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Tel: +81-3-3261-5407 Fax: +81-3-3261-1874

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Urban Renaissance in Osaka

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New Developments toward Urban Revitalization in Osaka City -Aspiring for next generation urban development through public-private collaboration

Toru TAKAHASHI
Manager, Planning Division
Office of Urban Revitalization and Promotion, City of Osaka

Introduction

We are currently experiencing a flow of major reforms, such as internationalization, decentralization and administrative and financial reorganization. Amid this flow of reform, in order for cities to survive, it is essential that they switch from urban development that is focused on the development of space, to urban development which combines the utilization of the stock of urban facilities with the enhancement of space, and which has urban functions and concepts that ought to be introduced, such as policies for nurturing industry to support Osaka's next generation industry.

This paper describes the current circumstances in Osaka, which is at the center of business in the Kansai region, and it presents an outline on the question of how the public and private sectors are collaborating to develop strategies for a new city for the next generation such as the easing of regulations and the enticement of private-sector projects in emergency urban revitalization districts.

Osaka's Potential

From long ago Osaka has led the economy, being referred to as the "Nation's Kitchen." Osaka has produced many entrepreneurs filled with determination and with very distinctive personalities, and has founded many world famous companies, including Matsushita Electric Industrial (Panasonic) and Sharp. Also, in terms of an education environment, there has been a shift back to inner city areas, not only by national and private tertiary institutes, but also by satellite universities and graduate schools for adult learners run by public companies that have utilized special zones for structural reform.

The Kansai market is equivalent in size to the Shanghai market, which is at the center of global economic development, and in terms of GDP, it is comparable to all of Italy (source: "Annual Report on Prefectural Accounts", the Cabinet Office). Also, as the office building vacancy rate improves, and as it is revealed that there are places exhibiting upward trends for land prices, we are now in a situation where investment is expected, particularly in the Kita and Minami areas. The population is also showing signs of recovery, with the inner city area posting an increase of 40,000 people in nine years.

In terms of transport, railway and expressway networks are being developed, and a second runway is being constructed at the Kansai International Airport, meaning that an even greater number of users can be expected in the future.

Osaka's Urban Development

The three key elements to urban revitalization

(1) Strengthening functions to create intellectual businesses

The key industries are robotic technology, IT (the ubiquitous network technology), and healthcare and preventive medicine.

(2) Enhancing functions to attract more visitors to Osaka and develop cultural activities

