

## 《Session 2》

**A Message from Town Development  
Sites in Okinawa**

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In the years since the end of World War II, Okinawa has seen areas turned into US military bases and then subsequently returned to Okinawa. It has also witnessed an array of new developments. With these trends have come changes in the makeup of regional communities, lifestyle transformations, and the disrepair of sacred areas known as *Utaki*.

I am a planner involved in the work of town development. Because town development is based on the concept of “public welfare: promoting happiness in the community”, I make it a point to closely study the relationship between the people living in a region and the region’s spaces and society when I do my work.

I believe that it is important to learn all you can from the region’s history. Because this understanding is essential, I do not just consider whether or not the region has important cultural properties. Instead, I pay attention to and learn from the ways in which traditional cultural properties have meaning for the regional society. By immersing myself in the local environment and seeing things in the context of the region’s history, I can gain an understanding of how cultural properties that have developed through time are used, the mechanisms within which cultural properties are matched and harmonized with the regional society, and, to use a modern term, the “balance of coexistence” between cultural properties and society.

Here, I would like to address the relationship between town development and sacred spaces as seen from history-based town development efforts in Okinawa.

In 1987, Taketomi Town on the island of Taketomi was selected by the national government as a district having an important village landscape. However, this selection was not based on a government initiative. Rather, it was born from a decision by the Taketomi community to establish an ordinance requiring protection of the area’s traditional landscape and subsequent efforts in this direction.

Thirteen years later, Tonaki Town on Tonaki Island followed in Taketomi's footsteps to pass a similar ordinance. Both of these ordinances clearly stipulate that it is important to maintain and preserve not only rows of houses but also *Utaki* (which are sacred areas) and other traditional aspects.

On the other hand, the prefectural capital of Naha established the "Naha City Urban Landscape Ordinance" through which town development efforts are underway that clearly emphasize the importance of landscape creation. Similarly, Okinawa Prefecture has established "Okinawa Prefectural Ordinance for Tourism Promotion" that targets the entire prefecture. These tourism promotion ordinances contain articles on the preservation of village landscapes that sparked the prefectural government to conduct a survey on this topic. This survey became linked to the movement on Taketomi Island and ultimately led to the national government's selection of Taketomi Town as a protected village landscape. On top of this is the "The Okinawa Prefecture Environment Impact Assessment Ordinance". Assuming that development is going to take place, this ordinance requires that the environmental burden caused by development be predicted and that measures to reduce this burden be implemented. In this way, protection through the establishment of rules (i.e., ordinances) and community determination is an effective tool in town development. However, the landscape ordinances of Naha and Okinawa Prefecture are not sufficiently detailed to preserve *Utaki*. And furthermore, the Ordinance on Environmental Impact Evaluations does not serve to stop development. These ordinances only effectively cover their purposes and the items specifically stipulated within them.

As another method, we can clearly mention that this issue is important when drawing up development or improvement plans and then implement projects that are based on these plans. Unfortunately, however, such plans do not always stick. While there are projects that firmly take preservation of historic culture into



Lots of small simple *Utaki* are seen at Kita-Nakagusuku village.



Lots of large exquisite *Utaki* are seen on Taketomi Island.



Torii (gateway), lantern or oak trees on roof symbolize the people's desire to beautify *Utaki*.

account, in many cases, only a certain degree of consideration is given to historic aspects when social capital is constructed to make living environments more convenient and comfortable. Consequently, there are some projects in which the core significance of these preservation efforts becomes lost.

At this point, I would like to present some examples of how the original nature of *Utaki* as sacred places is being drastically changed.

1. *Utaki* are given various new functions, which changes their original appearance. For example, they are used as parks and “gateball” (a game similar to croquet) facilities.
2. The original appearance of *Utaki* is changed due to landscaping projects or addition of features that are born from a desire to beautify them or improve ease of use. This includes the addition of lanterns, shrine pathways, halls of worship, and plants.
3. The *Utaki* lose their original appearance because their forests are lost or cut back due to development of surrounding areas. This development includes installation of water pumps, development of agricultural lands, road improvement, building of residential areas, and development of military bases.
4. The *Utaki* lose their original appearance because their forests are sold to make money for the community, or because the forests (including the *Utaki*) are put to other regional uses. This includes their being used as regional athletic facilities, etc.
5. The *Utaki* themselves are lost because the connection between the *Utaki* and local residents has been destroyed. This includes the abolition of festivals or combination of *Utaki*.

It would be impossible to conduct uniform evaluations and to take consistent action toward solving the various problems that surround sacred places in regional society. However, I would like to close my comments by expressing my own opinions on how *Utaki* should be valued and used in town development.

First of all, I believe that it is most important to view *Utaki* as cultural property and to emphasize their status as such.

Secondly, we must review our method for achieving this. I believe that regional entities must take steps toward creating ordinances that protect *Utaki*.

The new Landscape Act is just now taking effect, and I believe this means a regional posture toward the action that considers appropriate ways of fully using *Utaki* is required. Thus, I believe the third thing we must do is to remember that an important part of utilizing *Utaki* is maintaining the idea that all parts of the regional environment and all parts of daily life in the region have value, without losing sight of the importance of incorporating historical aspects.

In order to achieve this, I would like to find a new meaning for *Utaki* that fits the modern age - one that can sustain *Utaki* as symbols of regional society. I wish to emphasize this as the fourth point. Originally, there was a system in place where people made circuit pilgrimages to *Utaki*. For today's world, I propose making a new network of items in the community that should be valued. This network, which would connect different places, could include natural items, historical items, items that we value in our daily lives, symbolic and "extraordinary" items such as festivals, and items that are important in terms of peace-of-mind and dignity. By incorporating *Utaki* into this network and then considering them, I believe we will find hints that will lead us toward discovering this new meaning.

And for the fifth point, I believe we must expand this network in a



Lots of *Utaki* are included in a town development plan of Ishigaki-city.

Above: Play equipments are under construction beside *Utaki*.



Forests of *Utaki* were cut down into a large open area (playground) in Haeburu town.



Spring water has been considered as sacred and worshipped.



The improvement of a green park completely changed the surrounding landscape.

way that links local residents with people in other areas so that we can share the importance of sacred spaces. I hope to see more intensive academic research on sacred places, and I am grateful that this international forum sets an excellent model for steps in this direction.