

LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF THE ONSEN (HOT SPRINGS) INN ASSOCIATION OF URESHINO, JAPAN

Shoichiro Anai

Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture,
Graduate School of Science and Engineering, Saga University
Saga City, Saga Prefecture, 840-8502, JAPAN
13577002@edu.cc.saga-u.ac.jp

Nobuo Mishima[†]

Professor, Dr Eng., Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture,
Graduate School of Science and Engineering, Saga University
Saga City, Saga Prefecture, 840-8502, JAPAN
+81-952-28-8703, mishiman@cc.saga-u.ac.jp

Yoko Taguchi

Lecturer, Dr Eng., Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture,
Graduate School of Science and Engineering, Saga University
Saga City, Saga Prefecture, 840-8502, JAPAN
+81-952-28-8615, ytaguchi@cc.saga-u.ac.jp

Abstract

Hot springs (*onsen*) are a major economic contributor to many Japanese towns. These assets have great potential to revitalize local areas that have recently suffered economic decline. This potential, however, has been underexploited, largely due to improper land use. Our study considers one such example in the hot springs town of Ureshino, in Saga Prefecture. This historic station town, dating back to the Edo era (1603–1868), was once a thriving destination with traditional Japanese-style inns; however, local land use, street planning, and facility maintenance have declined under the administration of individual landowners. We examine the condition of these inns and associated facilities, such as parking lots and employee dormitories, in order to make recommendations for improving land management practices. The results of our analysis are as follows: 1) many inns have gone out of business and been abandoned, even in the center of town; 2) inns have been left without proper management; and 3) parking lot additions have been uncoordinated and piecemeal. Thus, we argue that the Ureshino Inn Association should take the initiative to improve local land management strategy.

Keywords: hot springs town, Japanese inn association, land use management, out-of-business inns, urban revitalization

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Onsen (hot springs) towns are major contributors to many local economies in Japan. These assets have great potential to revitalize local areas that have recently suffered economic decline.

[†] Corresponding author



a) Parking lot.

b) The main street of
Ureshino Onsen.

c) Inn.

Figure 1: Visual examples of land use in Ureshino Onsen.

This potential, however, has been underexploited. This could owe to many different factors, including lack of strong leadership, inefficient advertising, poor land management and urban development practices, and so on. Land use is particularly poor in hot springs towns. Ureshino Onsen in the city of Ureshino, located in Saga Prefecture on the southwestern part of Kyushu, is a prime example of land mismanagement. This historic station town, established during the Edo era (1603–1868), was once a thriving resort destination populated with traditional Japanese-style inns; however, in recent years, land use, street planning, and facility maintenance here have declined under the management of individual landowners. In light of this mismanagement, we argue that the Ureshino Inn Association (hereafter referred to as the UIA) should take the initiative to coordinate and manage local land use.

1.2 Review of Previous Studies

Several previous studies have analyzed land use in hot springs towns and other facilities in Japan. For instance, Takagi and Koshizawa (2003) considered potential improvements in maintenance measures and systems for urban land management near Maruyama Park in Sapporo. Kato et al. (2007) analyzed land use and space management in the Kamiikeda district in Nagata-ku, Kobe, to consider how to improve living environments and use housing sites effectively, with a particular focus on vacant lots rooms. Kawashima (2001) has looked at land use and maintenance in mountain village colonies in Minase-mura, Akita Prefecture.

With regard to onsen in particular, Yamada et al. (2001) analyzed trends in the regional peculiarities of hot springs towns nationwide in order to improve onsen city planning techniques. Yamada et al. (2004) looked at building arrangements to illustrate changes in the hot springs town of Fukushima Higashiyama from 1926 to 2003. Matsumura et al. (2004), meanwhile, focused on street-level changes in the hot springs town of Kumamoto Hinagu over a much longer period of time (1409 to 2007) and divided this period into five stages: discovery, land development, prosperity, decline, and regeneration.

