

Landscaping Changes Communities

Hikari Koide

Tokyo University of Agriculture

Sawasdee kha! Let me first introduce myself. My name is Hikari Koide, a student of Tokyo University of Agriculture or Tokyo NODAI. Today, I will present to you my presentation entitled “Landscaping Changes Communities”.

I am a major of Landscape Design in Tokyo NODAI. The word landscape came from the words “land” and “scape”, which means to create indigenous scenery. In landscape design it always requires to do a research by discovering indigenous resources by reading local background and analyzing them. It make these discovered local resources and put them into good use to create beautiful indigenous sceneries. And those sceneries are always related on local daily lives of their communities.

However, there was a big occurrence in Japan that has changed its entire sceneries. It was the Tohoku Earthquake that occurred on Mar. 11, 2011. Not only towns and cities were destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami, but also the scenes of people’s everyday life has disappeared due to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Fukushima Prefecture was greatly devastated.

As a Japanese student of landscape design, it was my desire to use my field of study to help my country. But from a practical perspective it was difficult for us students to effectively act against such difficult problem. Because we do not have enough funds, time, and technical skills for solutions of the problem. However, we, the students, have possibility. It is our unfettered idea not bound by financial matters or conventional ideas. Is it possible to get back lost sceneries from a viewpoint of landscape and student’s unfettered idea?

As a student in Tokyo NODAI, I am luckily exposed not only to education confined in the classroom, but also practical education in the field.

Last summer, there was a chance to participate in a landscape design workshop called “Summer Studio” in Tokyo. It was organized by Japan Institute of Landscape Architecture. Around thirty students from eight different universities took part in it. They were split into teams and were assigned target areas with corresponding cases. The aim of this workshop was to learn skills in the field of town planning.

Through this workshop, I further realized the real condition in Fukushima. Despite the news seen in the world, there is still a town in Fukushima that is not damaged physically by the calamities and affected by the radiation. The town is Ishikawa.

As you could see in this figure, Ishikawa is located in the forefront of cool spot area which is very safe. This is the reason why it is expected as a center of reconstruction of the prefecture. Moreover, the town is lived by people for more than thousand years thanks to its firm ground. It is not damaged physically, but it is suffering from financial damages caused by harmful rumors and misinformation. Although there is low radiation level, many people are scared to come to the town and buy their products.

In line with the town's revitalization, our team assigned Gosaisho Highway as a target area. Gosaisho highway is one of the main routes which connect the inland to the coastal area. It runs between the mountains and is used as a community road for more than four hundred years. When the Tohoku Earthquake occurred, people in Ishikawa were able to deliver relief goods faster than the local government.

To make a persuasive proposal, the most important thing is to know well about the region. A fieldwork and interview to its local people was held. I felt the actual atmosphere, heard the voices of its people, and found valuable pieces of information that are not in the Internet.

On the other hand, a new relationship was seen growing between the people in the town and the heavily affected bay area as they continuously support each other. I thought that this kind hospitality from the town people is as beautiful and valuable as other tourist attractions.

Based from our fieldwork, the idea of making this community road into a "Scenic Byway" have come up. It is not only making a highway with beautiful scenery but it includes its indigenous resources in the scenery. Our team convinced that this hospitable people should be the emphasis of the proposal. By making full use of the town's unique landform, we wanted to make invisible resource visible. In the future, if drivers pass through this scenic byway, they will get interested of Ishikawa leading to the return of the town's industries.

There was a keyword in our proposal. It was a heart of kind hospitality of local people. We convinced that a showcase the community's heart of kind hospitality communicated with a background of beautiful terrains and seasonal scenery has a power to attract people. A highway to enjoy a scene of hospitality, Omotenashi Highway. This is the title of our proposal. From our culture, we Japanese pay careful attention to the idea of hospitality, where not only direct actions like serving a cup of tea, but we also arrange a warm environment for our visitors like decorating the surrounding with the season's flowers. This is to ensure that the visitors will have a great time that they will want to experience again. Scenery which rose up between town people and tourists would be a magnificent tourist attraction in the future.

In our plan, we will invite children from the bay areas to the town. These children are forbidden to play outside because they are living in an area where the amount of radiation is high. In Ishikawa, we aim to provide a place where they will feel free to enjoy activities with local people. With the help of the community, they will cut down cedar trees and replace them with broad-leaf trees. Single vegetation of cedar trees could easily cause landslide but by replacing them with broad-leaf trees, their wide root system could grab the soil and

hold it firm. In addition, they change its color into a beautiful red during autumn and that will beautify the scenery.

The longer the relationship continues, the larger the scenery in the town changes. People planting in rice paddies at the bottom of the valley complimented by the broad-leaf trees coloring the base of the mountains will definitely be a sight to see. Before long, tourists will visit to see the scenery and form a special relationship.

In our proposal, by making a highway of hospitality, their strongest resource, people passing the highway will drop by into the town. And through communications with local people, they could learn the safeness of Ishikawa and its fresh farm products, as well as their comfortable hot springs and other good points. In the future, the harmful rumors will be corrected and the industries and community of Ishikawa will be better.

From this workshop, I realized that students became the needed connection—the catalyst between administration and local people. To make a town planning proposal of an actual town could be an effective training for students. At the same time, the proposals were able to make good use of these local resources and moved the town. In an actual town planning, economic activities are often the priority because local administrators and consultants are the main planners. In reality they can make a practical proposal based on financial and technical matters. But the core of its management, who forms the scenery of the town, brings it up, and passes onto the next generation, is not administrators or consultants, but the local people. I think to make indigenous scenery sustainable, the most important thing is to show the people possibility and motivate them well. And students unfettered idea not bound by financial matters or conventional ideas has a possibility to motivate local people effectively. In on-the-spot inspection, they showed us a lot of new, beautiful and attractive resources. However, local people were too used to them and not noticing them. From now on, we should make use of local traditional resources by letting them notice how attractive they are and make indigenous landscape.

The workshop was originally held as an educational training for student and local people just assisted our fieldwork. However, local people got interested and influenced by our attitude which making a survey and planning proposal earnestly. As a result our work and contributions were often published by local newspapers. The fact that these students don't have sufficient knowledge made sufficient proposals. That gave a big surprise and possibility to the local people who were having a hard time facing this misunderstood problem. And it was able to involve the local society and achieving an effort for development little by little.

This article says that they started a new educational project based from our proposal. Now, an acorn planting project has started. This project involves children of the bay area and the people of the Ishikawa. Acorn seedlings will be planted in nurseries and after three years, these will be planted in the green spaces located in the bay area for disaster prevention. Through this project, children will learn about disaster prevention through interaction with the community. This budding connection between the mountain and the sea will lead to a bright future.

In conclusion, many efforts have been made in Fukushima, but it is not sufficient to revitalize the area. It is still covered with a veil of rumors and misinformation. To make its magnificence seen, what we could do is to let them notice how wonderful the land they live in through effective landscaping. Unfettered, free ideas of students could help on the activation and development, and through the field of landscape design, they can move forward effectively. These are the first step to take away its veil.

I believe if students could act against indigenous communities with a viewpoint of landscape, we can change the world.