Driving Sustainability in the Ancient Capital

KUFS × SDGs



Global Challenges, Local Solutions

Sustainability has become something of a buzzword; a panacea for the challenges that we all face in the 21st century. You cannot have failed to notice the Sustainable Development Goals. Established by the United Nations in 2015, the SDGs represent an ambitious set of 17 targets with a delivery date of 2030. The SDG symbol is everywhere—a roulette-wheel of 17 colors that adorns pin badges and corporate websites alike.

The goals are global in their scope, but save for world leaders, industrialists and plutocrats, our reach as individuals remains strictly local, largely limited to the communities in which we live, work and serve. So what CAN be done at the level of community engagement?

For a few weeks in the autumn of 2021, as part of the Community Engagement Program (CEP), students from the Department of Global Studies at KUFS spent time with 11 change makers that are trying to make a difference to the communities that they live in, in a way that echoes with the aims of the SDGs.

These people—many of whom have built lives and businesses for themselves in a place far from home—include organic farmers, tea masters, hoteliers at the pinnacle of the hospitality industry, a one-woman NPO fighting for animal rights, and local entrepreneurs seeking an ethical and sustainable way to make great beer and coffee. They all have a tale to tell, and it's a tale worth hearing.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Bold Initiatives

A Zero Waste Life

Walking the Zero Way

When we think about the future of our planet, we cannot avoid environmental issues. It is said that we can take a small but important step to solve some of these problems with a serious examination of “waste" in our daily lives. The CEP students spent time with Bianca Y. Michaels and Mona Neuhauss, two pioneering environmental activists in Japan, to think about the current situation of the waste problem, based on the theme of Zero Waste, an environmental movement that is being promoted on a global scale.





More plastic than fish in the ocean?

If everyone in Japan says “it’s just one straw,” that still means that 126.49 million straws get used and thrown away.—Mona Neuhauss

According to the World Bank, the amount of garbage thrown away across the globe every year is about 2 billion tons. Did you know that Japan ranks fourth in the world for municipal waste and second in the world for disposable plastic containers? This means that we are unknowingly contributing to environmental pollution, resource shortages, and CO_2 emissions caused by waste incineration.

The situation surrounding plastic waste is particularly serious. Mona, a spokesperson for Japan's first zero-waste supermarket, told the students that only 9% of the world's plastic is recycled. This is despite the fact that plastic essentially does not break down in nature. Of the remainder, 12% is incinerated and 79% is left in the natural environment, either in landfills or is simply thrown away*1.

Plastic in the wild causes serious pollution in the ocean. Microplastics, which have been shredded to less than 5 mm in size by factors such as ultraviolet absorption, flow out of cities into the ocean through drains and rivers. "There have already been several reports of fish and seabirds mistaking plastic for food and eating it, which could affect our health in the future," says Mona, who quoted from an estimate that by 2050, the mass of plastic in the ocean will be greater than the mass of fish.

The era of pursuing convenience, producing and consuming as much as we want, and throwing away garbage is over. Time is running out.

Reference: *1. *Science Advances (www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.1700782)*



Bianca Y. Michaels
Sustainability Consultant and #Impactivist



Totoya Zero Waste Store

totoya-zerowaste.com





Mona Neuhauss

PR/Communications Manager, Totoya inc. Founder of No Plastic Japan



Recycling: The LAST resort

Some of you may be wondering why the keyword "Recycle", which is so important for environmental issues, has not been mentioned so far. When the previous four Rs are not possible, Bianca explains, only then should we consider the next R: "Recycle". "This idea that we can just recycle everything is a big misconception, because a lot of energy is used in transportation and recycling. It's really the last resort."

Bianca is so passionate when getting her points across—she thinks it is vital that we become aware that every single action we take in our daily lives has an impact on something and someone else on the planet.

Food waste: an ethical issue

The concept of "Zero Waste" can serve as a signpost for dealing with today's waste problems. Bianca, an #Impactivist and sustainability consultant, founder of start-up Zero Waste Japan and a committed follower of the Zero Waste way, helps put us at ease, "No worries! Just be aware of the 5 Rs and you'll be fine."

