

**Designing For A New Urban Image:  
Odaiba Waterfront City, Tokyo**

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This paper is part of the on-going Masters research of the author.  
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## Abstract

Tokyo aims to achieve the image of a 21<sup>st</sup> century capital, as a world-leading international city that is attractive and lively to ensure its international competitiveness and continuous prosperity. Towards this end, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) for the past few years has undertaken various efforts in city planning in 'rebranding' the image of Tokyo. The recent development of Odaiba Waterfront City can be seen as an effort to realize the vision of creating a distinctive future urban image of Tokyo. Odaiba was born as a result of development that puts emphasis on quality built environment through a pragmatic approach in urban design via co-operation between the Government and private sector. Odaiba demonstrates a brand new Tokyo meant for working, living and visiting and provides the driving force for the vitality of tomorrow's Tokyo. Odaiba has well designed public transportation system, work places, shopping and entertainment, parks and recreation and residential neighbourhoods; which are generally uncommon in other parts of Tokyo. This paper is based on the on-going Masters research on the same subject which attempts to analyze the overall urban design qualities of Odaiba with respect to the TMG's vision of creating a distinctive future urban image of Tokyo. The outcome of the research is expected to help to determine to what extent Odaiba contributes to achieve the TMG's vision and what steps are necessary to fully realize the vision.

## Introduction

Odaiba (77 hectares) is part of the New Waterfront City (442 hectares) developed by the TMG on a reclaimed land in the Tokyo Bay. The development of the New Waterfront City on the artificial island started in 1995 to revitalize the area which was left under developed, under populated and full of vacant lots due to the 'bubble economy' burst in 1991. Odaiba since then has been successfully transformed into a new shopping and entertainment district of Tokyo, popular among tourists from local and abroad apart from offering a new working and living environment. Odaiba is well served by the highly popular Yurikamome New Transit system which provides panoramic views of both mainland Tokyo and Odaiba from the Rainbow Bridge as well as giving the sense of futuristic Tokyo.

The aims of the paper are:

- i. To examine the history behind the development;
- ii. To examine the urban design approach adopted and implemented; and
- iii. To examine the urban form and image created.

## Land Reclamation, Decentralization Policy and Bubble Economy Burst

It is very important to understand the history behind the development (See Table 1 below) in order to get a better understanding of the reasons for Odaiba Waterfront City's existence and the resultant current urban form and function. Quoting from Moughtin, Cuesta, Sarris and Signoretta, 'peeling back the layers of history which encrust the modern city reveals the reasons for its present form and function' (Moughtin, Cuesta, Sarris and Signoretta, 1999: pp.51).

Land reclamation work in the Tokyo Bay started during the Edo period (1603 to 1867) followed by the Meiji period (1868 to 1912) and continued until the end of the last century. Odaiba (Daiba in Japanese means fort) was originally built in 1853 by the Tokugawa Shogunate as a series of 6 fortresses in order to protect Tokyo from attack by sea. In 1985 as the policy to decentralize Tokyo's function took place, the newly developed artificial island in the Tokyo Bay was planned as a new sub-centre with

business and residential function called the 'Rainbow Town'. However, the 'bubble economy' burst in 1991 halted the development of the area leaving many vacant lots until the plan to revitalize the area took place in 1995 allowing more commercial and entertainment related activities in the area. The revived development is called the 'New Waterfront City' and consists of four areas: Aomi, Ariake-Minami, Ariake-Kita and Daiba on 442 hectares of reclaimed land. However, Daiba or Odaiba as known commercially which covers an area of 77 hectares forms the main development of the New Waterfront City and is the focus of this paper.

