

# International Urban Planning Competition for Miyajimaguchi Area

## Thesis

We visited Miyajimaguchi on a glorious morning in May. The train had been empty enough to catch the last two (reversible!) seats, elderly ladies greeted us out of their stores along the main street, we spotted an already sun-faded poster of the “International Urban Planning Competition for Miyajimaguchi Area” on the windows of a restaurant, observed the busy gardeners meticulously trimming the trees on the roundabout in front of the ferry terminal, a hipsterish shop sold us a coffee for the crossover to Miyajima, came back a few hours later to the mainland with dozens of selfies taken with the charming deers of the island, and finally started our exploration of the parking and residentially defined hinterland of the main street.

On such days Miyajimaguchi appears sleepy, a bit dreamy, but far from being on the verge of an infrastructural collapse when 25.000 visitors per day may try to visit Itsukushima. On the approximately 15 peak days per year – on which traffic congestion is either significant or serious<sup>1</sup> – the over-filled parking must indirectly work like a joint sealant, connecting the archipelago of residential and commercial islands with each other. But what happens on the other 350 other days per year? Let’s imagine, kind of allegorically, Miyajimaguchi awakening on a foggy morning in late November. Miyajima is gone. Like on the photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto, there’s only the calm seascape and its misty air lying in front of the shore.

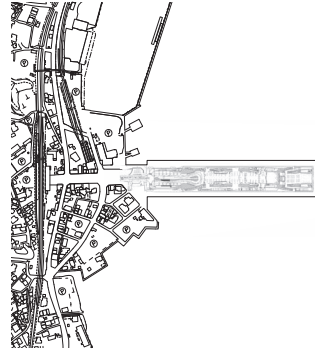
*Seascapes, Hiroshi Sugimoto (1992)*



<sup>1</sup> Traffic Congestion Calendar and Parking Lot Map for the Miyajimaguchi Area, 2014 (2014年度 宮島口周辺混雑カレンダー・駐車場マップ)

In the absence of Miyajima, Miyajimaguchi would need to look inwards, directing its attention towards itself. A brief inventory qualifies Miyajimaguchi as thinly populated (20%), commercially aligned to serve others (14%), functionally dominated by supra-regional transport infrastructures (7%) and fragmented by an abundance of undeveloped land, mainly reserved for parking (36%).<sup>2</sup> The land of the future Miyajimaguchi terminal and its open spaces are laid out on a perimeter of little more than 1 hectare — an area assigned to welcome over 4 million visitors per year. In comparison, Yokohama's International Passenger Terminal occupies a land area of 3 hectares, but is used by half the number of visitors (2 million in 2006).

