



Next Horizon Sustainable City

2026 City of Kitakyushu

Message

Kitakyushu is a city that once supported Japan's period of high economic growth through its manufacturing strength, led by steel production. At the same time, as a result of that rapid development, it became one of the first cities in Japan to confront a wide range of environmental, economic, and social challenges.

Yet, each time, citizens, businesses, and government joined forces to overcome those challenges. Through this history, Kitakyushu has developed the ability to rise again and again, a process we now describe as a regenerative capacity.

Today, we face a new set of challenges. How should we nurture the industries that will support the next era? How can we build a sustainable and inclusive city in a super-aging society, leaving no one behind? How should we confront increasingly severe climate risks?

The year 2025 marked a decisive turning point.

Investment related to corporate attraction reached a historic high, and large-scale projects—including one of the largest offshore wind power developments in Japan—are steadily progressing. Moreover, for the first time in 60 years, Kitakyushu achieved a net social population increase, driven in particular by the inflow of young people and women. This is clear evidence that Kitakyushu is regaining trust and reemerging as a city of choice.

Our challenge now extends far beyond our borders. Participation in OECD meetings in Paris, international conferences in Bonn, partnerships with Kaohsiung City in Taiwan and Telangana State in India, and long-standing cooperation in water supply technology in Cambodia all demonstrate that Kitakyushu is contributing to global sustainability through sustained action.

I view sustainability as a baton—passed from the past to the present, and from the present to the future. Crossing generations and national boundaries, this baton connects us all. Today, Kitakyushu firmly holds this baton and passing it on responsibly to the next generation is our shared mission.

With this determination, we have set forth the vision of “**Next Horizon: Sustainable City.**” At its core are four guiding concepts: **Mandala-like Network:** a city where diverse actors are organically interconnected

Altruistic City: a city grounded in mutual care and consideration

Regenerative City: a city that continuously renews itself

Transformative Agent: a city that actively shapes change in the world

As global crises such as climate change and biodiversity loss intensify, cities worldwide are being called to lead transformation. Kitakyushu is uniquely positioned to stand at the forefront of this movement. This is because the city is built on a regenerative and altruistic legacy.

These concepts are closely aligned with theories of urban transformation proposed by Professor Xuemei Bai. We are deeply grateful for the academic insight and encouragement that support and strengthen our initiatives. To realize this vision, we are advancing three core projects:

Transformation (Retalabo): driving urban co-creation and innovation

Attraction (Destination): positioning Kitakyushu as an international hub for sustainability

Passion (Matsuri): fostering a culture in which citizens participate naturally and with enjoyment

Together, these initiatives form the driving force that will carry Kitakyushu toward its next horizon. Above all, the greatest strength of Kitakyushu lies in the passion of its citizens. Sustainability does not grow from obligation alone. It emerges from the desire to try, from enjoyment, and from the wish to contribute. It is this spirit that I trust most deeply.

The world today faces challenges of unprecedented complexity and difficulty. Precisely for this reason, Kitakyushu will share its experience and capacity for action with the international community, and work together to shape the future.

Together with all of you, let us pass this baton to the future.



Kazuhisa Takeuchi

Mayor of the City of Kitakyushu,
Japan



Message

Today, humanity is facing global challenges of unprecedented severity. Climate change is accelerating, biodiversity is disappearing at dozens of times the normal rate, and many of the Earth's planetary boundaries are being exceeded. At the same time, more than half of the world's population already lives in cities, and by 2050, two-thirds of humanity will be urban residents. Cities also account for more than 70% of global consumption based CO2 emissions. In this sense, cities are often viewed as the "culprits" of climate change.

However, I believe that cities are also the places where the most innovative solutions emerge (renewable energy adoption, next-generation mobility, and green infrastructure). In other words, cities are not only the source of problems, they are a treasure trove of solutions.

We are at a historic turning point at which cities must take bold and coordinated action. It is not enough for pioneering cities to act alone. When cities form networks, learn from each other, and strive upward together, they can change the trajectory of the entire planet. Actions by even a small number of frontrunner cities can create ripple effects and chain reactions, generating positive momentum, and establishing new norms towards sustainability. In this sense, we must re-envision cities as "transformative agents" for global sustainability.

There are three roles that cities should play as transformative agents: First, each city must transform itself, shifting away from conventional development pathways and accelerating toward desirable, sustainable futures.

Second, cities should not aim only to improve themselves; they must also support the transformation of other cities. Leading cities should serve by example but also act as catalysts.

Third, cities must build strong networks and act together. To prepare for climate-related disaster risks and secure resilient energy and food supply chains, solidarity among cities is more critical than ever. Cities connected and acting together are much more powerful and resilient than striving alone.

Next Horizon Sustainable City is the first in the world to embrace this concept explicitly in a city's vision and practice.

Why Kitakyushu? It is because Kitakyushu is one of the cities capable of becoming a "pioneering nucleus" for global transformation and because it embodies strong elements of "altruistic city", a concept put forward in my 2024 article in Science. I argue that global sustainability cannot be achieved by a handful of advanced cities alone; it is essential for these cities to reach out and bring along cities that are lagging behind. Altruistic actions by leading cities are key for this.

