

**European-Japanese Summer School on
"Ecology and Economy – Strategies for Sustainable
Development"**

Wittenberg, August 1997

The idea of offering Japanese and European students a chance to meet in an ecological summer school was stimulated by requirements from both environmental education and cultural and science policies. From the viewpoint of environmental education it makes sense because Japan as well as some European countries range at the top of environmental efforts and success with a strong capacity for environmental innovation. Bringing together students from these countries offers a chance to learn by comparing and inquiring into reasons for differences.

With regard to cultural policies, bringing together Japanese and European students means involving two regions of the world which are expected to co-operate intensively, but are in reality far from a satisfactory degree of exchange in economy, culture, and science. There are far less Japanese studying in Europe than in the United States. Inviting Japanese and European students from various disciplines to study together offers the chance to build bridges; bridges across language barriers, across barriers of different academic socialisation and across different cultural backgrounds and learning cultures, while enhancing knowledge of other countries and encouraging mobility.

In order to make full use of these chances, a summer school was chosen as the only form of teaching that allows combining intensive environmental learning with social learning. The "Summer School on Ecology and Economy – Strategies for Sustainable Development" took place in Wittenberg between August 4th and 17th. It was organised by the Seminar for Japanese Studies of Martin-Luther-University, Halle-Wittenberg, the Japanese-German Center Berlin as well as the European Japanese Experts Association, and was headed by Professor Gesine Foljanty-Jost, director of the Seminar and chairwoman of the Association. The summer school was supported by the European Commission, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the German Federal Foundation for the Environment (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt). Its aim was to bring together students from different cultures and disciplines to study and work together on global and local environmental problems and possible solutions.

The programme was aimed at providing students with an intensive course in "sustainable development". Networks of environmentalist, of European-Japanese co-operation and of scientific partnerships between

European and Japanese universities were activated to recruit participants. Students applied on their own or were recommended by their academic tutors. In the end, thirty participants had enrolled: eleven of them were Japanese or from Japan, twelve were from Germany and seven were from other EU countries. They represented disciplines such as physics, economics, political science, medicine, and geology. Almost half of them had already attended lectures on environmental issues at their home universities, or even planned to specialise on environmental issues in their major subjects. The others were "beginners" motivated by the idea of European-Japanese student exchange and the chance to experience co-operative learning, combined with a strong interest in the field of ecology and related issues.

Programme-planning reflected the rather heterogeneous mixture of students. The first week was dedicated to two goals; one was the creation of a common frame of reference. Experts from various disciplines and countries were invited to give introductory lectures on basic issues such as eco-systems, ecological modernisation among others. The second task was to form student work groups. The groups were arranged according to participants' interests such as water, waste, and energy.

Lectures

On the first day interest focused on the Asian-Pacific region, particularly on Japan and China. This was partly due to the number of Japanese students, but even more so to the lecture of *Takeuchi Tsuneo* from the Environment Agency of Japan. He pointed out that this region will be decisive for global environmental problems like the greenhouse effect, deforestation, and urbanisation, due to its 3.1 billion inhabitants and its enormous growth rates.

The different backgrounds and academic fields of the speakers also led to different descriptions of environmental problems. Economists like *Kawakami Tsuyoshi* or *Niizawa Hidenori* (both from Japan) were most concerned with the cost-effectiveness of environmental policy, whereas ecologists like *Ota Michitaka* (Tokyo/Cambridge) highlighted the gap between human intervention in eco-systems and our limited knowledge of the basic functions of those systems. He stressed the need for continuous learning in order to make ecological principles work in human societies, economies and politics. From a sociological point of view, *Wolf Schluchter* (Germany) emphasised the importance of citizen participation at the municipal level as in the Agenda 21 process. Widening the focus to the national level, *Neil Summerton* (UK), himself a former government official, described the groups of actors in environmental policy including governments. Governments and their political and administrative systems depend on favourable conditions such as a high level of economic development and an advanced ecological consciousness in the population for successfully promoting ecological mod-

ernisation. This was deduced by *Maurie Cohen* (US) from a comparative political science analysis conducted in several OECD countries.

