

The Old Minato River

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The Old Minato River

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Introduction

Before 1900, the old Minato river ran through this site from the Rokko Mountain to the sea. However, the government redirected the river because of frequent flood and filled the old river bed to convert it into a new commercial axis. Then, the old Minato river site developed and became the old city center of Kobe. It was the commercial center and cultural center as well. After the World War II, the Kobe city office moved to Sanomiya and all the development was focusing on Sanomiya. The commerce of the old Minato river site declined year by year.



The north part of the site is a fresh vegetable and fish retail market, which is the biggest market in Kobe and is also called “the Kitchen of Kobe”. The south part of the site is a commercial street named SHINKAICHI. Part of the Shinkaichi street is covered with glass roof where most of the stores are Casino and Gambling shops. Other part of the Shinkaichi street was covered too but during the reconstruction the roof was moved. This part has cinemas, theatres and the Art Village Center, which mainly present the cultural activities. Between the market and Shinkaichi is a big urban park with underground parking and commerce.

Besides the Shinkaichi’s gambling part is Kobe’s biggest red-light district. Gambling and prostitution together made this part a “bad image” according to the Kobe citizens. The part was also considered as an unsafe area. Although the government worked hard on these problems and the security is not a problem anymore, the “bad image” in the Kobe citizens’ minds can not be easily erased.

Problems & Issues

As Sanomiya became the new fast developed city center, the commerce on the old Minato river site lost its competition capability and the shopping center declines. The old Minato river site can not find its new identity in the new era to redevelop in the new city environment. At the same time, because of the “bad image” of this area, it lost most of its young customers, especially young female customers.

The site has a long and important history because the old river ran through here and it was the old urban center. However, nowadays, we can find nothing to remind people about the history. There are few historical items left and no efforts were done to preserve history.

- Decline of the shopping center;
- Enhancement of a historical area (old river and ancient urban center of Kobe);
- Recognition of the past and its interface with the southern district (Nishide, Higashide District) and mountain;
- Reinventing an urban landscape that contributes to Kobe urban identity.

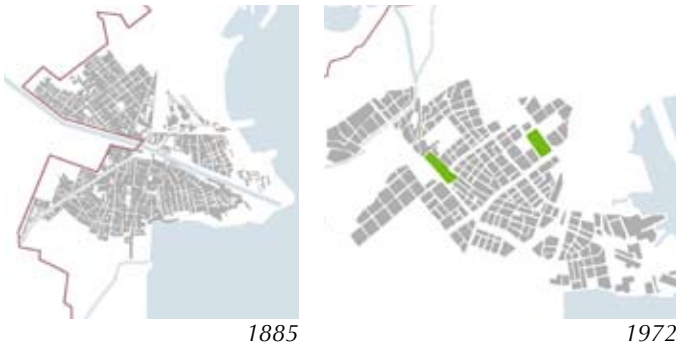
Analysis

1. History

The old Minato river flooded very often during its past, so the river bank was constructed higher and higher to prevent the flood. Year after year, it became a linear barrier to separate the commu-

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nity into two parts.



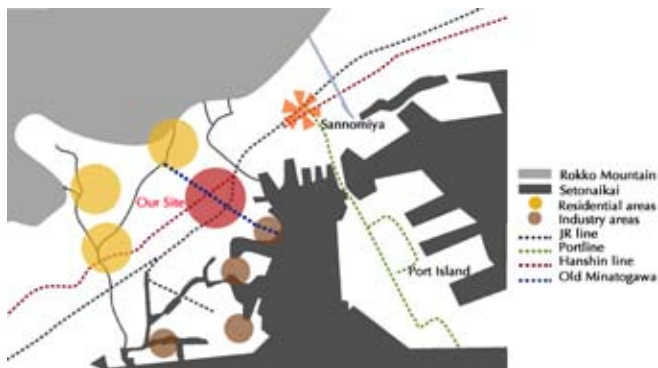
After the redirection of the river and refilling of the old river bed, the high topography was kept and the site looks like a spine bumping out of the ground. Thanks to its important location and the city policy, it developed into the urban center of Kobe.

However, as the city put all of its efforts on developing Sanomiya, the old Minato river site was forgotten in the city plan. The shopping center declined. It is no longer the urban center. The economy development slows down.

