

TO INSPIRE STUDENTS IN PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY DESIGN

A Case Study from Ohnogawa Greenway Rehabilitation Proposal

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to cover and examine the following:

- To illustrate how a community based design proposal was employed to inspire students in participatory community design
- To present how community based design could be utilized as an advocacy proposal
- To test how a short charrette type instruction could be employed to introduce students on planning and design process
- To validate the author's intuition in the profession and education in cross cultural situations

INTRODUCTION

The project site was the Ohno River Greenway (3 km), located in Nishiyodogawa District of the Northwest sector of Osaka City with 6 million people. The client, Aozora Foundation was established in 1996 after a litigation settlement with a number of manufacturing industries in the District. Litigation was on environmental pollution (air, water and noise), and was widely publicized as Nishiyodogawa Public Pollution Litigation. Activities of the foundation cover: research and implementation on machizukuri (town planning/building), communication and information exchange on public pollution and environmental education. As a part of Machizukuri, the foundation had produced a proposal titled "Environmental Rehabilitation Plan of Nishiyodogawa District, 2000." Residents together with the foundation had produced inventories of the existing resources and problems and potentials of the District to support the plan through a wide public participation process.

Ohno River once was a free flowing canal used for transportation, fishing and recreation, still remembered by residents. It was covered and the site was converted to a bicycle road. After 30 years of installation, it is now called as Ohno River Greenway,

heavily used by residents for commuting and recreation. Lately, because of the green mass it provides, it had attracted infill high density residential development along the greenway, indicating its economic as well as environmental value. The rehabilitation of Ohno River Greenway was a major part of the plan to reintroduce native habitat and improve amenities. Time had been rapidly approaching in thinking of renovation of this valued treasure. The Greenway shows overgrowth of vegetation and wear and tear, and a new consciousness of the residents on environment exhibits a great need for adaptation of design and implementation plan.

An intensive two-week period was used by students assisted by instructors going through existing available resources of the site, meeting and working with the client and residents to produce a number of design proposals so that it could be used as an advocacy tool in future discussion with the owner and manager of the Greenway: Osaka City Public Works.

The project awaits the next step involving a preparation of an official design plan and presentation to public agency for discussion and adaptation. Students had an invaluable experience through this project and learned the importance of communication with the public and clients and also among design team members.

A design studio was organized to be their first design project for a period of two weeks with the following purposes:

- To illustrate how a community based design proposal was employed to inspire students in participatory community design
- To present how community based design could be utilized as an advocacy proposal
- To test how a short charrette type instruction could be employed to introduce students on planning and design process
- To validate author's intuition in the profession and education in cross cultural situation

AWAJI LANDSCAPE AND HORTICULTURAL ACADEMY (ALPHA)

Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Academy was established in 1998 and started its instruction in core courses in 1999. ALPHA currently is a part of the newly established Hyogo Prefectural University. ALPHA admits students with a minimum of a bachelor's degree for its core program.

In introducing ALPHA, the academy states the following:

Founded on man's love, respect and sense of awe towards life on Earth, Awaji Landscape Planning & Horticulture Academy (ALPHA) was established with the aim of pursuing a special

discipline of landscape planning and horticulture. This discipline will be able to help shape regional culture and preserve natural environments by focusing on plant life as the ideal medium for bringing man and nature towards a closer relationship. ALPHA provides students with an educational research environment conducive to propagating new ideas, from conception to practical work, and with the facility to draw on the knowledge and wisdom inherited from others. The Academy also aims to disseminate its ideas to the world as a whole, to foster new leaders and to create an information resource that contributes to society. Both teachers and students within ALPHA share a great mission to nurture a foundation that incorporates the realities of modern industries occupying great areas of land while regaining and promoting landscapes and environments that allow human life and culture to better coexist with real nature. It is for these reasons that our education is considered as an actual study and to be of great historical significance.

It is a modern discipline aiming to restore the prominence of inter-relating fields, originally viewed as 'life space' studies, such as social living, civil engineering, architecture, landscape gardening, and industry. It also seeks to position community planning as a form of cultural activity that revisits the importance of our nature and regional culture without any priority for economic issues. There were many great achievements within science, technology and economics in the 20th century, a number unlike any other period in history. However, at the same time, we neglected our environment in pursuit of security and abandoned the richness of living together with the nature around us.

DESIGN STUDIO AND PROJECT

Purpose and Schedule

My teaching was primarily aimed at introducing planning and design process (process of inventory, analysis and synthesis) in a short period of time, forcing students to make decisions and move on and recycle back as needed.

