Preservation of the traditional townscape in Yanaka, Tokyo
New renovation system with architects in residence

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1. INTRODUCTION The district stretching from northeast to east-center Tokyo neighborhoods- Yanesen (Yanaka, Nezu, and Sendagi) and Negishi to Ueno, Hongo, Akihabara, Kanda, Jimbocho, and Yushima- is home to a large concentration of cultural resources. Its history spans from the feudal era to the present days, and with just two kilometers in radius, it remains completely walkable. In spite of this, each of the areas composing the district has suffered significant transformations starting from the large-scale developments before the 1964 Olympics. Solely, by chance and community activism, some areas have managed to escape major damages in the 1923 Earthquake and the Second World War, retaining the atmosphere of the 19th and early 20th century. However, due to the increase of pre-war buildings in need of major renovations, many of these areas have been facing the threat of aggressive redevelopment. A growing number of foreign visitors, further endangers the special characteristics of the place. Therefore, Yanaka has been selected for a study aiming to propose a system for preserving and renovating the old buildings and to create a balance between the locals and the tourists with the intention of maintaining the cultural resources that frame the distinctive image of the area.

2. SITE Yanaka is a historical part of Tokyo developed as a temple town in the Edo period (1603- 1867) that still retains the charm and the warmth of the past and a rich culture of everyday life. Located next to Ueno Park, the neighborhood still brings home to more than 70 temples and buildings from Meiji era. Thus, in spite of natural disasters and war, old buildings remain, retaining much of the traditional townscape. In recent years, Yanaka has undergone a transformation, and traditional spaces have been adapted to art galleries, cafés, restaurants and Airbnb. Others have been demolished and replaced by parking spaces. Together with the local shopping street, the town's characteristic small alleyways have become popular attractions for foreign visitors. As a result of the difficulties for property owners to dispose of the old traditional buildings, the construction of large-scale condominiums around the area, and the rapid growth of visitors in response to the movement towards the Olympic Games in 2020, Yanaka's traditional townscape has been changing under the name of re-development (Fig.01).

3. DESIGN STRATEGY In order to approach the issue that represents the developments, considering both the intangible and tangible characteristics of the area, extended community and Yanaka Workshop were selected as design strategies (Fig.02).

3.1 Extended Community The practices, representations, knowledge and skills preserved and passed on through generations, are a special part of the cultural identity of the town. Locals (**Inside Community**) aim to protect the cultural resources of the area from the high pressure created by the tourists (**Outside community**). As these two groups have diverging behaviors, an **extended community** is introduced as a new temporary contributor, which through the daily life experience manages to balance the

