

Students Exchange Program

between
University of L'Aquila, Italy
and
Shibaura Institute
of Technology, Tokyo, Japan
since 2000



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A research and education project
granted by the two Institutions



Students Exchange Program

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and

The Shibaura Institute of Technology, Tokyo – Japan,

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Edited by

Terenziano Raparelli, Walter D'Ambrogio, Pierluigi Beomonte Zobel

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Preface

The cooperation between the University of L'Aquila (ULA) – School of Engineering, Italy, and the Shibaura Institute of Technology (SIT) of Tokyo, Japan, started in 1994. At that time a Cooperation Agreement between the two Universities was signed. Prof. Hiroyasu Funakubo of SIT, currently retired, was the promoter of this agreement, and we want credit him for his generosity and show our gratitude for his important effort. The agreement started slowly but the improvement was constant, year by year. In the year 2000, the students exchange program started mainly for the mechanical engineering students of ULA, and the Komeda lab's students of SIT. Each year about 2 students of ULA leave for Japan for a 6-month stage in SIT finalised to the experimental work of the master thesis, and 1 student of SIT leaves for one year stage in ULA finalised to an experimental research project. In 2002 the students exchange program expanded to the architectural sector of our School, for the interest of Prof. Fuji from SIT and Prof. Continenza of ULA. The project for the architectural students was different from the mechanical engineering one, because the focus of their project was a 4-week workshop, where team of Italian and Japanese students' worked on a technical project. The workshop was held one year in Italy and one in Japan year by year. In this introduction pages we refer mainly to the exchange program for mechanical engineering students, that we and prof. Komeda know very well, while the introductions of Professors. Continenza, Ito and Fuji will deal with the architecture workshop. The students that joined this program, both from ULA and SIT, have been engaged in research areas such as, for example, the active hand orthosis, the rehabilitation robot for upper arm and the master-slave system for catheter guide.

The most important aspect of this exchange program, in our opinion, is the fruitful experience of cooperation among students and teachers from Japan and Italy. The different culture and customs between these two countries is evident in many different situations in the lab or during the everyday life in the town. These differences enriched all of us and led to many discussions and debates. We think that the experience of our students in Japan and of Japanese students in Italy gave them a “key” to understand better a people which is different from us and also to enjoy this difference.

Our hope is that these activities can be further developed in order to enforce the

cooperation between ULA and SIT, both in the students exchange and in the research activities. We also hope that a wider approach can facilitate the understanding among people of different tradition and lifestyle.

The booklet is organised in two parts, mechanical engineering and architecture, and it is a collection of the past experiences in Japan or in Italy written by our ex students.

We would like to thank Francesco Durante, as supervisor of a number of research projects in ULA labs, to Michele Gabrio Antonelli, for helping us in these research activities, and the staff of the International Research Office in ULA and in SIT that was really important for the success of this program.

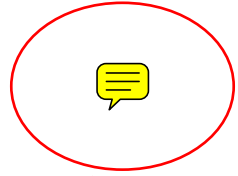
Finally, we would like to thank all the students that enjoyed this program in the labs of ULA and SIT, they made this exchange program possible: Carlo Fontana, Marcella Verzilli, Toyokazu Egawa, Davide Milardi, Stefano Salustro, Lisa Yoshimoto, Takahiro Kumagai, Paolo Di Claudio, Fabrizio Alcide, Livia Azzena, Takuto Nagashima, Danilo Di Pietro, Shoichiro Otsuka, Rita Di Rienzo, Masaru Ide, Stefano Di Francesco, Lorenzo Di Giuliantonio.

Terenziano Raparelli
Walter D'Ambrogio
Pierluigi Beomonte Zobel

Professors responsible for the students
exchange program ULA-SIT (mech. eng.)
at the University of L'Aquila from the
year 2000-present

It is a great pleasure for me to publish this booklet, it is one way to prove that our international exchange programs are very effective. There are so many international collaborations between overseas universities but some of them are limited to the simple signing of a contract and include no activities. In our collaboration, we have executed many programs and have had many exchange students involved. We have accepted about 10 mechanical engineering students so far, and they all had excellent ability, motivation, and qualities. In particular, they had very good skills in mechanical design, and they saved many beautiful mechanical systems. And also, I have sent many students from my laboratory to Prof. Zobel's laboratory. Of course they enjoyed very much research work, Italian life, nature, and so on. These students really fostered not only their research abilities but also their mental strength during their stay in L'Aquila. Experience is the most important thing for young generations; therefore, the student exchange program should prove as an excellent experience to appreciate different cultures and customs. I would like to sincerely thank the staff of the University of L'Aquila in the hope to continue and to expand our collaboration in the future.