Bianca says the most important thing is to "Refuse" (to have the courage to refuse disposables and unneeded packaging), followed by "Reduce" (to use your own bottle and try not to produce garbage) and "Reuse" (to reuse as much as possible through flea markets, sharing and repairing).

So what's the next R? "Rot," or the process of composting food waste or food scraps. Food waste in Kyoto accounts for 38% of household combustible waste, but because it contains a lot of water, it consumes more energy when incinerated. Therefore, in environmentally advanced countries, it has already become a standard practice to compost food waste and turn it into nutrients for the soil. Bianca suggests that Japan should introduce a national composting system as soon as possible.

She also warns about the problem of "food loss," where food that is still edible is thrown away. Food loss in Japan is about 6 million tons per year, which is about 1.5 times the amount of global food aid provided by the World Food Programme. "Each citizen throws away about one cup of rice (about 130g) of food every day. Considering the fact that we depend on imports for about 60% of our food, we need to change our mindset as soon as possible."

Change the way you shop

Totoya, Japan's first zero-waste supermarket, opened in Kyoto City in July 2021. When you enter the store, the first thing you will see is fresh fruit and vegetables set out as you'd find them at a farmer's market—so you get whatever is in season and nothing is wrapped in plastic.

The store does not provide any single-use containers or packaging, so customers need to bring their own bags and containers. If they don't have anything with them, Totoya rents out shopping bags, jars and stainless steel bentō boxes for a small deposit. Dried goods such as pasta, grains and nuts are sold by weight from dispensers (made from wood and glass) and customers simply fill their container with the required amount. RFID tags, which are a type of tracking system that uses smart barcodes, are then stuck on the container to detect the container's weight from the in-store scales.

Everything at Totoya is aimed at reducing waste to zero. Totoya also seeks to tackle food loss, which is a major problem for supermarkets. Mona adds, "We make use of fresh produce before it nears its use-by-date, and cook it up into deli items or our lunch and dinner menu, which customers can enjoy at the restaurant space located towards the back of the store."

The company has even filed to patent the design of their shopping trolleys, which are made from scrap wood and fold into a variety of configurations to make shopping by weight easier for the customer. Shopping for groceries is indeed a major part of our day-to-day living, but zero waste touches on almost every aspect of our lives. We need someone that understands how all of this fits together!



interviewer:
Biei

Totoya is truly the most beautiful supermarket I've ever been to. There was no sight of packaging nor single-use plastics and that leaves more space for various kinds of food than I'd expected. Shopping there made me feel like I joined their community and contributed to making the planet a better place all together. The best part was its warm atmosphere. You'll feel welcomed and connected to the staff, and even the other customers. Satisfaction is probably the biggest reason why I loved Totoya. I highly recommend going there to take your first step to a better future.

An Agricultural Revolution

Feeding Our Future Selves

Organic farming is sustainable, kind to the environment, and good for your health. So why aren't we all knee-deep in organic produce already? The CEP students talked with Chuck and Tyas to find out.



Chuck Kayser
Organic Farmer / Midori Farm

The Accidental Farmer

Ask yourself three questions: Do you feel good about what you do? Are you providing something good for the community? Is it beneficial for the environment?—Chuck Kayser

Born and raised near Chicago, Illinois, Chuck Kayser never planned on becoming an organic farmer. Over a decade ago he started growing vegetables on a hillside overlooking Kutsuki, a village in Shiga Prefecture, and what began as a hobby quickly turned into a passion.

Organic farming eschews agrochemical fertilizers and pesticides, as they are seen as damaging to everything they come into contact with. "It is what's best for one's own health and for the health of the environment. Chemical pesticides are not safe. Not only for the people who are spraying them, but also the people who are eating the vegetables and the people downriver from the farm because the pesticides are washed off from the farm into the river," explains Chuck.

Instead of chemicals, organic farmers like Chuck remove pests by hand or control the pest population with organic sprays made with environmentally friendly dish soap, neem oil, and pepper. It is harder work than chemical farming, which is why he is so happy when people volunteer to help out, living and working on the farm for weeks and sometimes months at a time.