Kitakyushu has demonstrated this altruistic spirit. After overcoming its own environmental challenges, it generously shared its expertise both domestically and internationally, supporting environmental improvements in other cities. As many of you know, Kitakyushu underwent a dramatic transformation from a "city of pollution" to an "environmental model city." The city has a long history of initiating and supporting city-to-city collaboration, with more than 300 projects over 15 years. In 2011, it was selected by the OECD as the first Green Growth Model City in Asia. Kitakyushu has earned high international recognition for its altruistic stance as a driver of environmental cooperation.

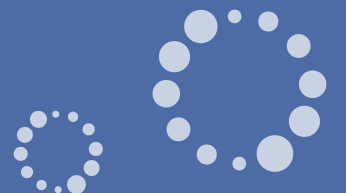
Building on this track record, Kitakyushu is now taking its next step through the "Next Horizon Sustainable City", to become a globally leading transformative agent with concrete projects.

Let me close by emphasizing once again: cities are not bundles of problems they are rich reservoirs of solutions. Cities must become the transformative agents of our era. And Kitakyushu is standing at the forefront of that movement. I am truly honored to be able to support Kitakyushu in this endeavor. I look forward to working together with the City of Kitakyushu.



Xuemei Bai

Distinguished Professor and ARC Laureate Fellow at the Australian National University. Her research focuses on the science and policy of rapid urbanization and urban system sustainability. Coordinating Lead Author for IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities; named as one of the World's 100 Most Influential People in Climate Change Policy in 2019 and 2022; Laureate of the Volvo Environment Prize 2018, and the Global Economy Prize 2021.



Team Support Messages



Yukari Takamura

Professor at the Institute for Future Initiatives, The University of Tokyo

Cities consume significant amounts of energy and resources, including those sourced from outside their boundaries. Approximately 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions originate from urban areas. Should cities advance appropriate measures and transition to a decarbonized and sustainable society, they can create opportunities to enhance resource efficiency and substantially reduce GHG emissions globally. Cities, as a hub of people, knowledge and technologies, possess the potential to creating solutions and innovations essential for the transition to a sustainable society. I strongly expect that Kitakyushu City, leveraging its accumulated experience and achievements in the environmental field, will become a hub for exchange, cooperation and collaboration as a transformative agent for realizing a sustainable society.



Tokutaro Nakai

Executive Advisor, Nippon Steel Corporation, Former Vice Minister of the Ministry of the Environment

The prosperity of urban civilization thus far has led to ecological destruction, including disasters caused by global boiling and mass extinctions of species, threatening the survival of human society. In the modern era where the majority of humanity lives in cities, the key to humanity's survival on Earth lies in whether urban civilization can be transformed into a paradigm harmonized with the planet. Kitakyushu, a hub of exchange since ancient times and a center of modern iron production since the Meiji era that supported rapid economic growth, overcame the environmental problems that arose alongside it and became a leading eco-town in Japan. It is precisely Kitakyushu that is well-suited to disseminate a new paradigm of Earth-harmonious urban civilization. We wish to explore the concepts of a mandala-like network, an altruistic city, a regenerative city, and a city as a transformative agent, and to disseminate from Kitakyushu a vision for sustainable cities that will endure for three thousand years into the future.



Kazuo Tase

President & CEO SDG Partners, Inc.
Former Senior Advisor for Human Security at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

I believe that the essence of sustainability and well-being lies in a positive-sum approach, one in which people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives come together to create new forms of value that did not previously exist. From this perspective, I greatly value and wholeheartedly support the City of Kitakyushu's decision to place the concept of altruism at the heart of its community development, and its efforts to articulate a clear and compelling direction toward both human well-being and harmonious coexistence with nature. At a time when the world is undergoing profound turbulence, and when sustainability itself may appear to be facing strong headwinds, I am firmly convinced that this initiative will extend far beyond 2030, contribute meaningfully to the nurturing of future generations, and evolve into a model of city-making that leads not only Asia, but the world.



Francesco Zurlo

Dean of the School of Design of Politecnico di Milano

Design exists to improve people's lives, giving shape to their desires, which are the vital force that drives us. But satisfying them without limits can damage the environment and create stark inequalities. Desires are indispensable, yet an excess of them can threaten what allows us to live. Traditions offer us a solution: to guide every desire through the principle of CARE. Caring for the environment, for others and for the "more than human" thus becomes the direction of the project. Kitakyushu, transformed into an altruistic city, demonstrates how care and the project inspired by it, can become the driving and sustainable force behind a community



What Is Sustainability?

It is the force to not abandon either the present or the future.

It is the cause to keep challenging ourselves for today and for tomorrow.

It is a commitment to every individual: those living now, and those yet to come.

Kitakyushu's journey toward sustainability began with a powerful voice from its citizens.

