

An Asia-Pacific City of the Future

By Denis G. Gastin

"...Through the bilateral cooperation of our two nations located on the northern and southern tips of the Pacific (we could) construct a multifunctional, futuristic polis which will provide a forum for international exchange in the Pacific Basin area, as well as be a model for new industry and new lifestyles looking ahead to the 21st century."

— Hajime Tamura, Minister for International Trade and Industry, Canberra, January 7, 1987

With these words Hajime Tamura, then-MITI minister, proposed to the Australian government, at the ninth Australia/Japan Ministerial Committee meeting, potentially one of the most exciting and forward-looking collaborative ventures in the Asia-Pacific region in this century.

Tamura said that the Multifunction Polis could "act as a flagstaff to indicate the roles to be taken by both our countries.... Australia which, in its bicentennial year, is aiming for progress in a new direction and Japan, of which more contribution toward the international community is demanded."

Feasibility study

Senator John Button, Australian minister for industry, technology and commerce, responded warmly to this "vision" and Australia agreed to join Japan in undertaking a full feasibility study of the Multifunction Polis. To maximize prospects of success, the Australian government suggested that the feasibility study should:

- chart the leading edge of technology and infrastructure to set the standards of industry, commerce and lifestyles through into the next century;
- examine a concept which is culturally diverse and truly international in terms of both its focus and participation; and
- establish commercial viability in order that it would eventuate through private sector investor participation.

In due course an Australia/Japan Joint Steering Committee was established to oversee the study. This committee comprises prominent members of the public and private sectors of Australia and Ja-

pan. It is serviced by a joint secretariat located in Australia and supported by a budget contributed by the governments of both countries and 160 Australian and Japanese companies. The feasibility study got under way in late 1988 and is to be concluded in March 1990.

Few would choose to ignore—indeed few could afford to ignore—an opportunity to look into the future with an eye to shaping it to match their most ambitious objectives. Of course, the Multifunction Polis cannot, of its own accord, become responsible for the achievement of the full range of national and regional objectives for the future, but it could—and should—become a testing bed and a lighthouse for the future. What can be learned in this project can be applied elsewhere.

Australia has been undergoing a period of structural adjustment as it makes the transition from prosperity based on its natural resource endowments to prosperity based on the knowledge-based and living-based industries of the future. Australia sees the Multifunction Polis as an important instrument of wealth creation in that it can provide new avenues for cultural exchange and opportunities for greater internationalization of industry, adding value to its manufacturing and research industries through connections between R&D and downstream markets, and enhancing its unique physical and social environment. In so doing, it believes it can contribute better to a stronger and more secure Asia-Pacific region.

For its part, Japan is undergoing structural adjustment of another kind. Its post-war industries have served it well and generated an income level and capital base which enables it to play a greater role in international affairs, in such a way as to foster peace, prosperity, environmental protection and cultural exchange on a global scale. It is looking, therefore, for new opportunities to enhance the internationalization of Japanese companies, people and systems.

Approached in the right manner—with conviction, collaboration, intelligence and confidence—the Multifunction Polis can yield "pay dirt" for most of these objectives.

We are looking to find a rationale, a commercial rationale, for a "City of the Future." We must look on it, therefore, as not only a city—a model for living and new lifestyles—but also as an economy. A city must have an economic structure to sustain its population.

A cosmopolitan city

In this sense we see the Multifunction Polis as an incubator for new industries, a powerhouse for new ideas, a cosmopolitan city of people from countries around the world. We see it as a new and dynamic focal point for the Asia-Pacific region. It would be profoundly Australian as well: it would be designed in such a way as to network and enhance—and give access to—the very best the continent can offer and all that the international participants bring to it.

The Multifunction Polis would be built around seven future-oriented industry groups: education; information and telecommunications; leisure, entertainment and media; health; environment and agriculture; construction and design; and advanced transport services.

To make it happen, the Multifunction Polis would embody an infrastructure designed to provide competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Basic services would utilize the latest technology to conserve energy and to establish maximum environmental sustainability. Advanced transportation and telecommunications networks would link the Multifunction Polis to Asia-Pacific and world markets as well as to Australian markets. There would be a framework of new institutions to promote research, development and education in the core industries and in aspects of living and lifestyles.

Both international private and public enterprises are invited to join the Multifunction Polis "visions"; to contribute to and to influence the shape of this exciting new concept as we proceed through the feasibility study and onward toward its materialization.

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