The second priority of my teaching was to inspire students in participatory community design through a studio project assignment. The third priority was to expose students in English instruction given by visiting faculty from abroad.

The studio project was designed to be for two weeks with the following schedule:

May 8: Introduction of teaching staff, participating students and the project. Forming of six student studio groups.

May 10: Visiting the project site and interviewing the client/user group.

May 14-15: Consulting with Kobayashi. Students were encouraged to discuss about what their group wanted to do.

May 16: Presenting the Inventory and Analysis phase of the project. Students were advised to use as many visuals as possible. Keeping the objective of the project to renew and rehabilitate the project site in mind, students were requested to present how they saw, perceived, felt, heard and smelled.

May 20: Presenting each group's proposal. This presentation was exhibited on one sheet of 60cm x 90cm covering the entire process. Each team had ten minutes to present and five minutes for question and answer.

Date to be Determined: At the beginning of the project no schedule was included for presenting to the client due to a limited time frame. A number of students volunteered to make a presentation to the client group six months after.

Students

Thirty students from the first and second year initially signed up for the project and twenty-eight completed it. One third of the initial group was second year students.

The majority of the first year students came to ALPHA from no design nor planning background, which ranged from agriculture, law, literature, and political science. Only a few of them had a previous degree in art, environmental design and architecture. Graduates from ALPHA to date entered into a variety of professional areas including public agencies in planning and design, private design firms, non profit community organizations, contractors and material suppliers/manufacturers.

Project

The purpose of the project is to produce idea proposals for rehabilitation and renewal of the Ohno River Walkway in Nishiyodogawa Ward of Osaka City to a client group, Aozora Foundation of Nishiyodogawa.

The Client

Aozora Foundation was established in 1966 after a lengthy civil litigation and settlement process with a number of public agencies and private manufacturing industries. Litigation was on public environmental pollution on land, water, air and noise.

Aozora Foundation was established based on a settlement fund of 30 million yen. Three major purposes of the Foundation are:

- to undertake research work on rehabilitation of polluted areas and community planning for these areas,
- to publish and exchange information on experience from public pollution and community planning, and
- to assist in environmental education and implementation activities.

To summarize, the Foundation states: it is an organization actively engaged in Machizukuri (community planning and design) based on experiences from public pollution and also to assist others in such activities. As a part of Machizukuri, the Foundation produced a proposal entitled “Environmental Rehabilitation Plan of Nishiyodogawa Ward 2000” in 1998. Residents together with the Foundation produced inventories of existing resources, problems and potentials of the Ward in order to support the proposal through a wide public participation process.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of the project, evaluation of the program was requested from participating students. The following list a number of responses:

- It was a very concentrated program but too short.
- Too much time was spent in group dynamics- trying to understand group members.

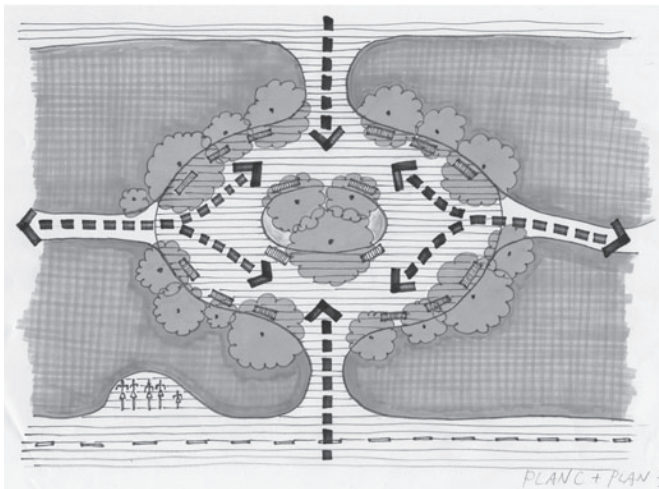


Figure 1. Work of team one.



Figure 2. Work of team one, Plan 1.



Figure 3. Plan 2, welcome mascot “Harry” and willow tunnel.