2. Location & Traffic

The old Minato river site is between the Rokko Mountain and the sea. On the old river bed is a linear commercial area which is surrounded by varied residential areas, including the high dense poor area and new constructed area after 1995's earthquake.

The JR Railway and Kobe's subway pass through this area and both have stations here. As for the vehicles, the express way has exit in the Shinkaichi part and there are two important boulevards



cross this area. What's more, all the traffic to the other side of the Rokko Mountain has to pass here. By these analysis, we can find the importance of its location.

3. Economy

The supporting economies in this area are gambling (including the boat race ticket center), prostitution and the market. The gambling and prostitution bring a negative influence on the competition with other districts of the city. The market is the most important positive element in the economy. It serves the whole Kobe city and it has a long history. These make it the potential economy that we can promote and put accent on.

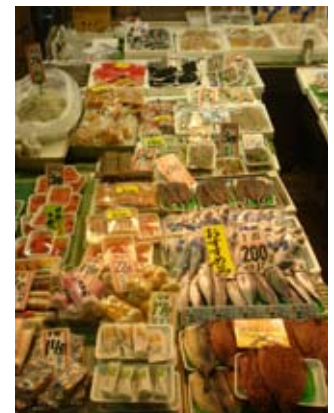
4. Culture

In the past, this is the most important entertainment center. Cinemas and theatres were very dense here. But as time passed by, the situations changed. There are few cinemas left. Fortunately, the community realised this and is working on bringing the cultural industry back. Nowadays, the Art Village Center was built and several culture activities are held annually, such as the Shinkaichi Music Festival and the Film Festival for women.

5. Site

a) The Market

The market has a long history and is still very busy these days. As the biggest vegetable and fish market in Kobe, it is also very success on its uniqueness. It is also called "the Kitchen of



The market

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Kobe" as a compliment. What left here is the small open shop and face to face communication which is very different from the supermarket. These advantages make it still very popular these days even though the invasion of big chain supermarkets.

b) The public building between the market and the Minatogawa Park

These two public buildings between the market and the park separate these two part totally. Although the market and the park are very close, because of the appearance of these buildings, we don't see the park in the market and we also don't feel the existence of the market in the park. These two buildings are one of the physical barriers blocked the commercial and social continuity on the old Minato river site.

c) The Minatogawa Park



The Minatogawa Park

The size of the Minatogawa Park is about 100m x300 m which is quite big as a public space in the urban center. Most of the park left not covered by vegetations and is very empty with almost no visitors. Because of the construction of the river bank to prevent the flood, after the refill of the river bed, this part is still higher than the residential areas. In some meanings, it still brings inconveniences to the vehicles and pedestrians. Under the park, there are commercial areas and parkings. But because of the invisibility of the entrances, the commerce is not very

active, most of them keep unused.

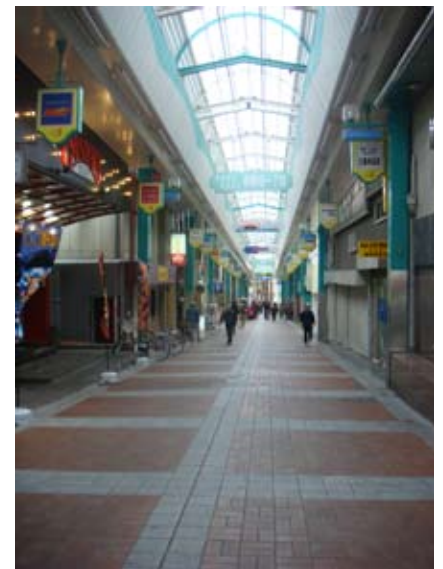
In such a big park, there are only a few trees on the market part as a small park in the big one. This tree covered part is the most frequented area in the park. People likes to stay under the trees and communicate with each other. The Japanese chess is very popular in the park, especially during the weekends -- the area under the trees are very occupied by chess players and watchers.

Around the park, there is an element school and a middle school, a market, a shopping street, but we rarely find the interactions between the park and its neighbours. The park itself as public space does not work well. It has a lot of potentials to be found and to be used.

d) Shinkaichi Covered Part

This part is covered by a glass roof, it protects people from rain. But, at the same time, it blocks the sun light and fresh air as well. The street is always a little bit dark, even during the sunny days. People lost senses of time, especially the gamblers. They keep gambling from the opening to the closing.