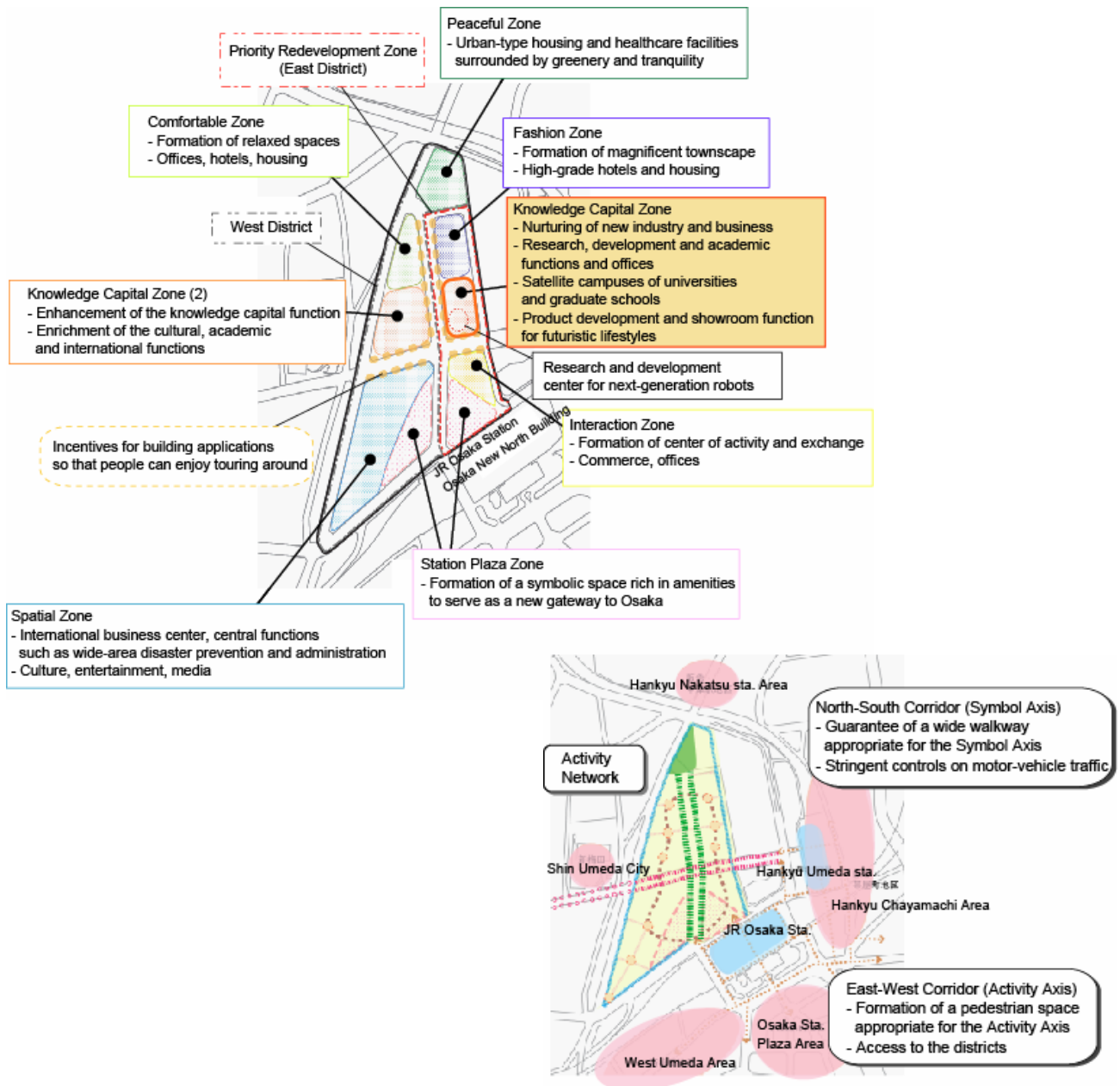
The objective is the utilization of urban stock, such as the "Osaka, the City of Water," and the "Midosuji Boulevard"; the utilization of historical heritage, such as the Bunraku puppet theater, for the "encouragement of artistic and cultural activities"; and, above all, the development of business center functions and cultural/academic functions as well as high-standard housing development in the Nakanoshima Zone, which is the symbol island of Osaka.

(3) Promoting attractive urban development

As a result of the April 2002 designation of Emergency Urban Revitalization Districts, the public and private sectors have joined forces to expand urban development which has a thematic element of demonstrating regional characteristics while considering free-thinking proposals from the private sector. A new 21st century model in urban development is being promoted, including the leading project, "Development of the Osaka Station North District" and the "Knowledge Capital Concept," which aims to accumulate, exchange and communicate information on advanced technology, culture/art and other fields.

Conclusion

The source of a city's vitality is its people. In order to produce a rich culture and industry, and in order to realize high-quality life in the city, it is essential that the people who gather, live and work in Osaka demonstrate that creativity. Osaka City aims to achieve a city rich in the accumulation of knowledge, technology and culture.



Revitalization of “Osaka, the City of Water”

Naomi KUNOIKE

Senior Staff
Office of Urban Revitalization and Promotion, City of Osaka

Introduction

Osaka used to be known as the “the City of Water.”

Cities with inner city areas surrounded by rivers on all sides is rare the world over. The revitalization of “Osaka, the City of Water” is a key to the revitalization of Osaka.

“Osaka, the City of Water”: recently, this name is being heard more and more.

The Origin of the City of Water

From the 15th century and into the beginning of the 16th century, numerous waterways were excavated for the purpose of marine transport and for discharging waste water. As a consequence, from long ago, Osaka earned the nickname, the “City of Water.” In those days, the transport of goods and people was mostly done by boats using canals and other channels, and so these waterways played a great role in the urban development of Osaka. A diverse range of goods were transported into Osaka from all over the country, and the city showed great activity as the “Nation’s Kitchen.” Waterside sceneries of the area were incorporated into ukiyo-e prints and into literary works, such as those by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, a Japanese dramatist of the predecessor to Bunraku puppet theater.

However, as we enter the 18th century, there was a shift in the means of transporting goods and people toward trains and motor vehicles, and this led to a gradual decline in the role of the waterways. In addition, increases in the volume of traffic and the degradation of water quality created social problems. As a result, many of the waterways were filled in and transformed into roads.

Nevertheless, even today, there are still some 33 watercourses in Osaka City, flowing a total distance of 146km, and occupying approximately ten percent of the total city area.