During Japan's period of rapid economic growth, Kitakyushu suffered from severe pollution. Yet from a simple but profound wish from its people of "We want blue skies", the city tackled its pollution problem and overcame it. Kitakyushu was reborn as an environmental city recognized around the world.

The first voices raised were those of mothers from local women's groups.

That single action mobilized citizens, businesses, and the government alike, and grew into a bold challenge that ultimately drew global attention.

Cities, nations, and the world.

The global environment, local communities, and industrial economies.

The present and the future.

All are connected.

Kitakyushu is a city that has continually harnessed this power of connection.

And today, while cherishing these connections, it continues to take on new challenges for the future.

The world is now entering an era of even greater difficulty and uncertainty.

That is precisely why cities like Kitakyushu, cities that begin with the will of their people, are needed by the world.

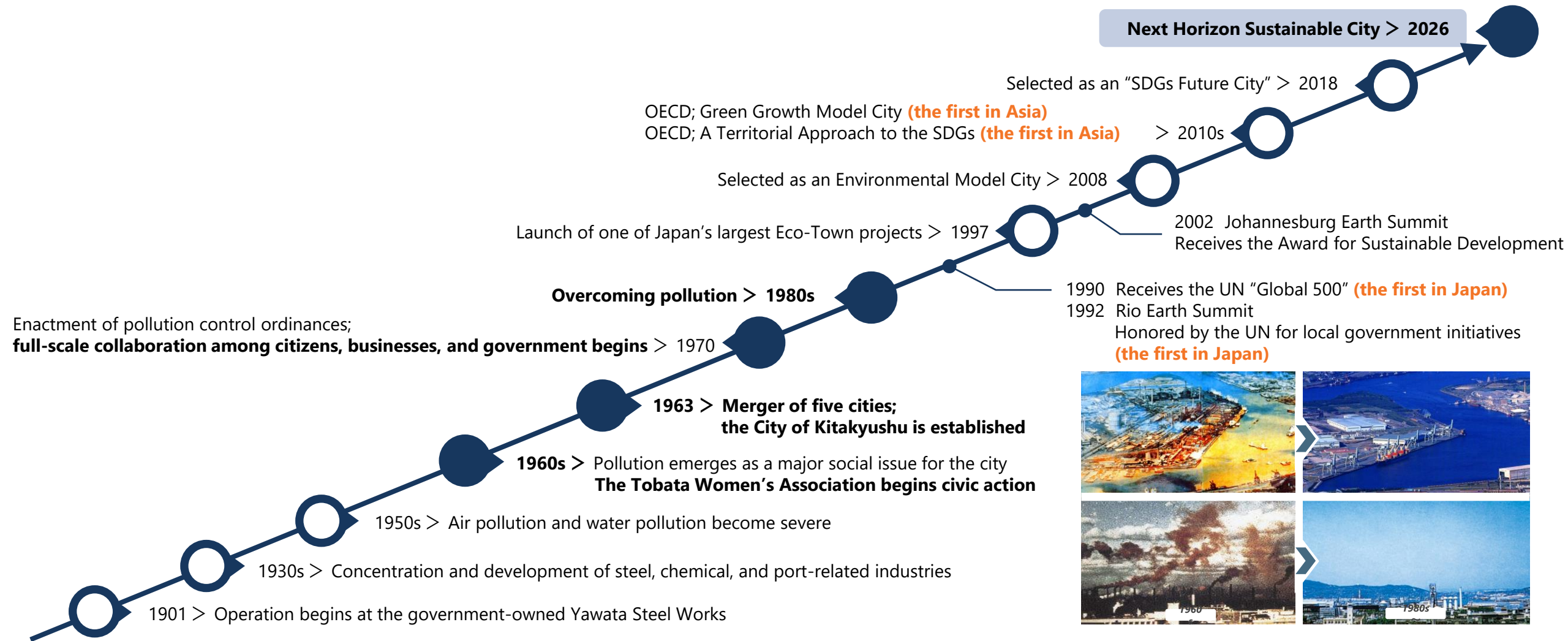
Human aspiration becomes action. Action moves cities. Cities move the world.

With this conviction, Kitakyushu moves forward—
toward the Next Horizon Sustainable City.



The History of Kitakyushu as a Sustainable City

Kitakyushu has consistently remained at the forefront of each era, repeatedly confronting challenges and, each time, transforming itself together with its citizens.



What Is the Next Horizon?

As a sustainability leader on the global stage, Kitakyushu is expected to confront a complex and interconnected set of challenges (decarbonization, circular economy, biodiversity loss, population aging, loneliness, and employment) as well as translating that experience into shared global value. By continuously addressing these challenges and openly sharing its lessons with the world, Kitakyushu is called upon to serve as a **transformative agent**—a city that does not merely respond to global change but helps to drive it.

