
Search for Comfortable City Life
~ Through Comparison of Japanese and American Cities ~

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1. Introduction

Many of teaching materials for environmental education tend to deal with global warming, acid rain, ozone-layer deterioration, regulation of carbon dioxide, and so forth. These are apparently serious issues and deserve to be materialized. However, the ultimate goal of environmental education at school is, not only to raise the knowledge on those issues, but also to promote abilities and attitudes mentioned in the Course of Study. Thus, we have decided to develop materials for social studies at the elementary level, noting the following three points of view.

- ① To raise interests in the environment.
- ② To deal with the contents from the viewpoints of environmental education.
- ③ To diversify learning activities.

As behavioral objectives, students are expected:

- ① To become interested in their own environments, realize their values, and consider what they can do to preserve the environment.
- ② To become aware of the situation and change of the environment, and express their understandings.
- ③ To actively participate in the preservation of the environment within the range they are concerned.
- ④ To attain basic knowledges and ideas on the national land and social environments according to their developmental stages, and to understand that the environment makes a man while a man makes the environment.

As mentioned earlier, environmental education at school should develop abilities and attitudes to make a right judgement and decision to solve environmental problems, in addition to the acquisition of the knowledge on concerning issues such as economic and social problems, science and

technology, and the environment.

Thus, we have decided to compare Japanese and American cities, namely, Soja and Greenville, with an intention to encourage students to grasp the situation of their hometowns, consider the problems, and suggest solutions. Students' careful thoughts on city creation will eventually lead to the treatment of environmental problems, the attempt to preserve the environment, and the foundation of city creation in the age of life-long education.

2. Creation of Comfortable City

The basics of the creation of a comfortable city is to activate the city. In order for a city to be activated, the nature of the city should be well preserved; institutions should be well equipped, and events should be held in an effective way using its nature and institutions. In other words, activation of a city preserves the nature, gathers people, materials, money and information, and eventually promote the local economy. The necessary condition for a comfortable city seems to be arranging the natural environment, institutional environment, and affective environment.

① Natural Environment

Natural environment includes nature such as sea, mountain, river and lake, and artificial nature such as park, square, and roadside trees. Arranging those natural environments make residents relaxed and satisfied, eventually activating the city.

② Institutional Environment

Arranging institutional environments such as public institutions, cultural institutions, pavements, street lamps and so forth; is considered highly significant in city creation. Today's institutional environment emphasizes prevalence of sewage system, and also includes invitation of conferences, trainings, colleges, and technologically advanced companies.

③ Affective Environment

One of the most important sources comprising amenity is the city's unique atmosphere characterized by its tradition, history, culture, festivals, and annual events. The atmosphere of the city is an integration of the city's nature, institutions, residents and other environments. Besides, traditional events and festivals help to make the city more famous, and to raise the residents' sense of belonging and their patriotism to the

city. Activation of a city also requires the residents' active participation in the planning and implementation of events that attract more people.

As mentioned so far, activation of a city is achieved by completing natural, institutional and affective environments. However, a mere completion of historical heritages, and cultural or recreational institutions does not mean "a comfortable city". It is the citizens, their administration system, and the community's hearts that humanize the nature and the institutions. In other words, what counts most is the creation of the citizens with the right balance between hardware and software.

3. Taka-chan's Experience in America

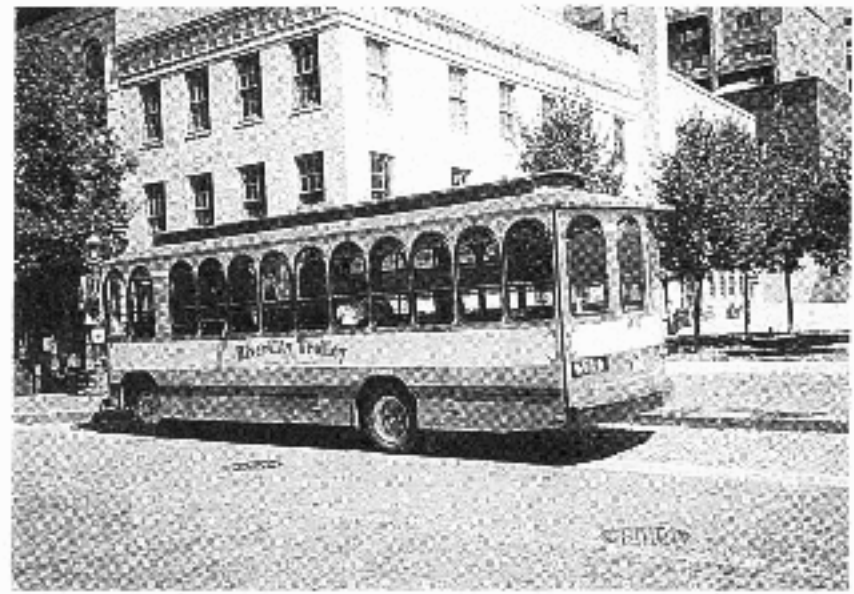
Hello! My name is Takamasa. Just call me Taka. I'm a junior-high third-year student. I went to Minneapolis and Greenville in the United States. Minneapolis is a big city in Minnesota located in the

Midwest, rich in its water thanks to the Mississippi. Greenville is a small town in North Carolina, rich in its green trees.

In Minneapolis, Ms. Enloe, a middle school teacher, showed me around the city. We first drove around the downtown area in a trolley bus.



Downtown Minneapolis



Trolley Bus

Taka: Wow, what a big city! Much bigger than my hometown, Soja. What's that big river called?

Enloe: That's called the Mississippi, the biggest river in America. It's relatively narrow here, but in the South you can't even see the other bank.

Taka: Does it run through the country?