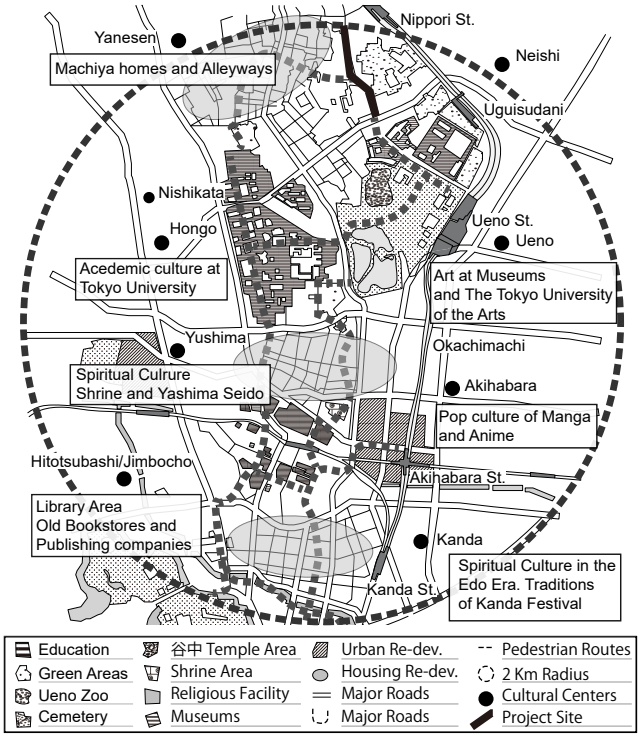


Fig. 1 Tokyo's cultural resources area

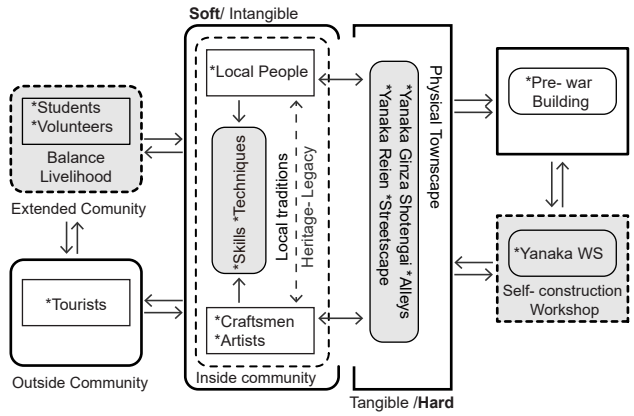
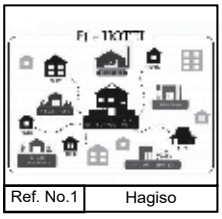


Fig. 2 Yanaka's cultural resources. Problematics and strategies



Renovation Project References

No	Name	Funding	Planning
1	Hagiso	Crowdfunding	Owner
2	CASACO	Government	Public- private
3	YUUTO Village	Private	Owner
4	Kitaoji House	Sponsorship	Workshop
5	Chidori Bunka	Private	Community
6	Hida Kuma	Sponsorship	Community

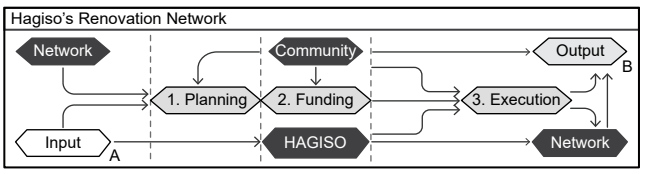


Fig. 3 Renovation System references

contrast in behaviours and interests between the existing communities.

3.2 Yanaka WS Much of the original townscape and its distinctive characteristics have been protected and preserved. These resources can be observed in 4 different areas: Yanaka Ginza Shotengai, Temple/ Shrine area, Alleyways, and Cemetery. Intertwined within these areas, Pre-war houses with historical value listed in "Taito ward cultural property Survey Report"[1] urging renovation can be found. As these buildings are a legacy with high value to be maintained, a self-construction workshop (**Yanaka WS**) is stablished aiming to renovate and upgrade each one of the houses. For preserving the living culture of the area such as alleyways, shopping district, historical buildings, and local's lifestyle's distinctive character, connections between each of the resources are taken into consideration (Fig.03). Architects in Residence System (AIR 谷中) has been established as the renovation strategy. AIR谷中 gives the opportunity to the Extended Community (Architecture students, craftsmen and young artists) to stay in Yanaka. Therefore, by attaining and developing skills in traditional timber construction techniques on the site for a period of time participates actively in the renovation activities (Fig.04).

4. DESIGN PROPOSAL Housing is the main function of the buildings to be renovated. Even though such buildings gather together and create a private community, it is considered how these houses to be renovated can be linked to the economic and cultural network in Yanaka. For preserving the main physical features and additionally creating a contemporary space within a traditional module a methodology from two approaches is proposed.

4.1 Spatial approach Structural Reinforcement by implementing load bearing walls (耐力壁), combining structures of two or more houses through the separating void or through a shared wall, extending the existing spaces in the vertical axis or in the horizontal axis, Revealing the original structure and implementing new materiality are the physical targets to be achieved by the renovation.

4.2 Functional approach Learning, creating and connecting are the three practices to be developed as part of the renovation process by implementing AIR谷中 system. **Learning,** participants study and learns from local carpenters the practical aspects of traditional timber construction on site. The extended community interacts directly with the inside community. **Creating,** prototyping and construction of large-scale wooden structures involving the construction industry and the creation of traditional handcrafts, involving the network of galleries and young artists today present in the area. **Connecting**, the inside community is willing to share Yanaka's resources with the Outside community. Open spaces are proposed for creating awareness of the treasures and traditions in the neighborhood (Fig.06).

5. CONCLUSION This proposal suggests an alternative approach to the recurrent difficulty of dealing with old buildings in Japan. While the easiest way is to stop resisting and submit to an aggressive development that omits the legacy of traditional communities like Yanaka, AIR 谷中 is a system that brings together architects, craftsmen, tourists, The local community and the industry with a common purpose, and thus creates a participative way of recovering and preserving traditional townscapes with high value for future generations. Eventually, AIR 谷中 can be applied by any other community willing to get involved actively in deciding the future of their town.