Besides this gambling part there is Kobe's biggest red-light district. This is a district that the Kobe citizens avoid to walk in. Although the



Shinkaichi covered part

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security problem was solved thanks to the government's hard work, the "bad image" still keeps people away this area.

Both the gambling area and the red-light area become a social barrier to block the continuity of this linear shopping center.

e) Shinkaichi Uncovered Part

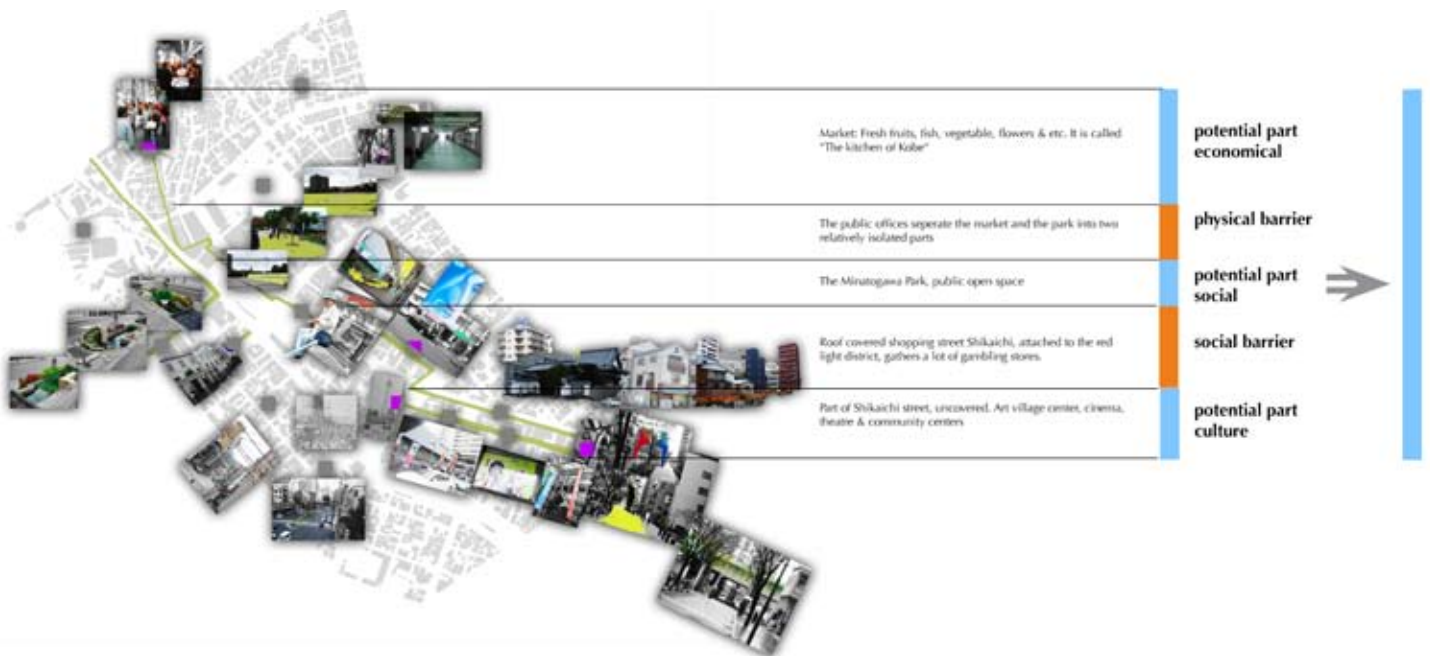
This street was covered too, but after very precise researches, the government removed the roof and brought in the sun light, fresh air, blue sky and green trees. The environment was improved and the gambling shops are disappearing as time passes by. More and more cultural places relocates here, such as cinemas, theatres, the Art Village Centre, etc. Little by little, this area is restoring its cultural center.

The community tries different meanings to bring



Shinkaichi uncovered part

back culture, get off the "bad image", and bring young people back, especially young women. The Shinkaichi Music Festival has been held several times and already has very strong influence for the community and the city. The Film Festival for women is the exclusive way to attract women. The whole community is working hard to find its new identity. The cultural activities should be promoted and be confirmed as a positive image for the community.



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Masterplan

Macro-design

1. Policy of the Kobe city

The Kobe city has its development strategies: Design city, Revitalize the city, Create culture center. These can be considered as the main direction for our design. We design following the city is main strategies.