Enloe: Yes, all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. This river provides Minneapolis with plenty of water.

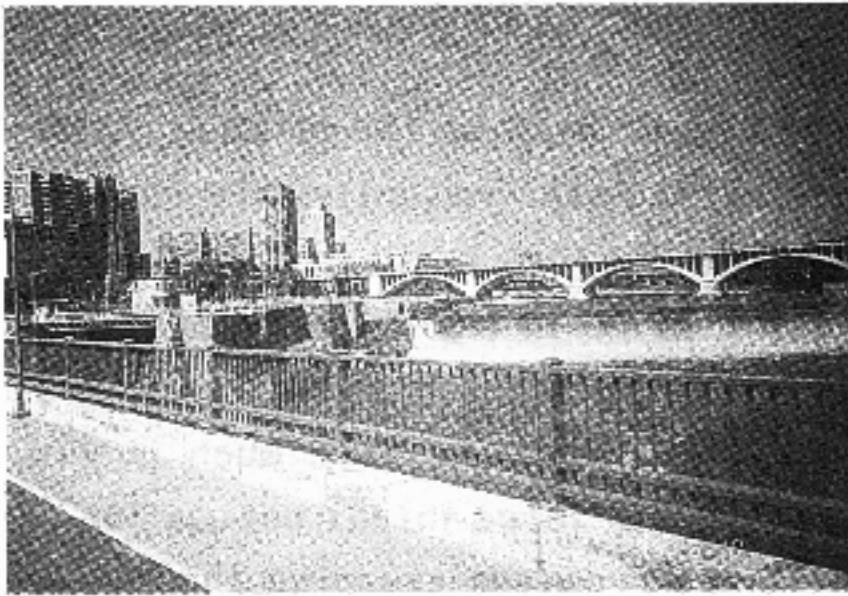
Taka: Look! What's that bridge connecting buildings?

Enloe: That's called a "skyway". It connects all the major buildings in the central area of Minneapolis. What do you think it is for?

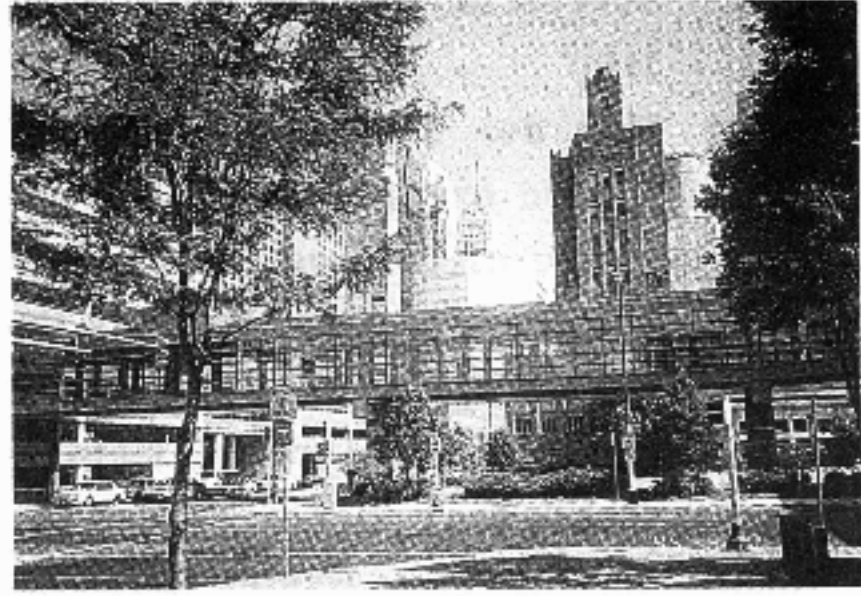
Taka: Hmmm. To avoid a traffic jam?

Enloe: Good guess. But the main reason is that it is too cold to walk outside in winter here. The inside of the skyway is well air-conditioned.

Taka: That means the city is built according to the local climate, right?



The Mississippi



Skyway

The next day, I visited the City Office of Minneapolis and interviewed an officer, where I saw something that made me think how advanced American cities are.

Offer: Hi, Taka. You came all the way from Japan to see us. Let me show you something you can't see in Japan. The Apolo System!

Taka: Oh, it's just a map. I use this in the social studies class.

Offer: No, no, no. This is not an ordinary map. This is an outcome of all the data on Minneapolis put into computer. It took a vast amount of money, time and labor.

Taka: For example, what kind of information could it give us?

Offer: First of all, we have residential blocks, that is, how many houses there are in a block, including how many trees there are. We also have land prices; which part of the city is cheap or expensive. Population is another example.



The Apolo System



Residential Block

Taka: Sounds great! But do they have anything to do with people's daily life?

Offer: They do. The Apolo System is utilized to improve the citizens' life. A good example is the map showing crime rate. Actually, Minneapolis is one of the most notorious cities for its high murder rate. Only if you know in what part of the city a crime is likely to happen, you can locate more police stations there. Another example is the map showing infant population. It will help mothers very much if you locate more kindergartens in the area with large infant population.

Taka: So, the Apolo System helps to solve the problems grasping the situation.

The next day, I left Minneapolis for Greenville. I hear that Greenville is as large as my hometown, Soja, in population. What is waiting for me there? I'm quite excited!

Mayor Jenkins, one of few female mayors in America, met me in Greenville. She talked to me as if we were old friends. She explained Greenville's city policies, referring to "The Horizons Plan": nine concrete objectives for the improvement of the city life.



Mayor Jenkins

The Hirizons Plan

- (1) Promoting economic development
- (2) Preserving the environment
- (3) Promoting sound land use
- (4) Maintaining the character of the community
- (5) Expanding community facilities
- (6) Providing affordable housing
- (7) Improving mobility & transportation
- (8) Creating new recreational opportunities
- (9) Encouraging citizen participation

Taka: Nice to meet you, Mayor Jenkins. I'm Taka from Japan. This is a little gift for you, *sensu* or a fan from Soja City.