1. 谷中のすまい。台東区文化財調査報告書第三集

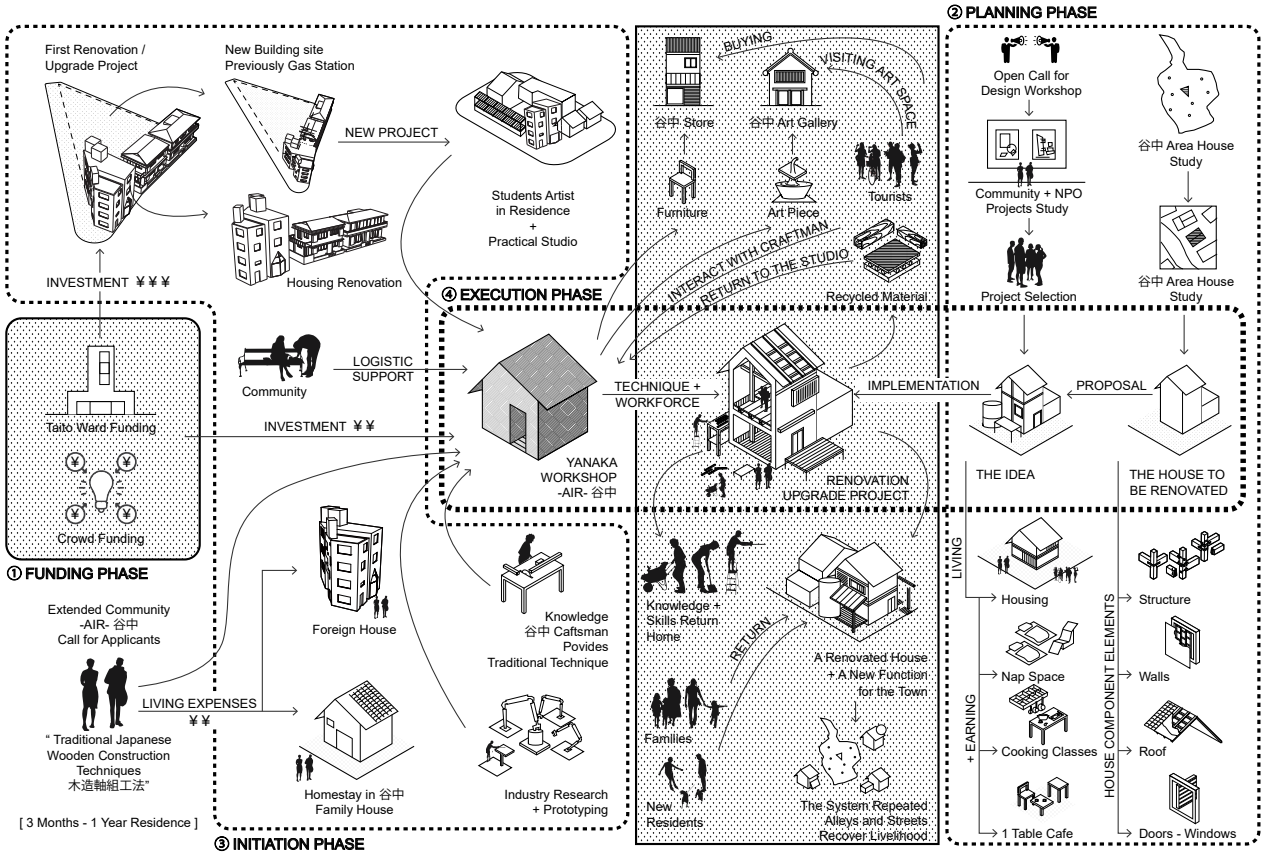


Fig. 4 Renovation phases- Architects in Residence (AIR) system

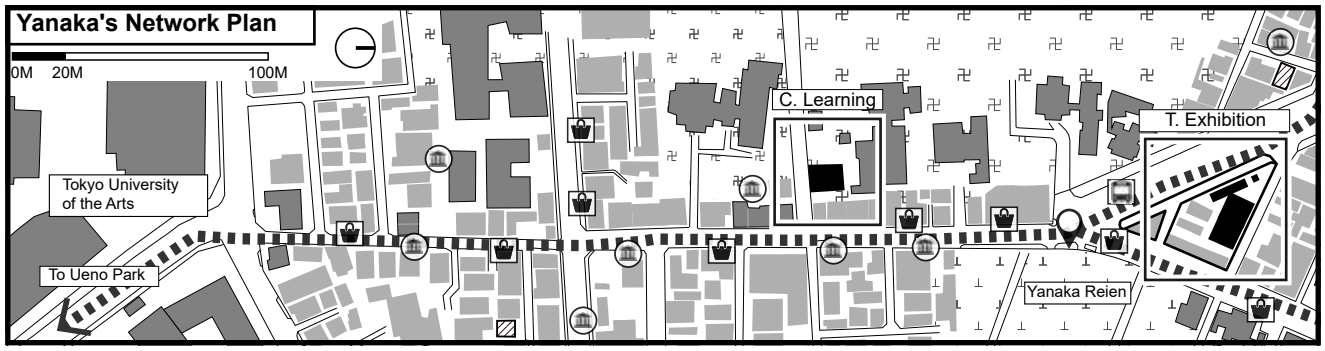


Fig. 5 AIR 谷中. Project Sites, from Ueno park to Yanaka Reien