Takashi Komeda
Professor responsible for the students
exchange program ULA-SIT (mech. eng.)
at the Shibaura Institute of Technology



The European Directive 85/384/EEC provides that the architect training process will be subject to completion of a period of practical experience in professional and productive realities, both in national and international field. According to this directive, the department of ~~Building and~~ Architecture and Urban Planning of University of L'Aquila, provides that the architect training will be subject to completion of stages, too.

In that way, the last courses' students have the possibility to live "project experiences", which join the technical content to the possibility of comparing with different methods and cultures, both in national and international field.

We had the opportunity to involve in the comparison of the architectural project, students from extra-European cultural backgrounds: so in 2000, began the Architectural International Workshops with the Architectural Faculty of Tokyo Shibaura University, and in the following year it began with the Architectural Faculty of Pontificia Universita' Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) of Santiago de los Caballeros (Rep. Dominicana).

The collaboration between students and teachers from different countries, has been organized in the space of a month, that is the time they needed to develop a complete and in-depth architectonic idea, from the data acquisition to the accurate editing of project drawings and models.

The Workshops are based on the simulation of operating conditions of a architecture competition, and the students have to work out an architectural solution to a real project topic subject.

In March 2006, Japanese Institute of Culture housed an exhibition of the students' projects worked out during the workshops in Shibaura, in parallel with the analysis and the researches worked out by the teachers on the same themes.

Talking about specific and concrete problems, the comparison of different cultures, teaching methods and didactics management, has just provided some spin-off for those who took part in these activities, for both students and teachers. From a human point of view, the expected effects of such a long didactics experience, soon revealed themselves; through this event we could define new job and research possibilities together, thank to our mutual esteem and favourable opinion.

To conclude I would like to thank those who have shared in the success of these initiatives aimed at improving Architectural Studies in the partner universities: first of all Prof Hiromi Fujii, for having stimulated all of us at the beginning of these experiences; the teachers involved in the programs: for SIT Prof. Yoko Ito, Prof. Hi-

roshi Ouchi, Prof. Yoshio Sakurai; for university of L'Aquila Prof. Mario Centofanti, Prof. Giulio Tamburini, Prof. Aldo Benedetti and Prof. Sergio Rotondi; the "University and Heritage" Unesco Forum, which assured his sponsorship, and finally ANCE representatives, Professional Associations and the Sulmona, Avezzano and Colonnella Municipal Administrations, the Province of L'Aquila and the Comunità Montana Sirentina.

Romolo Continenza

Professor responsible of the students
exchange program ULA-SIT (architecture)
at the University of L'Aquila

In 2007, ten students and three Professors from Italy went to Tokyo for this workshop joining ten students and three professors from Japan. The project topic was “Re-vitalization of Down-Town with renovation of Tokyo municipal beneficenza house”, which was constructed in 1932 after the Great Earthquake of 1923.

The house is the only existent building that the Tokyo municipal office constructed in order to supply food for refugees and poor inhabitants. The contemporary administrator of the building, the Koto ward office is determined to preserve it, and its new usage is actually expected to shape new attractive architectural ideas.

Although the theme was specifically related to the Japanese modern history, Italian students could comprehend the disaster, and all the students could reach consensus on their ideas and accomplish the architectural complex, with the proposal of specific concepts.

This workshop is an excellent proof of the effectiveness of “*Project based learning*”, where the participants considerably improve their communication and presentation skills, their ability to create general plans and architectural solutions.

This time I and other Japanese professors were surprised at the great potentiality of Italian students in relation to architectural design. In Tokyo, they seemed very happy to show their ability. On the other hand, Japanese students could also work effectively with Italian friends and professors, owing to their cooperation and friendship, which we appreciate so much.

We really hope that this exchange program will continue also in the future. Molte grazie!

Yoko Ito

Professor responsible for the students
exchange program ULA-SIT (architecture)
at the Shibaura Institute of Technology

More than 15 years have gone by since the Shibaura Institute of Technology (SIT) has started the Architecture exchange programs taking place alternately in partner schools.

The first exchange program was launched in partnership with the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-ARC), with the didactic collaboration of architects from the Morphosis Group, such as Thom Mayne. The program was later extended to the Moscow Institute of Architecture (MARCHI) and the School of Architecture Paris-Belleville (EAPB). Finally, the exchange program with the University of L'Aquila (ULA) was launched in 2002.