Mayor: Welcome to Greenville. Thank you for a nice present.

Taka: I see lots of Japanese things in this office. Do you have a friend in Japan?

Mayor: Greenville has good contacts with Japan. A lot of Japanese companies have branches here. ASMO, a car-part company is one example. Greenville used to have its economic base in tobacco industry, but depending only on agriculture is not enough for the further development. That's why we need more industries. And invitation of industries also helps to provide jobs to East Carolina University graduates.

Taka: I see.



ASMO Factory



Tobacco Field

Taka: But I suppose the industrial growth will cause environmental problems. I saw a big river on the way here. How is the water quality?

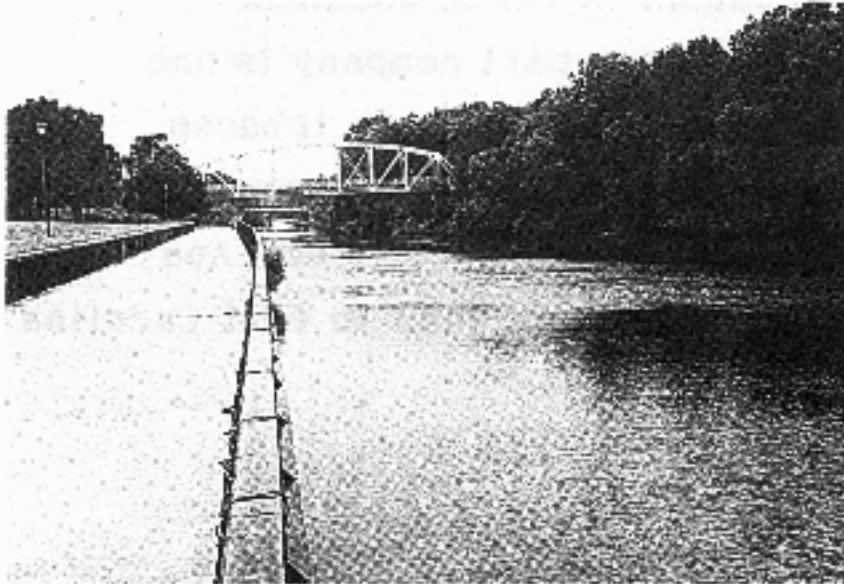
Mayor: You're talking about the Tar River, right? Water pollution would cause a great problem, because all the water supply in Greenville comes from that river. We don't invite industries unconditionally. We reject possible contaminaters such as chicken processing industry or heavy chemical industry. In addition, family waste is purified in a tank before disposed into the river. Since Greenville economy is dependent on agriculture, it is difficult to regulate agricultural waste. Instead we regulate industrial and family waste.

Taka: Hmmm. It's a complicated situation. By the way, my hometown, Soja, has a big river named the Takahashi River. Along the river are CALPIS and Yamazaki Bakery, which do not pollute the water so much.

Mayor: It's just like Greenville case.

Taka: Yes. The ideas on a good city environment are the same all over the world!

Mayor: You got it, Taka.



The Tar River (Greenville)



The Takahashi River (Soja)

I visited the Department of Police and Fire building under construction. They are integrating the police and fire stations. Mr. Hinman, Chief of Police showed me around the new building.



Mr. Hinman's Office



Fire Station Waiting to Move

Chief: Welcome to the Department of Police. You don't have to be nervous. Relax yourself. You are a good citizen.

Taka: Thank you. But I've never heard police and fire stations in the same building.

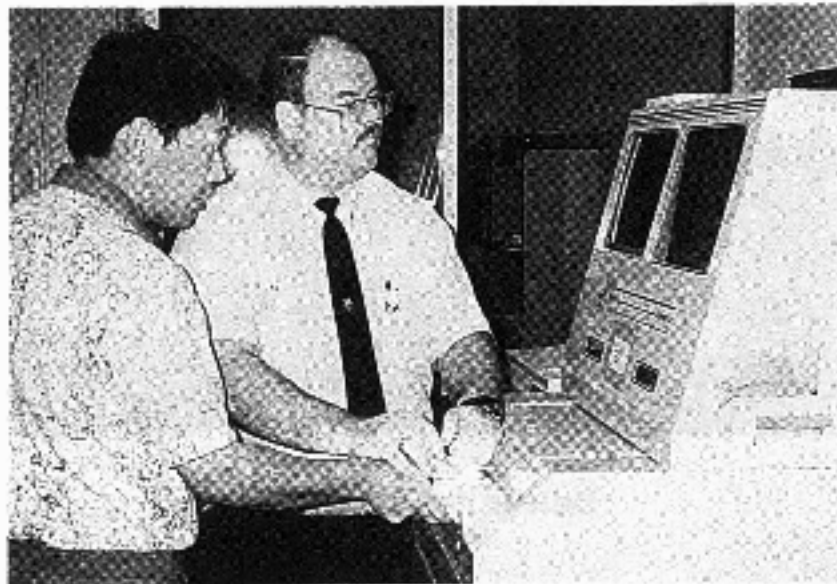
Chief: It's really convenient because we often turn out together. Of course, it's relatively a new idea in America. Now, I'll show you

around. Please follow me.

Taka: What's this huge machine?

Chief: This registers criminals' fingerprints. It's connected to the central computer in FBI, and once registered, you can be identified wherever you run in the U.S. You want to be registered?

Taka: Sure. Here it comes. Now, I can't do anything bad.



Fingerprint Register



Registered Fingerprint

Chief: Can you tell what this room is for?

