

“Stands Square” in Otsuchi Town

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Introduction

“Stands Square” is an outdoor Izakaya style bar and restaurant which was planned, designed and constructed by collaboration with citizens of Otsuchi and a team in University of Tokyo (UoT). Izakaya is a place for everyone. No dressing codes, no difficult manners. Just for people to enjoy eating, drinking and chatting. It is a common space. This project is to create a common space for the victims in Otsuchi town; the Tsunami hit area.

The Site

Otsuchi is a narrow-shaped town, which entirely covers up two rivers called Otsuchi and Kozuchi that run from the inland, through the town and out to Otsuchi bay. Otsuchi has a population of approximately 15,000 (before the earthquake) and the total square measure is 200 km². However, due to its geographical conditions that limits the inhabitable area to be only the alluvial plain around the bay head, where the two rivers meet, and narrow land along the rivers; a total of only 1 % of the entire area. Therefore, the density of population in the inhabitable area is extremely high (ranked 5th highest in Iwate prefecture), and it is located right by the sea. Otsuchi has lived with the sea. Due to the Tsunami of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the central part of the town as well as the seaside area were totally washed out with as many as 1,281 victims (as of April 1st, 2013) were victimized by this extraordinary disaster. At maximum, over 6,000 people were refugees. Half of the citizens suffered from Tsunami seriously. Iwate prefecture ranked the damages of cities into 4 grades. Otsuchi and other 3 cities were graded as worst “catastrophic”. What made things worse was that the town hall was washed out with the Mayor and many officers together. So the administrative function of the town got paralyzed. Around the end of May, there were no houses, no stores and no restaurants in the center of the town. It was completely blacked out when night come.



Fig.1 Geographical Condition of Otsuchi Town



Fig.2 Central Area of Otsuchi Town (May 31st, 2011)

Beginning of the Project

In Otsuchi, there is a research center of UoT (Otsuchi Marine Research Center). Dr. Yukio NISHIMURA who is a chief of the Campus Planning Office of UoT and his lab members (Urban Design Lab) planed to enter Otsuchi to support the community near the research center. At the same time, Dr. Yu NAKAI was named as an advisor of the town regeneration by Iwate prefecture. He and his lab members including me (Landscape and Civic Design Lab) also planed to enter Otsuchi to relieve and cheer up citizens. Then we organized a team; Otsuchi Regeneration Support Team of UoT on May, 2011.

But we were totally at a loss that we didn't know how should we enter the town. As the town office was very busy operating much more works with much fewer staffs, we didn't want to bother them. However we didn't have any acquaintances in the town. After several days passed, we could get information by chance that some citizens organize their team named “Yuicco Otsuchi” for regeneration. So we had a contact with the leader and joined their 1st workshop in Otsuchi. After the workshop, we had a discussion what we could do with the Yuicco Otsuchi members. What they need was simply “Place to

gather". We propose to create a square with stands. Stands of Izakaya style. Square as a common space. Then they immediately agreed with us. Luckily, we had two key persons. Mr. K who is a core member of Yuicco Otsuchi is a cook. He ran a Bar Restaurant before 3.11. Everyone agreed on that he should be a master of Stands Square. Another key person is Mr. Katsushi NAGUMO who is our friend and is a designer, had experience to design stands.

But we were in adverse condition as far as capital. As we wanted their stands obtained by citizens themselves, not given by anyone else, we didn't get any subsidy. We decided to create Stands Square by ourselves.

Design and Construction

Mr. NAGUMO designed the Stands, tables, and benches. They were designed to have no complicated details so that even amateurs could construct them. In addition, the size of the stands was designated to be able to carry by a small truck. Design of stands made progress successfully. What we did next was to find materials. We visited a lumbermill where a friend of Mr. K worked. The president offered that we could take any lumbers we want. We chose several lumbers that suffered from Tsunami. The director of the lumbermill willingly helped us to cut timbers. Thus the project had proceeded with people's bond and their kindness.

Then we searched a place for Stands Square. At first there was an idea to carry stands to the evacuee shelters scattered in the town. But we didn't do that because we wanted to show our will not to give up the central area of the town; regenerate from the place filled with memories. Therefore we thought the best choice was Kozuchi Shrine which is a biggest shrine in the central area where annual traditional festival has been held. As citizens love traditional festivals so much, -- I hear almost all citizens belong or belonged to any traditional dance team of the festival -- everyone knows the shrine. Luckily again, a friend of Mr. K owned the land just in front of the shrine and willingly offered us to use the place. But as there still left small debris like fragments of glasses, we needed to pave. Again a friend of Mr. K who was a member of construction company brought two mounds of crushed stone. (Fig. 3) Another citizen also helped us to scatter and pave the crushed stones. Next to that, two men brought LP gas cylinder for grill. Some volunteers from Kyushu district helped us to construct the stands. Our students also worked very hard. (Fig.4) In this way, the Stands Square was finally completed by people's bond and their kindness on

24th July. We succeeded to get the light back in the center of the town.



Fig.3 Site of Stands Square in front of Kozuchi Shrine



Fig.4 Construction

What Design Can Do for Resilient Society

Many citizens had visited Stands Square and enjoyed eating, drinking and chatting. It was a common space for their hardest days. They could communicate with their friends, knowing they were alive from Tsunami. They could whine and/or cheer up each other.

What we did was not a design of stand itself but the design of place for very ordinary but essential communication and the scenery of people having communication at the symbolic location in the center of the town. This project got Good Design Award 2012 as special award from the chairman of Japan Institute of Design Promotion. The evaluated point was not design of stands itself but design to recover people's bond in the Tsunami hit town. In Japan, "Design" is no more a word to indicate simply arranging shape and color. "Design" is a kind of solution with knowledge and gentleness.

Stands Square had maintained for 3 months on its original place. The town office constructed temporarily shopping mall in Otsuchi

North Elementary School grounds in November 2011. Mr. K opened his bar restaurant in the mall with the Stands. The Stands Square is still working in the new bar restaurant to bond people and enable them to have ordinary communication.

People's bond must be one of the most important factors for resilient society. Thus, what we civil engineers should create is a place to breed people's bond. You can see plenty of public spaces left deserted in Japan. We should not design "public but deserted" space but "common" space that enable people to enjoy their daily life lively.



Fig.5 Stands Square (July, 2011)