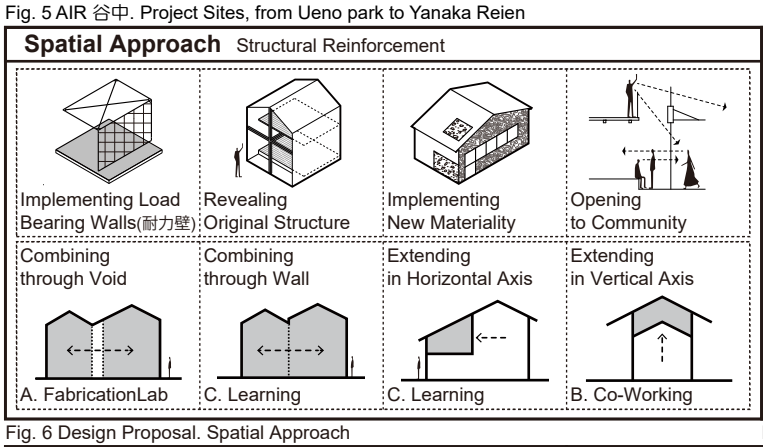


Fig. 6 Design Proposal. Spatial Approach

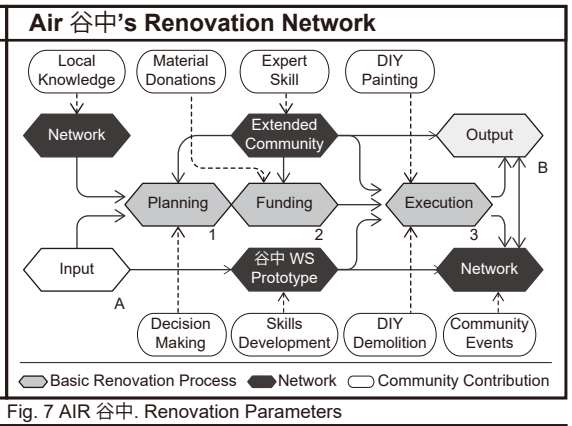
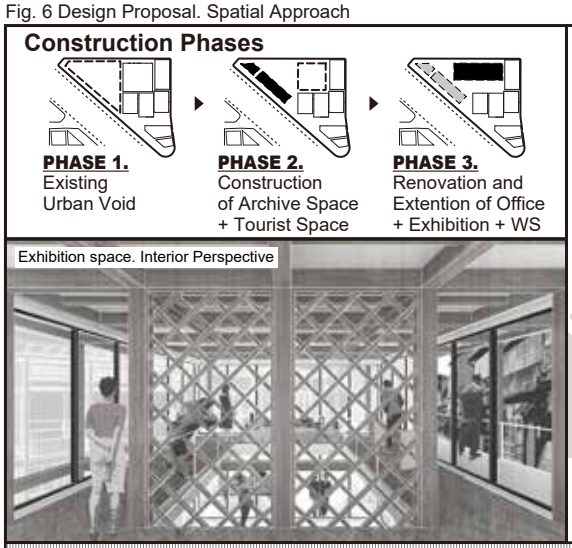
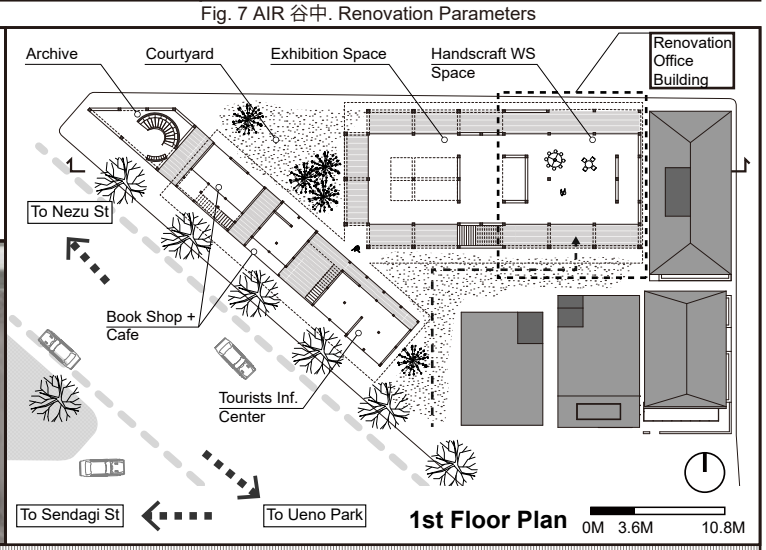