Taka: Looks like a nursery room.

Chief: This room is used to relax the children abused or sexually assaulted. Child abuse is one of the biggest social problems in America. Sexually assaulted children are often too shocked to say a word or too embarrassed to tell what exactly happened. In such a case, we use this doll for the listening.

Taka: I see. Thank you so much. I've learned a lot.

Chief: You are welcome. Why don't you ride a squad car for a memory?

Taka: That's great!



Nursery



Doll for Listening



Squad Car

Finally, I visited the North River Park. It's a recreational place for citizens, with its picnic field and boat rides, and at the same time, is a preservation area for wild animals and plants. Below is a dam constructed by beavers. I wonder how many beavers are there.

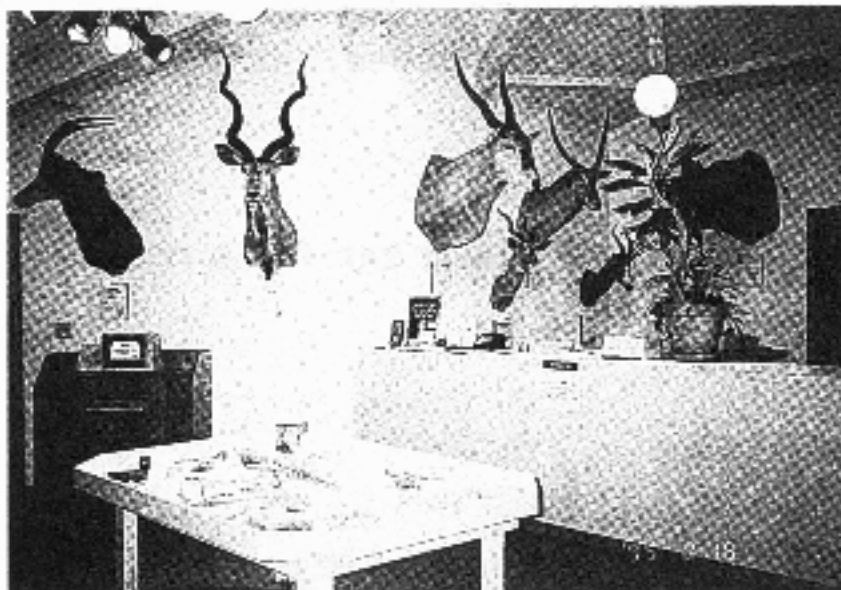


Swamps in the North River Park



Beavers' Dam

The Science and Nature Center inside the park had a huge collection of American wild animals. What surprised me was the exhibition of waste cans and litters. It was an encouragement of recycling. The idea of showing not only beautiful things but also dirty things impressed me a lot. This will make the visitors think about environmental problems.



Science and Nature Center



Litters Exhibition

This is the end of my long trip. I found Minneapolis and Greenville as nice cities as my hometown, Soja. But they still have their own problems. What is a comfortable city? What can we do to make our city comfortable? This trip made me think about lots of things. Now, I miss my hometown. I can't wait to go back. Good-bye, friends.

4. Comparison of Greenville and Soja

(1) Natural Environment

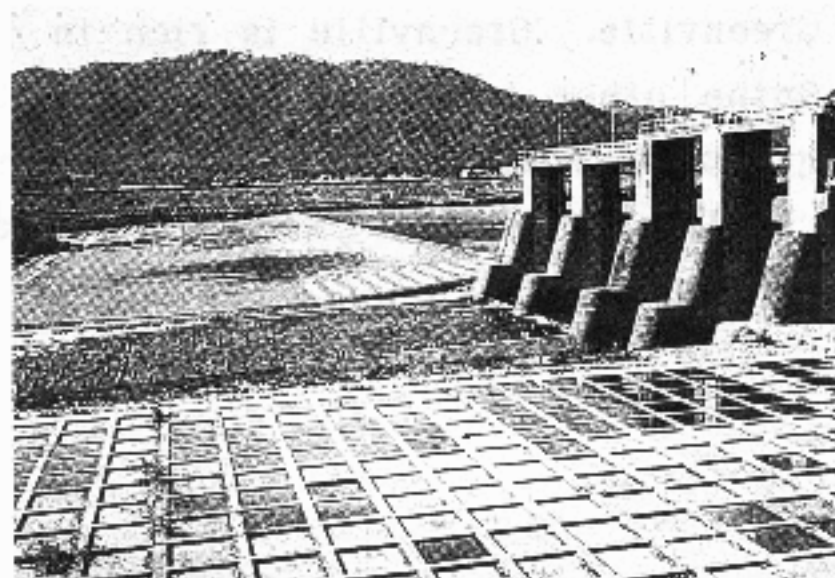
① Natural Environment of Soja

Soja City is mild in its climate, has little amount of precipitation, and is free from natural disasters such as drought or floods. Its geographical features are varied containing mountains (the two-thirds of the city) and the Takahashi River running through the central area.

The State of Kibi (the ancient Soja) is said to have prospered because of its rich natural environment: mild climate, less precipitation, abundant water, wide plain and green forests. The downtown area has few parks while there are lots of parks featuring its natural environment in the suburban area.