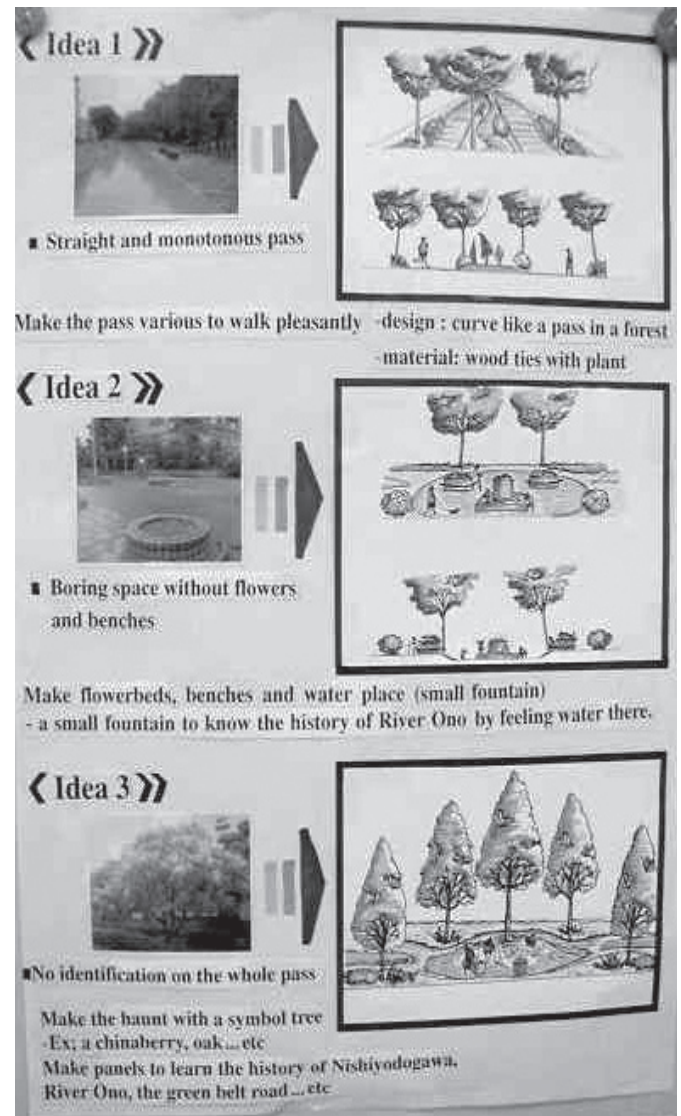


Figure 4. Work of team four.

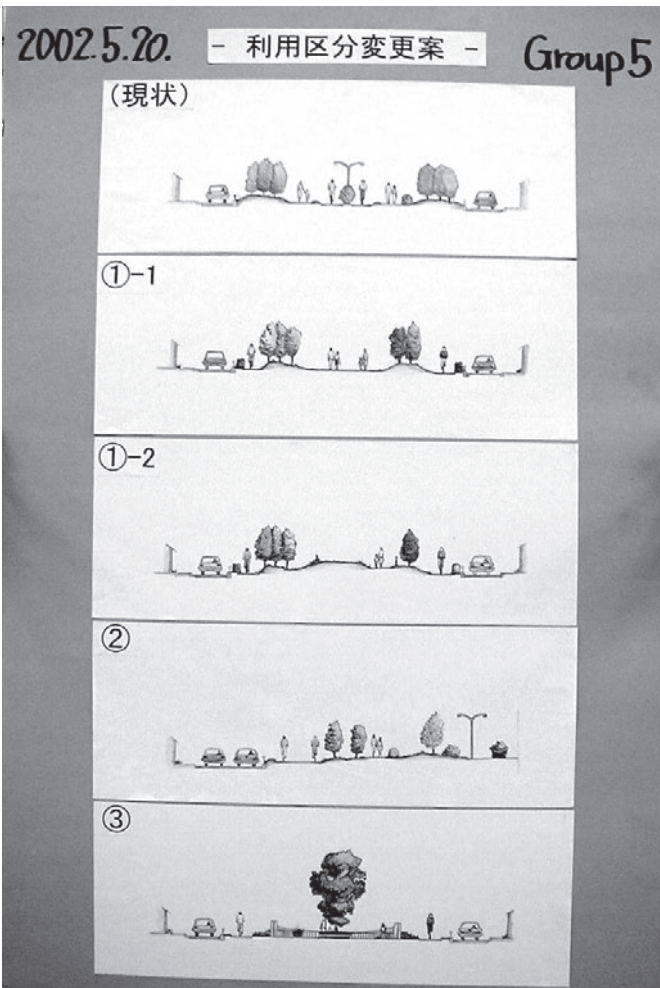


Figure 5. Work of team five.



Figure 6. Team six inventory.

