

# Utazu Town

Reviving traditional Japanese *kominka* to revitalise fading urban areas



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## Situation

- Utazu town is a small local town with a population of less than 20,000 and the town is facing an aging population and outflow of residents to urban areas.
- The town was exploring local resources that could attract attachment to the town by local residents and tourists from other areas.
- The town found that their temples, shrines and old residential houses had historic value and decided to utilise them in order to revitalise the town.

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## Intervention

- In 2005, the town redeveloped roads in the old downtown to create a historic atmosphere.
- Between 2008 and 2014, the town acquired an old Japanese-style building, an old agricultural warehouse and two empty residential houses and turned them into public venues with a traditional Japanese feel.
- Before the redevelopment, the town office took criticism from some local residents that didn't understand why the town needed to value traditional buildings. The town office persuaded them to support the project by explaining the importance of landscape improvement.

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## Impact

- The redeveloped building and warehouse are being used as public venues for concerts, exhibitions and cultural activities. And the redeveloped houses are being used as accommodations.
- Around the redeveloped area, exchange events and marches are being organised by local residents and these events are attracting several thousand visitors including from the outside of the town.
- The town was introduced in the popular overseas travel guidebook series Lonely Planet and is expecting more visitors from foreign countries.