The cultural and lifestyle differences were among our major concerns regarding the exchange program, but the main obstacle was represented by the difference between the two education systems. The Japanese system is extremely different from the American and European systems. In Western countries, the teaching of architecture is mainly focused on the formal aspect of a project, while the engineering subjects, such as the building process or the plant engineering process, are given less importance. In fact, this education system is a heritage of the old Fine Arts Academy. On the contrary, the Japanese schools of architecture are historically derived from engineering schools: therefore, both the formal and the engineering aspects are included in equal parts in the academic curricula. As a result, the Japanese education system is richer in engineering subjects. There are also some differences in course duration: the Western schools' study program lasts six years, while the Japanese system requires a minimum of four years for the first level, and two years for the second level. On the one hand, we could not avoid pointing out the negative aspects of our education system, but on the other hand, we realised how different are, in terms of quality and typology, the urbanistic and architectural problems challenging the European and the American culture. The problems arising in the relationship between the architect and the city cannot be solved by means of global, universal methods, since the relationship between different people is influenced by the uniqueness of the cultures involved and by the deep differences between such cultures. When starting the exchange programs, we carried out a careful analysis of these problems, and finally decided to favour the engineering aspects related to modern technologies, which are common to all countries and can be the center of a common study. However, the great attention given to the functional issues had left very little space for the historical and cultural themes, which constitute the substratum and the very essence of architecture. Therefore, we decided to reconsider these important aspects and

included them in the new program.

The topic of the program we suggested together with MARCHI and EAPB: “How to create and integrate modern architecture in a historical city”. This issue led to the following one: “How it is possible to create the representation (materialization) of the existence of the “present” beyond historical and cultural differences”. I believe that this topic is universal and that it belongs to all those people whose work leads to creation. I also think that the main topic of the exchange programs with the University of L’Aquila is focused on this universal theme.

Finally, having the possibility to work in Italy, with its rich history and historical architecture heritage, was a great pleasure and honour, not only for my students, but also for me. I have lived in Italy for three years when I was young, in order to study architecture and investigate my own skills. In those years I have learned a lot, and not only about architecture. I wish the same for my students and I believe that the workshop has been a great opportunity for them.

The University of L’Aquila and the Shibaura Institute of Technology had previously finalised an excellent exchange program between their Mechanical Engineering Departments and had expressed the wish to do the same in the architecture sector. The project was eventually implemented in 2002. Regarding this, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Prof. Zobel (of the Mechanical Engineering Department) and to Prof. Continenza (of the Architecture and Urban Planning Department). I firmly hope that this program will become permanent and I will do my utmost for its future.

Hiromi Fuji
Professor of Architecture
Former responsible for all the students
exchange programs
at the Shibaura Institute of Technology



Architecture Workshops

Elena and Stefano

Here we are: Elena and Stefano. We are the youngest in the group that went to Japan, and the first third-year students who gained a position in the admission list of the SIT exchange program. *Stefano Moretti* was about to give up his application because he had been “threatened” by a teacher, who told him he would not at-

test attendance to his seminar, because the journey to Japan caused Stefano to miss four classes! However, Stefano made the application and passed the exam in the following summer session. *Elena Santini’s* application was hung by a thread because of the terrible bureaucracy of the passport office, which finally issued her passport, just in time before



some other student was about to rip the airline ticket off her hand! But they finally took that flight, together with other brave students whose stories are collected in these pages (well, actually, they almost lost the flight! - *awful traffic on the motorway*).

The first week in Japan was spent in the exploration of the new world. The two students had a strange feeling: except for some rare corners in Kyoto, those cities seemed unaffected by time. Their urban plan and architectural identity seemed to belong exclusively to the present: they looked like a futurist painting.

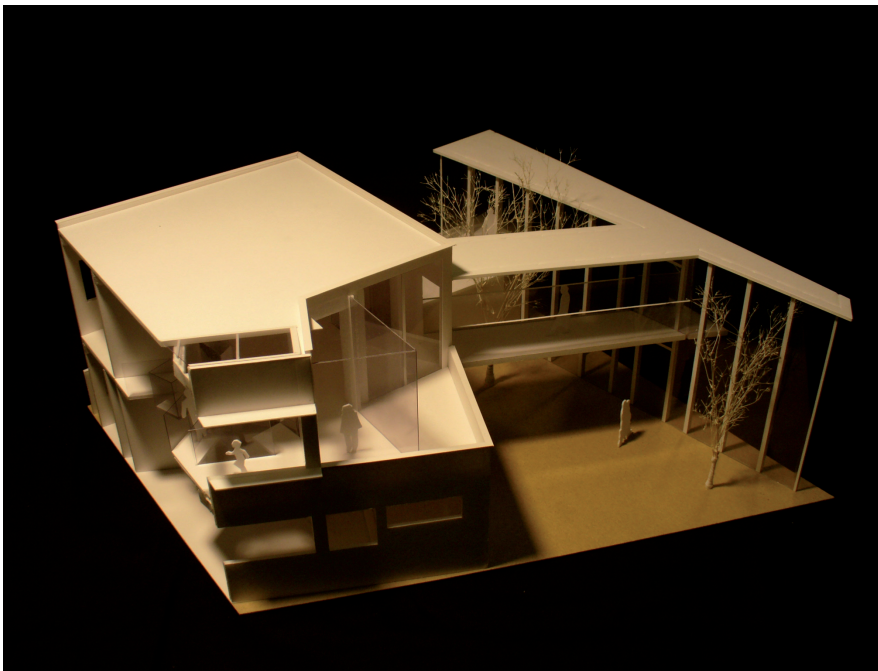
Once back in Tokyo, we began to work with two “typical” Japanese: Mikiko (a very lively girl) and Hiro (a curious guy). The work was a great creative exercise, though with a limited dialectic relationship (the Japanese didn’t seem to be outstanding in project ideation, but they have a real talent for making tridimensional models – the windows of the restaurants in Japan are full of food plastic models).

