

Environmental Education and Ecotourism to Preserve the Seto Inland Sea Area

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One of the most vital challenges facing humans today is to halt and then reverse the destructive effects of our modern society on the environment. The past two centuries has seen the emergence and peak of the industrial revolution. Along with this came the unbridled pursuit of wealth and economic growth, the demands of increasing consumerism and lifestyles utilising technology and products which require raw materials and chemicals that when improperly discarded can find their way into the environment and ecosystem causing pollution and green-house gases.

Through the process of education in schools this trend can be reversed by bringing about awareness and changes in culture and attitudes with new methods of re-cycling and disposal. With an active ecotourism program more immediate changes could result through the process of catering for visitors who admire, enjoy and fully utilise a clean and friendly environment. With the introduction of the important role of ecotours and creating eco-friendly industries, benefits could go to the local population and create examples to the wider world of what can be achieved through the use of alternative methods in industry.

The Seto Inland Sea is an area covering 600 islands and a water paradise surrounded by land where societies live in small villages to large cities. It is considered to be unique and valuable in the world. There already exist many resorts, hotels and recreational facilities which provide locals and visitors with a calm and peaceful environment which must be preserved for the present and future generations.

Any potential environmental problems facing the Seto Inland Sea area must be fully addressed now to preserve one of the most unique and important regions in the world. Industrial and population growth in Japan over the past fifty years has put pressure on this area. The most notable cases being the reclamation of land and the Phoenix Scheme (waste and garbage disposal) in the Osaka Bay area of the Sea. The large population living and working on the coast surrounding the Sea produces huge amounts of industrial and domestic waste daily. Due to the difficulty and costs of other methods of disposal, the sea and the islands within have been used as sites for waste disposal. This practice is recognized as having very long-term detrimental effects on those who rely on the environment for their livelihood. With the realisation that dioxins and environmental hormones reach far into the eco-system in a pernicious and damaging way, and the memory and fears of previous experiences elsewhere, citizens have protested to Governments over a very long period, often only to be ignored. A recent case which has attracted a great deal of attention and public support is Teshima Island's fight to reverse the damage from waste disposed there over a long period. The Teshima citizen's fight and success has set standards which Governments must

take heed of to change or introduce laws and regulations which make it impossible for a repetition of such practices. It is their legal and moral responsibility to do so.

An existing eco-tourist attraction is the Awaji Yumebutai, which is being used for part of this conference and is an example of the commercial use of reclaimed land following excavations for building the new Kansai airport. This facility includes a Hotel, a shopping area, a music hall, a gallery a display hall and parkland for recreation. It is available for environmental education and ecotourism purposes.

In Teshima Island's case, once cleaned up, commercial interests could be found to design ways of reclaiming the damaged area for similar future eco-friendly use and profit, with taxes being used to pay for the clean up work and for compensating the residents. Another type of environmental restoration and preservation is the Biotope, a bio-diverse environment created by people to be populated by plants, insects and animals. Also there is a campaign underway called the Olive Tree Plantation Fund. This is a project resulting in a million olive trees being planted around the coasts of the Seto Inland Sea, each tree costing 1,000 yen to buy and plant. The progress of these kinds of projects could be used by children for environmental education and future ecotours. It is up to all of us to act. Every one of us, private or public citizen has a role to play in turning around the environmental degradation through education, preservation and our own personal example and efforts.