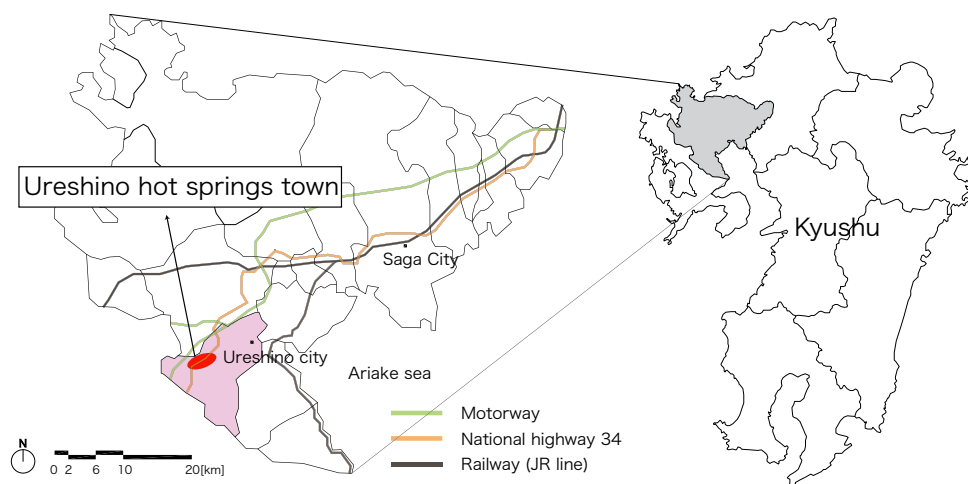


Figure 2: Location of the study area (Ureshino Onsen).

From this review, we can see that it is important to properly manage land, hotels, inns, and related facilities in hot springs towns. We suggest that the ideal solution is for local inn associations to establish a system of land management.

1.3 Aim

This research aims to clarify the fundamental areas of improvement for land management in Ureshino Onsen, with a particular focus on inns and related facilities.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Area

The study area is Ureshino Onsen, located in the center of the city of Ureshino. It was originally established as a station town along the Nagasaki road in the Edo era. The main street used to be lined with Japanese-style hotels or traditional inns (*ryokan*). After World War II, Ureshino Onsen experienced a development boom due to Japan's rapid economic growth. New buildings were constructed, along with signs advertising business activities. However, in recent years, Ureshino Onsen has faced gradual economic decline. Additionally, as a result of uncontrolled building activities, the street landscape has become haphazard and disordered, despite the town's original orderly and careful planning.

2.2 Study Method

2.2.1 Data Collection

We focus on the period from 1975 to 2012, beginning with the year when the town's annual number of bathers began to increase. We investigated all inns using relevant literature,



Figure 3: Examples of parking lots excluded from this research.

housing maps provided by the Zenrin Corporation, and interviews with inn owners.

2.2.2 Analysis Method

We analyze the following conditions: 1) past land use of inns and related facilities, and 2) current land use of inns that have gone out of business.

3. PAST LAND USE OF INNS AND RELATED FACILITIES

In this section, we analyze past land use of inns and related facilities to show that the piecemeal individual management of inns and related facilities is responsible for land management problems in Ureshino.

3.1 Related Facilities

In our research, the term “related facilities” refers to parking lots, shops, and employee dormitories owned by local inns. We have excluded parking lots situated in the bottoms of inn buildings (see Figure 3), restricting our investigation to parking lots with their own foundation or ground space.

3.2 Past Land Use of Inns

In this paragraph, we analyze past land use of inns and related facilities. Parts (a), (b), (c), and (d) of Figure 4 show previous land use of inns and their shops, dormitories, and parking lots.

3.2.1 Previous Land Use of Inns

Most of the inns that are currently in the town center existed in 1975. On the other hand, the majority of the suburban inns were built on vacant land after that year.