After one week work, we made the first, catastrophic presentation of the project: the legendary Prof. Ouchi was amused at our vintage red cafeteria and too-low crossing bridge. The motherly words of Prof. Ito did not spare us an emotional breakdown, which fortunately lasted only one night. The next morning, the young designers were back on the project area, with the same enthusiasm of the first *briefing*, but with greater awareness. After fourteen days - and never ending nights - of hard work, the *Group D* finally got to the final presentation and gained the second position. We came second: nobody would bet on it still today.

Elena was so shocked that she lost all her gifts and passport three hours before the return flight. She went back home some days later. Her mother had to go - and is still - under psychiatric therapy because of that. Stefano has fired his barber: he has a traditional *samurai* tail now.

The architecture workshop had a high didactic and training potential. We think it was more accessible than its "twin program" called Erasmus, because it took a shorter, yet more intense period of time.

Well, creating an architectural/urban project in just three weeks hides the risk of not achieving a complete result, but the real profession does not offer longer deadlines. We also hope that in the future we will find the same excellent teamwork we have experienced in 2007 Tokyo



Barbara Gerosolimo, Yoichiro Kamei, Ai Komatsu and Giuseppe Angelosante

*...I want to see places and meet people able to make me reconsider my opinions...
Barbara, April 2007*

*...Workshop as an "introduction" to the architect's profession, with a dynamic approach, human interaction, exchanging ideas and points of view, as well as a great opportunity to learn.
Giuseppe, April 2007*

THE PROJECT – Paper and pencils on one side, plastic models and a craft knife on the other side: different methods of architectural expression made complementary by a common project.

Initial difficulties: the concept of *architectural recovery* was hard to understand for the Japanese students, who live in a country that tends more to renewal than re-

covery. On the other hand, the Italian students had to work in an unknown urban space, with planning standards and dimensions never studied before.

However, the combination of different paces, together with a spontaneous exchange of ideas, resulted in a thorough, creative and enthusiastic work.

The students here have access to a modern structure and the equipments are always available: this is a different way of being



at university, which made it easier for us to put our ideas in concrete form.

We had weekly deadlines, the possibility to discuss with teachers and other students, to see the project development on the drawings and plastic models, just like in a building yard. We made a final presentation of the project to an experts' committee, with the additional difficulty of speaking English, but the friendly feedback we received was a source of great satisfaction.

The PROJECT stimulated our interest in JAPANESE traditions and culture. We had the chance to explore this country together with special people. This was not only an education experience, but also a human, social and friendship experience. We looked at the world with “squinting”, creative eyes: the experienced and familiar European point of view, and the new, wonderful Japanese perspective.

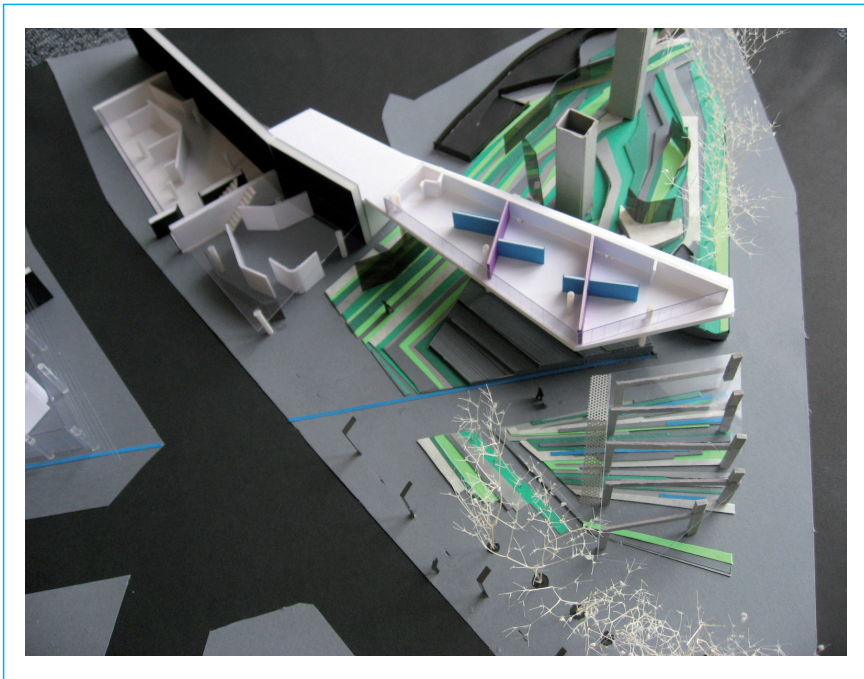


I'm glad for this experience and for being an architecture student.

