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OUTLOOK

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Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Finding inspiration in Taiwan

One in a series of stories for Earth Week, April 12-22, 2008

Apr 21, 2008

By Dale Albanese

When I arrived in Taiwan eight months ago, I was pleasantly surprised to find myself living in a country where most households separate trash, recyclables and excess food waste.

At designated times, what sound like ice cream trucks signal residents of a particular area to cluster and meet the trash crew. Truck one picks up your solid waste while truck two grabs and quickly sorts your recyclables. ([See a few photos of the process.](#))

Everyone participates, and best of all, it is completely self-sustaining. The program requires no outside funding because revenue is generated from collected recyclables.

Recycling is naturalized into the lifestyle of many Taiwanese, both in my home of Yilan County, a coastal agricultural province laden with mountains and melons, and in the capital of Taipei, about an hour northwest.

While U.S. cities increasingly are designed around single-use zoning, where business, retail and residential areas are separated by distances requiring a car to get from place to place, in Taiwan, you can leave your apartment, walk to buy your morning soy-milk and egg sandwich (roughly \$1.25), bike or scooter to work downtown and cross a dozen mini-farms managed using sustainable bio-intensive raised-bed practices along the way.

The two cases above represent why I believe there is strong potential for Taiwan to be a frontrunner in the international green movement.

So where to go from here?

Embedding the concept of sustainable living into a growing demand for corporate social responsibility is essential to developing a green lifestyle. Future business and science leaders studying in universities today should live in an educational environment where success in innovation goes hand-in-hand with increasing the demand for, and access to, a sustainable lifestyle.

With this goal in mind, I am developing a social business intended to make the integration of sustainable practices a fundamental

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Just one example of Taiwan's eco-friendly way of life is the efficient use of land. Mini-farms like this one can be found between most buildings, on the roadside, riverside or along the train tracks.

Photographer Dale Albanese

About Dale

Dale Albanese, a 2007 graduate of Ohio University, agreed to write this essay for *Outlook* as part of its Earth Week coverage.

Currently fulfilling a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship in Taiwan, he is using his time abroad to learn about Taiwan's sustainability practices and establish a social business to further the green movement.

Dale earned a bachelor's degree in international studies and English last June. He already is well-traveled, having studied abroad in Shandong, China, and taught English in Ecuador.

While at Ohio University, Dale was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and the Green Resource Network and served as an executive

part of corporate, personal, national and transnational culture. I will do this primarily through educational efforts (such as workshops), networking (by establishing forum space, both physical and virtual, for idea sharing and problem-solving, for instance) and by directly connecting innovators and creators with well-intended corporations and agencies. The organization will serve as a bridge to connect means with ideas.

My mentor and partner in the project, Anita Chan, and I plan to offer innovative educational sessions for a variety of age groups. This summer, we'll offer a number of three-day camps for elementary-age students to learn about sustainability at home in a hands-on fashion, from do-it-yourself picture frames to encouraging Mom and Dad to eat local. For older participants, starting with college-age students, short retreats will help individuals become creative and compassionate leaders who are aware of their ability to shape society and the necessity of doing so in a sustainable way.

In the beginning, we will work out of a number of arenas, but we hope to utilize the Huashan Culture Park in downtown Taipei as a central forum space to host these dialogues, day camps and retreats. We also hope to open a resource center, where children, their parents and young adults can come together to learn, both from provided materials and one another.

How are activities such as these funded? It's not nearly as hard as you think to raise \$1 million (the 30/1 exchange rate helps, too). While ideas for specific projects will begin with us, I believe the quickest route to change is by laying down tracks and getting out of the way; let everyone else build the sustainable future around the train depot you select.

The primary tasks of this business will be direct education and efforts to persuade corporations and institutions to fund and encourage *all* activities of this sort. From alternative-energy science competitions to training youth to be leaders in a sustainable world, all ideas should have a company whose corporate social responsibility budget would back them.

Networking beyond Huashan, Taipei and Taiwan will involve linking people to sources of information and new ideas all around the world.

I also am interested in learning from others' solutions to problems and methods for success. In this spirit, I invite you to contact me with ideas, questions or news about the green front back home. I'm also happy to share information on travel, study or living in Taiwan. I can be reached at dalealbanese@gmail.com.

officer of the Chinese Language Association and as vice president of the International Student Union.

See Dale's (mostly photographic) perspective on Taiwan at <http://dalbanese.blogspot.com>.

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