



Kitagata Buraku

CASE STUDIES OF COLLECTIVE HOUSING IN ASIAN CITIES SERIES • NOV 2021

Kitagata is another of Japan's 6,000 Buraku communities that have faced centuries of institutionalized discrimination, isolation and impoverishment. When a set of government programs was finally introduced to right some of those wrongs, this Buraku community in Kitakyushu City and a team of young community architects took advantage of them, to collectively redesign and rebuild their crowded riverside community. Kitagata is one of several pioneering Buraku communities which spearheaded a larger movement of community-led redevelopment of run-down, neglected neighborhoods in Japan.

- Project Kitagata Buraku
- Location Kitakyushu City, Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan
- Size 1,920 households
- Finished 1993
- Type On-site redevelopment of a historic outcaste Buraku settlement, in collaboration with community architects and with support from special government subsidies

CONTEXT AND PROCESS

Buraku and Machi-zukuri in Japan

Five hundred years ago, Japan's feudal society was organized into a strict caste system of warriors, artisans, farmers and merchants. Those who slaughtered animals, dug graves and worked leather (thereby becoming tainted with the impurities of death) were the system's "untouchables." Called first *efa* ("filth") or *hinin* ("non-human") and much later *burakumin* ("villagers"), these outcastes were forced to live in squalor, poverty and social exclusion in designated settlements called *buraku*, on the outskirts of towns and cities, where they were easy targets for abuse.

Discrimination against the Buraku was outlawed in 1871, but mistrust and hostility continued right up to the 1960s, when pressure from the Buraku's long-standing liberation movement induced the government to launch a series of special programs to help improve the lives and settlements of the Buraku. Besides improvements to education, employment and welfare, these programs provided support for the physical upgrading of Japan's 6,000 Buraku districts (representing some three million people), in which government budget was passed directly to the Buraku Liberation League (BLL) branches in each community. Two-thirds of this money came from the national government, and one-third from the local government, but it was up to each community to negotiate with its local government and decide how to plan and implement the projects. The Kitagata project described here was supported by those special Buraku upgrading programs.

Many less-active communities were content to let local governments take charge of upgrading their settlements, and most municipalities were only too happy to take on these lucrative construction projects, in which the entire settlements were demolished and replaced with grim, contractor-built public rental housing blocks for the former residents. But a few Buraku communities, like Asaka in Osaka, Misaki in Chikushino, and Kitagata, took advantage of special government programs and provisions which allowed them to develop a variety of community improvement projects themselves, in a more participatory style. In those days, community participation was unknown territory in Japan, so the people in those Buraku communities had to make up the rules for how to plan and redevelop their settlements as they went along.

Machi-zukuri

Machi-zukuri ("participatory town planning" in Japanese) is a concept which emerged from the project at Asaka Buraku, and from a few other seminal redevelopment projects, undertaken in the 1970s by poor communities who wanted more say in how their neighborhoods were redeveloped. Through these early community-driven upgrading projects, Japan's Buraku communities played a pioneering role in establishing the institutional and financial arrangements for the machi-zukuri facility, and became test-cases for the model in which communities design and implement their own redevelopment and local and national governments support. These projects became very well-known and inspired other communities to do participatory plans of their own. Machi-zukuri was gradually incorporated into national town-planning policies and practices, through a series of new laws and regulations. Even today, this kind of community-driven planning continues to be most visible in Buraku settlements around Japan.

The community

Kitagata is a large Buraku settlement in the city of Kitakyushu, on the island of Kyushu, in western Japan. The settlement was established centuries ago, on a bit of land that was then outside the city, on the mucky banks of the Murasaki River, where the residents practiced their caste-based trades of leather-working, street-sweeping, animal butchering, undertaking, sand-carrying and waste collecting.

Today, the 34 hectares of land Kitagata occupies is just a few kilometers from the city center, and is home to 1,920 households. In the 1980s, when the redevelopment process began, the whole area of Kitagata had been very densely built up, with a temple at the center of the community. 57% of the old wooden houses in the community were badly damaged by time and were in a dilapidated condition, with leaky roofs and patched-together walls. Some of the houses were occupied by owners, and some by renters. The alleyways which wound through the community were so narrow that two people could not walk beside each other. It was like a labyrinth inside there, and outsiders could easily get lost. The houses were built so close together that most got no daylight and were poorly ventilated. The community experienced frequent fires, which the municipal fire-trucks and ambulances could not reach.