Giuseppe, November 2007

It was an enthralling team experience...Now I look at things from the different points of view I have discovered thanks to my journey companions. This was an educational and a life experience.

Barbara, November 2007



Marta Gaudieri

The possibility to take part in a workshop in Japan has been always very appealing for me but I would have never imagined that this experience could have been so enriching for me both from the “architectural” point of view and from the human point of view... In the end I was even jealous with Elena who had the chance to spend a few extra days there.

All the Japanese guys that we met were extremely kind to us: they were very helpful and patient and they supported us in every occasion... Even when we asked them to comply with our apparently “weird” requests (such as for example changing the schedules of our trips according to our... meals).

Before going to Japan, I used to consider that country as a far away place with very few things in common with Italy... After all, it's not so different; I was wrong!

Japan is on the opposite side of the world... and it is really the opposite of “our world”: everything looks perfect, cleaned (although it is almost impossible to find a garbage container around), well organised (...even too much, to a certain extent!)

Its culture is different and fascinating, it combines tradition and modernity, respect for other people and for the environment... it is difficult to describe Japan to western people. I think you really have to see and live in this country before understanding it thoroughly. As for us, even if we lived there for one month we only had a little “taste” of that new world.

Even architecture was very different to us, especially in relation to the approach and purpose of our project: Italians are very pragmatic, we work with concrete plans... The Japanese, instead, prefer theory and philosophy, and so they would create plastic models and they would constantly changed their mind (we might decide to call our project “Into the night”... because the final idea came to our mind during the night, just a few hours before the final presentation).

But it was great working with them and learning about the life of other university students, so different from us... Their faculty is basically open 24 hours a day (and it's common to see students that sleep there for two or three days). Technology is everywhere: classrooms full of computers with flat screens, mice, printers, plotters, scanners and everything works perfectly (yeah, just like in our faculty!) and all the students can use them.

We spent many nights in the faculty in order to stick to our deadlines, suspending work every now and then for a break at Family Mart – the small supermarket underneath the university, open 24/7 ... and despite the fatigue, those are the moments that I miss the most.

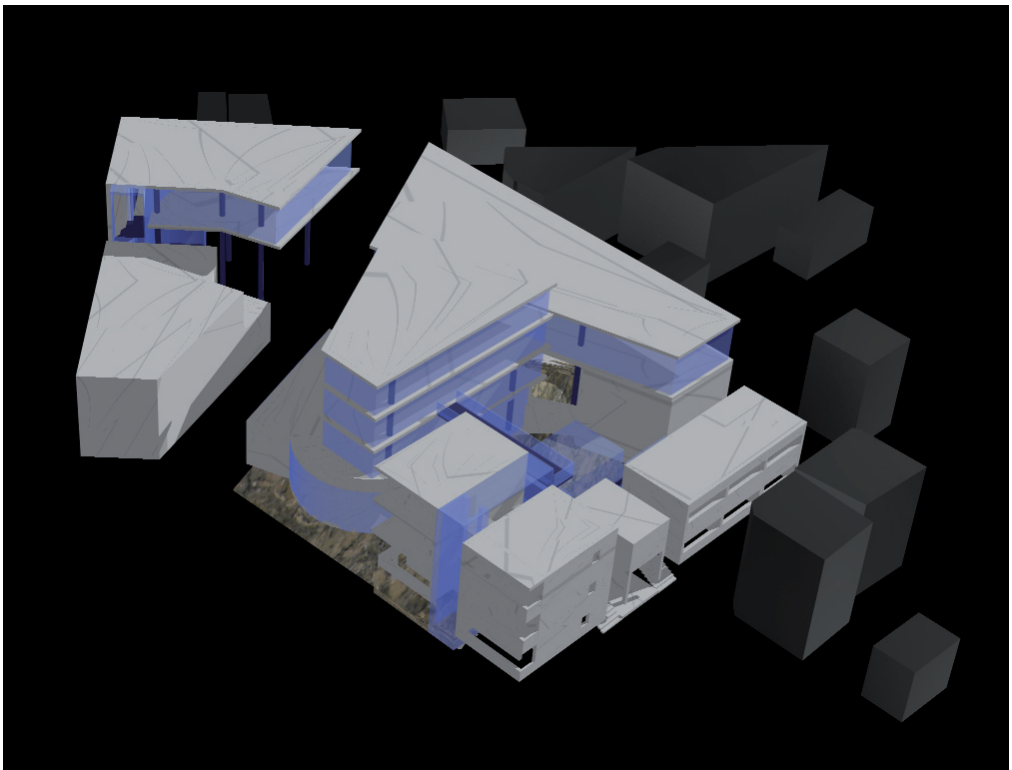
In retrospect, I believe that this was one of the greatest times of my life: it was very important for my architecture studies, and it opened my mind allowing me to look at architecture in a different way...