Kitakyushu now moves forward toward the Next Horizon of the sustainable city, guided by four core concepts:



●●●Mandala-Like Network

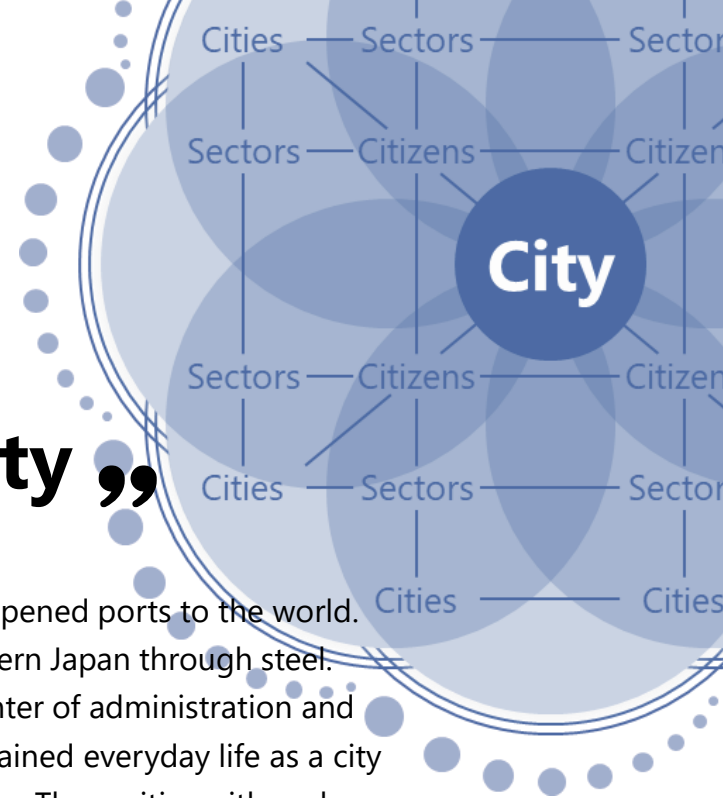
“A Mandala-Like Network Born from Diversity and Solidarity”

For centuries, Kitakyushu has served as a vital node for the movement of people, goods, and culture across the Japanese archipelago. The Kanmon Straits have long functioned as a lifeline linking Honshu and Kyushu. From the Meiji era onward, Moji Port became Japan's gateway to overseas trade, and railway networks spread throughout the city. Value, knowledge, and technology flowing in from the outside world infused the city with new energy and in turn, that energy was sent back out to the world. In Kitakyushu, a natural cycle between the inside and the outside has taken deep root.

In 1963, the five cities of Moji, Kokura, Wakamatsu, Yahata, and Tobata came together on equal footing to form the City of Kitakyushu.

Moji and Wakamatsu opened ports to the world. Yahata supported modern Japan through steel. Kokura became the center of administration and commerce. Tobata sustained everyday life as a city of education and culture. These cities with such distinct histories and roles, chose to join hands and become one municipality, for the sake of the future, was in itself an embodiment of diversity and solidarity. Contribution to the outside world does not weaken a city from within. It strengthens its inner capacity. Diversity and solidarity do not create authority—they create a resilient future.

This mandala-like network—in which people, life, time, and space are all interconnected, without boundaries between inside and outside—is alive and deeply embedded within Kitakyushu.



Altruistic City

“An Altruistic Spirit That Moves a City Beyond Its Limits”

Kitakyushu was once a city that produced 90 percent of Japan's iron. As development advanced, severe air pollution and water contamination emerged. For the sake of their children and the future, citizens rose up to fight this issue.. Working together with industry and government, they succeeded in restoring blue skies and clean seas. The technologies cultivated through this process were shared generously by Kitakyushu with countries across Asia. Over the past 15 years, the city has implemented more than 300 international cooperation projects in the environmental field. How many cities in the world can claim such a record? Among them, the water supply cooperation with Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, is widely known as the “Miracle of Phnom Penh.”

Today, Kitakyushu is also home to many global companies in fields such as robotics, sanitary equipment, and automobile manufacturing—industries that support daily life around the world. In this way, Kitakyushu and its citizens continue to contribute to global well-being. Above all, the people of Kitakyushu possess a deep spirit of compassion and a strong capacity for action. When they see someone in need, they cannot simply look away.

When people act for the sake of others, they often demonstrate strength beyond their usual limits. Perhaps the same is true of cities.

Kitakyushu has a rich and enduring history of altruism.



Regenerative City

“Where Regenerative Power Revives Nature and Community”

Kitakyushu is a city that has restored clear seas and blue skies, brought rich plant and animal life back to its urban core, and built a safe and secure urban environment.

Our city is home to the largest concentration in Japan of companies that generate renewable energy and lead in resource recycling.

And above all, transcending tradition, voices of challenge and hope for urban regeneration and community revitalization are rising together with the resonant beat of the Matsuri drums.

When people come to see crisis as opportunity, they often unleash a level of passion greater than ever before. On a larger scale, perhaps the same is true of cities.

Kitakyushu has a deeply rooted tradition of regeneration.

In this way, Kitakyushu has become a city where altruism and regeneration resonate together.

Once a steel city that supported the world, and later a city reborn through environmental leadership, Kitakyushu is now creating a new circle of the future.

We aspire to expand this circle of altruism and regeneration to the world.