2. Masterplan & Strategies

a) We will focus on the old Minato river site's commercial part, which is exactly on the old Minato river bed. As design, we will remove the physical and social barriers to make the old Minato river commerce a fluent economic unity.

On the important nodes we do different design according to its actual situation. Once we successfully connect the park with the market, the park with the Shinkaichi shopping street, the old Minato river will be reunified by its function.

For the physical barrier – the public office buildings, we can open the first floor to renovate it into an commercial corridor or an exhibition space. The goal is to make the market and the park visible each other.

For the Minatogawa Park, we will make the underground commerce very visible and we will redesign the park to make it dialogue with other

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parts of the community. It should work differently as the other small parks in the community and it should work harmoniously with them.

For the Shinkaichi covered part, we will suggest to remove the roof according the other part, to bring back the sky, sun light, fresh air and green plants. By this way, we will change the actual situation – dark and isolated. The ambiance will totally be changed by the new design. A new pleasant commercial and public social space will be created. At the same time, we can borrow Amsterdam’s experience on changing the red-light district – by inviting fashion and creative cultural industry to install their studios and galleries to replace the casino and prostitution industry. The new fashion and creative cultural industry will help to erase the “bad image”. The social barrier here will also be broken.



Strategies 1

b) we will try to bring the history back, the history of the old Minato river. The river once ran through this area, but today, on this site, we didn't find any indication of this history. Generation by generation, the history will disappear. For this reason, we will revalue the trace of history by design. We can use abstract and concrete concept to bring back the river; according to the situation of each part, we do different designs to fit them.

For the market part, the streets are very narrow, the stores are small and close and it is quiet busy. So the most possible way is to work on the pavement. By using linear symbol to represent the river, to tell people that the river was here. For the Minatogawa Park, we can dig out a real river to present the history in a very visual and direct way. The topography is also good enough to make river flow because of the slope. The river will also bring high value for the park.



Shinkaichi covered part after removing the roof

For the Shinkaichi uncovered part, we will put accent on promoting cultural activities to make this area a new cultural center.

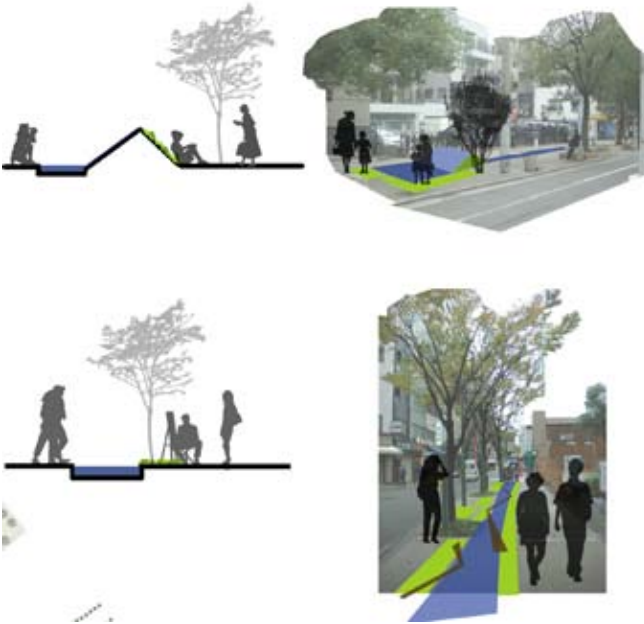


Concept of pavement in the market

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For the Shinkaichi shopping street, it is a pedestrian street and it is relatively large. We can do some linear water landscape to remind the history of the river. At the same time, the water landscape and trees will create a very pleasant ambiance to walk through.

our design, we will work on the Minatogawa Park to make it a leading role in the community's network of public spaces. Those small pocket parks will work individually and together to serve the community. We believe that the public spaces network will attract people to walk in and communicate with each other, to encourage social activities.



Concept of Shinkaichi shopping street

c) We will re-qualify this area's public spaces and re-plan them to make them work well for the whole community as real social places. In



Strategies 2

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Micro-design

After the analysis of the site and macro-design, we think the Minatogawa Park very important to the whole commercial spine. It has a lot of potential to be found and to be developed.