Takahashi River and Mountains



Takahashi River and Downtown Soja



Stupa in Kokubunji-Temple



Sunagawa Park

② Natural Environment of Greenville

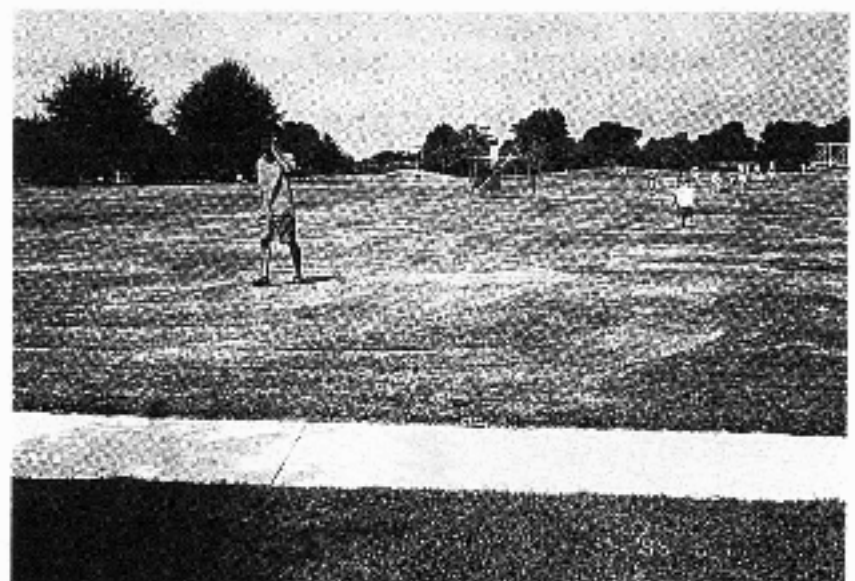
Greenville is quite similar to Soja in its climate, population and industrial structure. The City Council of Greenville adopted a long-range comprehensive plan, called Hirizons, that helps to paint a picture of Greenville in the year of 2010. The Horizons Plan addresses nine fundamental goals:

- #1. Promoting economic development
- #2. Preserving the environment
- #3. Promoting sound land use
- #4. Maintaining the character of the community
- #5. Expanding community facilities
- #6. Providing affordable housing
- #7. Improving mobility and transportation
- #8. Creating new recreational opportunities
- #9. Encouraging citizen participation

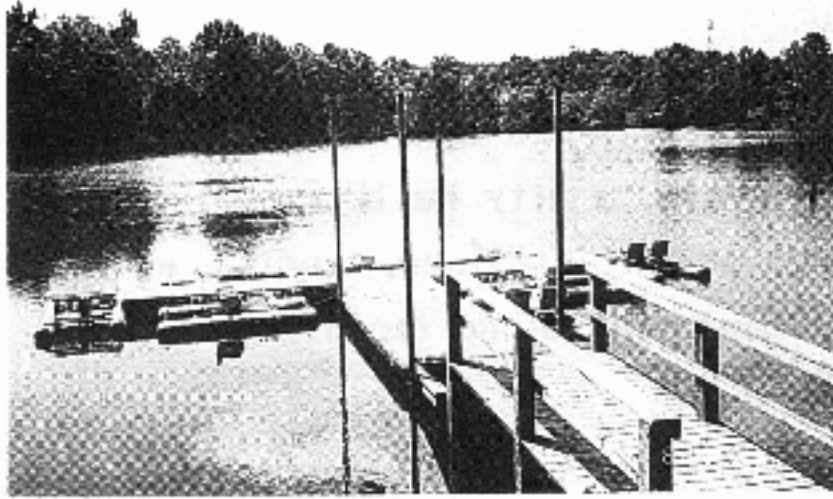
The plan integrates the natural, institutional and affective environments in Greenville. Greenville is rich in its water and green natures as Soja. On the other hand, the Tar River that runs through the town is being gradually polluted by agricultural chemicals. The government is trying to regulate industrial and family wastes in order to control further contamination.