Fig. 7 AIR 谷中. Renovation Parameters





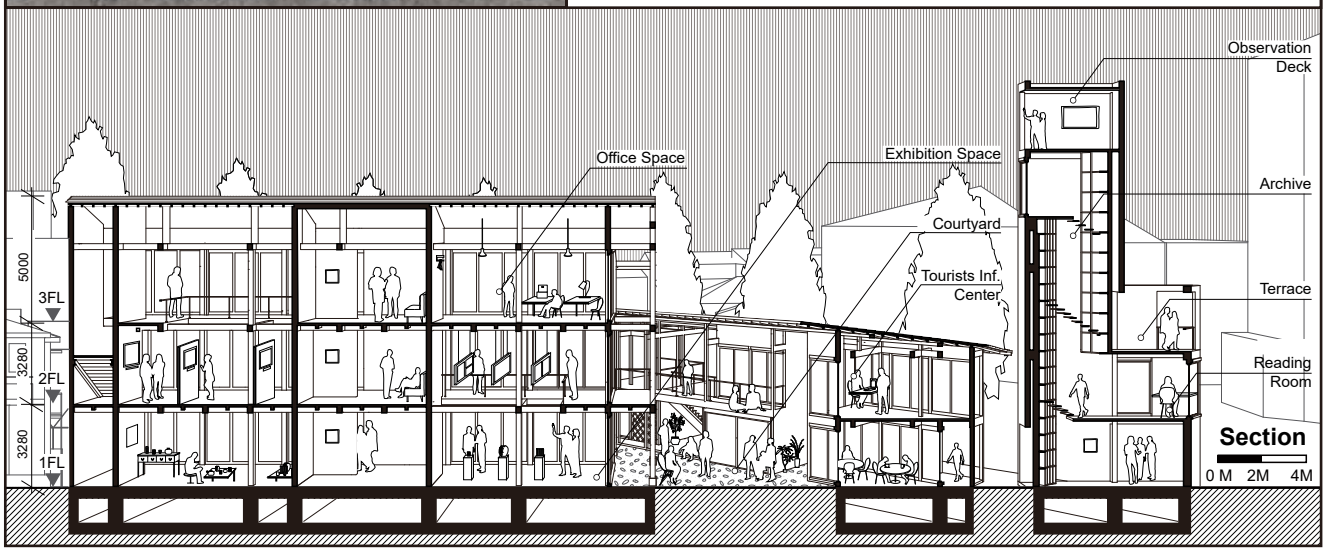


Fig. 8 Tourists- Archive space. Plans and Section Perspective

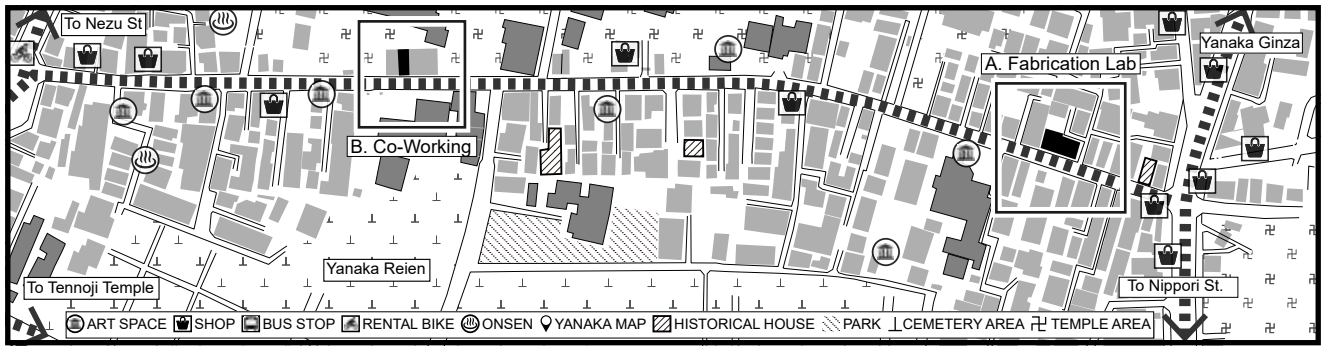


