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1. Connecting Places that Have Maintained Strength

Member : Ibrahim Zakaria Bahreldin, Manami Fujiwara, Eduardo Guerrero, Ishihara Masaya, Anna Robinson, Tripti Sharma, Xiangwang Meng

As an urban design strategy, it is only possible to connect places that need to be connected. Karatsu has many elements that have maintained strength; historic and culturally significant structures including Karatsu Castle, Karatsu Shrine, the former Karatsu Bank, and the historic city walls; streets including Kyomachi, Gofukomachi and Ochawan Kiln Street; and natural systems including the Chouda River, Matsuura River, Nishinohama Beach, and the surrounding mountains. These elements are dispersed throughout Karatsu without being clearly connected in a functional, visual, or spiritual manner. Stronger connections between these elements and greater permeability to the natural systems will provide Karatsu residents and visitors with better access, legibility, and orientation through their city.

Our proposal focuses on enhancing the existing connections throughout Karatsu in addition to creating new connections that further emphasize these strengths. We consider the city as an integrated system with inter-relationships supported by real (physical and visual) and symbolic (cultural and spiritual) connections. At a regional scale, our strategies aim to enhance connections with the natural surroundings. At a citywide scale, we aim to enhance the relationship between the districts while supporting the identity of the collective spirit. At an inner city scale, we aim to empower the relationships within three districts we defined based on the clustering of existing strengths: the Castle District, the Shrine District, and the Merchant District.

Our strategies include interventions along corridors and at key intersections that better define the pedestrian experience through a concentration of connective experiences. Infill development strategies are used to better define street edges through a rhythmic variation of facades, walls, and landscape treatments that address the street while preserving and promoting critical view corridors to the mountains and water systems. The implementation of these strategies will unify the strengths of Karatsu that have been maintained throughout history.

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2. Strengthening the Living Heritage

Member : Lopamudra Neog, Shravan Kumar N., Mao Miao, Hiroki Muto, Erina Ishigami , Daniel Miller, Brenda Snyder

The people of Karatsu have inherited a city rich in culture and tradition, yet today much of Karatsu' s unique historic character has been lost or overlooked through insensitive development practices. To re-edit and revive today' s fragmented Karatsu we suggest a comprehensive approach towards the strengthening of Karatsu' s living heritage. Historic structures inherited from previous inhabitants forms built heritage. This when combined with core culture, social values and lifestyle cultivated through time becomes living heritage. Living heritage promotes identity and a sense of belonging for people through an accumulation of traditions which hold meaning for current and future generations.

Historically, Karatsu' s economy thrived on international and regional exchange. Today, we feel Karatsu possesses the same potential. Parallel to the reactivation of regional economic and cultural exchange we believe in generating and retaining cultural expressions and practices. Together they form a vital body of knowledge which provides continuity, dynamics, and meaning of social life to all generations of people as individuals, social groups and communities. We believe strategic reuse of Karatsu' s historic structures and spaces will promote strong social activity, identity, and engagement -- in turn reviving the unique heart of Karatsu.

Building Karatsu in its location resulted in impressive walls that define the districts of the city to the present day. We discovered the western wall on our walks and developed designs which trace it as an important physical and social element within the city. In the Warrior Quarter we designed a walk through the northern blocks where we have made use of empty parcels, turning them into community facilities including community orchards and gardens to grow vegetables. This walk connects a series of important cultural and community assets. Finally, we designed a city street corridor connecting City hall and the central shrine which will become a symbol of Karatsu' s economy, encouraging regional food and arts, which for generations thrived on vigorous international and regional exchange.

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3. Karatsu as an Eco-Walkable City

DESIGN VISION~To walk a city is to understand its identity.

A walk in Karatsu should be akin to moving through a gallery of the city's historical, natural and cultural elements. Whether it be a resident or a tourist, the pedestrian should be aware Karatsu's identity as a castle town, shaped by its proximity to water and mountains, and interspersed with elements of wabi-sabi, including Karatsu-yaki and Shinto shrines.

Above all, an exploration of the city on foot should be a stimulating and pleasurable experience. When there are interesting things to see, people to observe, social interactions to make, and comfortable places to rest in between destinations, walking becomes a preferred, rather than forced, mode of transportation.

In 50 years, we envision Karatsu to be an "eco-walkable city", where most trips are made on foot, bicycle and public transit, instead of by car. The city should be an example of sustainable living, with an emphasis on the preservation of natural resources, as well as the protection of the city's local merchants through the enhancement of the city's walkable commercial core.

In order to realize this vision, Karatsu should adopt an aggressive strategy to strengthen its pedestrian connectivity. The city should be designed with the average, every-day pedestrian in mind as priority.

CREATING COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENTS TO WALK IN

We designed enjoyable walking environments, based on the incorporation of the following factors:

- 1)Protection from wind in the winter, and abundant shade in the summer
- 2)Pedestrian pauses interspersed in between long journeys, located with desirable views and street furniture for resting
- 3)Appropriate feeling of enclosure (defined mainly by building heights and street width)
- 4)Replacement of underground tunnel crossings with street-level crossings (placing pedestrians first instead of cars)

DESIGNING A NETWORK FOR FOUR PEDESTRIAN USER GROUPS

In order to understand how the pedestrian networks are used, we talked to local residents to find out where they walk to on a daily basis. From these interviews, we identified four main groups of users of the pedestrian network in the city: schoolchildren, working adults, seniors, and tourists. We have designed in order to accommodate for the pedestrian routines of these four groups.

