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Design for Sustainability



**GEN-Japan  
2025 Mini-EDE  
Final Report**



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Gaia Education  
Ecovillage  
Design Education  
Programme



# GEN-Japan 2025 Mini-EDE Final Report: Contents

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# CourseOverview

## Course Overview (up to 200 words):

GEN-Japan has held the certified EDE programs since 2017.

From September to November 2025, each session of GEN-Japan Mini EDE ran for three nights and four days per month. The appeal for participants lay in staying at two dynamic sites while learning directly from 12 authorities about 4 dimensions.

The September and November ones took place in an urban ecovillage, the Azone Suzuka Community. The October one was held at the “Small Earth Project” site near Tokyo ; that involves preserving traditional terraced rice fields through partnerships with students and companies from Tokyo.

Another defining feature of the program is to learn practically relationship-building by “the mutual listening dialogue.”

Running sustainable initiatives requires its communication platform, where anything can be talked openly and relaxingly among members. Participants particularly appreciated that the three-week period between each three-night, four-day monthly retreat and the next session allowed them to apply what they learned in sessions to review and reform their own sites or workplaces.

## Participants:

Based on this proven approach, this session gathered nine participants ranging from their 30s to 60s: including two eco-village management members, a municipal community policy division staff, and welfare facility staff. Participants have kept their networking to support together since they graduated.

## Course rhythms :

The first day, 12:00 acceptance. 13:00 to 15:00 check-in and exchange of home-works and challenges with



breaks.15:00-1700 visits with orientation to local sites. 17:00 to 18:15 free time and taking a shower 18:15-19:30 a night meal and rest, 19:30-21:30 practical session. 21:30 social time.

The second day to the third day, 6:00 to 7:00 maditation, diaries, connecting nature, to 8:00 a breakfast and rest, 8:30 to 10:00 lecture or practical group exploring, interaction with host members with breaks. 10:00 to 12:00 group work. 12:00 to 13:15 lunch and rest. 13:30 to 16:00 open lecture and group session. 16:00-18:00 visits a local hot spring, rest and stay in nature.18:15 a night meal and rest. 19:30 to 21:30 practical session. 21:30 social time. The third and forth day in November for designing whole day.

The final day, the same schedule in the morning. After cleaning 13:30 to 15:00 final reflection. 15:00 to 16:00 report writing as the reflection.

## Highlights & challenges of each dimension

### Social Dimension



Through learning to listen to each other after self-exploring, empathy naturally arose for each other's diverse backgrounds, life experiences, and true feelings—aspects that cannot be fully grasped by words or actions alone. This created a warm space for dialogue. Through this process, we sensed the potential within humanity and society. The importance of creating safe spaces for dialogue in community building and management was recognized, leading to the launch of an ongoing study group after the program concluded.

All subjects were covered.



“I had seen conflicts arise from differing opinions during workplace meetings. However, by listening to the true intentions and backgrounds behind those opinions, I prevented division, found common ground through mutual compromise, and improved the workplace environment.”

42. A public servant in Toyonaka city

“A dialogue that engages with death is essential for the growth of humanity at any age.

Maki Kawamura, Terminal Care Doctor”



## Ecological Dimension



Participants directly experienced two distinct initiatives, while the third was covered in lectures. The first was an ecological initiative connecting satoyama restoration with a typical city. The second involved restoring 1,000-year-old rainwater-fed terraced rice fields in a depopulated village—about an hour from Tokyo—by connecting urban students and companies. The third was an urban-permaculture initiative in central Tokyo. Especially at the second venue in October, the connections between deep mountains, satoyama, and humans, and how the culture of people living alongside nature through wisdom throughout history manifests as the terraced rice field landscape, led to a fundamental reexamination of one's own existence and a return to a more open heart.

“For the first time in my life, I walked to the mountain water source. Seeing water seeping from a small hollow, I was moved, realizing even great rivers flowing to the sea begin with such small, quiet movements.”  
Systems Engineer, 35 years old, Male



**Satoyama is a sculpture of Life.**

**Yoshiki Hayashi.**

## Economic Dimension

Participants learned about three distinct initiatives. The first was "eumo", a form of perishable money created for the bridge towards the "empathy-based society" by Kazuhiro Arai, a former international financial professional. Eumo has become populated around Japan, connecting other local currencies. The second was Awa Money, the local currency of the Small Earth Project. The third was the Azone community's large family economy that requires no money. This system has stopped for last two years. They could hear about the process from its creation to its current suspension and learned about the challenges facing new economic models.