Most of the residents of Kitagata had low-paying and irregular jobs as construction laborers, house cleaners or workers at the nearby race-track. But many also had jobs with the city's Sanitation Department cleaning sewers and collecting garbage. It was one of the victories of Kitagata's Buraku Liberation League

movement that they had been able to negotiate to upgrade their traditional street-sweeping and garbage collection work into these formal jobs with the city, which came with better pay, pensions and benefits.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The following part of the case study was written by Yoko Hatakenaka, who spent six years living and working with the people in Kitagata to plan what became one of the first community-based development projects for marginalized groups in Japan. Yoko is a senior community architect who directs an NPO ("non-profit organization" in Japan) called Kochi Citizen's Council, which is based in the city of Kochi, on the island of Shikoku, in southern Japan. Yoko has worked with Buraku communities to develop several pioneering community-driven settlement upgrading projects in Japan, including this one at Kitagata.

In spite of the many problems, we found that there were also many good points to be preserved in the Kitagata settlement. Those maze-like alleys formed the basis of the community and had a lot of charm. They were always kept very clean, by common consent, by those living along the way, and no speck of trash was left lying around to disturb the passersby. People also managed to grow flowers and shrubs in the narrow lanes, which gave a peaceful feeling, and there were many hand-made benches and places where people could gather for leisurely chats while enjoying the cool evenings. In those ways, the people in Kitagata had developed very close human relationships, in which, if a companion drew near, both people could subtly protect their privacy at the same time they were enquiring towards each other.

When we began working in Kitagata, we immediately sensed that in the long history of the area, people had grown accustomed to knowing each other intimately and took joy in living together. We called this way of living the "Kitagata style." This sort of connection between people was widely seen in Japanese society, but it has been lost due to the social shifts and rapid economic growth that has taken place since the 1980s. As we progressed with our project to work with the people to remove the problems of the present living conditions in Kitagata, the question that lingered in our minds was whether this charm would survive after the improvements were made.

The community redevelopment process

Kitagata was the largest Buraku in Kyushu, and was in great need of environmental improvements. For many years, the Buraku Liberation movement in the area had been proposing redevelopment plans, but it wasn't until 1982 that the Kitakyushu City administration took up the proposal seriously. A year later, the city set up a field office just outside the community to oversee the redevelopment.

In 1983, my organization, the Wakatake City Planning Institute, was commissioned by Kitakyushu city to work with the people to develop a plan to improve the community's housing and environment - a project which received funding support from the national government's special program to improve the living conditions in Buraku settlements. For eight years before that, I had been involved in redevelopment planning projects in other Buraku areas, and had also developed plans for cities, towns and villages. At the age of 33, I became the Kitagata community's 33-year old architect.

We move in and start to know the people

We started by renting a house inside the Kitagata community for our team (which included me and three engineering students from Toyo University), along the "90 cm Road," moving into that house ourselves, and beginning to talk with community residents in various public places, such as the public bathhouse ("sento"), which was back then an important place of gathering in most Japanese communities. We also joined the local festivals and concentrated our efforts on simply making our presence felt in people's daily lives.

Since many people came and went along that road from dawn to midnight, it was a good place to take the measure of the local people's communication. Since only one window separated us from this 90-cm Road, talkative women walking by would stop to ask, "Have you fellows gotten something to eat?" or "Have you taken a bath?" At first, people were suspicious and wondered who on earth these guys were. We also felt a little embarrassed, and initially, everyone was a little stiff and formal. But gradually, people got used to seeing us around and began to call us out to sit and talk.

Creating a system that allows residents to participate in the planning

We thought that unless we received the participation and full understanding of the residents, it would be difficult to actually plan and effectively work in the settlement. So we made an effort to create a system that enabled the residents to participate in every stage of the process, from surveying and planning level on. Machi-zukuri is the term we have in Japan for the process of community redevelopment, and I would like to

stress in this story the human aspects of that community redevelopment process in Kitagata - which is the most important part. Please don't pay too much attention to what we actually built in Kitagata, but try to feel the human process that brought about the physical transformation in that community.

In order to advance a planning process which included the residents as the leading participants, it was necessary to set up an organization composed of those residents. There are several ways of doing this, but in this case, representatives of the citizens groups in both the Kitagata Settlement and surrounding areas formed their own Progress Council. It was the Progress Council's job to completely understand the living conditions and the opinions of the local people and to make sure their ideas were part of the planning. To do this, the Progress Council set up several block committees and study committees, to cover specific areas and to look into specific aspects of the project and create more channels for information and more opportunities for discussion.

Once the discussions and the learning about the upgrading possibilities had started, we began inviting the residents in these smaller groups to workshops. The theme for the first round of workshops was simply to discuss Kitagata's good and bad points. We planners and architects and city staff learned so many things from the residents in these workshops. The residents themselves also came across facts and stories about their own community during the discussion process. These small groups later became the units for planning the redevelopment of the community, which wasn't done in one giant set, but was done in lots of little pieces. The final redevelopment plan was simply a collection of all these little pieces put together. By February 1990, the Progress Council had met 49 times, to discuss various aspects of the planning and ways to carry out the work.

