

Ekuko Naka

Landscape Architect,
Norway

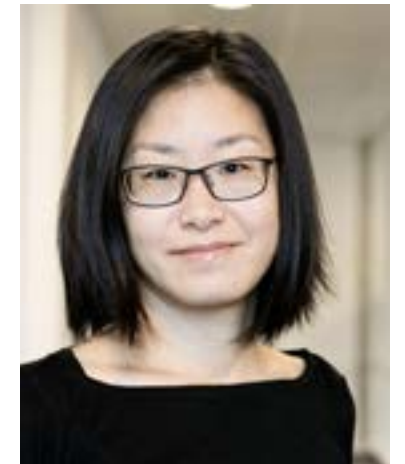
1. Please share with us your life trajectory, from Japan to the many years you have spent in Norway.

I am a Japanese landscape architect and have practiced in Norway for over 20 years. After I studied Environmental Design at the University of Tsukuba in Japan in 1994-98, I received the Norwegian Government Scholarship and continued my studies at the Norwegian University of Life Science, where I got a master's degree.

As a landscape architect and sometimes a project manager I have been involved in interdisciplinary project developments of especially large-scaled city infrastructure such as bicycle highway and

city-bus routes, residential areas, school yards, sports arenas, public spaces such as streets and parks, and health institutions in all phases – from regulation/spatial planning, master planning, detailed design to construction site follow-up. I have been observing how the society grows and develops, and culture matures from the standpoint of a landscape architect who contributes to improving quality of life by working on the physical aspects, as well as the standpoint of a mother of two sons. My greatest interest and goal lie in creating livable and sustainable quality of life for the next generations.

Ekuko Naka is a landscape architect from Japan and has worked in Norway for over 20 years, currently working at Sweco Group, Europe's leading architecture and engineering consultancy company. Through landscape design with plant composition on a human scale she contributes to making social sustainability in society more visible, while considering environmental- and economic sustainability. She is also a board member at the Stavanger branch of NLA (Norwegian Association of Landscape Architects), and has contributed to establish research collaborations between Norway and Japan.



2. How did you learn about the Hibaku-jumoku and GLH – and why was it important to you?

My old supervisor at University of Tsukuba (emeritus professor Masakazu Suzuki) and his team made an ecological survey and mapping of Hibaku-jumoku in Hiroshima and published the academic paper in 2014. I happened to know about this study when I was planning a study tour to Japan on behalf of NLA (Norwegian Association for Landscape Architects). I was shocked by the existences of Hibakujumoku and their silent messages - the brutality of the war and the power of nature. I had no doubt about the need to add to the program a one-day-visit in Hiroshima. In the spring

of 2015 the study tour group visited Hiroshima and was hosted by GLH, ANT Hiroshima, arborist Mr. Horiguchi, and Prof Suzuki. This was the very first time that I met Hiroshima's special citizens "Hibakujumoku".

3. In your, experience what has been the impact of A-bomb trees on your community and also for the youth?

This heartbreaking meeting with the trees and people in Hiroshima, led to the seeds-ceremony in Oslo when ICAN received Nobel's Peace Prize in 2017 together with the a-bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Andreas Løvold, an

arborist at the Botanical Garden at University of Oslo, and I were the initiators behind this ceremony in Oslo on December 9, 2017.

This ceremony triggered the wish of creating an education program with Hibakujumoku as a mediator. In the autumn of 2020, I finally had the opportunity to test a teaching method for a subject called international cooperation titled “The messages from the silent witnesses” together with teachers at Gautesete Junior High School in Stavanger. Professionals and youths, from five cities in three nations gathered side by side online.

The biggest surprise and discovery for me through the lecture, was that Hibakujumoku is a “universal language” that allows everyone to understand even complicated topics regardless of nationality, religion, or age. While discussing the trees and seeds, we discussed

religion and ethics, philosophy, politics, democracy, reconciliation, geography, environment, natural science, urban and regional planning, culture and history, folklore, art and literature, diversity, sustainability, and solitude, all at the same time!



Andreas Lovold, Ekuko Naka and her son and other students from Gautesete School under the 150-year-old Gingko tree at the Botanical Garden of Oslo university.

3. Mankind struggles to give up war and violence — what can the love and beauty of nature do to

address these wounds? What more can we do from Hiroshima through the message of peace that GLH is promoting?

I have just become more and more convinced that these trees will contribute greatly to the dissemination of peace and create an arena to let people from different standpoints gather and discuss democratically. I wish to develop further pedagogical arenas and networks of international cooperation with Hibakujumoku as a mediator.

4. Did you always know you wanted to work around plants as a landscape architect? How do you navigate the plant and human relationship in your work?

I like to create something new through a process where different attitudes, values, ideas, skills, and resources challenge each other. For me, it is a self-evident concept that developing, design, technical



solutions, and sustainable maintenance/follow up must be seen and solved in conjunction and holistically. The plants, especially trees play a central role in that process because of their abilities to bind the artificial and the natural together physically and philosophically.

Feature edited by Saeeda Razick of GLH