Federica Di Biagio and Valentina Monaco

“A workshop is a very important moment in our training, especially as architecture students. It is a moment of exchange which is essential to learn and discuss very different methods, theories and techniques on the approach to a project and to exchange cultural and experience knowledge as it normally happens when there is an encounter with a different world”. This opportunity, which has been constantly suggested by our teachers, since the very beginning of our university career, led to this exciting situation for all those students, like us, who took part in a workshop in Italy or abroad.

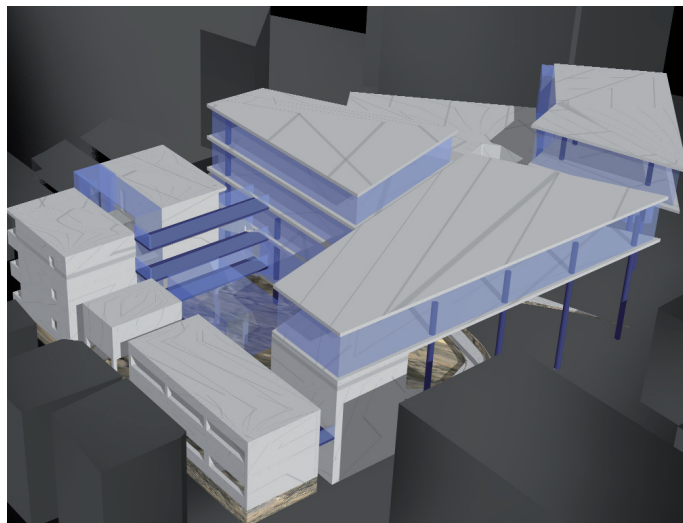
But why are students not always convinced about participating in this type of programs? Mainly because of classes and exams that take place during these initiatives. And above all, the idea that workshops constitute a waste of time in the path to graduation!

And what about us? Why did we participate? Did we have time to lose? No, not at all! We just trusted those people who gave us their advice and we followed our lively passion for architecture! After our initial curiosity we realised that we strongly

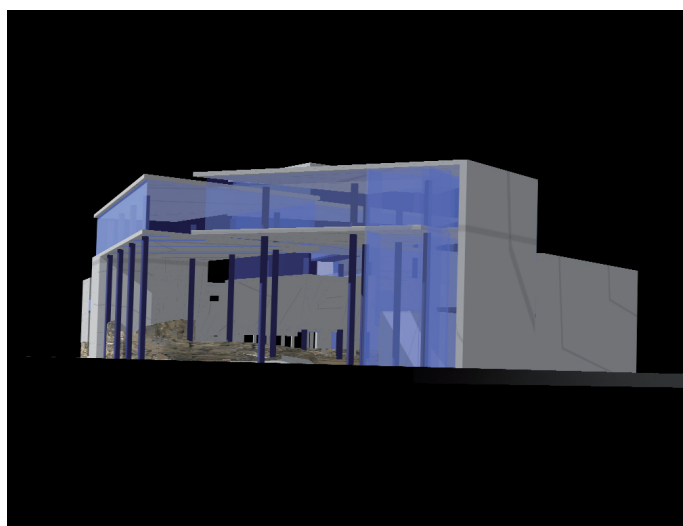


wanted to invest ourselves in an architectural project based on concrete needs for more than twenty days, by working in real international team. Our adventure started in 2006 with the participation in a workshop organised in our faculty called “Soul Places”. Participants came from Japan and The Dominican Republic and the workshop ended 10 months later with another workshop in Japan.

Since the first experience in Italy we've been positively impressed by the non-superficial approach to planning of Japanese students which were part of our planning group. Then, with the workshop in Japan, we realised that the exceptional commitment and attention showed by Japanese students was actually a reflection of their culture and perception of reality which greatly differed from ours. These differences are reflected in the Tokyo architecture, which can be considered as “extreme”, in the sense that there is a clear tension towards dimensions and formal research. The chance we had to experience this peculiar attitude in the pursuit of a dogmatic perfection, characterised by the constant dismantling and assembling of every element that form the work, constantly creating new forms and features, represented a unique and unrepeatable experience.