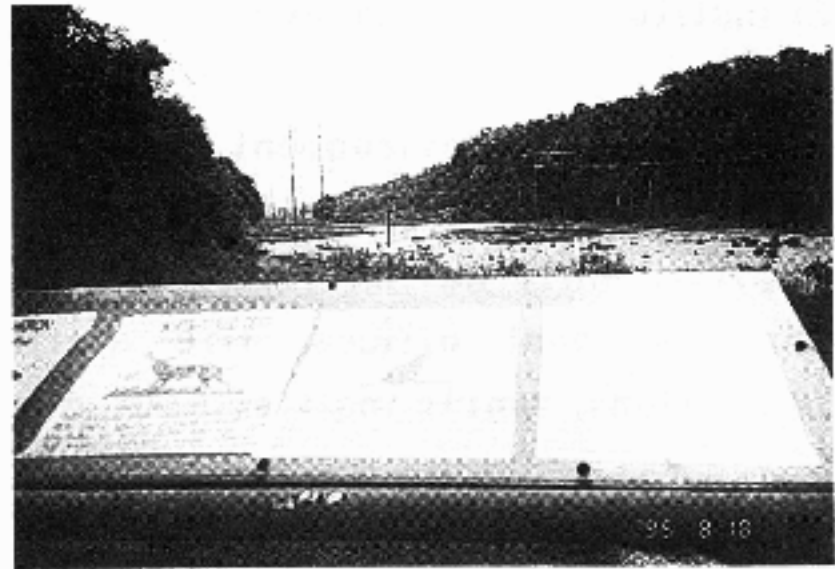
The Tar River



Town Common Park



Artificial Pond
in North River Park



Preservation of Wild Animals

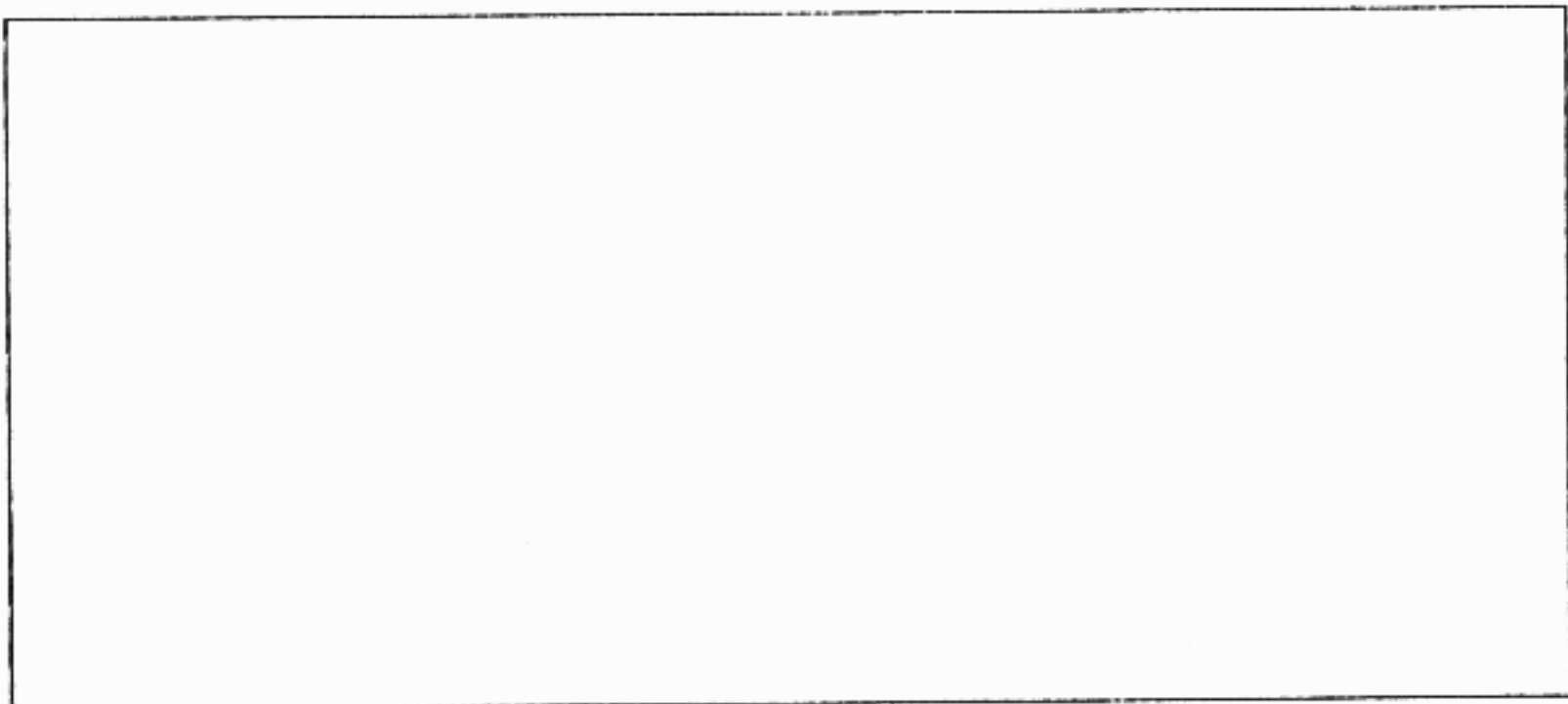


Tobacco Field



Corn Field

③ What do you think about the natural environment of Greenville and Soja?



(2) Institutional Environment

① Institutional Environment of Soja

Soja City lacks an art museum, a natural science museum and a general hospital, while having railways (JR), highways, a city hall, an university, libraries, post offices, fire stations, police stations, social welfare institutions, sports institutions, department stores and factories.