Table 1: Odaiba Waterfront City's Development History

<b>1985</b>	<b>Policy to decentralize Tokyo's function.</b> Creation of a new sub-centre with business and residential function in Tokyo Bay's reclaimed land. Daytime workforce was expected to be 110,000 with a night-time population of 60,000.
<b>1990</b>	<b>Rainbow Town Machizukuri Guidelines</b> produced to guide development.
<b>1991</b>	<b>Bubble economy burst.</b> Development halted.
<b>1993</b>	<b>Rainbow Bridge</b> , a two-tiered suspension bridge completed with a total length of 3.75km linking the development with Tokyo city centre.
<b>1995</b>	<p><b>Revitalization plan.</b> Creation of a New Waterfront City (442 ha) in ten-year stages from 1995-2016 including Daiba district (77 ha). Odaiba - Promotion of optimum land use according to its characteristics ie: development of a seaside commercial zone along Odaiba marine park with business functions sited to take advantage of the easy access to transportation to the business and commercial functions in the Aomi Area, and development of urban-life housing on the eastern side of Odaiba Marine Park to take advantage of the excellent seaside views.</p> <p>The revitalization plan also allowed more commercial and entertainment related activities in the area and a revision of daytime workforce to 70,000 and a night-time population of 42,000. For Odaiba, the target daytime workforce and night-time population are 17,000 and 5,000 respectively.</p> <p><b>Tokyo Waterfront New Transit 'Yurikamome'</b> (in Japanese means black-headed seagull) began operation linking Shimbashi and Ariake stations on a 12km track (extended to Toyosu Station in 2005).</p>
<b>1996</b>	<b>Hotel Nikko Tokyo, Decks, Searea</b> opened and restaurants, game centres and other amusement facilities completed. A public marine transportation system (water bus) was also established connecting downtown Tokyo.
<b>1997</b>	<b>Fuji Television Network (Fuji TV)</b> moved its operation to Odaiba which building was designed by famous Japanese architect Kenzo Tange.
<b>1998</b>	<b>Rainbow Town Machizukuri Guidelines revised</b> to accommodate changes made by the 1995 revitalization plan.
<b>2000</b>	<b>Aqua City</b> opened offering more shopping, dining and entertainment experience.
<b>2001</b>	<b>New City Planning Vision of Tokyo</b> established. Division of Tokyo into five zones and one of the policy implementations is the creation of a distinctive future urban image for each zone including the 'Tokyo Bay Waterfront Vitalization Zone'.

## **Urban Design Policies and Guidelines**

Eventhough the plan to create a new sub-centre in Tokyo Bay's reclaimed land started in 1985, it was not until 1990 the TMG produced the 'Rainbow Town Machizukuri Guidelines' as a guide for development of the new sub-centre. The reasons being the early stage of development was spent on basic provision of infrastructure and utilities. The guidelines were later prepared through active citizen participation like many other 'machizukuri' plans in Japan in which consultation with professional bodies, academicians, developers, business communities etc were sought. Beginning 1990, land parcels started to be opened for sale and lease to private enterprises. However, the bubble economy burst in 1991 forced development in the area to be halted until the plan to revitalize the area was implemented in 1995. The Guidelines were revised in 1998 to accommodate some flexibility and changes in the 1995 revitalization plan. The guidelines have become an important reference not only for the authority but also for developers and other interested parties who wish to invest in the area. The guidelines clearly specify the urban design objectives for the area including detailed aspects such as land use plan, landscape plan, density and mix, scale and appearance which are all basically aimed at producing the best urban environment in the Tokyo Bay. The guidelines cover four main development components including business, commercial, residential as well as park and recreation.

It is understood that Japan's city planning deregulation in the 1980's which aimed at encouraging development by relaxing regulations (Sorensen, 2002) has helped towards both the development and revitalization of Odaiba Waterfront City in the 1980's and 1990's respectively. City planning deregulation continued in the 1990's and has affected many areas including the Odaiba Waterfront City. The 1995 Odaiba's revitalization plan for instance allowed more commercial and entertainment related activities in the area as a result of a rezoning exercise. The 1995 revitalization plan was a divergence from its original plan which was designed purely for business and residential function. Obviously, the changing economy and aspiration forced for a more flexible implementation plan to be adopted to ensure a more successful development strategy. In addition, the 'Rainbow Town Machizukuri Guidelines' prepared were pre-determined through consultations with various bodies and a close co-operation between the Government and private sector. This makes it easier for developers and investors to understand the spirit and purpose of the whole development and thus making high compliance on their part. In addition, the TMG also work closely together with the private companies to provide the best infrastructure in the area.

## **Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG)'s Vision**

Tokyo has 12.54 million inhabitants (as of September 1, 2005) or 10% of Japan's population. With a population density of 5,736 persons per square kilometer, it is one of the most densely populated cities in the world and on a larger scale the Tokyo Metropolis is inhabited by approximately 33 million people. High rise office and commercial buildings plus extensive network of train lines make up the façade of the city but many areas in Tokyo are also densely packed with old wooden houses. Tokyo's attractiveness as a major capital city needs to be enhanced and the TMG's idea of the image of a 21st century capital encompasses the followings:

- i. The world's largest metropolis, supporting approximately 33 million people;
- ii. The world's leading city with an economic vitality on a national level;
- iii. A living city at the head of a new civilization in Asia;
- iv. An attractive cultural city with 400 years of history;
- v. An environmental city co-existing with abundant nature, such as mountains, the ocean and rivers; and

vi. A disaster-conscious city that can overcome natural disasters such as earthquakes.