Transformative Agent

“Cities as Transformative Agents Shape the Next Horizon for Our Planet”

To address global-scale challenges and achieve sustainability, fundamental transformation is required. Current responses remain fragmented and insufficient. Climate change is accelerating rapidly, and biodiversity is being lost at a rate ten to one hundred times faster than the natural background rate. Under these conditions, cities are now called upon to fulfill three critical roles if we are to secure a future that is resilient to climate impacts, safe for people to live in, capable of conserving biodiversity, and able to maintain the balance of nature on our planet.

First, cities must break away from conventional trajectories and accelerate the realization of desirable futures.

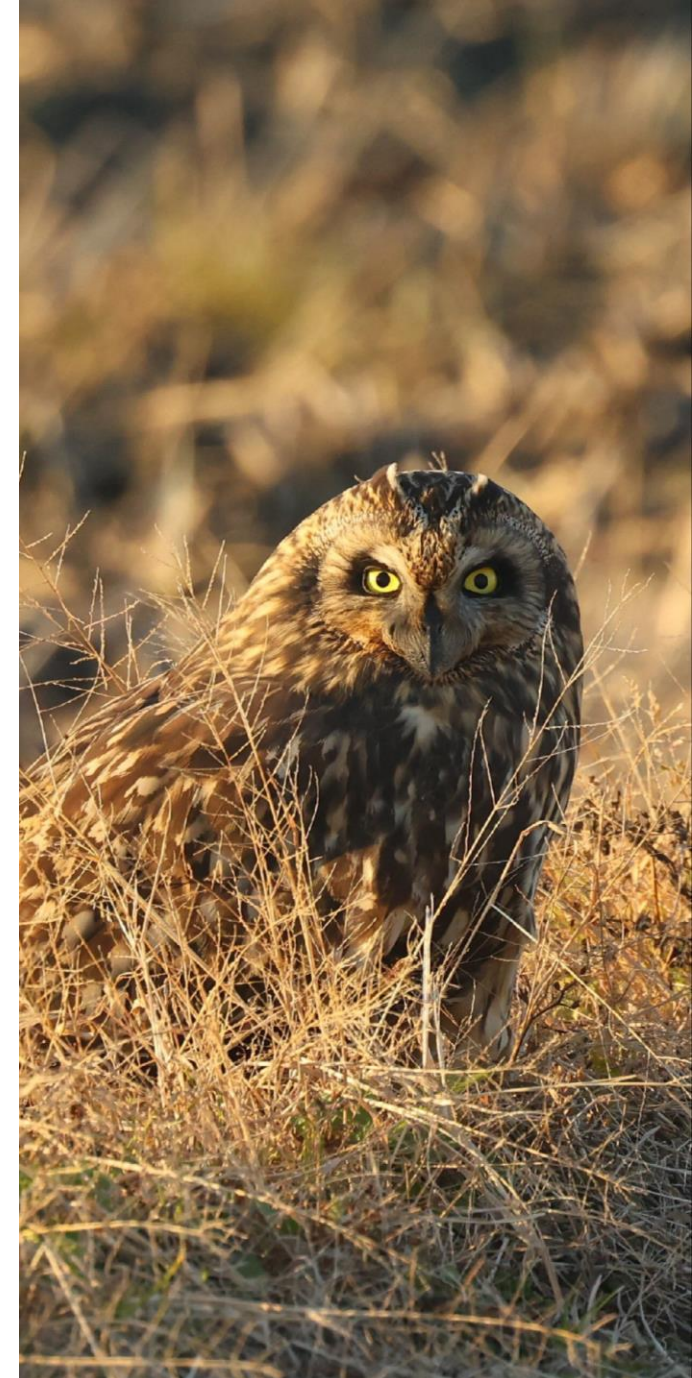
Second, cities must go beyond improving themselves. They must influence and catalyze transformation in other cities—not only by serving as models, but by actively driving change.

Third, cities must build networks of collaboration that enable diverse stakeholders to respond collectively to disasters and external shocks.

Urban action is not merely the sum of individual or organizational efforts. Cities function as integrated systems: they generate change, embed it in society, and carry it forward. Moreover, cities possess the power to spread social transformation across borders.

Societal change begins with small but determined centers of motivation and capacity. Cities should support and amplify these centers—and serve as transformative agents that advance change.

This is what we mean by the Next Horizon Sustainable City.



How Do We Reach the Next Horizon?

As a transformative agent, Kitakyushu will advance three core projects to realize the Next Horizon Sustainable City.

Retalabo

- Kitakyushu will establish a practice-based laboratory that embodies altruism, regeneration, and transformation.
- Through collaboration among citizens, industry, government, and academia, Retalabo will build processes to address and resolve complex and wicked problems.
- By applying strategic design, the city will pursue initiatives that lead the world—and actively share the knowledge and experience gained with the global community.

Destination Project

- By leveraging tools such as the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index), Kitakyushu aims to become a destination for people committed to sustainability—a city they aspire to visit at least once in a lifetime, and to which they wish to return again and again.