- 1) Around the park, there are metro and JR railway stations.
- 2) It is the most important large public space in this community.
- 3) It is a key element to link two commercial parts – the vegetable & fish market and the Shinkaichi shopping street.
- 4) It is now well used and does not function well.

Then, let's take an overview of the problems and our design intentions

Problems:

- 1) The park is a very big open space, but there are not too many people using it. It is quiet empty.
- 2) Its topography makes it separate the community into east and west parts.
- 3) The entrances of the underground commerce are very invisible, so that the commerce is not going well.
- 4) The park and the market is not well linked. They are isolated by two public office buildings.

Design intentions:

- 1) Dig out a river in the park to bring back the memory.
- 2) Well link the market and the park.
- 3) Put the underground commerce very visible and accessible
- 4) Give new and correct functions to the park, bring more people into the park.

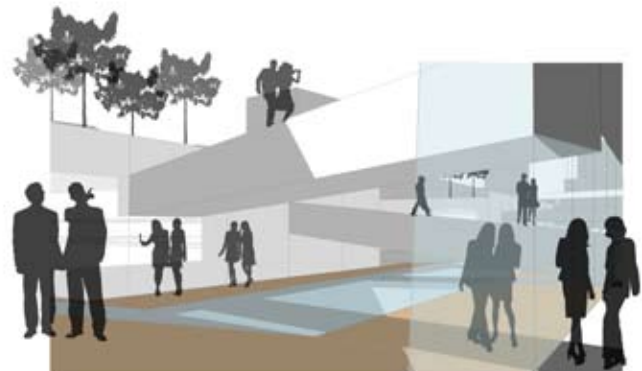
We dig down to look for history and we create a new river. Both sides have paths for people to have a close touch with the river. Also, it gives an opportunity to observe the surrounding at a low place and the noisy city is temporary hid-

den. What we have are blue sky, sun light, river and fresh air.



scene 1

At the same time, the digging opens the underground and makes the underground commerce very visible and very accessible, raises its commercial value. We also change the arrangement of the stores and convert some of the parking into stores, which makes it more reasonable and more valuable. It links the park with the market from ground and from underground, the two parts reunited at this point. We also see the continuity at the node where the park meets the Shinkaichi shopping street, so the old Minato river shopping center has been united into one continued commercial center. We also can introduce bookstores, galleries, cinemas, restaurants and etc. to promote culture.



scene 2

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Plan



Cross section



Longitudinal section

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Up to the park, after our observation and analysis, we found people like to stay under or besides the trees. In the above analysis, we also mentioned that people are gathering under trees in a small part of the big park. So why not enlarge the small part to the whole big park. There comes our design – an urban forest. What can the urban forest give?

a) Form

The irregular plantation will make some contrasts in form, dense vs. sparse, high vs. low, dark vs. light, etc. In the park, it looks more natural when planting irregularly.

b) Environment and Ecology

Most of the streets in Kobe are very narrow and it is impossible to plant trees aside. So the entire city need trees other than another concrete construction. This massive urban forest will improve air quality in this community. It is a nature closer to their everyday life than the Rokko Mountain. It can be considered the expand of the nature from the Rokko Mountain to the city.

We are thinking to plant different types of trees to keep the variety and will premier choose the indigent Japanese trees. This choice will keep this urban forest capable resist diseases and other dangers.

c) Function

Trees can supply shadows for people to rest, to gather, to communicate. That is a pleasant social place. Trees change as seasons change, so they will bring movements to the park, such as blooms in spring and splendid colors in autumn. These movements will attract people to the park.

When we plant trees, we also leave some open grass spaces to fit big activities and festivals. For example, concerts in the park, films in the park and fashion show in the park. We also can have different programs for the park, such as a Sunday market or weekend chess.



scene 3

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Conclusion

After this design, the memory of history is brought back. The barrier between the fresh vegetable and fish market is broken. The problems on this node is successfully solved. The market and the park are linked both the ground and the underground. The Shinkaichi shopping street and commerce under the park are linked too. The economy on this spine revives. The shopping street as linear public space and the park as large public space work together to improve the quality of lives. The social barrier on the Shinkaichi part is broken too. So the old Minato river comes back again in another sense, economy flows, culture flows and social life flows. Moreover, the linear spine serves the community and they interface with each other.



Bird's eye view

Reference

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- Parc des Locomotives, Montreal
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