Besides, we learned a lot, we enjoyed our experiments and working with no anxiety. We wanted to push it to the extreme despite the tight deadlines. Seeing our teachers in a more human way than usual was also very interesting for us. The workshop, finally, gave us the opportunity to “experience” the Japan architecture and to understand also the social approach and



how this is different from ours but still very interesting for us. To conclude, it was a wonderful occasion that left an indelible mark from the human and academic point of view.

A concise description of the project carried out in Japan

The project is the result of the common willingness to connect the fabric of the existing built area with the Beneficenza House through an expedient: the idea of a hook.

As suggested by the term, the unification of the different parts, in this project, is achieved with different strategies:

- The closing to vehicles of the street separating the two selected areas.

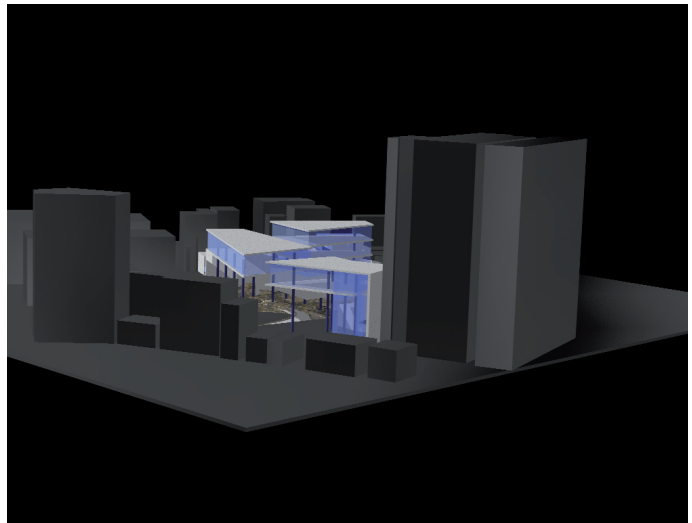
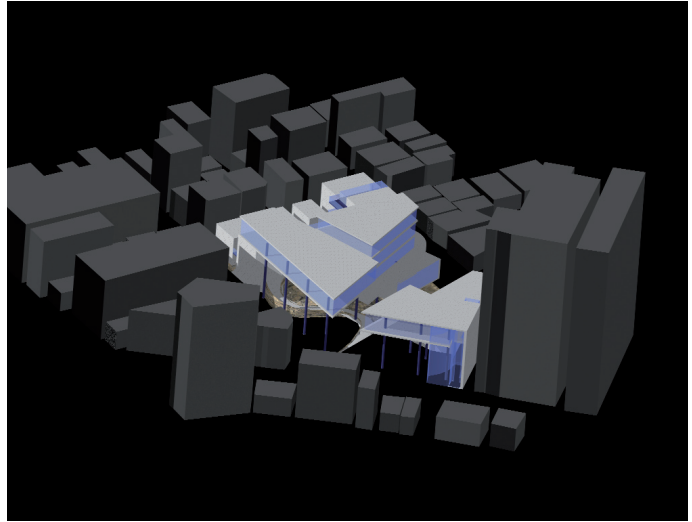
- Emptying of the volumes, at the lower levels, in order to emphasize the views of the *Beneficenza house*;

- Safeguarding the shape of the lot by including buildings which are well integrated in the context both with their plans (by considering the alignments) and in the front view (by respecting shapes and heights);

- The height of the new buildings will be relatively lower in order not to stand above the Ben-

eficenza house. This choice, which apparently is not cost effective for the companies that will fund the project, is, on the contrary, a way to protect the health of the elderly and the youth that live in the area and in the near proximity.

Here are a few charts explaining the project:



Rieko Hada

(K Partners Architects, in Tokyo)

My experience with the workshop and my stay in L'Aquila

I participated in the workshop2005 in Japan. This workshop has been organised every year since 2002. I then studied at the University of L'Aquila for six months thanks to the relationship between this University and The Shibaura Institute of Technology.

This workshop took place in May and June 2005 lasting approximately one month. We had to conceive and realize a project very quickly. The theme was “ The Re-birth of the Historic City of Castles of Kanazawa”. The focus of the project was a centre for the elderly in Kanazawa. Kanazawa is located north-west of Tokyo. It is a city where the architecture reflects its ancient tradition, history and culture. However, the city has many problems linked to the aging of its population.

We worked in teams (each one was composed of two Italians and two Japanese students). We started by visiting the area and then we carried out our project. While working we also had the chance to experience some peculiar local traditions such as the tea ceremony; we also visited the Sake factory (Sake is a liquor made from rice) which gave us the opportunity to know and appreciate some aspects of the Japanese culture, something that sometimes is unknown even to the Japanese students.