During the course of the workshops, we gradually began to discover the community's spiritual treasures, which we call in Japanese moyai. Moyai literally means the process by which people share things and work together. The word moyai represents the way of life of residents who have shared many hardships together, faced many problems together, and known sadness and happiness together. We set out our aim of the project to improve the housing and environment, and at the same time to help the community revive this spirit of moyai, which is part of their heritage. When people clean the street together every day, that's moyai. And when people share stories about what's happening with each other in the morning and after work, that's moyai.

Launching the "City Planning News"

In order to encourage the enthusiastic participation of residents in the project, it was necessary to provide them with up-to-date news about what was happening. Also, in order to make the planning a part of the whole community, it was vital to continually announce the Progress Council's discussions, let everyone know about workshops and events, answer questions coming from community members and keep everyone informed about progress, issues and delays. When there is a lack of information, rumors start to fly, and it takes a good deal of effort to put them to rest. This was long before the days of mobile phones and social media! So as a way of getting out basic information on the project, we created the City Planning News. The newsletters were prepared by our planning team, with illustrations and simple language that everyone - even children - could understand. The newsletter was printed and delivered to every house in Kitagata. By February 1990, 31 issues had been published and distributed.

Engaging people to look at their community in new ways

By working with the residents to survey the history of the district and its existing environmental, housing and industrial conditions, we saw the need to bring out both the district's problems as well as its good points. It was important for the residents to reaffirm their connection with all the problems of the area - not only the environmental problems that came with crowded conditions inside the houses and in the lanes, but also the ways Burakumin discrimination persisted in people's lives. In the process, we discovered that Kitagata had great energy. We hoped that energy would always be treasured by the people, and we vowed to create a city planning that would carefully maintain it.

To get the children in the community to participate in the planning and to look at the charms of their community in a new way, we organized an event we called the "Great Maze Festival." The children were all given maps of the community, with directions to go around in groups, on different routes, looking to find certain surprises and tricks at various points along the way. Local organizations of women, youth and elderly people contributed to the festival by making traditional tools for games such as bamboo horses and straw sandals. We wore masks and carried banners which depicted figures from the "paper-scissors-stone" game, and surprised the children at the corners of lanes. The children could only proceed on their way after winning "paper-scissors-stone" game with the grown-ups along the way. The idea of the event was to help the children to experience unexpected discoveries by looking at their own community from different

viewpoints, and learning how to make the best use of the alleyways in their community. More than 400 children and their parents participated, dividing themselves into 50 teams.

Finding out who wants what in the redevelopment

In order to understand the residents' evaluation of the state of their houses and living conditions, as well as their desires for alterations and improvements, a questionnaire was developed and sent to each household. The questionnaire included concrete, practical questions like: are they willing to sell their houses to the city or not? In the case of planning new roads in the settlement, are they willing to help by moving their houses? The details from these household questionnaires became the basis for the first draft plan for Kitagata, and allowed each household's preferences and aspirations to be worked into the plan. The questionnaire also helped a lot to overcome the reluctance many residents still had about the redevelopment project.

Meanwhile, the planning team undertook physical survey and residents interviews and compiled the results for people to easily understand. These were presented at meetings of the Progress Council. Issues and problems of the area were reviewed and identified at these occasions and shared among the representatives sitting in the Council, the local government officers and planners. Broad strategies for improvement in the community gradually emerged.

First rough draft redevelopment plan

Based on the initial views expressed by people in the questionnaire, our planning team worked out the first draft plan of improvement, which put forth the basic design and concepts. The plan proposed for a combination of new public housing and new private houses on redeveloped parts of the community, and on-site upgrading of existing houses in other parts. Through the course of developing the redevelopment plan with the people, a few key principles emerged as very important to the residents:

1. Planning a neighborhood people in the Buraku Community can call home.
2. Forming an open community that maintains the district's existing unity
3. Creating a safe and comfortable living environment, with good quality housing for all, increased fire protection and areas for meeting and recreation which maintain the friendly spirit of the community.
4. Planning practically and realistically, to fit within the city's planning standards and budget constraints
5. Planning that embraces people's full participation in the creation of their new neighborhood and houses, and moving from "city planning" to "human planning."

First the draft plan was presented to the Progress Council and discussed, and introduced in the City Planning News. Then each block had meetings to explain the plan and to give people a chance to investigate their block in the plan, and make adjustments and improvements to their part of the plan. In these meetings, the number of people participating increased a lot. People sensed that the government was now determined and serious and the project was going to happen. More than 100 meetings and workshops were held for and by the Progress Council with assistance from our team.

