

Hands on Learning Report on Hokkaido Ecovillage Promotion Project

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The Climate Reality Project Japan

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Greetings! This is Jnifar Yumi, an intern at the Climate Reality Project Japan. During the Documentary Tour in Hokkaido last month, I had the chance to visit the Hokkaido Ecovillage Promotion Project in Yoichi before three of us international students leave Japan or start working this summer

Introduction to Eco-village

Eco-village is a community where residents collaborate to live sustainably, minimizing the ecological footprint on both the earth and its inhabitants. Eco-villages have emerged as sustainable regional models, addressing issues such as depopulation and child-rearing, and have expanded globally, particularly in Europe and the United States, with over 15,000 eco-friendly buildings in operation. The Hokkaido Eco-Village Project (HEPP), a non-profit organization, serves as a learning platform where diverse individuals can come together to explore eco-village concepts. HEPP aims to produce essential resources like food and energy within the community, fostering a connection between producers and consumers, and contributing to regional revitalization. Junka Sakamoto, CRP Japan's friend and a Climate Reality Leader herself, started her Eco Village initiative in 2009, which was then established into HEPP in 2012.

Vision of Eco-Village

During our stay, we learned about the core vision of the eco-village:

- **Sustainable Practices:** The eco-village teaches appropriate technologies for environmentally friendly food production and housing, aiming to develop practitioners within the region.



- **Community and Individuality:** It emphasizes the expression of individual uniqueness while fostering communication and group work to respect diversity within the community.
- **Local Economy:** In response to the global economy's impact on poverty and environmental destruction, the eco-village proposes local jobs and systems, practicing localization to promote shared prosperity.

Our Stay at Eco-Village: Day 1

We arrived at the Eco-village on July 14, 2024, and were greeted by Junka Sakamoto, the project manager, who gave us a comprehensive introduction to the community's principles and daily operations. The welcoming session included a tour of the facilities and the vineyard, along with an overview of the various sustainable practices implemented in the village.

Among these, we had the opportunity to see sustainable construction in action! The methods of utilising nature's resources without relying on unsustainable materials and technologies were truly impressive for us, living in modern society.

For instance, the learning centre used for various events is built with carefully selected local wood from Hokkaido. It is insulated with thick materials to protect it from outside temperatures, and the living spaces are designed to avoid direct sunlight, reducing dependence on heating and cooling systems.

Outside, there is a shower room that uses a high-efficiency system to generate hot water by harnessing solar energy directly as heat, without converting it to electricity. In the backyard, there is a handmade grease trap with two compartments where bacteria purify the wastewater coming from the sinks in the shared house and other rooms. In the backyard, we saw the installed solar-sharing system.

The tiny houses designed for one or two people also have dedicated solar panels, providing all the electricity needed for daily living. In the centre of the room, there is a heat storage heater filled with stones, acting as a thermal mass heater. By utilizing the high heat retention properties of the stones, the room can stay warm all day with just a few hours of heating in the morning.

The tiny houses have small kitchens and sinks, and the water used there is drawn from tanks filled at the shared house. The water holder is transparent, so

it is easier to see how much water is left to use before it needs to be fetched again. Miss Junka explained, "When you consider the effort involved in fetching water, you naturally avoid wasting it."

This principle doesn't apply only to water. We have become accustomed to seeking more in our daily lives because we do not directly bear the costs—namely, the sacrifices, efforts, and hard work of others—and we are not made aware of them. The Eco-village, where we can experience the costs of our lifestyle firsthand, is an incredibly valuable and meaningful place!

After that, we spent time in the kitchen garden, learning to identify and differentiate various herbs under the guidance of Miss Junka. Eco-village's backyard is a vital educational resource, used for harvesting seasonal vegetables. Volunteers and guests usually contribute to maintaining the natural environment and seasonal flowers alongside Miss Junka. The garden not only supports daily life with fresh produce but also adds aesthetic value with companion plants and flowers. I bought two jars of cherry and blueberry jam which was handmade by the HEPP team! It was delicious and has become a part of my daily breakfast. This makes me think about the people who prepared it and appreciate the food on my plate more.



Later, we assisted in the kitchen when some deer meat was brought in by one of the neighbors. The eco-village focuses on self-sufficiency, and products are shared within the community. The meat needed to be sliced and prepared for the next day's meal. Yuki-san did a great job helping to prepare the meat along with other volunteers. After the table was set, we got to know the other student visitors, who were there on a study tour from England and Taiwan, and enjoyed a cultural exchange during dinner.

We learned that after dinner, everyone had to wipe their plates clean with a patch of cloth (an old dress torn into small pieces), to remove oil and other

impurities before washing them. This practice prevents oil from entering the water pipes, which are connected to the nearby rivers. The guests took turns washing, drying the dishes and cleaning up after dinner – a real community experience!

Day 2: Hands-On Activities and Learning



We participated in several hands-on activities that highlighted Eco-village's self-sufficiency and community-oriented approach on the following day. The day started with breakfast, followed by everyone getting into the daily morning cleaning tasks along with weeding the garden and the walkway.

One of the highlights of this stay was participating in vineyard activities, which is specifically known as the Peace Wine Project. We engaged in tasks such as pruning, leaf removal, and weeding near the roots of each plant, which is critical for cultivating wine grapes. The unusually hot weather in 2024 raised concerns about diseases, but the communal effort in trying to overcome these obstacles is surely inspiring and educational. Ecovillage members and volunteers helped farmers all over the place, which was appreciated.

We also learned about the eco-village's role in the broader community. During the grape-growing season, eco-village members and volunteers from many countries around the world assist local farmers, fostering strong relationships and mutual appreciation. This concept of Peace Wine made me think about diversity and harmony in agricultural practices. These concepts are often talked about in classrooms and workplaces but never in the fields. So we were lucky to have a sustainable lifestyle experience rather than reading about it in theory. After the laborious work under the hot summer sun for 2 hours, we were treated to a delicious lunch prepared by neighbours. After a break, we went off to learn how to chop wood using an axe and wood-cutting equipment. None of the interns had prior hands-on experience with this task, so it was a novel and valuable skill for all of us.



Sandwiches for lunch and homemade panna cotta with cherry jam!

After that, some of the interns went to the *onsen*, a traditional Japanese hot spring, to relax and rejuvenate. The onsen experience was a perfect way to unwind after a day of hard work, providing both physical relief and an opportunity for cultural immersion. For dinner, we got to eat deer stew with bread dumplings, along with a side dish called *Bramboráky*, a famous Czech potato pancake. All these were prepared with care and love by our English friends from the U.K. During dinner, we all took turns to say a few words from our experience during our stay there. I think most of our comments included how we took the food on our plates for granted, as we never think about how much effort and time it takes for our ingredients to arrive on our plates. Having said that, we learnt to appreciate every bit of food we eat and learn to connect with nature more. We reflected on our experiences and the knowledge gained, and bid farewell to everyone, as we had to leave very early the next morning. The stay at Eco-village was both enlightening and enriching, reinforcing the importance of sustainable living and community cooperation.



Our visit to the Eco-village was a profound experience that underscored the potential of sustainable living and community empowerment. The Eco-village model not only promotes ecological balance to endorse a rich way of life for individuals, but also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility. The lessons learned during our stay will undoubtedly inspire future initiatives and collaborations within the Climate Reality Project Japan.