CONCLUSION

Our design proposals challenge Karatsu's current state of unrefined, car-oriented networks. By introducing new connections and reinstating the pedestrian as priority for design, we hope to turn Karatsu's networks into a fluid system that stream from the outermost edges to the heart of the city and back.

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4. A Sense of Arrival

The rich cultural and strong geographical character of Karatsu is lost in the city spaces. There seems to be a disconnection between the spirit of the city and the manifestation in its spaces. Lack of continuity, loss of enclosure, loss of character, weak sense of orientation, and a strong sense of space daunt the arrival corridors and points alike of the city.

The catalytic design inventions aim to address these issues through:

- A unified, place-specific arrival network
- Visual and cultural orientation
- Pedestrian-oriented public spaces

The arrival network consists of 5 catalytic design interventions:

1 arrival corridor

- Strengthening the character of the city along its access routes endpoints of orientation.
- Park and walk strategy through strategically placed public parking structures.

2 Bus station

- Bus station as the new cultural center and point of arrival with float displays, Interactive Karatsu Yaki exhibit and local Yaki information, and a ceramics museum
- Signifies the historic alignment of the moat and entry point into the walled Castle town through spatial and landscape features
- Establishes a prominent public space at Karatsu' s central core.
- Integrates the central bus station as a hub with the shopping district to the south and historic Samurai district to the north

3 Train station plaza

- Links the southern and northern districts of the city.
- Orients automobile and pedestrian traffic in the north south axis to the pedestrian shopping and other city streets.
- Creates a sense of arrival fitting of its place as a prominent arrival point to the central core.

4 Castle Area Waterfront

- Creating vibrant public open spaces along the waterfront, with tourist oriented mixed-use street, and central core residential district.
- Houses the Karatsu history museum, focusing on its historic role as a Gateway to Asia and coal mining port.
- Connects the entry corridor of Karatsu Street (National Route 204) to Karatsu Castle via a strong axis

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5. Densifying and Revitalizing Karatsu's Urban Core

Member : Sebastian, Simona, Bojan, Mayumi, Hiroki, So, Yogesh, Cliff

The emphasis of our efforts is on the reactivation and repopulation of Karatsu's city center. The steady decline in its population has changed the fabric of land use; less density has led to vacant lands which are then turned into parking lots.

Its history as a castle town has left several types of lot sizes ranging from the higher-class samurai garden homes to the more tightly-knit merchant quarters. Between these two conditions, we saw opportunities for revitalization through urban design which were grounded on the creation of spaces that could introduce a special way of living in Karatsu. This new lifestyle could then be branded to create certain cultural identity for the city, where one could feel to be in Karatsu only by living in Karatsu.

To achieve this, we designated the spaces within the city's blocks as potential areas for redevelopment. With their current use being large parking lots, we feel the land within could be put to better use by creating new residential areas. Our goal is the creation of a higher quality living environment that could then attract more people and increase the population.

Our strategy is a morphological process of phasing.

Phase 1 is the direct placement of new, in-fill construction inside the city blocks, organized around new common spaces and lanes. Capital generated from this phase would then be placed into Phase 2.

Phase 2 involves rehabilitating the existing fabric by renovating existing store facades and making interior repairs.

Phase 3 is introduction of mixed-use and other program that could create a much more diverse lifestyle and bring in a wider range of activities to the inner city. The design process then recedes into a more indirect, regulating effort by establishing guidelines and ordinances for bulk and aesthetics of urban spaces in order to maintain the quality of this new landscape

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6. Imagining an Eco-Friendly City at the intersection of River and Sea

Keywords: urban ecosystem restoration; urban greenery sprawl; community bridging

Karatsu city has developed at the mouth of the Chouda River and the Matsuura River, the second longest (45.3km) river in Saga Prefecture. The water, initially used as a means to protect the castle town against attacks, defined the shape of the city. The water from Karatsu's natural harbor, used for connecting the region to China and Korea, brought wealth and cultural richness to the city. Karatsu is a city shaped by water, which is its strongest feature with the potential of bringing back to the city its original vibrancy and prosperity in a sustainable and ecological manner.

The first step would be to gradually and carefully release the water impeded by the flood control gate of the Matsuura River (located further upstream). This will bring back more water into the entire system, similar to what reached the city before the gate was built. As the water in the lagoon gradually reaches its original rich composition, native fauna and flora reemerges. Then, the Chouda River with its original ecosystem restored will penetrate the city bringing greenery, birds, and fishes, reassuming its importance in the landscape and generating new potential spaces for the local community. In parallel, another strategy takes place. Rainwater will no longer be piped directly into the rivers but it will naturally flow on the ground following the swales, creating green tracks that meet the river.

The resultant green network that covers the city and the lagoon will strengthen the city's identity as a best practice in ecological restoration, attracting visitors to its research center, perhaps supported by the Waseda University. This proposal will also revitalize the city by creating various opportunities for fostering community linkages, like the miniature urban farms in vacant lots along the river and the swales, where products locally produced by the elderly living in the dense neighborhoods will be found in attached mini-markets and food stalls day or night. The restoration of the river further than enhancing the cityscape will allow a more balanced ecosystem. The water has once more taken the form of protecting the city against its economic decay and reconnecting it to the future vision of sustainable, green and livable cities around the world.

This proposal may look impractical at first. True, it will take a long time but now is the time to start. We recommend therefore beginning at the micro-scale of each residence (separation of the rain water and grey water), each community space (retention ponds between houses/shops) and then realizing its implications at the city and regional scale.