We also opened a "Discussion Corner" in one room at the Civic Center as a place to hear residents' opinions. Based on the views expressed in these block meetings and in the Discussion Corner, the plan was altered and presented once more to the Progress Council. This whole process took about 4 months. The final plan then had to be presented to the City, and there was some pressure to move fast, because some of the government policies to subsidize the redevelopment were about to expire or change.

HOUSING AND SETTLEMENT DESIGN

Helping people design new houses communally

In the redevelopment of Kitagata, the residents could choose to upgrade their existing houses, build new houses or move into the public rental apartments they would help design. Under the terms of the government support program for the redevelopment, the city would buy the run-down houses of residents who wanted to sell, and could then use that money to buy a plot within the redeveloped part of Kitagata and build a new house there. To help the residents who wanted to upgrade or rebuild their homes, we teamed up with some young architects working in Kitakyushu City to develop a pamphlet of easy-to-understand house planning ideas, which we called the House Planning Information Box.

As we listened to the Kitagata residents talk about their housing and their community, we kept hearing the older people using the term "communal" to describe doing so many things together: "going to the communal bath", or "using the communal well." We kept this "communal" idea in mind when thinking about the housing designs too, and made it a theme of the housing design pamphlet. No matter which house type people

chose to build, the lots were purchased by parents and children, brothers and sisters, relatives and groups of good friends who wanted to build their new homes together, so that they could easily share gardens, and keep each other company. The housing design pamphlet included four designs:

- **Kitagata communal house**, designed for people with single families and financial limitations, who kept their old land, but could not afford to rebuild their houses and hesitated to enter public housing.
- **Two family house**, for two generations of the same family who wanted to live together. While ensuring each generation's independence and way of life, the model allows parents and children to live together.
- **Communal house for the elderly**, was designed so elderly families could live together and help each other.
- **Communal house for the young**, was designed to allow young married couples and young single people who take pride in the district to live together.

For each house type, a few households were chosen and visited several times, and while listening to their views, we actually designed their homes with them. Later, we set up a Home Planning Consultation Corner in the Kitagata office, where families could come and get help from the architects to design their new houses.

Participatory public rental housing design

In most public housing complexes in Japan - and in other Buraku redevelopment projects - the apartments are designed by the government in grim blocks, without no participation and no particular family's needs in mind. The units are then allotted to the occupants only after they have been finished. In Kitagata, we decided to design the public rental housing in a different way, with the full participation of the families who would be living there. For this we had help from Professor Endo's laboratory at the Kumamoto University. After determining the future occupants of each unit, we then held discussions with them, from the early planning stage. Most of the units consisted of three bedrooms with 6 tatami mats, a dining-with-kitchen, a bath and a toilet.

Even though space was limited, we then planned the rooms to fit the specific needs of each family. In one case, where a group of ten families were to be living together in one apartment cluster, the room designs were different in all ten units. We took into consideration the residents' ideas when planning the common spaces too - the walkways, gardens, playgrounds and community centers. In the community design workshops, people were enthusiastic in offering their suggestions to the apartment designs. One idea that came out of the workshops was the introduction of shared corridors on the southern side of the apartment buildings. These corridors were intended to reproduce in a multi-family building the functions of the old Kitagata's small lanes, and provide pleasant, breezy, sunny spaces for neighbors to meet and chat and pass the time. Those function were now to be taken over by common corridors on upper floors. It was very unique that multi-family housing had a corridor on the south with the advantages of sunshine and breezes.

At the time, these methods were quite progressive. Participatory housing design had been introduced in a few cooperative housing projects in Japan, but Kitagata was the first case of it being used in public housing. And it seems to have been effective. In most public rental housing, people usually stay no longer than five or ten years. But in our participatory public housing in Kitagata, there was a tendency for people to move in permanently. Construction of the rental housing began in 1985 and was completed by April 1991.

Planning common facilities with personality

Rather than dreary, dangerous and noisy roads which give priority only to cars, we studied how to create clearly-defined streets that are both easy and enjoyable for people to walk on, and preserve the functions and benefits found in open-air walkways: trees, landscaping, interesting paving patterns, places to sit and rest, curvy rather than straight lines. These ideas all made their way into the redeveloped areas of Kitagata.

Soon after we first started working in Kitagata, a group of fifth and sixth-graders started peering in the windows asking what we were doing. When they discovered our tables were filled with colored magic markers and paper, they began coming to visit us daily. Before we knew it, our walls were covered with their drawings, and our little "assistants" became part of our team. In these ways, we got to know the children and we keenly felt the need for a place where the children could freely gather and play and learn after school. That idea led to the inclusion of a children's center in the planning for Kitagata.