Fig. 5 AIR 谷中. Project Sites, from Yanaka Reien to Nippori station

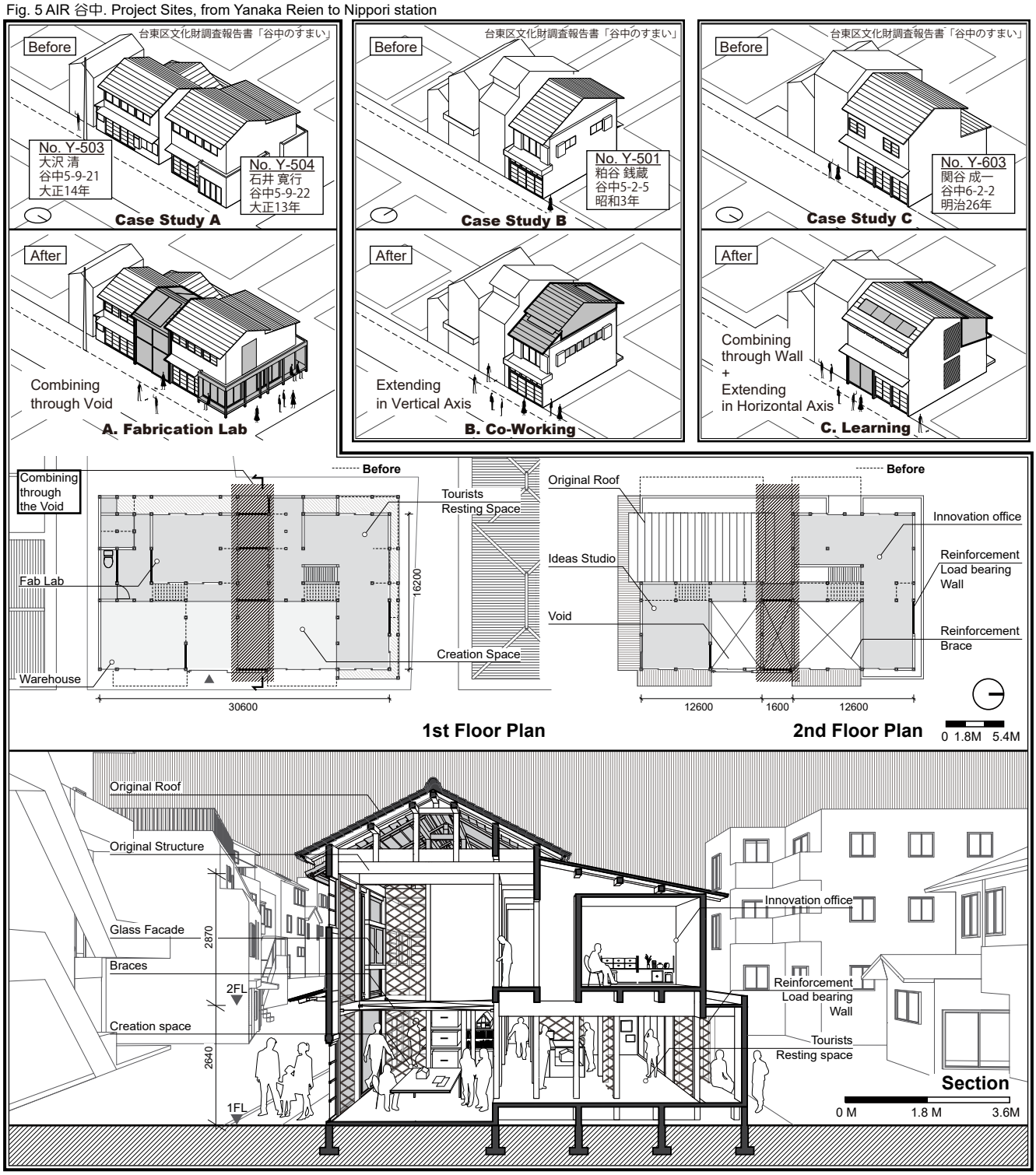


Fig. 9 Renovation Projects. Plans and Section Perspective, fabrication Lab