Waterways are a precious resource, and so a trial is being run to revitalize the area as the “New Water Metropolis, Osaka,” by redeveloping them as an integral part of urban development.

Action for Recreating “Osaka, the City of Water”

[Formulation of the Concept to Revitalize “Osaka, the City of Water”]

In December 2001, the Urban Renaissance Headquarters (within the Cabinet Office) established the “Revitalization of Osaka, the City of Water” as one of the urban renaissance projects. A revitalization concept was formulated that integrated inner city rivers as part of riverside urban development, and the improvement of river environments was promoted, starting with the Dotonborigawa River.

The revitalization concept positions the rivers encircling the inner city areas as “water corridors,” and sets as its objective “the creation of water corridors that reflect Osaka’s history– Sparkle Osaka, the City of Water.” The rivers in question are the Dojimagawa, Tosaborigawa (Nakanoshima), Higashi- Yokoborigawa, Dotonborigawa, and Kizugawa Rivers.

The following four key points have been established as basic policies for the “creation of water corridors.”



The Naniwa Tanken Cruise touring down the Dotonborigawa

(1) The creation of an attractive riverside

We will proceed with the development of beautiful urban areas to act as the platform for Osaka, the City of Water. While making use of the distinct characteristics of each of the zones, we will work for ingenuity to raise the attractive nature of water on the high levees, and, in collaboration with the riverside urban development, we will create a living and working environment that takes full advantage of the riverside, including incentives for buildings that face onto the river.

(2) The creation of pleasant riverside activities

Besides promoting the creation of new seasonal events for “Osaka, the City of Water” to be staged along the riverside, we will also promote the creation of bustling focal points as well as spaces for residents and workers to meet and relax. By broadly publicizing the attraction of “Osaka, the City of Water,” and by enhancing the systems for accepting visitors, we will conduct a dynamic range of activities to attract visitors to the area.

(3) The networking of waterways and the enhancement of their appeal

With a focus on water, we will proceed with promoting the image of “water corridors” linked to Osaka’s rich historical and cultural resources. We will enhance the pedestrian network and those functions joining land and water, thereby raising the touring element for visitors, and making for a unified attraction. Furthermore, we will expand initiatives aimed at revitalizing water transport, such as by enhancing the network of water transport routes and by improving infrastructure.

(4) The creation of a peaceful water environment

The southern Dotonborigawa River Zone is one of Osaka’s foremost commercial areas, and includes such prominent centers as Namba and Shinsaibashi. Whether it is day or night, this zone is always bustling. There is also a concentration of art and cultural facilities, including the National Bunraku Theatre showing Kamigata performing arts, in particular Joruri puppet theater and Bunraku puppet theater (which have been designated as intangible cultural assets), as well the Shochikuza, the Shin Kabukiza, and the Minatomachi River Place, which presents a range of outdoor events.

Meanwhile, the northern Nakanoshima zone forms a historical space representative of Osaka, the City of Water. This zone is the location of a group of modern buildings, including the Osaka Central Public Hall, the Bank of Japan and Nakanoshima Library, as well as many historical and cultural resources, including Hachikenya.

Among all the initiatives for the revitalization of “Osaka, the City of Water,” the riverside development along the Dotonborigawa River has been especially placed as the leading project, and it is being pro-

moted aggressively as a project with a high degree of expectation from both inside and outside of Osaka City.

Conclusion

I believe that the way toward the recreating “Osaka, the City of Water” is to proceed with a diverse range of projects while skillfully utilizing the current “appealing resources of the City of Water.”

To this end, I believe that, starting with the Dotonborigawa River initiative, it is important to merge the respective potentials of the “river” and the “town,” and then, with the cooperation of all the industry, government, academia, private-sector and NPO groups in Osaka working together, to revitalize the town of Osaka as a new “Osaka, the City of Water.”

I also believe that it is important that there be extensive broadcasting of information by the Council for the Revitalization of “Osaka, the City of Water,” in which the national government, Osaka Prefecture, Osaka City and the business community participate, and whose aim it is to recreate “Osaka, the City of Water.”