Matsuri Project

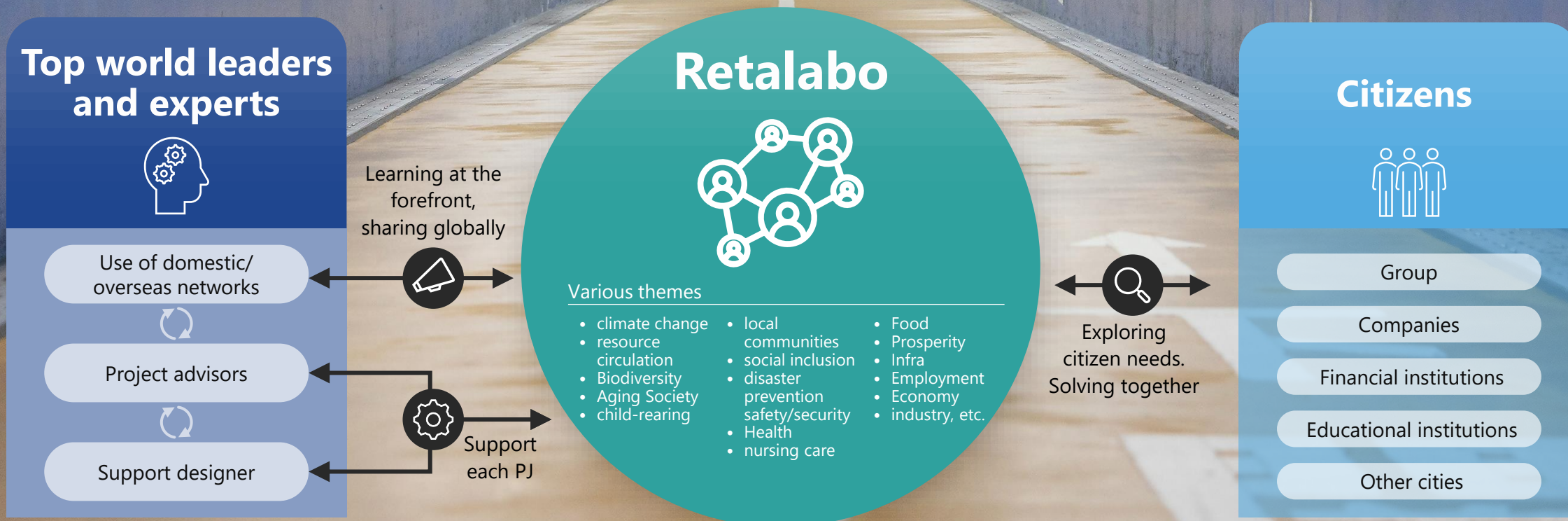
- By working across diverse fields and sectors, the Matsuri Project will activate sustainability rooted in citizens' everyday lives, inspiring enthusiasm and momentum toward a more sustainable city.