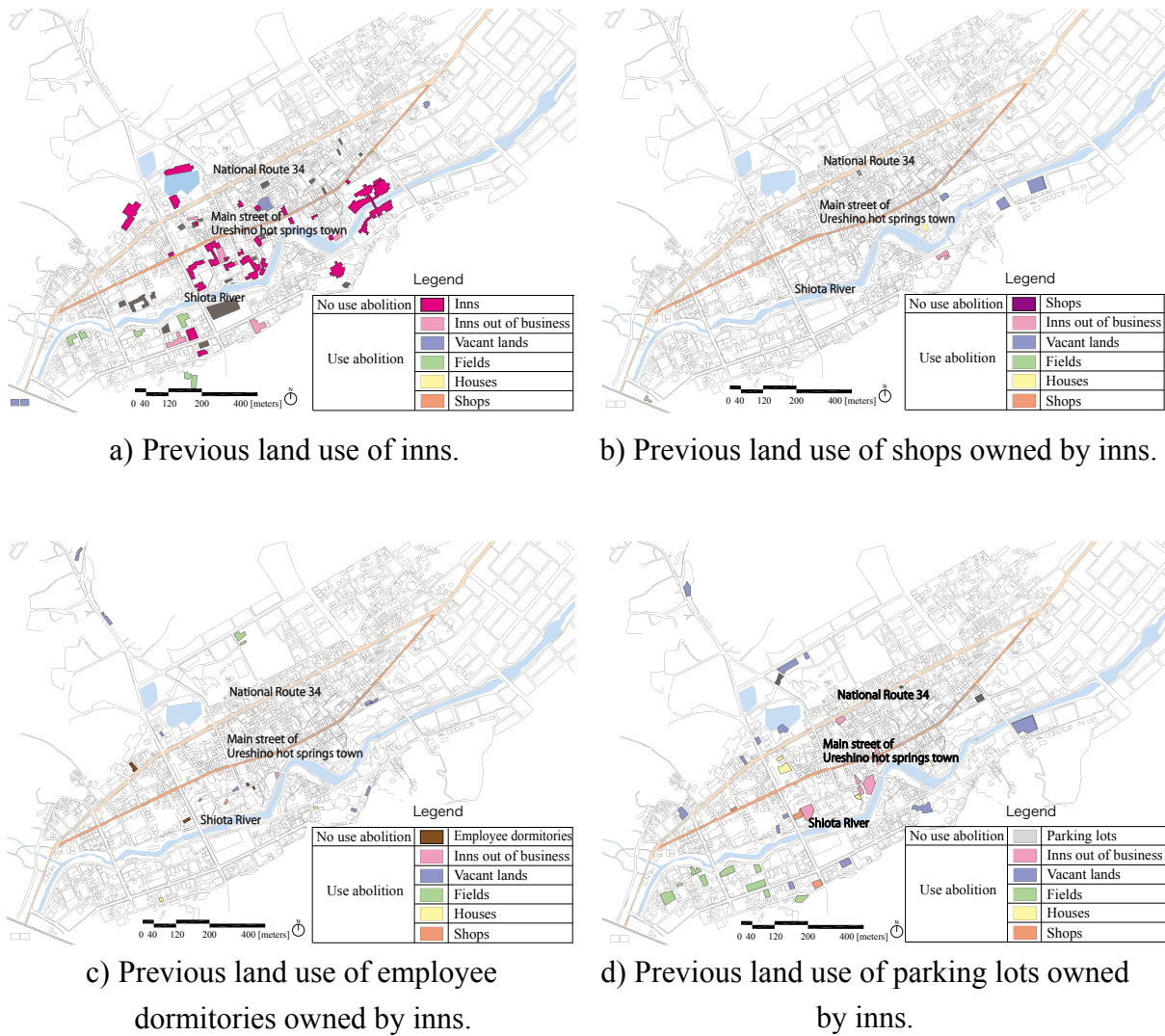


Figure 4: Previous land use of inns and related facilities.

3.2.2 Previous Land Use of Shops Owned by Inns

All of these shops were built near inns, mostly built on vacant land.

3.2.3 Previous Land Use of Employee Dormitories Belonging to Inns

These dormitories were mostly built near inns in the center of town. However, there were also several dormitories in suburbs that used previously vacant land.

3.2.4 Previous Land Use of Parking Lots Owned by Inns

Most parking lots located in suburbs were built on previously vacant land. In contrast, most parking lots in the center of town were built on the sites of inns that had gone out of business and were subsequently demolished.

3.3 Summary

Important findings from analyzing past land use are as follows: 1) most inns and related facilities located in suburbs were built and expanded on vacant land in an uncontrolled manner; and 2) most land vacated by failed inns was filled by parking lots. As mentioned above, we argue that land development should be conducted in a controlled and coordinated manner.

4. CURRENT USE OF LAND ONCE OCCUPIED BY INNS THAT HAVE GONE OUT OF BUSINESS

In this section, we analyze the current use of land that had been occupied by inns that went out of business in order to identify problems with local land management. We believe the lack of a governing body, like the UIA, leads to such problems, despite the fact that a decline in tourism should make land use easier.

Here, we classify out-of-business inns on two axes: 1) UIA members vs. non-members, and 2) opened before 1975 vs. after.

4.1 Out-of-Business Inns

To determine which inns went out of business between 1975 and 2012, we referred to “The 1973 Saga Prefecture Business Directory.” We identified 74 inns that had gone out of business between 1975 and 2012, as shown in Table 1.

