

**The International Design Competition for Environment Art Forum in Annaka
(Gunma Prefecture – Japan)**

by Sofia Castagneri

Tutor: Roberto Apostolo

Co-tutor: Clara Bertolini

This project focuses on a hypothetical participation in the International Design Competition of Annaka, in Japan.

It requires the planning of a polyfunctional centre called Environment Art Forum where people could find references to their history and to their own tradition and – at the same time – they could appreciate and respect the environment.

The Environment Art Forum project rises from a careful examination of the competition notice, which expressly demands its perfect integration to the surrounding environment.

Looking at the plan where the competition site stands, you can see that the ground level curves nearly create waves that seem to break down to the straight railway line and to the shin-kan-sen station, in the north of the area. These curved lines, conveying sensations of fluid and slow movements, seem in hard contrast with the rectilinear speed coming from the fast running train. Consequently, any object setting on the ground would be deformed by these forces and would get a shape expressing the inherent tensions of the area.



The object setting in these force fields appears like the ideogram *ma*, one of the main concepts regulating the architectural space in the Japanese culture. The *ma* expresses an interval between two things, both in the space and in the time. This is an essential notion of Japanese culture. Void is favoured to full, as it is easily comprehensible by observing traditional residences - without any furniture - and famous *zen* gardens, too.

Besides the *ma*, producing interruptions in any kind of sequence, leads to the concept of spatial or temporal rhythm.

In architecture, the *ma* can mean a fluid, vague space characterized neither as an inside thing, nor as an outside one.

The simple and harmonious beauty of this kanji – in which the meanings of interval, rhythm and the relationship between emptiness and fullness are graphically expressed by this term – has inspired the first form of the Environment Art Forum. When the ideogram has been set in the context, as expressed before, its lines have been deformed by forces coming from the territory morphology.

The inspiring idea for the creation of the Forum architectural form rose from this graphic study.



The competition notice does not expressly indicate the centre's functions. Some activities have been individualized after a close examination of the contest name. The project must be a "forum", a place where local people can become a community. The Forum is a new pole for the city life where both local people and occasional visitors can get in touch with the local cultural tradition, with the art and with the nature. Therefore the complex includes a museum, a restaurant, various refreshments, a library, an auditorium and a series of places suitable for conferences and workshops. Everything is immersed in a park.



To respect and to honour the Japanese constructive tradition, the wood has been select as project's dominant material for this project. The structure is realized in timber frame, and the fronts are screened by panels of wooden sunshades screening the direct sun.

They allow the external space to pass through the inside one, as according to the conception of the fluidity space in the Japanese tradition.

For further information, e-mail:

Sofia Castagneri: sofia.castagneri@libero.it