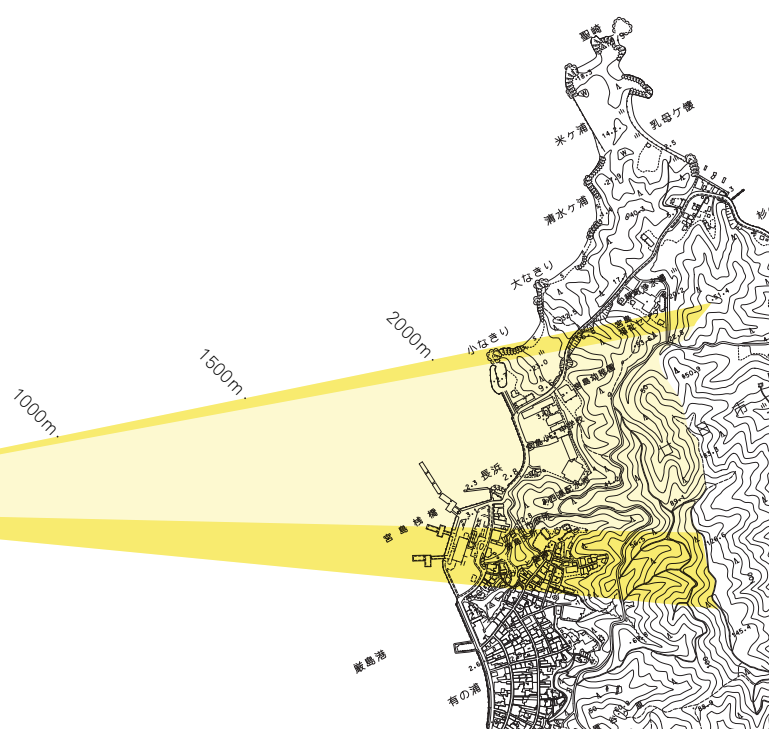
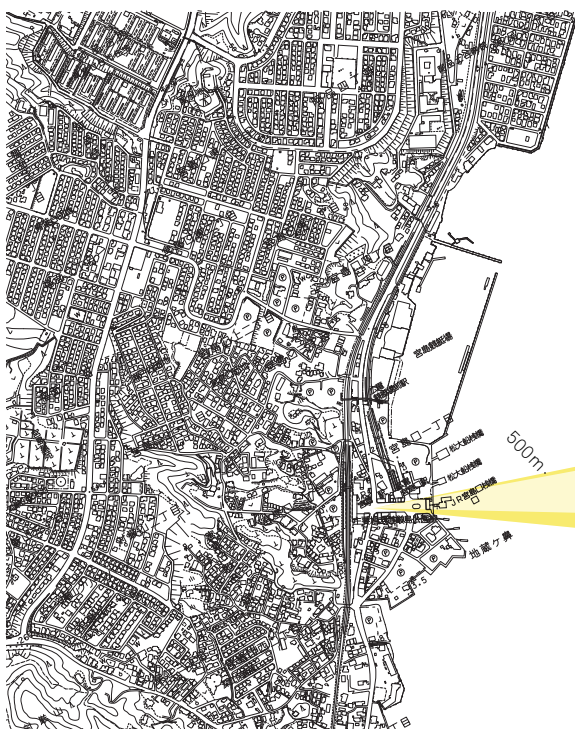
The generous surplus of public spaces and community-related functions of the Yokohama terminal, are indirect proof that Miyajimaguchi can not only dare more in terms of its programmatic offer, but also extend them far beyond the perimeters of the future terminal area. The city becomes a disperse terminal, incorporating programs that can be used by the inhabitants and adapt — like the Itsukushima Shrine — to the high and low tide of visitors. With Japan's unique hospitality as the key theme for the XXXII<sup>nd</sup> Summer Olympics ("Discover Tomorrow"), this event shall be the turning point in why Miyajimaguchi begins to not only serve Miyajima, but also itself, and far beyond 2020.



## 1. Formation of landscape

**"Importing" Miyajima's landscape to Miyajimaguchi.** More than one quarter of all visitors to Miyajima arrive in Miyajimaguchi via its eponymous JR station. The subsequent — approximately 5 minutes long — walk to the pier is "responsible for first impressions and lingering memories of a Miyajima Island visit". While the demolition of the current JR Ferry Terminal will reopen the view to Itsukushima, it is regrettably planned to reposition the new passenger terminal in the same axis. We would like to recommend a correction of this disposition in planned landuse plan for the terminal, ideally by inverting the position of the latter with the open space program. A condition that will literally "import" the island's landscape to the mainland, creating a cognitive link with the waterfront, and therewith enhance the identity of the main road by connecting its commercial activity with the visual elements that ultimately have also inspired most of its products.

**Creation of a hub.** With a total of 360 lots, the Hiroden Miyajima Garden is the largest of the numerous parking that are distributed all over Miyajimaguchi. The repositioning of the tram station will greatly affect this area, and is an opportunity to rethink the position of this large surface occupying the waterfront. 200 of the current 360 lots could be relocated to the municipal car parking (Miyajimaguchi Chusayajo), that will be developed as a multi-storey building. This operation would allow the clustering of the Hiroden tram station and the two ferry lines into one single transportation hub and allow for further commercial development of the area. A triangular park would replace the parking, finally having this area correspond to its nomenclature of "garden". A buffer zone between *arrival* and *departure* from Miyajima and a possible interface between visitors and locals, both groups simultaneously benefitting from this space.