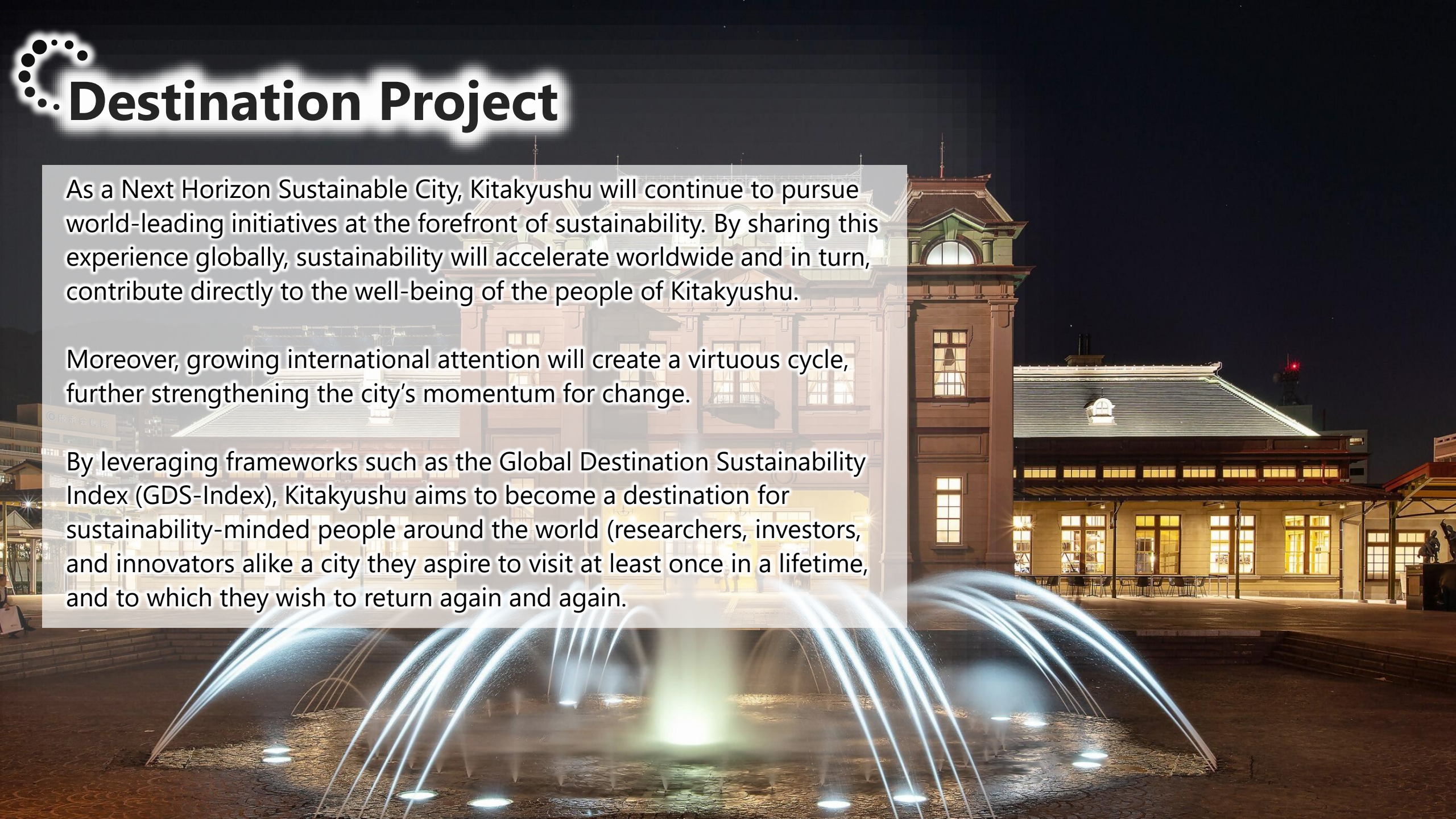


Retalabo — Altruistic, Regenerative and transformative agent labo

To achieve sustainability, innovation that transcends traditional sectors is essential. Under a Strategic Design approach, we will address complex and wicked problems in an integrated and cross-cutting manner, establishing a laboratory that serves as a place of practice for altruistic, regenerative, and transformative action. From this platform, drawing on the motivation and energy of citizens as a driving force, we will continuously generate urban transformation projects through collaboration among industry, government, academia, and civil society. This will also serve as a practical platform for implementing Japan's national initiatives, including GX*, LRSDGs**, RD***, RCES****, integrated synergy approaches, and policies that promote behavioral change among citizens.

*Green Transformation, **Local Revitalization SDGs, ***Regional Decarbonization, ****Regional Circular and Ecological Spheres



The background image shows a night scene in Kitakyushu, Japan. In the foreground, a large, illuminated fountain with multiple jets of water is visible. Behind the fountain, a large, historic building with a clock tower and a tiled roof is lit up. The building has many windows, some of which are glowing with light. The sky is dark, and the overall atmosphere is vibrant and modern.

Destination Project

As a Next Horizon Sustainable City, Kitakyushu will continue to pursue world-leading initiatives at the forefront of sustainability. By sharing this experience globally, sustainability will accelerate worldwide and in turn, contribute directly to the well-being of the people of Kitakyushu.

Moreover, growing international attention will create a virtuous cycle, further strengthening the city's momentum for change.

By leveraging frameworks such as the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index), Kitakyushu aims to become a destination for sustainability-minded people around the world (researchers, investors, and innovators alike a city they aspire to visit at least once in a lifetime, and to which they wish to return again and again.



Matsuri Project

Kitakyushu is a city of “Matsuri ” (meaning Japanese traditional community festivals that have been passed down for centuries). Matsuri, carried forward by the energy and commitment of people over hundreds of years, embody sustainability in its truest sense.

That same civic passion holds the power to shape the future of the city. When people experience sustainability in their everyday lives, strengthen their motivation, and take action for both the present and the future, this collective energy becomes the very engine that drives the Next Horizon Sustainable City forward.

By working across diverse fields—food, sports, entertainment, art, design, culture, and community—we will cultivate, together with our citizens, the shared energy that refuses to give up on either today or tomorrow, and that sustains continuous challenge.

This energy will accelerate transformation through Retalabo, propel the Destination Project, and be transformed once again into renewed civic momentum through the Matsuri Project—forming the starting point of a powerful virtuous cycle.

Kitakyushu's Journey Toward Deep Sustainability

Kitakyushu, the City of Deep Sustainability, where altruism and regeneration resonate. From here, we aspire to expand circles of connection and value together with all of you, as we walk the path toward a truly sustainable world.

We warmly invite you to experience Kitakyushu first-hand and to take the next step toward the future with us.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co9YzD9DGtM>

The Roots of Deep Sustainability

Kitakyushu, Japan's great industrial city, once the engine of rapid economic growth. But in the 1960s, it carried another name: "one of the most polluted cities in the world." In that moment of crisis, it was the mothers and housewives of local communities who first raised their voices for the sake of their children. Their voices gained traction amongst citizens, businesses, and government alike turning crisis into transformation. This is where the story of Deep Sustainability begins.



