Studying Sustainability in Japan

Cecily McCaffrey and Rie Tanabe, Willamette University
Sustainability in Japan

Willamette University summer session course:

“Sustainability in Japan,” hosted by Tokyo International U.

Co-taught by Asian Studies and Environmental Science faculty

Combines language study, seminar, and field work

Funded by the Luce Initiative on Asian Studies and the Environment
Japanese environmental policy

Triangle of actors: State, Local government, Business

Policy implementation based on consensus

Advantages: “buy-in” on environmental policies by stakeholders; efficient cooperation on shared policy goals

Disadvantages: time entailed in building consensus; difficulties of taking proactive steps against emergent concerns.

Case study: Waste management in Kawagoe, Japan
Waste management center
Waste management practices
Green city practices and energy conservation

- Green walls, curtains, and roofs
- Subsidies for solar power
- Rainwater barrels
- “Cool biz” office wear for summer months
- Using recycled materials for uniforms
Cultural Habits

“Mottainai ‘Baasan” =“Waste Not Granny”

Main character in best selling book by Shinju Mariko

Popular symbol of waste consciousness, represents wisdom of the “wartime generation” in emphasis on thrift and resourcefulness.
Conservation versus consumerism

Energy saving devices are a common feature of the built environment, but… Urban cultures of convenience temper impulses toward conservation

“My bag,” “my bottle,” “my hashi” are popular strategies of conservation, but… Businesses encourage consumerism while promoting “green” sensibilities
Takeaways (Rie)

Challenges: local initiatives are limited in scope and potential, rely on volunteer effort

Example: “Citizen’s forest” green space in Kawagoe

“Top-down” enforcement of environmental statutes and regulations seem more effective
Takeaways (Cecily)

Field-based/experiential learning experience emphasizes the importance of both visceral experience and practice.

“Place-based” pedagogy combined with problem-solving complements training in critical analysis and consideration of “the big picture.”

Attention to “everyday” practice can encourage recognition of local-global dynamics in daily activities.