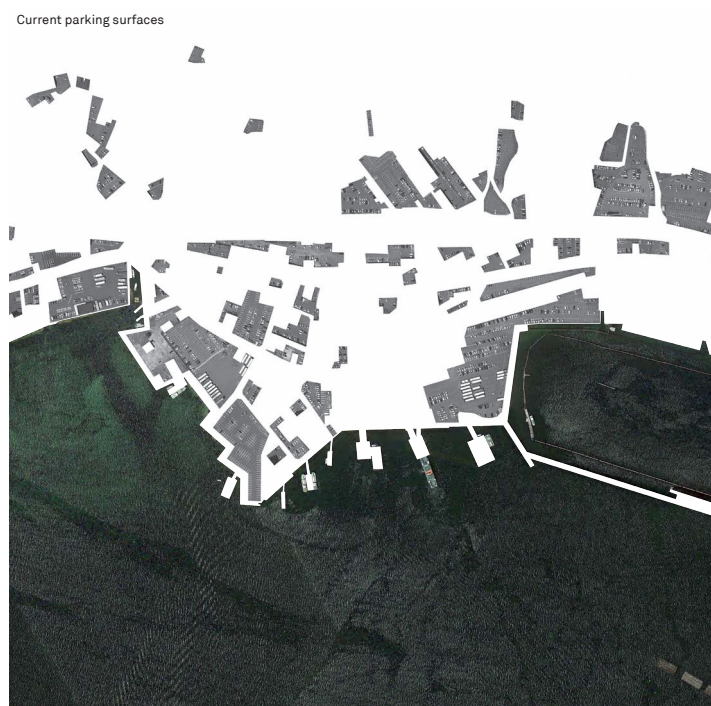


<sup>2</sup> Calculations based on "Existing Land Use Map" (土地利用現況図)



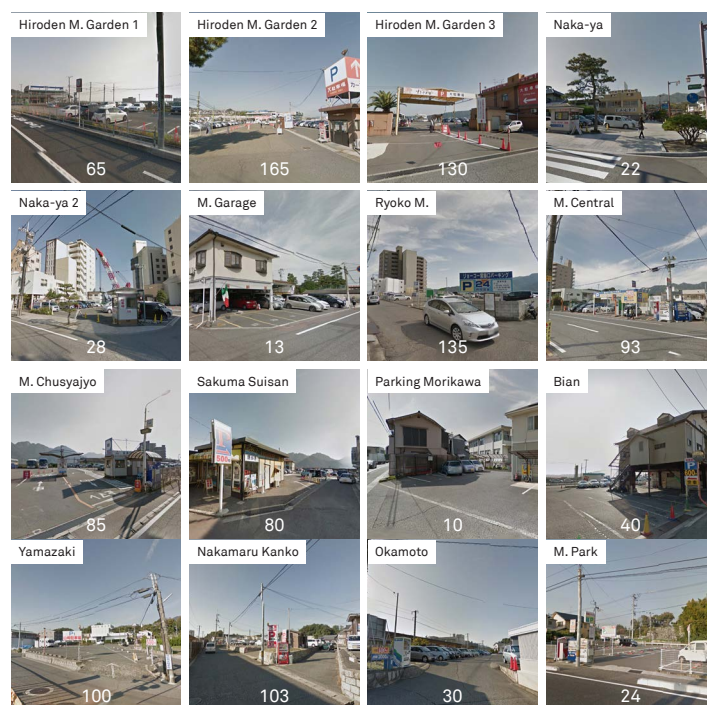
## 2. Creation of a space, bustling with people

**Creation of a green link.** The optimisation of the parking and transport structure will free new open spaces that shall be re-claimed for pedestrian circulation. Starting from the new municipal parking, we propose a new waterfront walk reuniting the ferry terminal and the Hiroden tram station, proceeding to link these areas with informal and temporary activities held on the other (temporary or permanent) public spaces. Besides redefining the perimeter of the area, the creation of a green link would link the lower city with the upper one, requalify the waterfront, adding new views and opportunities to extend the time in Miyajimaguchi by an appropriate leisure and recreation offer.



