

“Yokohama’s ‘Circular Economy Plus’ goal considers people the primary part of the circular economy because they actively tackle local issues. As of February 2022, there are fourteen Living Labs and two associations, which are open societies where people from different backgrounds, such as local citizens, companies, governments, and educational institutions, can work on regional issues.”

-Rina MUROI

Image Source: Yokohama Circular Economy Plus. Aquaponics, circular organic agriculture. Photo Credit: <https://circular.yokohama/en/2021/09/28/new-project-added-aquaponics/>



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Circular economy plus drives sustainable city development in Yokohama, Japan

Why a Circular Economy in Yokohama? Yokohama, reached by a 30 minutes drive south of Tokyo, is the second-largest city in Japan, with a population of over 3.7 million. Since its opening in 1859, Yokohama has thrived as one of Japan's leading port cities, and is now an innovation hub to where many gather to develop new businesses and participate in R&D. Yokohama has a vibe of an open mind, having many international exchanges and actively adopting new cultures. The citizens love the city and have civic pride - a diverse and creative community that values sightseeing, art, and culture has created the uniqueness of Yokohama today.

The Japanese government recognized Yokohama's advanced efforts to achieve sustainable development and selected it as an "SDGs Future City" in 2018. Yokohama aims for decarbonization by 2030 and is developing a variety of projects to meet each goal of the SDGs. The circular economy is a

comprehensive vision that manifests at the intersection of these efforts. It also achieves social justice while eliminating environmental impact, and enables a thriving city.

In 2021, the city of Yokohama set the unique goal "Circular Economy plus" under the agreement with three initiatives that encourage Yokohama's sustainable development. "Circular Economy plus" considers people the primary part of the circular economy. It has initiated "living labs", which are open societies where people from different backgrounds, such as local citizens, companies, governments, and educational institutions, can work on regional issues. Fourteen living labs and two associations are actively tackling local issues as of February 2022.

Circular Economy Practices Through Inclusive Communities

The SDGs Yokohama Kanazawa Living Lab is building circularity within the 3Ps (Planet, People and Prosperity.) Since Kanazawa ward has the only beach in the city, maintaining the ocean environment is their primary concern. Their choice method is circular agriculture. The local farmers utilize discarded eelgrass in the Kanazawa as fertilizer, and grow vegetables with a local primary school and a special education school. Using the vegetables grown and local ingredients, they create a unique seasoning called "Kanazawa Hachimi". The whole activity consists of inclusive community development, local consumption, sustainable education, and regional promotion while protecting the ocean environment.

Aside from the living labs, many companies and organizations support the circular economy in Yokohama. People Port Inc. upcycles used computers, for instance. Their project “ZERO PC” includes two types of “zero” concepts: making zero carbon emission and zero domestic refugees* (*For the purposes of this article, refugee refers to those applying for refugee status). To achieve these goals, they are taking the following actions:

- using 100% regenerative energy at their office
- reducing waste as much as possible by recycling every part of old computers
- hiring refugees as upcycling computer engineers and building their skills so that they can make their living even after leaving Japan

Furthermore, they donate part of their proceeds to organizations that support child poverty. Their contribution depends on the number of used computers they collect. This way, the more computers upcycled, the more children are supported. There is another organization working on circularity. The 3Ps Yokohama City Resource Recycling Business Cooperative runs “The Yokohama Reuse Bin (Bottle) Project”. It provides reusable glass bottles for locally made fruit juices produced in Yokohama. Its uniqueness lies in how they manifested a local child’s idea. In 2014, they received a picture diary entry that asked since reusable glass bottles are more eco-friendly than single-use bottles, why was it not the mainstream option. They felt the urgency to take action and implemented the idea. Since then, the picture diary has become a symbol

in the city – displayed as poster at bars and restaurants in the city. People learn about the environmental issue while enjoying a locally produced beverage filled in bottles mooted by the Yokohama Reuse Bin. They consider bringing such ideas to life is the responsibility of adults. Yokohama City Resource Recycling Business Cooperative will keep seeking for new ways of sustainable city development together with local citizens, including children.

Our Future: Innovation Philosophy

Developing inclusive communities is but one of the pillars of Yokohama’s circular economy. Its full essence can be understood through studying other philosophies, such as modernizing traditional habits (e.g. haishop) or regenerating ecosystems from Yokohama Blue Carbon. We see how the people in Yokohama lead circular economy with a foundation in innovation and by attracting diverse talents.

References:

Circular Yokohama. (2021), available from: <https://circular.yokohama/en/>
World Circular Economy Forum 2018

<https://circular.yokohama/en/about/why-we-promote-a-circular-economy-in-yokohama/>

In October 2018, Yokohama held the World Circular Economy Forum 2018, hosted by Sitra (Finnish Innovation Fund), in Pacifico Yokohama, bringing companies and government officials from around 85 countries together to promote a circular economy. In addition, the International Conference on Sustainable Brands 2020 Yokohama was held in February 2020. The city have established its position as a member of the global sustainability urban community.