Nearly all speakers agreed that cultural factors like values, habits, education and knowledge are crucial for solving environmental problems. Even the representatives from industry, e.g. Daimler, Siemens, Ebara and NEC, accepted this assumption although they tend to favour technical solutions like the concept of zero-waste factories developed in co-operation with the United Nations University, Tokyo. It turned out that several globally active companies have acknowledged the new tasks arising out of the concept of sustainable development. Representatives from two big German companies presented their ideas of how to take on global responsibility, e.g. by carrying out projects in developing countries. They even acknowledged a responsibility to influence the market in an environmentally sound direction by offering new products and services.

As a final highlight, *Reinhard Loske* from the Wuppertal Institute reported on his study "Sustainable Germany", which was of special interest to the students from abroad, particularly because of his visionary approach. In contrast to the technology-centred Japanese "New Earth 21" concept promoting for instance the sea-dumping of carbon, he presented a "Wuppertal New Earth 21" plan on how to reduce CO₂ emissions through social, political, and technical measures. These include sufficiency strategies aiming at a change in values and consumption patterns.

Excursions

It was a major goal of the summer school to examine local environmental problems in the region. The triangle of Halle, Dessau, Bitterfeld was one of the most polluted areas in the former GDR and has experienced a tremendous improvement in its environmental quality after German unification. Nevertheless, there still remain environmental problems that could be examined by the students during their excursions: open-cast lignite mining, problems of water supply in the region, waste treatment within the *Dual System*, and the modernisation of the chemical industry. The choice of sites corresponded with the subjects of the working groups, and the excursions were well prepared in special lectures by experts from the region. The excursions were evaluated by the students' working groups during the final days of the summer school.

Work Groups

The students were given the opportunity to profit from each other's knowledge in three work groups: energy, water problems, and waste and recycling. With the aid of tutors, the groups worked on a description of the problems, of the social actors involved, and on possible solutions. This

work was documented in written reports and in oral presentations on the last day of the summer school.

In its report, the water group analysed the local problems of water supply (partly caused by the construction of an ICE high speed railway track through a water and nature conservation area near Halle) and recommended an intensified participation of local citizens and NGOs. The cases examined showed that environmental groups in this region have little influence on large-scale technical projects like power plants or chemical factories. Industrial interests carry even more weight than in Western Germany in the face of high unemployment rates in the region.

Analysing the special case of a lignite fired power plant in Schkopau, the energy group criticised the high subsidies for such a centralised solution with an efficiency rate of only 40%. These subsidies could have been spent much more effectively on decentralised combined heat and power stations with efficiency rates of about 90%.

Solutions to waste problems were studied by the waste and recycling group. The group praised the German *Dual System* for providing some incentives for the reduction of packaging materials. However, they criticised the system for not urging consumers to avoid waste in the first place. Moreover, the recycling plant visited during one of the excursions presented an example of downcycling of light plastics which revealed the impossibility of fully-closed substance cycles in this field.

In conclusion, this pilot project of an eco-summer school was remarkably successful in more than one way. First of all, the mixed structure of participants from different cultures, disciplines and with different levels of knowledge proved a good prerequisite for some highly motivated work, especially in the work groups. Secondly, the summer school encouraged the students to engage in environmental issues. Even those who had never dealt with environmental topics before developed a strong interest in these problems, especially after visiting a power plant, a waste recycling factory etc. Thirdly, the intercultural exchange enriched discussions by its international perspective on the problems. And last but not least, it allowed the students to experience that the way people communicate depends on their cultural background. Debating and criticising are not universal features of co-operation but vary according to cultural background.

The summer school is planned to be held every year at changing locations and with varying environmental subjects.

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