In July 1988, that children's center was completed. It functioned both as a children's hall and as a physical education center and arena. While building the children's center, we received help from the primary school students, who helped make colorful tiles that were used to decorate various places in the center. Many

children and adults use the center every day. It is also used by people from Kitagata's surrounding neighborhoods, and has become a focal point for exchange between people inside and outside Kitagata.

Final plan for Kitagata

In January 1984, after lots of adjustments and contributions from the residents, we were ready to present our final redevelopment plan for Kitagata to the city. The redevelopment project in Kitagata differed greatly from the model used by the city in the past, in which all the houses in the area were sold to the city and demolished, and the land was redeveloped in mid-rise and high-rise public housing blocks. But in our surveys in Kitagata, we found that 30% of the people didn't want to sell their houses, and 50% wished to rebuild their houses on the land they already owned. So a "sectional renewal" plan was followed, in which a kind of micro-planning was done, combining in-situ upgrading in some areas and complete redevelopment in others. For that kind of micro-planning, the small group planning worked very well.

Of the original 1,920 houses in the area, 1,000 were to be bought and torn down by the city or moved to a different location. Using this newly-created space, the roads were arranged so that each house adjoined a road over four meters in width. Parks, open spaces and installation of sewer lines were also planned. All together, 407 units of public rental housing were constructed, as well as more than 300 private homes. Efforts were made to award construction contracts related to the Kitagata Project to local contractors in the area. By 1993, the construction of the redevelopment project was finished, with new roads, houses, apartment houses, parks and various public facilities.

Slide show under the stars

After completing the public rental housing, the residents organized a public event, inviting local officials and professors from the university. They called the meeting "Slide show under the Stars". The meeting was held on the open roof terrace of one of the rental buildings. The people showed slides and told the story of how they had grown up in the neighborhood, how they had remade their housing and neighborhood relationships, with the participation of all the residents, and how they maintain their rental housing and settlement by themselves, helping each other taking initiative.

Project timeline

- 1800s: Kitagata Buraku community established on the muddy banks of the Murasaki River.
- 1982: City accepts community's proposal for redevelopment.
- 1983: Redevelopment process there begins. Yoko and team moves into Kitagata.
- 1984: Initial redevelopment plan is presented to the city.
- 1985: Work starts on the public rental housing, the first reconstruction in the district.
- 1987: Professor Endo's lab at Kumamoto University joins project, helps with public rental housing design.
- 1988: Children's center completed in July.
- 1993: Project completed.

PROJECT FINANCING

Exchange rate in 1984: US\$ 1 = 250 Yen

Project costs

The cost of the implementing the project (including all the development of public facilities, public rental housing and the cost of purchasing run-down houses from people) came to about 20 billion Yen (US\$ 80 million). The funds to pay for the redevelopment came mostly from the subsidies in the national government's special Buraku settlement upgrading programs, with some funds also coming from the Kitakyushu municipal government.

Financing

For those families who wanted to build a new house by themselves, or buy land in the project for building their own house, there were soft loans available, if they needed it:

- New house building loans of up to maximum 6.4 million Yen (US\$ 25,600), at 2.8% annual interest, repayable in 25 years.
- Land purchasing loans of up to maximum 5 million Yen (US\$ 20,000), at 2.8% annual interest, repayable in 25 years.

IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

Successes

The Kitagata Project was one of the pioneering cases of participatory settlement development in urban low-income communities in Japan. In recognition of the achievement, the Architectural Institute of Japan awarded a prize of honor to the City of Kitakyushu and Yoko Hatanaka (as a representative of the project planning team) in 1994. The points cited in the award were: (i) efficiency in implementing an improvement project for a large-scale low-income settlement, (ii) role of planners as an intermediary between government and people, facilitating their partnership in the process of environmental upgrading, (iii) innovative attempt for house design reflecting "a joy of living collectively", and (iv) organization of a series of participatory activities in planning and implementation.

In the course of Kitagata's redevelopment, many residents lost the homes they had been living in for a long time. Those who could afford to rebuilt or renovated their old homes, but many of the poorer community members - both home-owner and renters - had no choice but to move into public rental housing. Since the newly rebuilt Kitagata looks so much nicer than the old one, people from outside the district might not understand the hardship and grief some residents experienced through the course of redevelopment. Even if it is old and narrow, one's home of many years is still one's home.