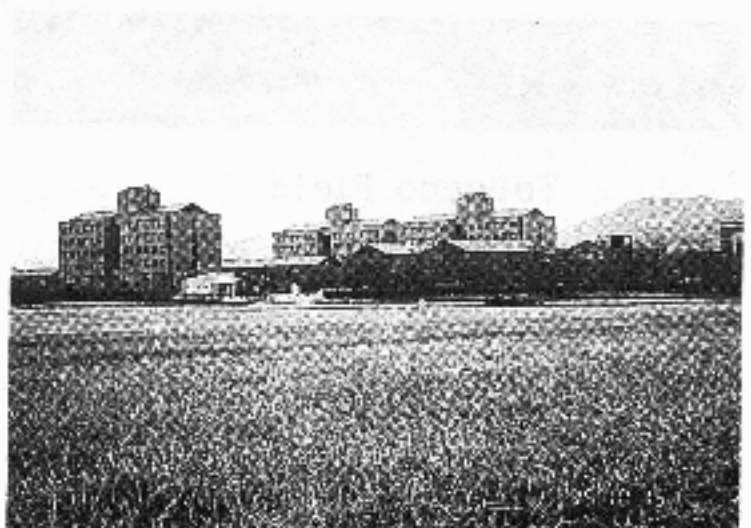
JR Soja Station



Kamigatsuji-Square and City Office



Soja-gu Shrine



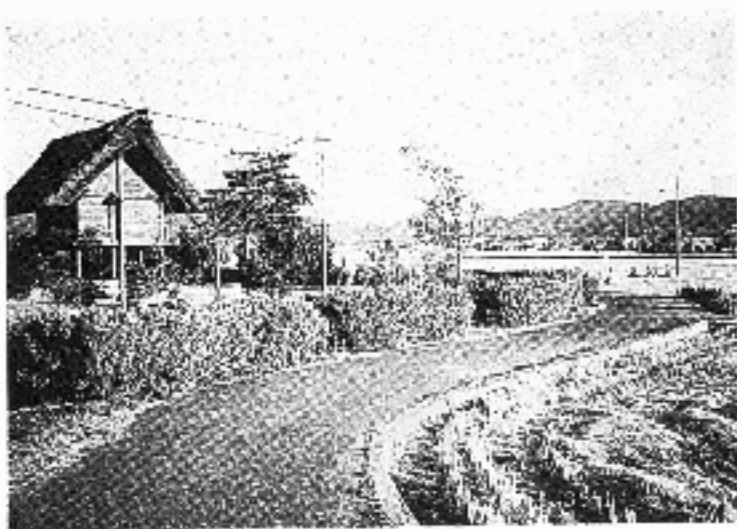
Okayama Prefectural University



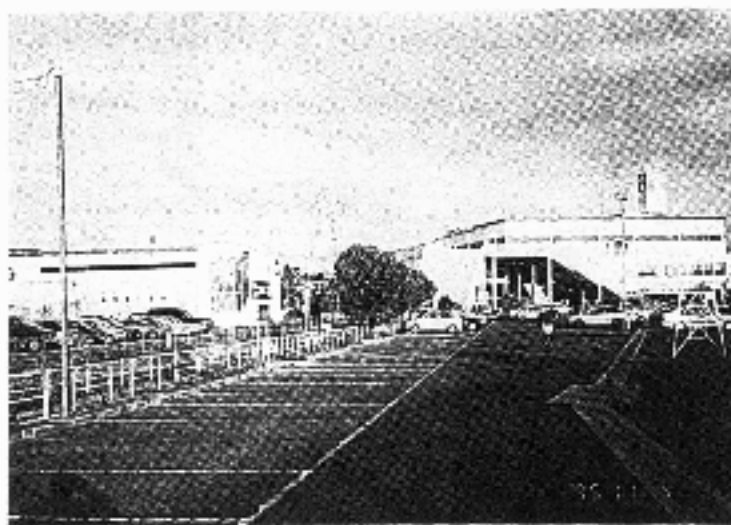
Public Housing for Laborers



Track & Field Stadium



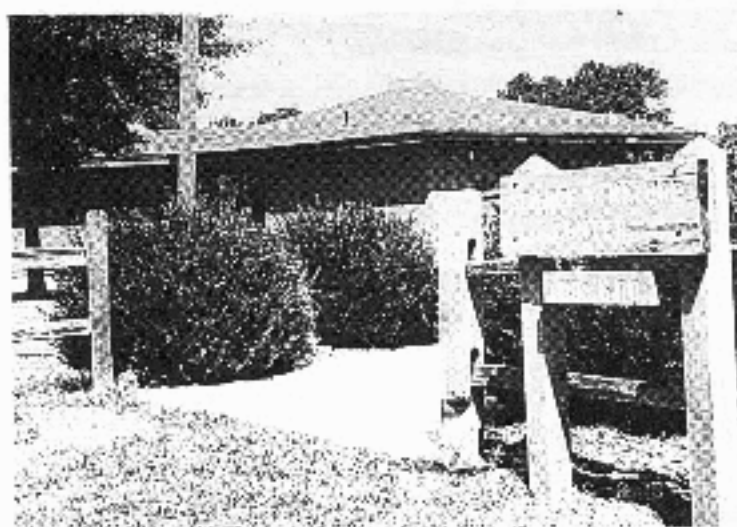
Kibiji Bike Road



Department Store

② Institutional Environment of Greenville

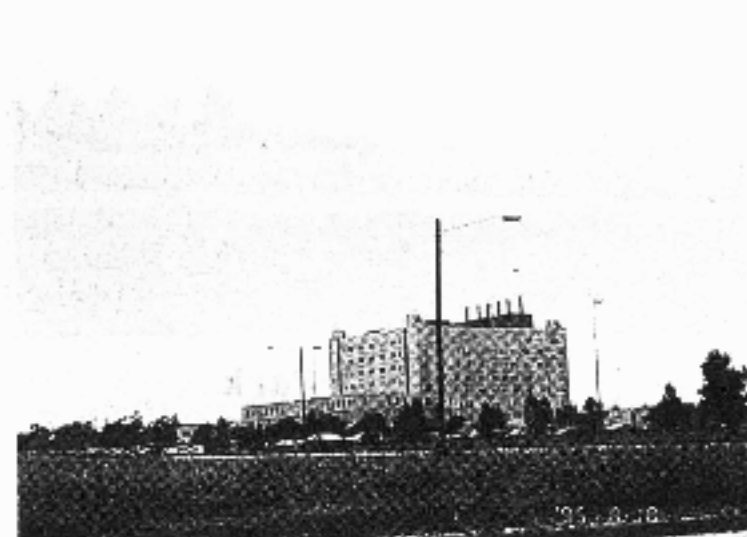
The main transportation is automobiles, and every parking lot has reservations for handicapped people. The town has developed on East Carolina University, Medical Center and tobacco industry, this lacking other industries. Industrial Park, including ASMO (Japanese car-part factory), has been recently established in the suburb. Greenville is now trying to invite other computer, automobile and pharmaceutical companies.