Source: Bureau of Urban Development, Tokyo Metropolitan Government (2006)

Whilst the national population is shrinking, Tokyo's population is increasing thus demands a balance between the attainment of economic prosperity and the need for a better living environment. As Tokyo is getting bigger and bigger as envisioned under the 'Tokyo Megalopolis Concept' which is part of the Tokyo Plan 2000, the potential of new areas are considered important in achieving this balance as a measure to create an attractive and dynamic Tokyo which will be a global city for all. Obviously, a new image of Tokyo which is attractive not only for the locals but also foreigners is crucial to sustain its economy in the long run. The new image of the city should be a reflection of all concerted efforts in urban design and place making which seek to achieve the best in creating a city image that is beautiful, vibrant and prosperous. Obviously the public decision on where to live, to visit and businesses to invest etc is very much influenced by the image of the city apart from other factors such as economic, social and politics. Kevin Lynch's work 'The Image of the City' for instance serves as a good guide for the building of a city image. However, creating a city image that is beautiful, vibrant and prosperous is no easy task and it takes a careful planning and commitment from the authority and other relevant parties to ensure its success. Quoting from Lynch, 'different environments resist or facilitate the progress of image-making' (Lynch, 1960: pp.7). Obviously, there are also many other waterfront or coastal city developments around the world but with varying degree of approaches in urban design in response to varying degree of local complexities.

The development of the New Waterfront City was given more impetus when the TMG in October 2001 established a 'New City Planning Vision of Tokyo' as an effort to enhance the image of Tokyo as a 21<sup>st</sup> century capital. The visionary effort sees the division of Tokyo into five zones and one of the policy implementations is the creation of a distinctive future urban image for each zone including the 'Tokyo Bay Waterfront Vitalization Zone'. The other four zones are 'Central Core Revitalization Zone', 'Urban Environment Vitalization Zone', 'Nuclear City Regional Collaboration Zone' and 'Natural Environment Preservation and Utilization Zone'. In the case of the 'Tokyo Bay Waterfront Vitalization Zone', the creation of an attractive Waterfront City has been promoted with the following three goals:

- i. enhancing the quality of life and harmony with nature;
- ii. fostering international exchange and a better future; and
- iii. contributing to the urban development of Tokyo.

Source: Waterfront Development Division, Bureau of Port and Harbour, Tokyo Metropolitan Government (2006)

According to the Bureau of Port and Harbour, Tokyo Metropolitan Government (2006):

"The Waterfront Subcenter plays an important role in stimulating the future vitality of Tokyo and supporting the livelihood of the local residents as Tokyo's seventh subcentre featuring an optimum balance of workplace and residential environments. While responding appropriately to the currently progressing IT revolution, the globalization of the economy and other changes in the socio-economic environment, the well-balanced compound development of the community is being furthered by organically linking work, residential, academic and recreational functions".

An association called the 'Machizukuri Kyogikai' was formed in 1997 with the objective of creating an attractive urban environment in the New Waterfront City. The association meets once a month and its members include representatives from the TMG, companies

operating within the area as well as resident groups. They have played an active role in helping to realize the TMG's 'New City Planning Vision of Tokyo' and they are also particularly active in organizing festivals and events in the New Waterfront City throughout the year.

### **Odaiba Waterfront City's Current Urban Form and Image**

It is understood that unconventional design codes have been adopted in Odaiba Waterfront City in which there is no intention to harmonize the building designs in the area. In 1993, there was a competition held for architectural designs of individual buildings in Odaiba attracting local and foreign architects as part of the 1995 revitalization plan thus resulted in striking and varied architectural styles on the ground today. A view from across the mainland looking into the Tokyo Bay obviously shows that Odaiba has changed the skyline of Tokyo and has given a new character to Tokyo. It literally creates a new 'face' or urban image of Tokyo using water and green features.

The development may also be considered as a successful urban regeneration project involving a close co-operation between the Government and private sector. Land parcels were sold to developers selectively who eventually constructed their buildings according to the TMG's overall plan. This is perhaps in line with the TMG's intention of creating and diffusing an urban culture, developing a waterfront urban resort that gets noticed easily and distinctively as well as exploiting the attractiveness of the coastal region within Tokyo. The development is also unique in the sense that it created a seaside which Tokyo previously never had. In addition, the urban design approach adopted and implemented in Odaiba also provides users with different kinds of experience as they navigate through the area and most importantly users feel a sense of place, safe and comfortable being in the area.