It's clearly a harder path to walk, but it is sustainable. Sustainable agriculture can help make SDG#2: Zero Hunger—a reality. Japan also needs to be more self-sufficient when it comes to food. Currently just over 60% of Japan's food is imported from overseas. Organic farms, and Japanese rural communities in general, need young people to move away from their urban lives and experience the joys and hardships of living and farming in the countryside.



In order to contribute to all of these goals, Chuck established Midori Farm a few years ago. It is a place to sell vegetables, host volunteers and run tours and events. He hopes to give people the opportunity to learn more about living sustainably, as well as to experience nature and appreciate locally produced organic agriculture.



Chuck offers pointers for people looking to make a difference as a consumer. "Vote with your wallet. Buy organic and you're not only voting for an organic farmer; you're also not supporting the conventional farming industry and all the things they invest in such as pesticides, etc. You're supporting people who are protecting the environment; you're not supporting people who are destroying it."

Ultimately it boils down to an ethical life. "It's important to me that I am able to look myself in the mirror. I enjoy what I do, I think I serve the community and I believe organic farming helps the environment. I feel pretty good about that."



interviewer: Misa

Chuck is working on popularizing organic agriculture from Midori Farm, and he faces a real challenge: in the EU 8.5% of farming is organic compared to just 0.5% in Japan. I was really interested in his project to involve friends/neighbors in his composting project. A lot of people just throw kitchen garbage away, and if they knew about composting they would see it as a resource. Having listened to Chuck, I now want to participate in hands-on events and learn more so that I can make environmentally friendly choices.



Mandokoro: A Tea-Time Capsule

The first Belgian to have become certified as a *Nihoncha* (Japanese tea) Instructor. Tyas runs The Tea Crane, a specialty store for organic, natural and pesticide-free Japanese tea.

A chance encounter with the *Book of Five Rings* by Miyamoto Musashi inspired a teenage Tyas to pursue a fascination with all things related to Japanese culture. As a young adult, he moved to Japan and in order to deepen his understanding of Japan's complex cultural traditions, he trained in *kendō* and *karate*, and studied both *noh* performance-practice and the rite-of-tea (*sadō*), for which he has been certified as a tea master in the Enshū-ryū tradition of tea.

Located about 90 minutes' drive from central Kyoto, Mandokoro is a hamlet nestled in a lush valley on the outer reaches of Higashiomi City, Shiga Prefecture. Mandokoro is one of the few historical tea villages still in operation in Japan, and the leaves they produce are of outstanding quality. Tyas and his friend Ren showed the CEP students around the tea gardens in the village one sunny day in October.

Tyas pointed out several characteristics that make Mandokoro perfect for growing tea—after all, it as a tea tradition stretching back some 600 years. It is 400m above sea level, and due to the altitude, the village is often covered in a morning mist. The inclined tea fields are fed by fresh, clean water that flows into Lake Biwa. The CEP students can attest to how good the water tastes here!

Tea grown in Mandokoro is characterized by completely organic and pesticide-free cultivation that does not rely on any chemical fertilizers. The villagers are loathe to use any artificial agents that might end up in the stream, which would eventually make its way into Japan's largest freshwater lake. Instead of chemicals, in Mandokoro they use all-natural fertilizers such as pampas grass and fallen leaves, along with canola oil lees, which combine to form a protective and nurturing mold that helps the tea trees make it through the tough Mandokoro winter.

"These tea trees are grown from heirloom seeds not cuttings, which produce clones, so each tea tree has its own character which translates to a distinct flavor, similar to the effect of the *terrior* in wine production," explains Tyas. "Some of the tea trees in the village are over 300 years old and these low tea bushes, which you can see are rather haphazardly arranged, create this very beautiful hillside scenery. The gradient that they grow on also means the tea harvest needs to be picked by hand." This contrasts with a modern tea plantation on flat land cleared for tea cultivation with long, evenly-spaced hedgerows designed for mass production and ease of access for machines during harvest time.