4.2 Differences Between UIA Members and Non-members

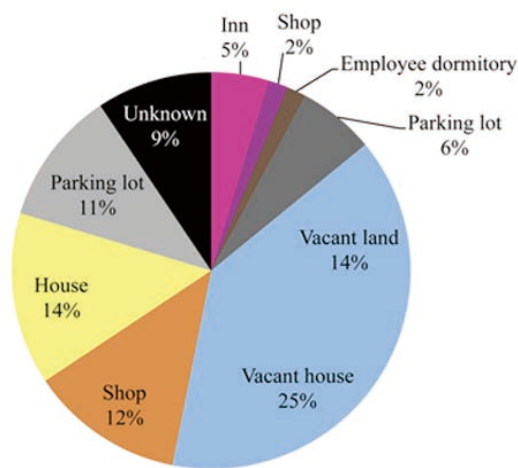
In this section, we analyze the current use of land belonging to inns that had gone out of business and compare differences between UIA members and non-members. Our investigation yielded two key differences. 1) Although several lots vacated by failed UIA member inns were converted into other inns or related facilities, no UIA non-member inns were converted into effective facilities. 2) About 30-40% of vacant land was left unused in the town, distributed between members and non-members.

4.3 Differences Between Inns Opened Before and After 1975

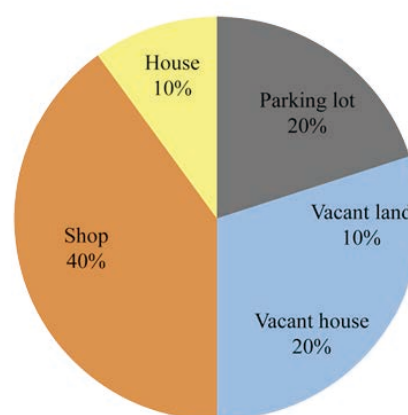
In this section, we analyze current uses of land belonging to inns that went out of business based on whether they opened before or after 1975. Our results were as follows. 1) Most inns that opened after 1975 were not converted to effective new uses, instead remaining as vacant land, vacant houses, or other buildings. 2) Vacant land and buildings accounted for 70% of the whole.

Table 1: Current use of land vacated by out-of-business inns, comparing UIA members vs. non-members.

Current land use	Inns and related facilities				Ordinary use						Total
	Inn	Shop	Employee dormitory	Parking lot	Vacant land	Vacant house	Shop	House	Parking lot	Unknown	
UIA members	3	1	1	4	9	16	8	9	7	6	64
	5.0%	1.7%	1.7%	10.0%	11.7%	18.3%	20.0%	15.0%	11.7%	5.0%	100%
UIA non-members	0	0	0	2	1	2	4	1	0	0	10
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	50.0%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	21.4%	100%



a) UIA members.



b) Non-members.

Figure 5: Current use of land vacated by out-of-business inns, reflecting differences between UIA members and non-members.

Table 2: Current use of land vacated by out-of-business inns that opened before 1975 vs. after 1975.

Current land use	Inns and related facilities				Ordinary use						Total
	Inn	Shop	Employee dormitory	Parking lot	Vacant land	Vacant house	Shop	House	Parking lot	Unknown	
Opened before 1975	3	1	1	6	7	11	12	9	7	3	60
	5.0%	1.7%	1.7%	10.0%	11.7%	18.3%	20.0%	15.0%	11.7%	5.0%	100%
Opened after 1975	0	0	0	0	3	7	0	1	0	3	14
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	50.0%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	21.4%	100%