I began working on Buraku area town planning when I was a college student, and will never forget a conversation I had then. I was visiting an old woman living in a Buraku area in order to conduct a survey. I asked her if she was willing to sell her home to the city, so her area could be redeveloped. She said to me, "Young man, please look at the scratches on this old wooden column. For me, this column contains memories whose value cannot be measured in money. Yes, it's necessary that conditions in this community be improved, but this column is why I don't want you to ask me so lightly if I am willing to sell my home or not." When I walked through the redeveloped Kitagata years later, I couldn't help but ask myself uneasily whether I had done the same thing in this place too? I believe that most of the community people who assisted us in the project had the conviction that if the project makes the district's living conditions better, and leaves a good town for their grandchildren to live in, then they should help.

The project did also cause some unintended troubles for poorer community members. Because the city paid compensation money to those whose homes were torn down, people who had been receiving social welfare payments ended up losing those supports. By tearing down a house, which is an asset, a home-owner receives compensation, which is also an asset. But unless that money is expended on living expenses right away, that person becomes ineligible for social welfare payments. And the system dictates that the housing compensation can only be used on housing costs, not on starting a small business which might help someone become financially independent.

More reflections from Yoko

From the experience I had working with the Kitagata community, I would like to suggest four points for professional architects who would like to work with communities in similar ways:

- The architect has to be like a story-teller, who can sit with people and help them visualize what buildings and conditions could be like in their community, after upgrading. An architect's drawings and words have to bring a story-tellers' skills to the process of community planning and community design.
- The architect has to help people change from problems to hope. People in the community always have a lot of immediate problems which make it difficult for them to see beyond those problems to some better future. An architect can help people see beyond those problems and translate worries into hope.
- The architect brings in an outsider's perspective. A community architect is a person who comes into a community from outside. And as such, the architect can bring in some good points and a new perspective, which can help people inside the community to see new possibilities. One of the odd things about communities that sometimes, the people who most directly face problems have a hard time recognizing those problems as problems. It can often be helpful to have friendly outsiders bring a in fresh perspective, and to see things the community people can't - both problems and possibilities.
- An outsider can help rebuild the troubled human relations within the community. But none of this can happen unless the architects can win the trust of the community people. How to get the people's trust? The best way to start is simply by listening to them, learning about their stories and their history, being there in the community with them. We have to learn from people, and if we really learn, we will win their trust.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

For more information about the redevelopment of the Kitagata Buraku, please follow these links:

A report on the Kitagata project by Yoko Hatakenaka, written just as the project was coming to an end:
http://www.achr.net/upload/downloads/file_22062021173455.pdf

An article about the project by Professor Mitsuhiro Hosaka, written in May 2000:
<https://pubs.iied.org/g01884>

Google maps: You can take a virtual walk through the entire Kitagata neighborhood now on Google Maps "street view" - every single lane in the community is in the system. Just go to Google Maps, and then search for "Kitagata, Kitakyushu, Japan".

For more information, please contact:

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PHOTOS



▲ The Kitagata Buraku community is located in Kitakyushu City, a large port city of about a million people in Fukuoko Prefecture, on the northern tip of Kyushu Island, in southwestern Japan.



▶ This aerial photo of Kitagata, from the 1980s, shows how crowded the houses were before redevelopment.



▲ Kitagata was formed in the early 19th Century on swampy land along the Murasaki River. At that time, it was far outside the city, but now the community is just 4 kms from the city center. You can just see the race course to the south, where many community members have jobs.

▶ There were no wide roads at all in the settlement - only very narrow lanes like this one. If there was an emergency, ambulances and fire trucks could not get into Kitagata at all.





There were lots of hand-made benches like these along the lanes, where people would rest, chat with neighbors and enjoy cool evenings.

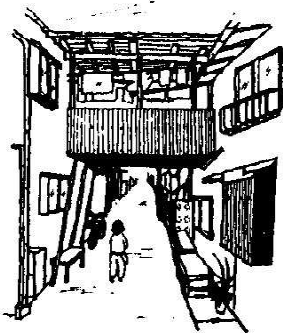
That's Yoko (on left, with beard and glasses) and his young team, chatting with community women in one of the lanes, shortly after they arrived.