The general public's perceptions on Odaiba Waterfront City's urban image should be given the utmost attention. Obviously, the public image of any given city is the overlap of many individual images and the public has a mental map of a city by its identity and character (Lynch, 1960). Arguably, the city image can be easily identified depending on how unique its identity and character and psychologically they have a profound effect on the memory of the public and visitors. Most visitors view that the development in Odaiba is unique and distinctive characterized by modern facilities and striking as well as varied architectural designs taking advantage of the waterfront. Odaiba also offers the public from all age groups a new shopping, entertainment and leisure experience. People have ease of movement within the area, access to high quality and plentiful open public spaces, excellent pedestrian environment, public transportation etc which can be summarized as follows:

- i. Users are clearly informed through the clear identification of public spaces.
- ii. Safe, attractive and functional public space. Good linkages between public spaces especially within the commercial areas.
- iii. Pedestrians are well connected to all developments within the area by a comprehensive pedestrian network.
- iv. Users may understand well development within the area aided by landmarks, signages etc.
- v. Public areas are quite flexible to accommodate changes eg. events and festivals.
- vi. A good mix of land use and activities gives users different experiences within the area.

In fact, many say that even the ride on the Yurikamome transit system gives users a new experience within Tokyo and is an attraction in itself. Thus many tourists prefer to take the Yurikamome instead of other modes of transportation to visit Odaiba despite its expensive fares. According to Japan Railway & Transport Review, seventy percent of people going to the subcentre use Yurikamome, instead of cars. Their reasons are as follows:

- Good views and comfort;
- Excellent accessibility to facilities, most of which are directly connected to stations; and
- Convenient starting point in downtown Tokyo.

Source: Japan Railway & Transport Review No. 16, June 1998 (pp.15–19)

According to the report again,

“Yurikamome is an exciting example of how transit facilities can contribute to the shaping of a new urban area. The continuing growth of Rainbow Town is certain to attract more people, increasing the need to expand the current capacity. Based on the experience of the Yurikamome AGT, there is no doubt that this unmanned system is destined to be the future of urban transportation.”

The design of Odaiba Waterfront City also takes into consideration of the local context. People who visit Odaiba can relate to this historic part of Tokyo in which the original Edo-era battery islands are well preserved as parks and also for tourist attractions. The buildings especially fronting the waterfront also incorporated sea elements in their designs and so as the motives on signboards, pavements, sculptures etc thus creating Odaiba's own distinct image. Without doubt, the number of tourists visiting Odaiba is increasing each year and many also will not miss taking photos of a replica of the French Statue of Liberty in Odaiba erected in 2000. In addition, there are many events and festivals organized in Odaiba throughout the year for visitors to enjoy. It is through such events and festivals that help to strengthen Odaiba's image and character to the public. There is always something to celebrate in Odaiba that is appealing to the public. The annual summer festival organized by Fuji Television for instance attracts millions of visitors to Odaiba coupled with other events at the local and international level throughout the year. The giant Christmas tree erected in Odaiba every year also never fails to attract visitors. It is also worth noted that tourists come to Odaiba due to other attractions also available in the rest of the New Waterfront City. The Palette Town in Aomi for instance offers visitors a ride on one of the world's largest ferris wheels apart from offering different kinds of shopping and entertainment facilities. Other attractions in the near vicinity include the Museum of Maritime Science (Fune-no-kagakukan), National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation (Mirai-kan), Telecom Center, Oedo Onsen Monogatari, Tokyo International Exhibition Center (Tokyo Big Sight) and many others. It is no wonder that in 2005 alone, the whole Waterfront City attracted about 42 million visitors.

Workers who come to work in Odaiba also have an easy access to the area by the public transportation system and work in a beautiful, ultra-modern and comfortable office environment. They also have a lot of choices to wine and dine in the area and to entertain clients. The residents who occupy the eastern side of Odaiba Marine Park also have easy access to various facilities within the residential enclave. There are schools, community halls, supermarkets, neighbourhood shops, convenient stores, post office, ATMs, clinics etc to cater for their daily needs. The barrier free design also makes life

easier for people with disabilities and the disaster resistant design (against earthquakes) also makes residents feel safe living in the area.