Science & Nature Center



East Carolina University



Medical Center



Supermarket and Its Parking



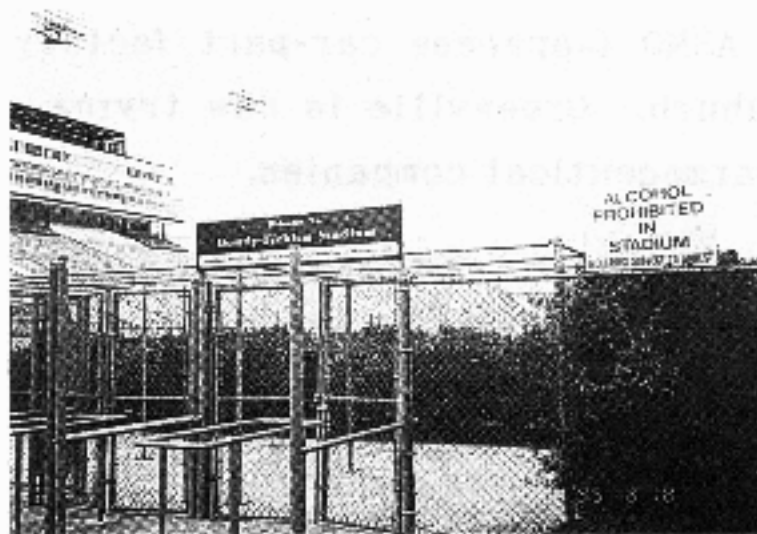
Courthouse



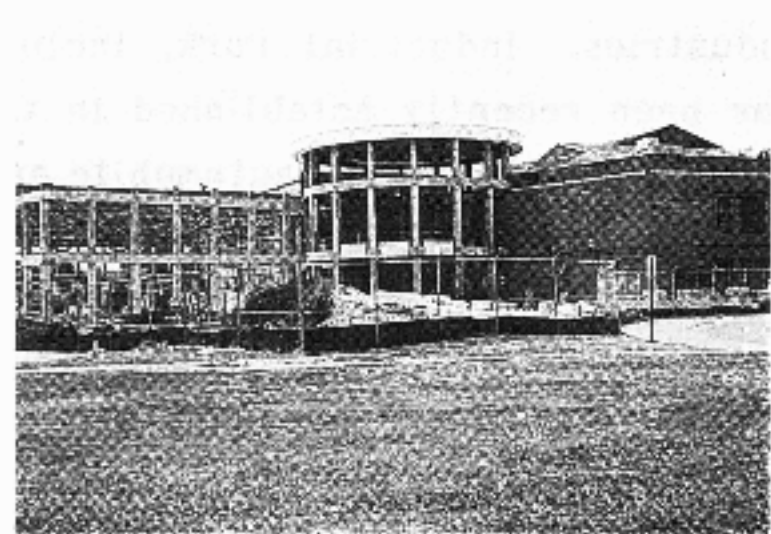
Reserved Parking (1)



Reserved Parking (2)



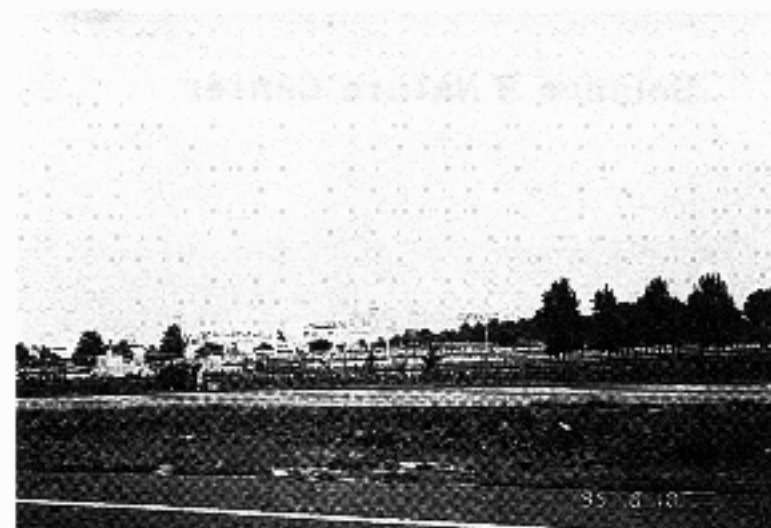
Football Stadium



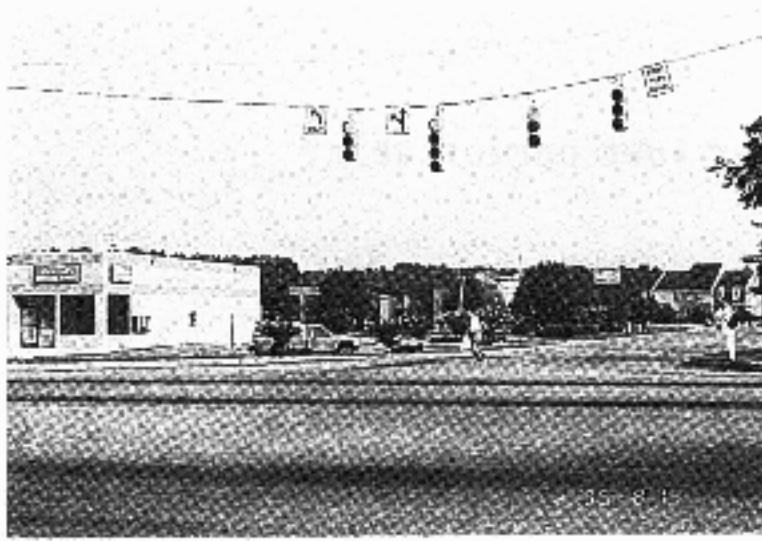
Gymnasium under Construction



Retirement Homes



Industrial Park



Intersection



ECU Campus Street

- ③ What do you think about the institutional environment of Soja and Greenville?

(3) Affective Environment

Soja City has various annual events: Kibiji Vetch Festival, Citizen's Fire Work, Sesshu Festival, Bicchu Kagura (Shinto music and dancing), Bicchu Drums, and so forth. In addition, the city government fosters citizen leaders by running "Shikakeninn-juku" (school for leaders).

In Greenville, one of the biggest annual events is the Independence Day Festival held in the Town Common Park.

A survey conducted by Soja City Government in August 1995 shows that the citizens' response to the question, "How do you feel about your town?" was: considerably comfortable (39.8%), average (35.8%), very comfortable (14.0%), relatively uncomfortable (7.7%), and quite uncomfortable (2.5%).

5. Worksheet

What elements do you think make a city or town comfortable?

(1) Natural Environment

(2) Institutional Environment

(3) Affective Environment