A Spirit of Altruism That Reaches Beyond Borders

The story of Kitakyushu overcoming of severe pollution spread across the world, helping to drive global environmental progress. Over the next few decades, more than 10,000 trainees from over 160 countries and regions have come to learn from Kitakyushu. At the same time, Kitakyushu had been developing cutting-edge technologies, supporting the evolution of environmental solutions across Asia. Local lessons powering global change. This is Kitakyushu. The living embodiment of the spirit of altruism.



Altruism Beyond Humanity

Back then our rivers were polluted beyond belief. But the locals of our city stood up, restoring them to their former beauty, where fireflies dance and fish swim once again. With deep affection and respect toward nature, local companies also joined in by planting over one million trees. It is here in Kitakyushu you can witness altruism that goes beyond humanity and see the living scenes of regeneration that have brought nature back to the city.

Kitakyushu's Sense of Beauty

Kokura Castle stands, restored through countless repairs. Before it stretches a Japanese garden, reflecting the beauty of the four seasons. Here, one can savor tea and the essence of Japanese spirit. Its beauty mirrors the philosophy of "kintsugi", repairing broken things with gold to create new value. Embracing scars and discovering new worth, this is the very essence of Kitakyushu's aesthetic, a celebration of regeneration itself.

Harmony Between City and Nature

Kitakyushu is a vibrant metropolis, sparkling with night lights. Just beyond the city, however, lie landscapes that tell stories spanning hundreds of millions of years. Karst plateaus, tidal flats full of life, and a former landfill transformed into grasslands where endangered species now thrive. This is "Urban Nature", a city where urban life and nature are woven together. The landscapes of Kitakyushu illuminate a path toward the future of our planet.



A Life-style of Local Production and Consumption

Kitakyushu, a treasure trove of seafood, boasting one of Japan's richest varieties of fish. The bounty of three seas graces daily dining tables. With its pure waters, the region also grows delicious rice and brews exceptional local sake. Here, households have long embraced a traditional wisdom: using rice bran, normally a discarded byproduct, to cook fish. Every part of the fish from skin, bones, and all is savored in this dish called "Nukadaki." Sea, mountains, and the kitchen, everything is connected in a continuous cycle. This is truly the pinnacle of local production for local consumption.

Industrial Strength

Just beyond the heart of the city rises a magnificent offshore wind farm. Along its shores is the Eco-Town, Japan's largest cluster of recycling companies transforms waste into resources. Companies here continue to create products that are good for both health and the environment. Through the power of technology, these industries walk a path of altruism and regeneration, embracing both global and local challenges without compromise.





"NOZOMI"
Hope

Public Safety Regeneration and Community Building

This area was once a stronghold of extremist, anti-social forces. But the city united to eliminate them, and today it is being reborn as a place of relaxation and community. Generations of citizens have taken on the challenge of connecting, acting for children, for the future, and reclaiming a city that is pleasant to live in. It is a continuous cycle of transformation, where the courage to change creates new value.

Cultivating Future Changemakers

The children of Kitakyushu are not only recipients of Deep Sustainability. They are its torchbearers. The entirety of Kitakyushu serves as a classroom for environmental and SDGs education, allowing young people to gain rich experiences from an early age and cultivate the spirit of altruism and regeneration. Using knowledge from previous experience to take action, the individuals who will change the future and become indispensable to the world are nurtured right here in Kitakyushu.

Rising to the Challenges of an Aging Society

For this city, challenges are opportunities for transformation. As a community built on human compassion and craftsmanship, Kitakyushu faced the issue of an aging population earlier than most. This prompted the city to embrace advanced robotics and AI, while creating systems of mutual support. Through the combination of technology and human warmth, Kitakyushu stands with its people in this era, embodying the spirit of altruism.



"SAKI"
Forefront



"NETSU"
Passion

The Passion of Kitakyushu

Kitakyushu is a city that loves sports. Athletes from around the world gather here, bringing their passion together. Their energy resonates even with the city's centuries-old festivals. The sound of Gion Taiko drums echoes through the sky, the heartbeat of Kitakyushu itself. Even in sports and festivals, innovative reuse prevents waste. The actions of citizens, moving for others, are deeply felt. What moves the heart is the combination of human spirit and city pride. This energy is the very engine of Deep Sustainability.



"KO"
Child

Kitakyushu overflows with the actions and spirit of its citizens.

The courage of mothers who helped overcome pollution, the challenges of those who love nature, advanced initiatives that connect technology with human warmth, the learning of children who will shape the future, and the passion embedded in festivals and sports.

All of these are connected, circulating, and sustaining the city as a whole.

Kitakyushu is a city that, together with its citizens, expands the circles of altruism and regeneration, and creates a truly sustainable future.

We warmly invite you to visit Kitakyushu, to experience its challenges for the future firsthand.

Let us work together to make the world a better place.

On behalf of all our citizens, we sincerely look forward to welcoming you.



Kitakyushu **Action!**

Move the future Kitakyushu City