That said, the tea community in Mandokoro does not think of themselves as "organic farmers"—they are just taking the same approach and using the same techiniques as previous generations, as the result is great tea as well as healthy and vital tea trees. Tyas found what he was looking for in Mandokoro. "I admire, and thus wish to acknowledge, honor and support the aspirations and the unstinted labors of small, independent, local Japanese-tea farmers. Artisan tea can preserve the health of our bodies and protect our environment because they are produced by safe and natural methods."



interviewer: Prateep

Hailing from Thailand, this CEP was a great opportunity for me to learn about the SDGs in Kyoto and beyond. In Mandokoro I experienced the world of the tea from Tyas and Ren. Their presentation really opened my vision and my mind. Mandokoro is one of the best places that I have visited in Japan, with its rich nature and beautiful environment. I highly recommend Mandokoro to anyone who is thinking of coming to visit Japan. You'll learn so much about tea tradition!



Tyas Sōsen
Tea Master;
Proprietor, The Tea Crane

The person on the left is Ren Yamagata. She was a city girl who moved to Mandokoro 8 years ago to help revitalize the organic tea industry in the village through PR and promotional activities. She now lives in a 180 year-old house with a thatched *kayabuki* roof.

Sustainability in the Beverage Industry

Coffee and (if you are old enough to legally imbibe) beer are some of the most enduring and popular beverages. Until quite recently, these markets were dominated by brands that supplied generic and somewhat characterless products to the drinking public. Nowadays things are changing, and we are seeing specialty coffee, microbreweries and other artisanal drinks that display the individuality of their creators popping up all over. Kyoto is an artisan's paradise, and these Kyoto-based innovators are finding critical and commercial success with business models that encompass the SDGs.

Opened in 2020 by Brant Tichko and his two partners-in-beans, Coyote is a real farm-to-table enterprise, selling coffee beans purchased directly from a small farming cooperative in the northwest of El Salvador, a tiny country in Central America. "Despite its excellent quality, coffee from the northwest of the country is not widely known due to the lack of a good distribution system. By buying directly from them, we can convey their passion for coffee and its deliciousness, and by eliminating the profits taken by middlemen, we can increase the income of the farmers."



So what does the coffee taste like? CEP student Nao can attest, "It is incredibly fruity and fresh. The taste serves as a reminder that coffee is made from a bright red fruit." Your beverage comes with a small card bearing the name of the farmer and a QR code that you can scan to find out more about the farmer's life, personality and approach to cultivation.

Coyote's commitment to sustainability goes beyond coffee. Misa points out that the furnishings are made from recycled materials and customers buying beans are encouraged to bring their own container. Also the store is 100% vegan. "Their 'egg' sandwich-made from pumpkin and tōfu-was a revelation. It was amazing!!"





A tale of two drinks



Kyoto Brewing Co. has a similar story. Ben Falck and two old friends from his days teaching English in Aomori Prefecture—inspired and emboldened in equal measure by their love of homebrew beer—decided to take the plunge and build a microbrewery in central Kyoto back in 2015.

"We started with a concept of brewing the beers we want to drink, starting with combining Belgian yeast with American hops. Our goal is to create beers that are flavourful yet balanced, and most importantly unique," says Ben. This uniqueness also extends to their names: *Ichigo Ichie* (Once in a lifetime), *6 Day Weekend*, *Farmers Table*, etc. They all sound playful and capture the imagination before even a drop is drunk.

The beer industry is fiercely competitive. Innovation alone is not enough to remain relevant and be sustainable. In order to be suitably positioned to add value to society, the partners put a lot of thought into their corporate ethics. All malt waste is recycled as fertilizer or composted for farmers, and their organic waste was offered as feed to the animal keepers at Kyoto Zoo, to help alleviate the funding constraints they were placed under at the start of the pandemic in 2020.



Ben adds, "Our environmental impact also influenced our decision to shift over to canning on our production line, as cans are much lighter to ship than bottled beer, which helps to reduce our carbon footprint and our aluminum cans are recyclable." Kyoto Brewing Co. is representative of a new breed of enterprise capable of balancing ethics and the needs of the environment against profit and growth. Great people making great products can change society for the better.