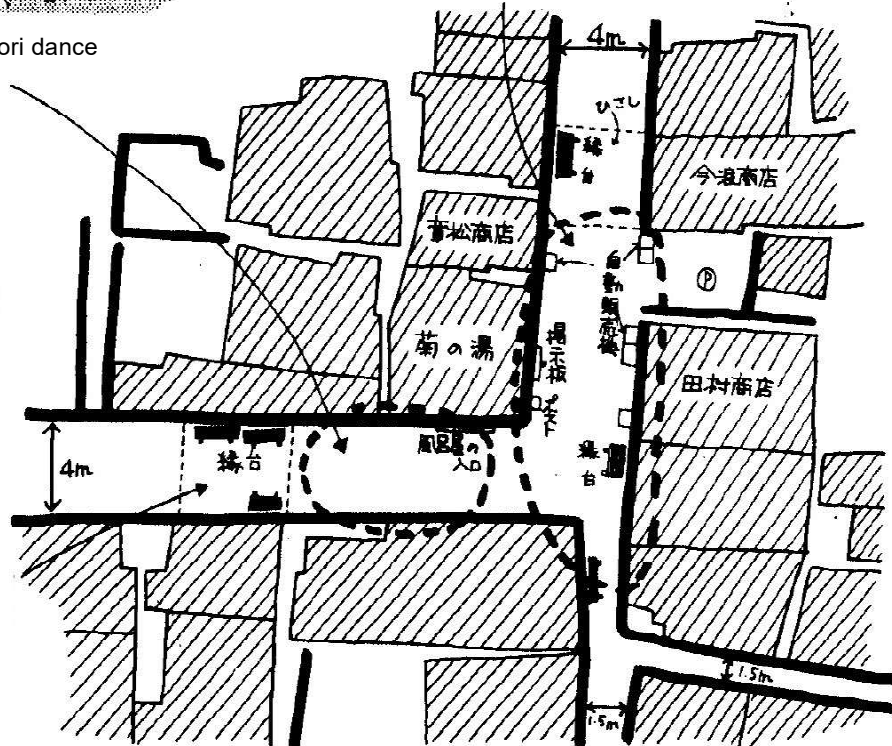
Lively Bon Odori dance



Lively gathering place with shoppers and people leaving the public bath



Above the roads, there are places for drying clothes, which people can use for protection from the sun while talking.



These are a few of the sketches Yoko and his team made of the small internal lanes and open spaces in Kitagata before the redevelopment began. This was part of their process of understanding the community and recognizing qualities and features that were valuable and worth retaining in the new plan.



Yoko: "We thought that unless we received the participation and full understanding of the residents, it would be difficult to plan and effectively work in Kitagata. So we made an effort to create a system that enabled residents to participate in every aspect of the planning."



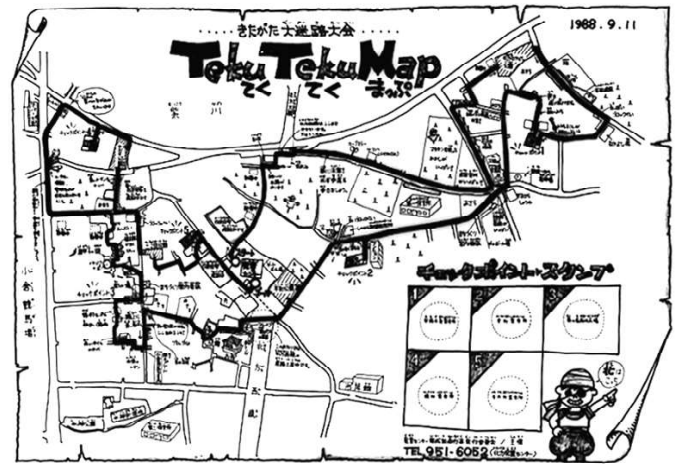
To make the planning of such a large area possible, the settlement was divided up into blocks, and the residents of each block worked together to identify the "spiritual treasures" and the problems in their area, and then develop their own plans for redevelopment.



BEFORE: Here is a map of one block, which the community people drew, to show the houses and communal facilities before redevelopment.

AFTER: This map shows the same block, with new roads, rebuilt houses (orange), new rental housing (red) and untouched old houses (blue).

▶ The children of Kitagata were among the most active and most enthusiastic participants in the redevelopment planning, from the very first day the architects moved in.



▶ The architects made this map for the Great Maze Festival, which was a fun way for both kids and grown-ups to better understand their community.



▶ The Great Maze Festival was organized during summer vacation, and the parents helped to make all the materials for the event.



▶ Here one group of children and their grown-up guide follow the map through the lanes of Kitagata, to see what surprises are in store.



▶ At some points, the children had to play "Scissors, paper, stone" before they would be allowed to continue on the course of the maze.



▲ Yoko and his team of community architects published regular "City Planning News" sheets, to keep residents informed about every stage of the planning and redevelopment process. By 1990, 31 issues had been produced and distributed.



▲ This photo shows one group of residents collectively planning the subsidized public rental housing they would eventually move into. Each unit of the rental housing was specifically designed to meet the needs of the resident family.



▲ Here the models of the public rental housing blocks, which the residents designed, are being presented to government officials from the city, who would then construct the housing, according to the people's plans.