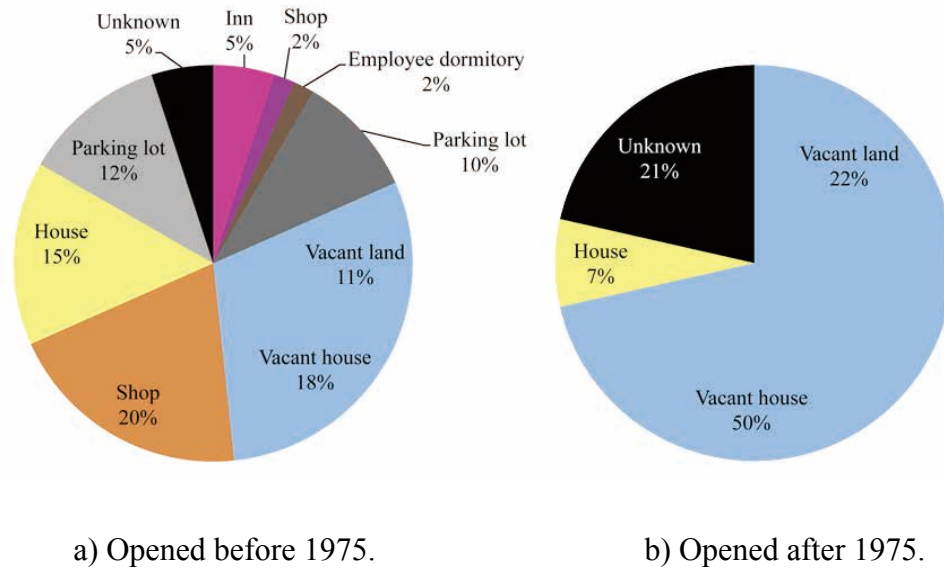


Figure 6: Current use of land vacated by out-of-business inns, comparing inns opened before and after 1975.



Figure 7: Vacant land and buildings owned by out-of-business-inns.

4.4 Summary

The analysis in this section yielded several results regarding the use of land vacated by failed inns. First, comparing the results by UIA membership revealed that UIA member facilities were mostly converted into new uses, while non-member facilities generally were not. Comparing the results by opening date of the failed inns revealed that land belonging to inns opened after 1975 was less likely to be managed after the inns' demise than land belonging to failed inns that opened before 1975.

These findings suggest that vacant land and buildings should be properly managed to ensure continued use. Not only would effective management help minimize economic loss, it would prevent vacant properties adversely affecting the town's landscape and visual aesthetic.

5. DISCUSSION

As a result of this research, we are better able to understand current challenges and fundamental points of improvement related to the management of land belonging to inns and related facilities in Ureshino Onsen.

Many related facilities in the town were built or expanded using vacant land; nevertheless, inns that went out of business were seen here and there at the center of the town. We believe this is further evidence of poor land management, and, in the interest of improving the town's future, recommend the UIA should proactively manage the land occupied by inns that go out of business, as well as parking lots and other related facilities.

On the other hand, many towns, including Ureshino, are seeing increasing numbers of vacant lots or buildings in town centers due to multiple factors, including soaring land prices. As this increase in vacant land results in general public deterioration, especially regarding the prevention of disasters and crimes, it is important to manage this land effectively via a local, central governing body. In this paper, we argue that a leading local private organization (in the case of Ureshino, the UIA), would be better placed to properly manage local land than would an equivalent public or governmental institution. We especially recommend that the owners of vacant lands and buildings consider how to use these properties most effectively. Introducing restrictions on the construction of new related facilities, distinct from development permits issued by the government, would also help curb the disorderly expansion and development of local lands.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our appreciation of Mr. Ikeda and Mr. Nakashima, officers of the Ureshino City Authority, for their useful advice, and to Mr. Nobeta of the Ureshino Onsen Tourism Association for the invaluable materials he provided. Finally, we are grateful to all the inn managers and local residents who cooperated with us by taking part in our interview survey.

REFERENCES

- Kato, C., Yasuda, C., Minowa, K., Suekane, S., Kuriyama, N., and Nagata, Y. (2007). A study on the transition of the land use and the space maintenance in piedmont densely built-up residential areas, focusing on the vacant houses and lots in Kamiikeda District, Nagata-Ward, Kobe City. *AIJ Kinki Chapter Architectural Research Meeting*, 445-448.
- Kawashima, M. (2001). A study on New Maintenance System of Land Use in Village.-A Case Study of Mountain Village in Minase-mura, Akita Prefecture. *Summaries of Technical Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Architectural Institute of Japan*, 629-630.

- Matsumura, M., & Nishi, E. (2007). A study on the formation and transformation of townscape in Hinagu hot spring town. *Summaries of Technical Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Architectural Institute of Japan*, 93-94.
- Takagi, S., & Koshizawa, A. (2003). A study on land use control and a scenic attraction problem in high-quality urbanized areas in Sapporo city. *Architectural Institute of Japan Journal of Technology and Design*, **17**, 415-420.
- Yamada, K., & Miyazaki, H. (2001). A basic study on planning method by analyzing trends and regional characteristics and revitalization program for hot springs town area. *Summaries of Technical Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Architectural Institute of Japan*, 813-814.
- Yamada, K., Miyazaki, H., & Fukumoto, N. (2004). A study on space configuration based on transition of hot spring area Part 1. A case study of hot spring area Higashiyama in Fukushima Prefecture. *Summaries of Technical Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Architectural Institute of Japan*, 215-216.
- The 1973 Saga Prefecture Business Directory*. Saga Prefecture Joint Association of Commerce and Industry.