Fresh Insights

Justice, Peace and Equality

The greatest challenges facing humanity



Holding court

The word "sustainability" makes us think of our relationship with the environment, but without justice and peace, our society itself becomes unsustainable. The SDGs state that it is crucial to provide "access to justice" for all and to protect basic human rights in order to achieve a society where people are free from discrimination and violence.

"Start by looking at the constitution," says lawyer Makoto Yamamura. "Our constitution is a fundamental framework for justice. It is the supreme law of the land, ensuring equality and peace as rights for the citizen that no-one, not even the government, can take away."

To deepen their understanding of justice, Makoto took the CEP students to observe proceedings at the Kyoto District Court. Makoto explains, "Trials are conducted on the principle of presumption of innocence—the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty based on evidence presented by the prosecution. Sometimes we are so sympathetic to the victims that we get emotional and treat the accused during the trial with prejudice, but that is not true justice."

The experience of observing a trial can remind us of the challenge of respecting human rights with an unclouded mind.



interviewer: Issei

The Way of Tea has been a path to physical and mental well-being for about 450 years. However, the number of tea practitioners has been decreasing. Mike Hardy is trying to reverse this downward trend. I respect his aims and the experience changed my thinking and broadened my perspective. This was also the case when discussing a legal problem from Makoto, the lawyer. Given the situation, I was surprised to find myself sympathizing with the accused despite knowing she had committed a crime. I want more people to know about the presumption of innocence.

The universe in your hands

Originally a native of Kentucky, Michael Hardy Sogetsu illustrated how the Japanese tradition of *Chadō*—the Way of Tea—can help us lead fuller, healthier lives. *Chadō* is a tradition built around the serving of matcha that teaches practical skills, philosophy, culture, and communication. It was established during the 16th century, which was a time of social upheaval in Japan. Amidst this uncertainty, the *chashitsu* (tea room) was a secluded oasis of peace, without distinction of status, where a person could be physically and mentally refreshed.

At Mike's invitation, we turned off our cell phones and entered the *chashitsu*, a space made with natural materials such as wood, clay, and paper. The sound from the kettle and the light through the *shōji* was pleasant. Combined with the sweet, the matcha was very refreshing and the act of drinking tea in such a setting was a marked counterpoint to our busy lives. By briefly stepping away from our everyday distractions, *Chadō* is an opportunity to reconnect with the moment, with others, and with nature.





interviewer: Hyemi

Yui surprised me when she explained how pets are treated by some people. Since I was little, I assumed all pets were adopted by well-educated owners. However, when I heard there are pet shops selling pets like Christmas presents I was shocked. I am a person who loves animals and cares about them with all my heart. I never wanted a pet because I wasn't sure I could care for them well. So the opportunity to volunteer and help out is priceless and I have Yui to thank for opening my eyes.



Knowledge is Paw-er!

Justice can take many forms. Yui Onishi is the dynamic founder of Pawer., a one-woman NPO dedicated to animal welfare and eliminating culling and euthanasia (*satsushobun* in Japanese) of stray cats and dogs, as well as spreading awareness in order to make a better society by reducing the numbers of animals that end up at shelters.



"In the UK and California, which are advanced societies for animal welfare, pets are generally acquired from shelters or purchased from reliable breeders, and pet stores do not sell puppies and kittens from puppy mills," observes Yui. On the other hand, in Japan, the pet shop industry is worth 1.5 trillion yen and the big pet shop chains are focused on selling cute puppies and kittens at the highest prices, with little or no owner education. Unwanted pets are often abandoned, leading to another problem: strays. Buying a pet on impulse because it's cute is a recipe for disaster if that person is not ready for what might be a 15-year commitment.

Yui also pointed out the problem of stray cats. "Cats have a very high reproductive rate, and more than 80% of all pets destroyed in Japan are cats. Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the solution to preventing a population explosion of stray cats in particular."

CEP student Kevin shared, "It's great that Yui is sharing knowledge and working to educate people about pet ownership. The more we know, the more likely we are to make better decisions."

For more information: pawer.jp

The Future of Hospitality

Sustainable Luxury?



