

Regional Centres of Expertise

on education for sustainable development

RCE OKAYAMA

Geography

Okayama City, located on the north shore of the Seto Inland Sea in Japan, is a major transportation hub in the Chugoku and Shikoku areas. The city has a population of approximately 670,000 and an area of 660 square kilometres, making it the second largest city in the Chugoku region.



Regional challenges

Since the Meiji era, the Okayama region has been developing steadily as the centre of Okayama Prefecture. It has acquired business, educational, cultural, political and administrative functions and has all the facilities necessary for a comfortable lifestyle.

On the other hand, the Okayama region faces problems similar to those of other Japanese cities.

- Projections show an expanding aging population with one out of five people in the city being a senior citizen in 2010. If this projection bears out, the region's economic power would decrease and the burden of social security would become heavier.
- Several urban problems, such as migration from the midtown to suburban areas, destruction of farmland and natural environment in the suburbs, and severe traffic congestion from over-dependence on private transportation, are becoming serious threats to the sustainable development of the city.

RCE Okayama's perceived role in the region

Various organisations and institutions have carried out educational programmes focusing on the environment and intercultural understanding. However, as the content and frequency of such programmes have varied considerably, it is difficult to judge whether they have been effectively implemented in the region. Consequently, consultations among organisations connected with ESD, in response to the launch of DESD, led to the creation of the Okayama ESD Project. This project aims to effectively promote ESD activities which reflect the nature of the Okayama region.

The activities of RCE Okayama are virtually the same as those of the Okayama ESD Project. With the acknowledgement of the Okayama region as an RCE in June 2005;

- it will be easier for groups or individuals engaging in ESD-related activities in the region to create a flexible network for their common interests and purposes;
- groups or individuals can access broader and more complex views and can engage in their activities across a wider area, as well as in a more meaningful way, through exchange of information and interaction with others both within and outside the region;
- in cooperation with higher education institutions, such as universities, a higher level of knowledge and/or technique can be utilised; and
- by exchanging information with RCEs around the world through the United Nations University, various groups involved in RCE Okayama, including administrative bodies, citizens' groups, educational institutions and business organisations, will be encouraged to cooperate for higher quality ESD activities.

Okayama



Goal of the RCE

The goal of the Okayama ESD Project is to promote ESD which reflects the nature of the region and to create a community where people learn, think and act together, through interaction and cooperation between people involved in ESD within and outside the region.

Short-term objectives

- To raise understanding and awareness of SD and this project among organisations, groups and individuals in the region, and to increase active participation by affiliated organisations.
- To support organisations involved in ESD and strengthen partnerships with them.
- To create ESD-related programmes or curricula which reflect the nature of the region.
- To promote activities of each organisation involved in ESD.
- To foster Primary Organisations which will serve as the backbone for ESD promotion in the region.

Long-term objectives

- To designate and foster specific organisations as Primary Organisations to promote ESD in the region. These organisations would play a central role in enhancing the capabilities of each affiliated organisation to implement ESD in accordance with its characteristics and abilities.
- To raise awareness and understanding of SD among all people living and working in the Okayama region.
- To create a sustainable regional society through ESD.

Organisations involved

There are many formal, non-formal and informal educational organisations already involved or that are being involved in RCE Okayama. A few of the many organisations are Okayama City, Okayama University, Okayama University of Science, Okayama UNESCO Association, Conference of Okayama International NGO Network, Okayama Chamber of Commerce, Sanyo Shimbun, Okayama Ichinomiya High School, Kyoyama Junior High School and the Kyoyama Community Center.

Decision-making structure

The Council of the Okayama ESD Promotion Commission will formulate plans for the promotion and implementation of activities, while the Steering Board will designate and support Primary Organisations and Activities involved in ESD, facilitate collaboration, exchange and communication between organisations involved in the RCE, and raise awareness and understanding of ESD throughout the region. The ESD Research Group will research and investigate methods which will effectively promote ESD activities that reflect the nature of the region. The Secretariat of the Commission is the Environmental Conservation Division, City of Okayama and its budget will come from money entrusted by Okayama City and other external subsidies. Activities will be decided at the Council and subsequent operation will be managed by the Steering Board.

Activities

Activities in 2005 included the natural energy school, cleanup of traditional rural landscapes, visit to a firefly habitat, environmental education activities on freshwater quality and fauna, collection of recyclable waste, visit to a waste treatment plant, investigation of wild animals and plants, examination of water and air pollution and environmental study on the theme of resource circulation.

Forthcoming activities include:

- support for Primary Organisations and Activities;
- creating a network to promote information exchange and collaboration between organisations;
- improving ESD knowledge, understanding and abilities among instructors of each organisation;
- improving knowledge and understanding of ESD in the region as a whole; and
- creating and operating ESD learning programmes and curricula.

Achievements

The Okayama ESD Project has sponsored or co-sponsored the following activities so far:

- Establishment of the Okayama ESD Promotion Commission.
- Round table discussion in Okayama and a workshop on first steps of ESD.
- Leadership workshop on ESD.
- Okayama International ESD workshop.
- Mini-symposium on a sustainable society.
- ESD learning seminar.
- ESD lecture series for community centre workers.
- ESD lecture series for the general public at community centres.

For more information

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