As for companies operating in Odaiba, this is what Mr. Hisashi Hieda, the Chairman and CEO of Fuji Television Network Inc. has to say about Odaiba:

“A unique town is now being constructed in Tokyo Waterfront City. It is completely different from such downtown areas as Marunouchi and Otemachi, and from such shopping districts as Ginza, Shibuya and Shinjuku. The Waterfront City is growing with diverse functions and facilities, such as companies housed in intelligent buildings, hotels, amusement centers, shopping malls and superhigh-rise condominiums. The greater part of the area faces the sea, and the landscape is superb. This town is really unique.”

Source: Waterfront Development Division, Bureau of Port and Harbour, Tokyo Metropolitan Government (2006)

However, some general negative perceptions have also been noted. Some members of the public have commented that the image of Odaiba as being too futuristic and not human in scale. This futuristic image is probably projected by the Fuji Television building which is well known for its eccentric architecture and has become the landmark of Odaiba. Standing at 123.45 metres high with a unique spherical observation platform, it has easily become the iconic symbol of Odaiba. The Yurikamome transit system on the other hand is an automated guideway transit which is rare in other parts of Japan and sets a new era in future urban transit system. In addition, the whole New Waterfront City itself is built on an artificial island, thus strengthen the public's image of the area as being futuristic. Quoting from Shirvani, 'problems associated with the human dimension are not the only ones urban design faces, but they are strongly interrelated with its other problems and ultimately interdependent with them' (Shirvani, 1985: pp.51).

The public have also commented that the main streets in Odaiba are congested during weekends and holidays. This is due to the high number of visitors who come to Odaiba by cars especially for shopping because cars are more practical to carry goods rather than the public transport. Another reason is because they prefer to park their cars nearest possible to the shopping malls eventhough there are ample parking spaces available in the near vicinity for park-and-ride. There is a free bus shuttle service called the 'Tokyo Bay Shuttle' covering the main attractions within the area. The public have also commented that the Odaiba beach is polluted in which active swimming is prohibited and thus the beach is limited to activities such as strolling, beach games, sun bathing, etc. Many articles have also been written about Odaiba which portray its image as lonely spots for lovers or silent couples due to its popularity among young couples who go there at night to enjoy the Tokyo Bay scenery and the illuminated Rainbow Bridge. Interestingly, this is the webpage of [tokyoessentials.com](http://www.tokyoessentials.com) has to say about Odaiba:

“Prepare to be hit by the 22nd century! With space age buildings, electric cars and fantasy shopping malls, Tokyo's newest district is futuristic and surreal. Built on reclaimed land in Tokyo Bay, a monorail links Odaiba to the mainland. Watch out too for the silent couples. As the site of the world's largest Ferris wheel, it's also a popular, if not compulsory, dating spot”.

Source: <http://www.tokyoessentials.com/odaiba.html> (2007)

Some other negative aspects can be summarized as follows:

- i. Public spaces are more open and do not give much sense of enclosure.



- ii. Lack of softscape to soften the concrete image. Lack of shade to protect from the sun during hot summer days.
- iii. Less legible connection between development fronting and backing the waterfront.
- iv. Private environments are less flexible to accommodate changes.
- v. The commercial development on the ground floor is generally hostile, not taking full advantage of the waterfront area.
- vi. Lack of urban design relationship between Odaiba and the rest of the Waterfront City and also Tokyo as a whole.

## Conclusion

Many cities around the world have undertaken various efforts to reinvent themselves through excellence in urban design. A good urban design adds value (Bartlett School of Planning, Cabe and DETR, 2001) and contributes to a good city image and identity and thus attracts people and investments and consequently brings other social, economic and environmental benefits. Odaiba Waterfront City clearly demonstrates some excellence in urban design worthy of emulation in other parts of Tokyo. The overall urban design qualities reflect the TMG's desire to have a new urban image which is lacking in other parts of Tokyo. It sets an example of a serious commitment by the Government and private sector towards the creation of a distinctive future urban image of Tokyo meant for working, living and visiting.

Based on the present situation, the Governor of Tokyo Mr. Shintaro Ishihara has full confidence in the overall development of Tokyo Waterfront City:

"The Waterfront Subcentre area of Tokyo is endowed with advantages not found elsewhere including waterfront scenery and a substantial urban infrastructure as well as amusement, convention and other functions. We will move ahead with the creation of a community that encourages tourism by establishing a structure for attracting tourists hand in hand with outlying areas taking full advantage of the charm of the city while forging ahead with the further development of the Waterfront Subcenter".

Source: Waterfront Development Division, Bureau of Port and Harbour, Tokyo Metropolitan Government (2006)

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