- It was the very first practical course/project that I undertook at this school.
- It was good that I was forced to make a decision in a positive way.

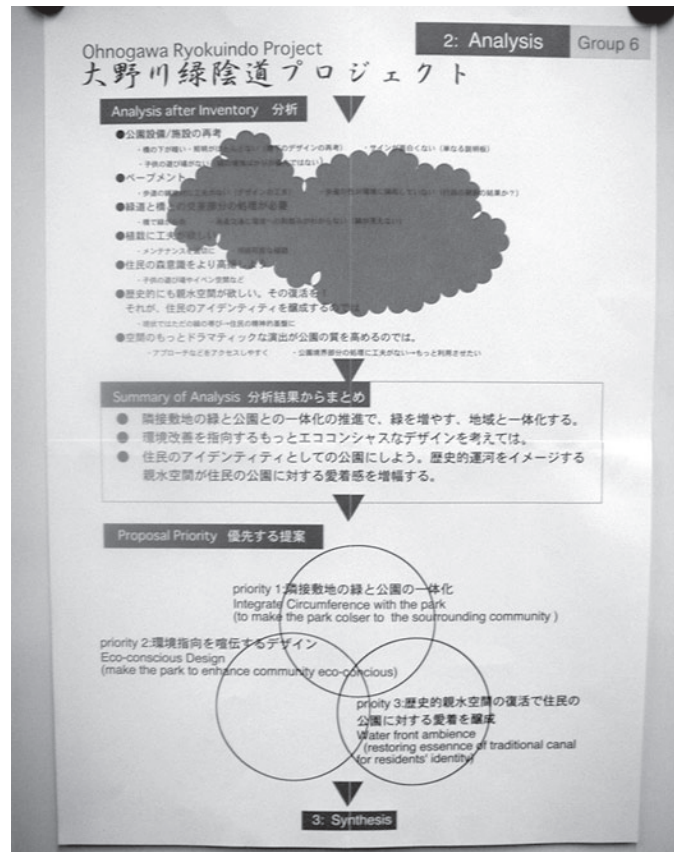


Figure 7. Team six analysis.

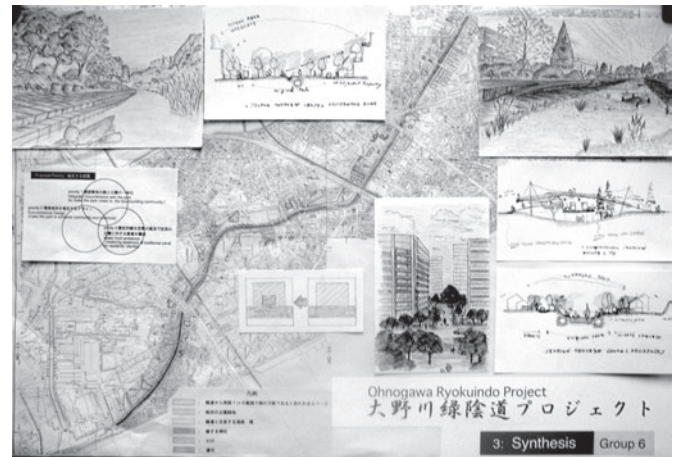


Figure 8. Team six synthesis.

- Instruction in English was hard.
- It is difficult to say that I acquired a sense in planning process.
- It is good that we try to communicate visually.
- It is good that we worked as a group collaboratively.
- We learned it is hard to transform ideas into physical form.
- It was a good experience working as a group and finishing it in time.

- We felt inadequate in presenting ideas.
- I got an inspiration from Ohnogawa Greenway Project to further my study.

Most of the evaluation and comments expressed were on the overall course offering and not directly on the studio project. It is not clear whether students were inspired in future participatory community design judging from their evaluation comments at this publication time.² One of the reasons for this may be that I did not directly ask whether they were inspired or not through the project. It may be too soon for the students to understand and perceive impact from this project. I contacted one of the participating students after two years of the program and received a very positive response on this question.

ENDNOTES

¹ The author was a visiting faculty from USA at the Awaji Landscape and Horticultural Academy (ALPHA), Japan during the spring of 2002. The author has over 30 years of professional and educational experience in the USA, Canada and Japan. Students with a variety of backgrounds had just started their program at ALPHA. A design studio was organized to be their first design project for a two-week period.

² I am happy to learn that the project itself may be continued with students participating from Kobe University under Professor Shiozaki's guidance. Professor Shiozaki is one of the Board Directors of the Aozora Foundation.