It was not easy for us to carry out this project. First of all we had some problems in communicating in English; then, we progressively got used to it and we developed the project with our common language (planning and plastic models).

While working on the project I noticed many interesting differences between Italian and Japanese students. The Italians started by classifying the outer areas according to their use. The Japanese students, preferred to focus on the closer areas. It seems that the awareness of the local environment is stronger in Italy. Besides, it is interesting to highlight the differences existing in the design process and in the use of plastic models. As Japanese we prefer to use plastic models, unlike Italians. I personally believe that plastic models can be useful to understand volumes. According to Italians, plans and CAD are sufficient, but we decided to use models anyways and it worked well. The Italians can present their work in an effective way and with confidence. This is one of the reasons why I admired them.

Occasionally, our differences caused some moments of tension and we sometimes argued. But we were always willing to carry out the project in the best possible way. We managed to finish our work on the project and, in the end, we mutually respected each other even more than before.

The last presentation was the perfect ending for the project and it was very re-

warding for me.

Although time was short, I believe that our work on this project has been very productive. I had the chance to study many things and one of the most important aspects was to build very good relationships with the Italians. Besides, it was also a good opportunity to discover more things about the Japanese culture.

I studied in the University of L'Aquila from March to August 2005 as a PhD student.

During my stay, I had many pleasant moments as well as problems, but overall, I have a lot of good memories about my experience.

I decided to go to Italy to take part in the archaeological excavations that are carried out in summer. But my specialty is the history of architecture, not archaeology. However, I was still interested in ancient archaeology.

Under the supervision of Prof. Continenza, I attended archaeology lectures, survey lectures and I personally participated in the excavation at the S. Angelo Castle (Tornimparte). Lectures were interesting but very difficult for me, especially because I don't have a good understanding of the Italian language. Although I was not competent about the excavation techniques, my colleagues helped me a lot in the field.

Thanks to this excavation, I developed great curiosity for the foundation of L'Aquila and so I wrote my thesis on this subject after going back to Japan. I searched the remains of the foundation of L'Aquila and I identified the peculiar characteristics of this city as opposed to other Italian medieval cities. Thanks to this thesis I was awarded a prize.

Although the conditions that surrounded me at the beginning of my stay in L'Aquila were rather complex and difficult, I managed to finish my stay thanks to the help of many people: teachers, archaeologists at the excavation, my friends from the workshop, my roommates, Erasmus students etc.

I really love L'Aquila, I love the beautiful streets, the natural richness, the nice people who live there. I've been really lucky to study in this beautiful city: nothing is more precious to me than my experience in L'Aquila. I hope to make full use of this experience in my life.

Thank you very much.

Silvia Calvisi and Elena Colimberti

The possibility of living in a world so far from ours, where traditions and modernity coexist, and the opportunity to create a physical contact with the local architectural buildings and to carry out a project with people belonging to a completely different culture motivated us to take part in this workshop. This experience went far beyond our expectations. The Shibaura, with its escalators, its tidy and cleaned areas and its silent environment showed the profound respect of the students for that building who was inhabited 24 hours a day.

Behind the doors you could see students in laboratories studying on their book or busy with their plastic models, eating, chatting or sleeping on their small mattresses.

I remember all the “nights” spent with other students in the workshop for one month. The room was full of scrap paper, pieces from the plastic models, print-outs and traces of food. I remember even when we attentively cleaned the room the last night, just like Japanese students, at the end of the project.

Recovery works are unusual in Japan where building are normally demolished and rebuilt from scratch. Some differences inevitably emerged within our group between us and our Japanese Shunsuke (aka Shu-Shun) and Shigeru. Some basic concepts for us such as the original structure and the use of materials etc. were considered as completely irrelevant for them and their culture since they tended to focus mainly on the preservation of the symbolic and ritual characteristics of the space.

In the practical part of the project, the approach was still totally different. On the one hand, we favoured design, the metric control of spaces and functionality, on the other hand, they privileged plastic models, thanks to their incredible manual skills, and the search for meanings beyond architecture, aspects that we thought were not part of a pragmatic and technological Japanese culture. This openness to new and unexpected horizons represented for us the most important lesson we could draw. The fact that we had to plan in a limited time, overcoming obstacles and disagreements and communication problems proved a very educational ex-





perience.

But Japan wasn't just this for us: Zen gardens and temples; traditions and contemplation of the landscape; travelling at 400 km/h on the Shinkansen and sleeping in the traditional futon; cities full of lights and colours, speed and noise... these are some of the feelings and sensations that we experienced when visiting those places, and even when we just moved from a metro station to another in the large spaces of the city of Tokyo.

And the profound and spontaneous friendship that bound together some of our colleagues, which went beyond differences of our open, and sometimes excessive behaviour, and their shy and reserved approach, always patient and kind, will remain forever.