The Regeneration of Urban Areas Densely Crowded with Wooden Buildings :The case of the Karahori District

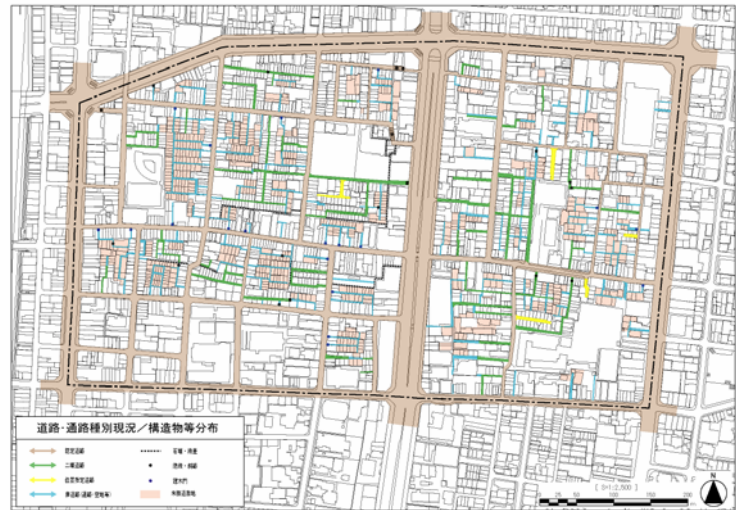
Yoko SHIBATA
Dan Environmental Design Institute

1. The Karahori District, where a lot of alleyways remain

While the Karahori District is located in center of Osaka City, it escaped damage during wartime, and so it is a district that even today remains many narrow streets. During early-modern times, it was a borrow pit for tiles, and since the Meiji era, numerous alley-units were developed. An alley-unit is the set of alleys and row houses. The alleyways (1.8m in width) have formed a complex network. Small shrines and wells still remain in the alleyways, and another distinctive characteristic is that there are many stone steps and steep hills – something quite rare in Osaka City. [Photo 1, Figure 1]



[Photo 1]
Row Houses along a stone paved alleyway; a small shrine by the roadside



[Figure 1]
The network of alleyways

Since fiscal 2004, HOPE (Housing with Proper Environment) Zone Projects have been run in collaboration with Osaka City and local councils. The projects focus on renovating townscapes without disturbing the natural beauty, while making the most of any distinctive characteristics. Several such design control properties of row houses or town houses have been completed. [Photo 2]



[Photo 2] Before and after of design control

2. Issues facing the Karahori District

More than half of the alleys in the Karahori District are no wider than 2.7m. Premises along the alley are properties without access to a public road, and under the existing Building Standards Law, rebuilding of these properties is not possible. For this reason, as the aforementioned efforts for townscape preservation have proceeded, in recent years, there has also been a diverse range of development in areas around alleys.

(1) Disorderly and discrete improvements to properties in alleyways [Photo 3]

When first developed, ownership of an alley-unit belonged to a single landowner, and the row houses along the alley were rental houses. However, as time passed, there was an increase in the number of alleys in which properties had been sold to the tenants, such that the owner of a building and land also occupied the house. In these kinds of alley-units, individual cases of modification can be seen, where major extensions and renovations, or new houses built without lodging a building-confirmation application have resulted in 3-story buildings being constructed without being set back from the alley. This has led to disordered townscapes, and has made it difficult to systematically ensure alley widths and networks.

(2) The apartment buildings development of entire alley-units [Photo 4]

In alley-units whose possession have belonged to the one landowner, the low rent earned from alley-units relative to the costly inheritance tax and property tax has resulted in a notable trend for entire alley-units to be developed as apartment buildings. The construction of low-rise apartment buildings in towns with alleys has not only led to problems in terms of the ambient environment, such as sunshine and a sense of oppression, but serious community problems have also arisen, such as there being no neighborly contact between residents of the apartment buildings and the old residents.



[Photo 3]
A 3-story house renovated
with no setback



[Photo 4]
Distant view of a 10-story
apartment building
developed on the site of an
alley-unit

3. In preparation for regeneration

In search for a resolution to the disorderly and discrete improvements to properties in alley-units, local councils considered rational systems that would allow for individual rebuilding,. However, under the existing framework, sites along alleys do not match the reality of the district, namely being without width or depth; and so it is evident that a new Karahori-designed system is required.

Furthermore, enabling individual properties to be rebuilt or renovated, assumes that the alley-unit will be left untouched; and so, similar to other urban areas that are densely crowded with wooden buildings, we are left with the issue of improving the capacity to prevent disasters. However, residents show an extremely acute awareness of disaster prevention – they place buckets of water outside their front doors; they do not place any flammable items in the alleys; and they make the small doors situated between alleys of such a structure that they can be kicked down in an emergency. The fact is that there have been no major fires in the district for many, many years. Based on the premise that these kinds of conventional methods for preventing disasters will be carried on. Further examination is needed for urban development that prevents damage from disasters, and which makes best use of the essence of Karahori.

