilience and rebirth.
The community has moved from being mere "bystanders" to active "guardians of the land". Collaborations with local youth teams like "Wave in Jinshan" produced 5 podcast episodes documenting the memories of elderly residents, effectively rooting the art in regional narrative.
Installations such as Aqueous Seed and The Narrative of Reborn Driftwood have become permanent landmarks, beautifying the landscape and inviting visitors into a silent dialogue with nature.

Ultimately, we achieved the goal of making sustainability felt. By breathing life into "wounded" wood, the North Coast has turned a recurring crisis into an model for sustainable tourism and community harmony.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

The project taught us that driftwood is a "memory container" rather than mere waste.

A significant surprise was the vulnerability of natural materials; extreme summer heat caused resin softening, while typhoons overpowered initial protection efforts.

These challenges taught us that preventative maintenance and custom-fitted safeguards are non-negotiable for outdoor installations.

We also learned the importance of "Safety and Design Balance." Following expert feedback, we adapted installations, such as shortening protruding parts on bus shelters, to ensure public convenience.

Advice for similar paths:

Prioritize Storytelling: While data is necessary, "people will never forget how you made them feel".

Use art to turn cold statistics into emotional resonance.

Adopt a Turnkey System: Integrating design and construction early reduces engineering risks.

Foster Guardianship: Involving 13 local schools and youth teams turns the community from bystanders into active protectors of the land.

Next time, we would enhance early-stage material testing against climate extremes.

Sustainability is not a static goal but a continuous journey of adaptation and co-creation.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

By repurposing approximately 250 tons of driftwood into trail mulch and 20 rest platforms, Northguan established a long-term "Categorization and Diversion" mechanism, shifting regional policy from simple waste disposal to resource empowerment.

The ripple effect extends deeply into education and social identity. The "Drifting Fish Schooling" project engaged 450 students from 13 local schools, turning environmental awareness into local pride and rooting SDG 14 and 15 values in the youth.

Furthermore, strategic collaborations with local youth teams like "Wave in Jinshan" led to podcasts and workshops that transformed residents from mere bystanders into active guardians of the land.

Permanent installations like Aqueous Seed now serve as "memory containers," inviting visitors into a deep dialogue with nature about time and rebirth.

The project’s success has inspired future plans for multi-day art-tourism routes, integrating local traditions into a sustainable cultural industry chain.

By breathing life into storm-scarred wood, the North Coast has proven that even natural debris can ignite a hopeful future where nature, art, and community coexist in resilient harmony.

Awards or Certifications
Formosa North Coast Arts Festival 2025：
https://museaward.com/winner-info.php?id=236361

Web Articles
https://www.northcoastartsfestival.com/mainssl/modules/MySpace/index.php

Other Relevant Links
Vedio：
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mzO3RUFKVl218SSMcHUlSfHJKToaaMaP?usp=sharing

Quotes or Testimonials
1.Perspectives from Artist Partners
Jiang Meng-si: He views the creative process as "director casting roles", stating: "Every piece of wood has its own unique shape, weight, and texture... this is not mere stacking, but a construction achieved together with the materials."
Chiu Chih-wei: He describes the collected debris as "forgotten monuments in the city," inviting viewers to rediscover beauty in the ignored.
Li Kuei-chih: He defines driftwood as a “memory container” that "transforms the life journey of the wood into a space for contemplating time, life, and the environment."

2. Community & Social Impact
Student Pride: A student from Dapeng Elementary reflected: "I feel happy and excited to paint on wood... Expressing my own creativity is the best work."

3. Visitor Voices
Following the 2025 Arts Festival, 75.9% of visitors reported being "very satisfied,"
leaving feedback such as:"Very nice place.", "Excellent!", "Thank you very much."