

Environment and Spirituality: Walking Pilgrimage

~as a case study of ESD good practice ~

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Exchange culture for conservation

Introduction

The researcher, as a course assistant, participated the Japanese Winter semester course 'Environment and Spirituality: Walking the pilgrimage', organized by the joint work of Wakayama University, Japan and Salisbury University, USA. The main activities of the course was the walking along the Japanese ancient pilgrimage routes "Kumano Kodo" which has been declared as UNESCO World Heritage Site. The course focused on understanding the mutuality between nature and culture, and recognising our inner relationship with natural environment through the walking and intercultural experiences. The researcher examined the course as a good practice of ESD in higher education.

Objectives of the course

- Reflect on our inner relationship with the natural environment
- Recognise our connection with the natural environment through our senses
- Understand the historical, cultural and ecological significance of pilgrimage routes and the nature-cultural integration seen in the Kumano Kodo
- Learn spiritual cultural of Japan (Shingon Esoteric Belief, Shinto, Aminism)
- Work with fellow students from US and Japan and local community members

Kumano Kodo as World Heritage Site

- Officially known as "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range"
- Declared as UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004
- Consists of three sacred sites in the heavily forested Kii Mountains (Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, and Koyasan)
- The three sacred sites are linked by the pilgrimage routes to the ancient capital cities of Kyoto and Nara
- The Pilgrimage routes reflect a unique fusion between Shinto, rooted in the ancient tradition of nature worship in Japan, and Buddhism.
- The area is still part of the living culture of Japan
- The sites are heavily visited and used for ritual purposes (15 million visitors annually)

Map of Kumano Pilgrimage Routes



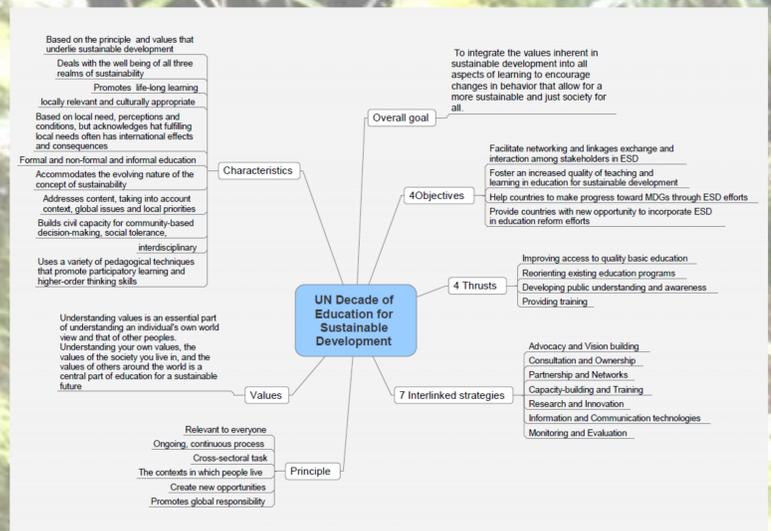
Course details

The course was designed as the environmental ethics class for the undergraduate students of Salisbury University, and took place from 2nd to 17th January, 2011, in Wakayama, Japan.

The course consisted of following activities;

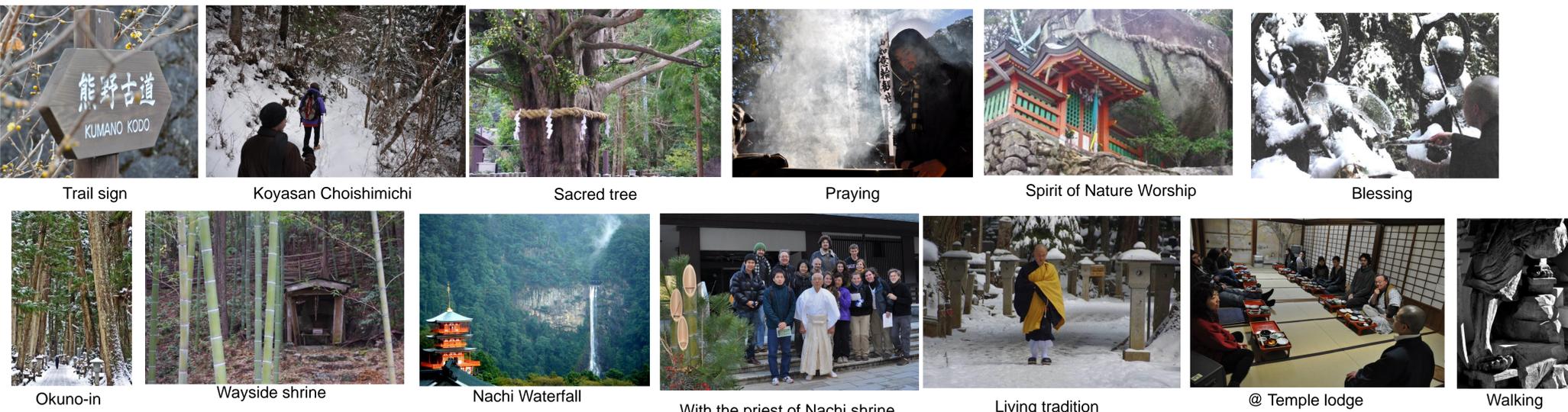
- Walking along the Pilgrimage routes (Nakahechi and Koyasan Choishimichi)
- Staying at the temple lodge
- Keynote speech from the chief priest of Nachi shrine
- Staying at a mountain farm and engaging in the work.
- Tea ceremony
- Cultural exchange programme with local students
- Writing journal, essay, haiku poem etc.

UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development



Discussion

- The course was uniquely designed to understand how culture and nature are in the mutual relationship by the walking along the cultural landscape
- Effectively utilised cultural resources of the world heritage site including intangible cultures to recognise our connection with the natural environment
- The activities can be replicated in other cultural setting and cultural landscapes
- The nature worship tradition and the conventional paradigm of environmental ethics



About ecco <http://www.ecco.org.au/>

ecco: exchanging culture for conservation is a not-for-profit organization based in Australia. Its main aim is to facilitate across-culture and community-based collaboration for sustainability. We facilitate student internship, field studies and volunteer conservation works ranging from re-vegetation/restoration* to environmental artwork. Educational activities (talks, workshops & seminars) and research are also conducted. We are team of professionals based in Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Germany. Our focus is *Local distinctness & Global connection* – by enhancing distinct features of locality, we develop a sense of place - each feature reflects a story of living with particular geography, climate, flora, fauna and other natural features and by linking isolated local areas, we form a global community committed to a common goal of sustainability.

Acknowledgement

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