▲ Here is one of the larger public rental housing complexes which the residents designed, with lots of spaces for gathering, socializing, growing flowers and keeping the community spirit alive.



▲ More than half the families in Kitagata opted to sell their old land and houses to the city and move into the permanent, subsidized public rental housing that they designed themselves, with help from Yoko's team of community architects. These photos show some of the small shared spaces, which the people had already begun to plant with little gardens.



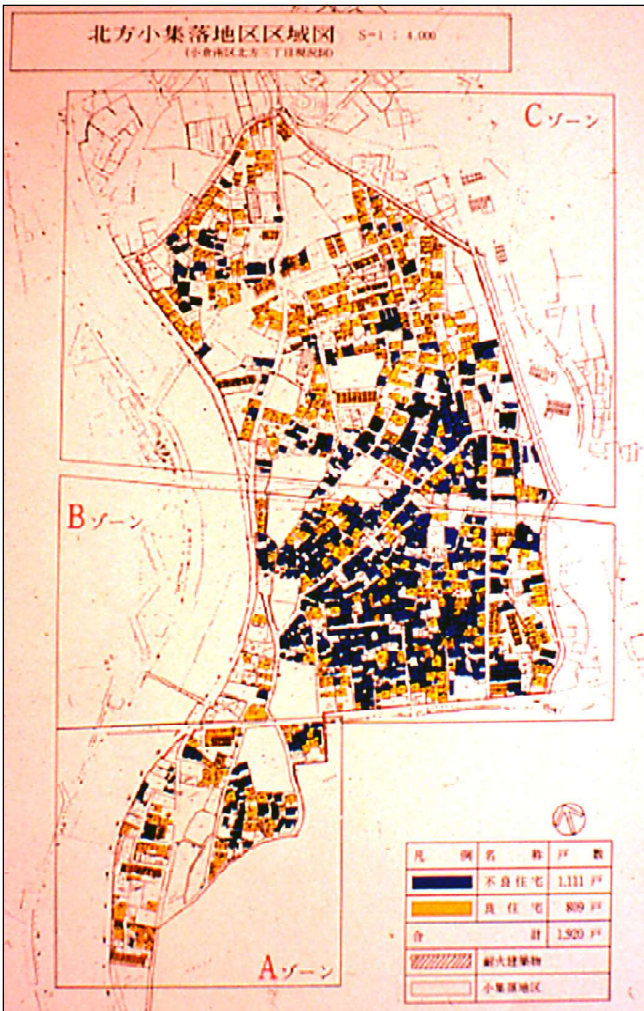
▲ Here the women are cooking a feast for a community gathering in the new community center, which was built and paid for by the city of Kitakyushu, according to the plans the community people developed with the community architects.



▲ That's the two-story Children's Center, where lots of after-school education and recreation activities for the children take place. The colorful ceramic floor tiles in many of the center's rooms were made by the children themselves.



▲ An important part of the planning of Kitagata's redevelopment was bringing in new roads and infrastructure, which the city government paid for. But instead of introducing a grid of faceless concrete roads, the community people designed their new roads with curves and with spaces for gathering, sitting and planting trees.



▲ **KITAGATA BEFORE:** The reproductions of these old maps are a little grainy, but they are important artifacts which show the entire Kitagata community, and how it looked before and after the redevelopment process.

▲ **KITAGATA AFTER:** Of the original 1,920 houses in the area, 1,000 were bought and torn down by the city or moved to different locations. Using this newly-created space, the roads were arranged so that each house adjoined a road over four meters in width. Parks, open spaces and installation of sewer lines were also planned. All together, 407 units of public rental housing were constructed, as well as more than 300 private homes.



▲ Another photo of one of the newly-completed public rental housing blocks, with apartments opening onto open shared corridors, with plenty of space for drying laundry and for kids to play.



▲ The entrance doors of two adjacent apartments in the public rental housing, with plants and decorations. Each apartment was designed specifically by and for the family who would be living there.



▲ *These photos show the same public rental housing blocks and how they looked 30 years later, in 2021. Most tenants of Japan's subsidized public rental housing stay only a few years and then move on, but in Kitagata, the public rental housing was designed with the concept that these would be permanent homes for the families who helped design them.*



▲ *Some photos from 2021 which show what the community looks like thirty years after the redevelopment process was finished. These show the inner lanes and some of the houses built by more affluent members of the Kitagata community.*



▲ *Some of the families in Kitagata opted to keep their old houses and land and stay where they had been living for a long time, and the redevelopment process gave people the freedom to make that choice. Here are 2021 photos of two modest houses which may be very little changed from the way they looked in the crowded lanes of the old Kitagata layout.*