With regard to the construction of apartment buildings, from the point of view of forming a townscape, the design control is possible, but since they are located in an inner city area, the development pressures would be great, and it would be difficult for the community to share a realistic image of the future as a residential district, rather than as a tourism or commercial district. It is unlikely that the community would even reach the formation of a consensus. Looking forward, and it will be important to first expand the view from the alley to the entire district, and then to use urban development techniques for the community to think about and share an image for the future. By going through these kinds of processes, I firmly believe that the strength of the community will increase, and a new ideal for the regeneration of alley-units that is appropriate for Karahori will come into view.

Awaji Landscape Planning & Horticulture Academy Leading Business Education on Landscape Restoration

Yue SHEN

Associate Professor, University of Hyogo

The Awaji Landscape Planning & Horticulture Academy (ALPHA) advocates “landscape horticulture,” a new concept which aims to realize communities where people coexist harmoniously with nature. This year marks the eighth year since the opening of the academy, and already it has sent out into society more than 100 graduates each with a high degree of expertise. Students at the academy gather from various fields all over Japan, and after having undertaken two years of hands-on education, close to 100% have set out into society with employment. This is despite the harsh circumstances of recent years, such as sluggish economic conditions and contraction of the construction-related industries. Graduates from the academy have enjoyed praise from many different fields, and are currently active in landscape restoration workplaces across Japan. In this paper, I will introduce ALPHA’s unique educational scene.

1. Formation of the educational philosophy, as viewed from circumstances behind the establishment of the academy

ALPHA began with Toshitami Kaihara, the former Governor of Hyogo Prefecture, advocating for the establishment of an educational facility on Awaji Island, that would be an institute for practical education and which would be concerned with landscape planning and horticulture. At the same time, the academy was placed as a key facility in the Awaji Garden City concept. As a new type of educational institute in Japan, by forming an educational environment, not often practiced in existing universities, where extensive hands-on education would be provided so as to be able to meet the needs of society, the following three goals were established: (1) the integration of interdisciplinary fields, (2) problem-solving abilities for the workplace, and (3) Nurturing of students with occupational abilities that meet the needs of clients. In terms of the specific educational technique, a structure was set up comprised of 30 percent lectures and 70 percent practice

2. “Hands-on” being the keyword for the educational focus

With focuses on design and plants, the educational content at ALPHA has been expanded from regional planning and landscape planning to include a diverse range of topics, including ecological preservation, urban development with participation by residents, and the construction of traditional gardens. “Practical education” has not simply meant the learning of technical and vocational skills, but rather an emphasis was placed on learning about relationships with society. In other words, practical education implies education in which the ability to resolve real problems in society is nurtured. For example, under the guidance of their instructors, students dealt with plans for a community park, and submitted their plan into competitions. As a result, they were presented a Minister for Construction Award, and they were successful in winning a community grant for the improvement of parks. The aim of education at the academy is to enhance problem-solving abilities and to

contribute to the further development of community environments by learning through practice. (Photo 1, Photo 2)



[Photo 1]
Students designed Awaji City's first park for urban blocks. Shown here are students carefully examining the model at the construction site.



[Photo 2]
Local residents listening to the proposal for the urban park designed by students. At ALPHA, students can experience the entire design process. Some of the designed works will actually be developed while the students are still attending the academy.

3. Education of the select few

There are 22 full-time teachers, instructors and other education staff at the Landscape Planning & Horticulture Academy. This is more than the number of students in either year. The full-time teaching staff are university teachers attached to the Institute of Natural and Environmental Sciences at the University of Hyogo. They collect information and technology from a variety of fields; they make use of their research achievements in their respective specialized fields; and they are engaged in lectures and practicals with an emphasis on solving problems in actual living environments. Another distinctive feature of the academy is that instructors, each with a rich experience of working in the field, play an important role in the education of skills. Students, who have undertaken two years of this kind of education, acquire a broad range of knowledge, and are able to receive fine-tuned instruction from teachers in an environment of small-group education, even for the solving of specific problems. The efforts and active involvement shown by former students is testimony to the real talent of students who have gone through this kind of education.

4. Outlook for the future

ALPHA is facing numerous challenges, just as our society is. Against a background of university education reform, there are calls for the development of methodology for Japan's first problem-solving type business education, which is closely linked to the community and which is always able to respond to changes in society. The expansion of new education in the development of a beautiful nation is the academy's mission, and I have great hopes for its success.