Participants has kept in touch with such innovative economic trials since they graduated in the end of 2025

### “An Economics Expressing Altruism、 towards Empathy-based Society. Kazuhiro Arai





## Worldview Dimension

. Participants felt compelled to humbly reexamine their way of life. Through walking meditation, music, and forest walks, they reconnected with nature and others, repeatedly focusing on their deepest selves through daily practices like journaling.

Furthermore, through lectures by Keibo Oiwa and Tetra Tanizaki, they were moved to encounter holistic perspectives, such as biographies of life and humanity viewed from the cosmos. In Masashi Ono's lecture, using optical illusions as examples, they learned about the limits of human perception and became aware of the existence of worlds beyond our knowledge.

**“Humans haven't just lived as humans. We were born from this planet, from all its living and non-living things and the connections between them. Keibo Oiwa (Shinichi Tsuji)**



## Design Studio & Case Study

Participants practically envisioned what initiatives they could launch in their own workplaces after completing the program, drawing on their experiences and learning from the Azone Suzuka Community and



Small Earth Project retreats. Using Azone Suzuka's Satoyama as an example, they also learned model ways to read the site from Mr. Holzhüter, a permaculture expert.

“I never imagined my Satoyama had such potential. Knowing all the materials and resources are right here made me eager to actually try it.” Farmer 29 Male

“I work as a tatami mat craftsman, and it was truly rewarding to rediscover the importance of Japan's traditional techniques and culture itself.” Tatami Craftman 36, Male.

“I want to start maintaining the neglected bamboo grove as soon as I get back. I'm thrilled to have a clear path to start food processing using bamboo.” Retired businessperson, 60, Female

**“Japan's indigenous permaculture; its rich and refined traditional culture and techniques, are unparalleled globally.” Professor Holtzhüter Kyle**





## Lessons Learned

Participants, delighted by the richness of nature, sometimes overestimated their abilities. For examples, one of them couldn't cross ditches she thought she could jump over. At night, with only moonlight, it's best to avoid driving on narrow, unpaved roads.

Graduates enthusiastically joined the kitchen staff. Communication preparing meals together became a renewed opportunity for dialogue practice. They relearned skills, and new networks formed through interactions with participants.

At the same time, meals incorporated vegetables and rice from the graduate community and ecovillage, generating income for them. These also served as souvenirs, much appreciated by participants.





Summary of projects/activities participants intend to engage in, inspired by their attendance in the course :

Some of members running the ecovillage have started organizing the dialogue sessions using “mutual listening discussions” for interested participants, as well as social dinners to foster camaraderie.

“The interpersonal relationships have improved in my team of the Manucipal Community Policy Division during this sessions. I will continue the mutual listening discussions in workplace meetings, monitor progress, and then as a team support the town's community initiatives.”

“I'm planning to move to the Azone Suzuka Community because I want to inherit the charcoal-making techniques, though I previously had no interest in and keep the tradition alive.”

“I will participated in a bamboo grove maintenance workshop and also learned food processing techniques, thinking about how I can make it work in my own hometown.”

“I will keep visiting around different kinds of Ecovillages or Ecovillage-like initiatives for a year.



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## Participant Quotes

### Public servant, 42, Female

“The communal life and the work itself are a continuous series of realizations in this programme. The learning environment is wonderful! As we can immediately experiment and put things into practice while doing discussion work.

“I had seen conflicts arise from differing opinions during workplace meetings. However, by listening to the true intentions and backgrounds behind those opinions, I prevented division, found common ground through mutual compromise, and improved the workplace environment.

I realized that the fundamental, welling-up feelings within humans are the same. How we translate them into action and bring them to fruition—there are a thousand ways for a thousand people. I thought that if we could discuss things, sharing that deep, simple feeling would bring joy and richness. And looking at it this way, the act of speaking itself is actually quite vague and unreliable. To have thought of it as a firm conviction, a firm sense of self—that was a huge mistake. In a good way, I hope we can become able to share that deep part of ourselves relaxingly, freely, without overthinking.

### 50 Farmer, Male

Regarding communication, I felt a tangible step forward within myself. Previously, I'd sought methods to create a state where we could talk to each other, but now I'm moving toward dismantling my own subjectivity, assumptions, and preconceptions one by one. Distinguishing discussion from action clearly—even though I don't fully grasp it yet—feels like something is starting to click in my mind. Creating rules hoping things will work out, only to become constrained, would be putting the cart before the horse. I want to foster an atmosphere where we can start things more irresponsibly and casually. Listening to Kazuhiro Arai, I realized that money itself isn't the problem; it's the rules governing how we handle it that are flawed. Hearing about the money system Arai is trying to create was truly exciting.