We all have some criteria when choosing a hotel: location, price, room size, facilities and services. What if we added sustainability as an important factor? According to industry leaders, that is exactly where the market is going. Increasingly, today's guest wants a hotel experience that mirrors the way they want society to look, act and feel.

The CEP class visited two global luxury hotels in Kyoto to learn about their innovative approaches. Opened in 2015 as the first luxury hotel property in Kyoto, The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto is an exemplar of the elite brand of Marriott International, the world's largest hotel chain. Park Hyatt Kyoto, which opened in 2019, is a small luxury hotel that represents the flagship brand of Hyatt Hotels & Resorts. Both Marriott International and Hyatt are proactively working towards the SDG targets with their SERVE360 and World of Care initiatives, respectively. These goals help make us aware of how today, true luxury does not mean being extravagant and wasteful.



Park Hyatt Kyoto

The students were really impressed with how at both luxury hotels, in order to provide a first-class service to their guests, top management were quick to acknowledge that their most valuable assets were their employees. Mark de Leeuwerk, General Manager of Park Hyatt Kyoto, says, "We care for our people, so that they can be their best." Xavi Gonzalez, General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto, adds, "We foster a work environment where diversity is valued, and quality of life is enhanced. Individual aspirations are fulfilled, and all of this adds to the charm and appeal of us."

Speaking of diversity, 44% of the managers at Park Hyatt Kyoto are women. In Japan, the number of female managers is less than 15%, one of the lowest rates in the developed world. It is clear that these hotels have taken a progressive stance and are contributing to female empowerment in the workplace.

♀44%
of the managers at Park Hyatt Kyoto are women.

Environmental protection is an issue close to home that guests themselves can contribute to. Marriott International has set goals to reduce water consumption by 15%, carbon emissions by 30%, and food waste by 50% by 2025. Progress towards these goals is tracked from corporate headquarters, and advanced technology in hotel kitchens helps prevent unnecessary food waste.

By 2025 Marriott International will cut CO_2 emissions by 30%.

CO_2 ↓↓↓ 30%

Sustainability can also be a factor when deciding how and where to construct a hotel property. Park Hyatt Kyoto is situated on the grounds of Kyoyamato, a Michelin-starred *ryōtei* (restaurant) that has been in business for more than 140 years, and by dividing the hotel building into multiple low-rise floors, the hotel and the surrounding environment seem to become one with the Higashiyama hillside. The hotel and the restaurant share a view of the Kyoto cityscape, and the historic Japanese architecture and gardens of Kyoyamato have been preserved for future generations.

Furthermore, both properties are committed to respecting local values and being a part of the community. In the U.S., Hyatt is working to help young people from minority communities find employment, and Marriott International is promoting volunteerism aiming for 15 million hours of global community contributions by 2025. As for community engagement closer to home, The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto supports animal welfare through donations to Pawer.(see p.7)

In Kyoto, there are more and more experience programs for guests themselves to immerse themselves in the culture and nature of the community where the hotel is located. The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto offers a bicycle tour to explore the city's sights and less-visited backstreets, where guests can connect with residents and learn about their lifestyle, customs, crafts, and the natural environment of the ancient capital.

Both Xavi and Mark acknowledge that sustainable hotel management at the luxury level is possible only when there is a happy, stable and mutually beneficial relationship between the property and the local community. The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto and Park Hyatt Kyoto are at the forefront of creating a virtuous cycle for the revival of their communities as well as for Kyoto as an international destination in a post-COVID world.



The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto



interviewer: Kazuto

Luxury hotels such as The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto maintain the highest standards in their relations with their customers and between their own employees. Sustainable luxury can mean ditching plastic and designing environmentally-friendly kitchens. I was pleasantly surprised to see how proud they are of their team as when I asked what your unique strengths were, they immediately answered, "The Ladies and Gentlemen of The Ritz Carlton, Kyoto"—I will definitely visit the hotel in the near future!



interviewer: Nao

I was interested in how Park Hyatt Kyoto cares for the mental health of their employees. This is the very top of the service industry, with many guests every day to take care of, but they emphasized that taking care of yourself is the first and last thing. That is one reason why Park Hyatt Kyoto is striving to improve the work/life balance of their employees.