Paper Title: Revitalizing Cities: Architecture as Regional Catalyst from Bubble Era Blowouts to Fukushima Fallouts and Beyond

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Proposed Program Stream:
Cities, Nature & landscapes: Liveable, networked cities and landscapes; Design, lifestyles and identity

Disciplinary Areas: Architecture and Urban Studies

Equipment requirements: Digital projector

Abstract
The “100 Million Yen Hometown Revitalization Program” (Furusato Sosei Ichikouen Jigyo), launched in 1988, was intended to foster regional revitalization by funding local governments. Many locales created projects rooted in local traditions such as conserving historic sites, restoring historic districts or constructing museums and cultural institutions. However, lack of guidance also led to the construction of many problematic “hakomono” projects, which were frequently criticized for creating exuberant facilities without regard for appropriate scale, functions, use or local constituencies. Concurrently, Kumamoto Prefecture initiated the innovative Artpolis program (1988- present) providing productive alternatives that have shaped the region through stimulating architectural interventions over the past twenty-five years.
Artpolis revolutionized public architecture in Japan and created multifaceted platforms for promoting architecture and municipalities across local, national and international audiences. In addition to being a mechanism for public works, Artpolis represents a comprehensive effort to produce inventive public projects, publicize architecture, and foster public spheres through architecture. The program established a system to commission architects to produce stimulating projects – from municipal museums highlighting heritage to lavatories in public parks – and support programs to cultivate broad public engagement with the built environment through multi-faceted events, ranging from local tours to international conferences and exhibitions.

Artpolis also precipitated a host of Japanese emulators including Toyama Prefecture’s “Face of the City” (Machi no Kao) program (1992-1998), which brought international architects to develop catalytic projects in rural Japan, and Shiroishi’s Mediapolis program (1994-2000), which created a city scale variation of Artpolis in Miyagi Prefecture. Examining these three programs elucidates roles for architecture in regional regeneration serving as catalyst for socio-cultural and political-economic developments. The programs also provide a broader context for understanding recent architectural revitalization efforts responding to the Tohoku disasters, including the “Home-for-All” (Minna no Ie) projects, the first of which was sponsored by Kumamoto Prefecture and inspired by Artpolis.

Examining Artpolis, the preeminent critic Koji Taki argued “what’s happening in Kumamoto seems to offer us leads towards rethinking the future of society and economy.” While Artpolis emerged from the cultural economies of “bubble era” Japan its legacies offer directions for architecture’s renewed contributions to society in the fallout of Fukushima. Collectively the Artpolis, “Face of the City,” Mediapolis and “Home-for-All” programs offer further leads towards rethinking future roles for architecture in the design of lifestyle and identities, and the creation of vital cities.