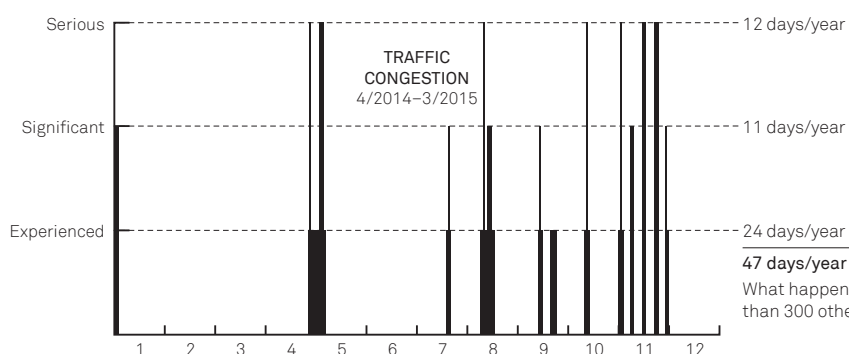
### Municipal car park as mixed-use public building / Waterfront Park.

The upgrade of the municipal car park as autonomous building is an opportunity to redefine this typology around the needs of Miyajimaguchi. While, in contrast to many other countries, mixed use buildings are common in Japan, this possibility is rarely considered for car parks. Ultimately a car park is a public facility, and recent projects like Herzog & de Meuron's *1111 Lincoln Road*, show that parking can be successfully paired with retail spaces and even residential use. Traffic-wise the planning efforts can be consolidated around this building, instead of distributed efforts to serve each of the parking areas individually.

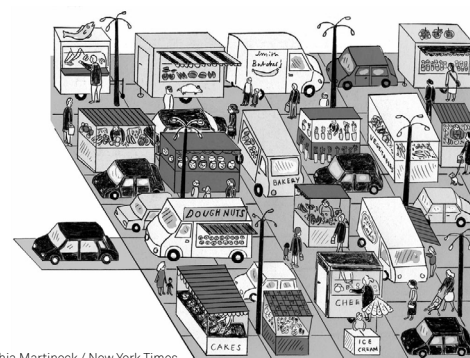


## 3. Improvement of amenities

**Creation of a flyover bypass.** Wishing an improved and "smooth flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic services" the competition brief correctly connects these qualities to the comfort level a place is able offering. Amongst several traffic conflict points, the National Route 2 intersection at JR station level is the most severe, as it constrains pedestrians to use an underpass. An analysis of the provided traffic statistics<sup>3</sup> leads to the conclusion that only 1 car out of 5 (of a daily total of 30,000) using the national highway is having Miyajimaguchi as the destination. A disconnection of the regional traffic from the local one would be made possible by a flyover (overpass), aligned with the current routing of the Sanyo railway line.



**Emancipation of parking lots as temporary public spaces.** The competition aims to "lure visitors to stay and enjoy Miyajimaguchi" by "developing currently unavailable functions" that "enable the visitors to stay and walk around in the area." In order to accomplish this, Miyajimaguchi must embrace and redefine what is its currently prevalent land use (parking) and deploy it for preconfiguring new public programs and uses. Unconverted open-air car parks shall be enabled to emancipate themselves as significant public spaces such as Tokyo's "Commune (24)", farmer's markets, food truck festivals, urban farming, "Park(ing) Day's" or temporary events around the 2020 Olympics, ultimately "contributing as much to their communities as great boulevards, parks or plazas."



<sup>3</sup> Guidelines for Application (募集要項) / Population, Households and Transport Access (人口・世帯数・交通アクセス)