

A spatial Anthropology of the Changing Use of Urban Spaces in Tokyo, Japan

Heide Imai, Working Paper

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A model for urban life in demographic change: „Less is more (space)“ - - A intercultural Comparison of Changing Regions in Japan and Germany

Short Summary

Cities like Tokyo have undergone a rapid urbanization in the 20th century and face recently new, complex urban challenges. However, responses to the changing urban space are often reflected in the emergence of e.g. new social movements, cultural revivals or the forging of unknown, hybrid subcultures, which can be understood when studying the diverse ways people (re-) interpret small urban places in relationship to their changing lifestyles. This paper will discuss the development of hybrid forms of lifestyles of young artists and creative's, new families and elderly found and studied in two local neighbourhoods in central Tokyo, posing the question: how are these creative practices and small urban places shaping each other and Tokyo changing urban landscape?

Attempting to explore the potential and activities of these small urban niches, the paper will introduce and discuss specific examples of urban practices which take place within the dynamic urban landscape of contemporary Tokyo and can - when analysed and understood - offer new approaches for hybrid and multi-generation living.

Keywords: Hybrid Lifestyles, Growth and De-growth in Tokyo, Small Urban Niches and their Potential

Long Abstract

Introduction

Cities like Tokyo have undergone a rapid urbanization in the 20th century and face recently new, complex urban challenges. However, responses to the changing urban space are often reflected in the emergence of e.g. new social movements, cultural revivals or the forging of unknown, hybrid subcultures, which can be understood when studying the diverse ways people (re-) occupy, reconstruct and (re-) interpret small urban places in relationship to their changing lifestyles.

The chosen approach moves into the small urban niches – in a geographical and psychological sense – and their everyday activities. Furthermore, the rising interest and importance of small urban places will be

analysed, before relating this to the rediscovery of small, local niches and emergence of different forms of alternative lifestyles.

Rising interest and importance of public space and small urban places

Leftover places – of different scales - exist in all cities but especially cities like Tokyo, a city which is rebuilt continuously. Living in Tokyo is an interesting mix of contradictions, the city is a patchwork of different building styles and types scattered in a network of small scale neighbourhoods with no street names, framed by larger streets and infrastructures of different eras. Every tiny plot of land and small scale urban space is used to built imaginative and creative structures. Especially along narrow streets, under tracks and on small scale urban voids, we find unique and innovative buildings (Atelier Bow Wow, 2002).

In this context, Mather, Karan et al (1998) stated that *“...Japanese have not only refined compactness on the landscape, but also they have become enamoured with the bonsai, the delicate bowl on the dining table, the tiny flower print, the small garden representing the universe...The Japanese are indeed the genius loci of small place, the guardian of the “inside.”...The Japanese landscape mirrors the cultural affinity for smallness, multiple land use, and compactness (Mather, Karan et al., 1998), p.35*. Similar, Ashihara (1989) argued that the Japanese city appear very messy but also work remarkably well. They content a ‘hidden order’ behind the visual chaos that we observe which is rooted in the Japanese geography and culture (Ashihara, 1989). Nitschke (1993) tried to get closer to this idea of the organization of space in arguing that *“... a space or ‘place’ is an area defined by ‘certain human activities’; constantly; it would move with the activity that gave its definition ... In Japan it is the procession or other event independent of spatial settings that make a place” (Nitschke, 1993)p. 23*.

In this sense, leftover places are the result of complex processes of ordinary life, constantly attracting the invasion of subjective uses, unplanned habitats and spontaneous activities (Amin and Graham, 1997; Groth and Bressi, 1997; Gronow and Warde, 2001; Jäger, 2005; Irazabal, 2008). Allowing new forms of ‘hybrid’ spaces and identities to occur and exist, functioning like a filter stimulating new creative potentials, such kind of interstitial places then are perhaps best understood as rules and practices or abstract metaphors that are useful for articulating, and spatializing, concepts and perceptions of difference (Morehouse, 2004).

This work is based on this approach, arguing that this small scale urban places and close-knit neighbourhoods attract a new kind of clientele - whether it being young artists, families or newcomers to the baby-boomer generation - which are looking for a such small niches of retreat, ordinary life and vernacular creativity (Edensor, 2009).

Tokyo's urban landscape of alternative and subculture lifestyles

In our everyday life we interact with our environment with our environment at every scale and at all levels, from the smallest to the largest. We dwell in and use individual buildings, experiencing these in a prolonged relationship and at many other levels. In relationship to these experiences, we can understand an alternative lifestyle as a lifestyle generally perceived to be outside the cultural norm. Usually, but not always, it implies an affinity or identification within some matching subculture (examples include hippies, Goths and punks). Traditionally not all minority lifestyles are held to be "alternative"; the term tends to imply newer forms of lifestyle, often based upon enlarged freedoms (especially in the sphere of social styles) or a decision to substitute another approach or not enter the usual expected path in most societies.

In the context of Tokyo we can argue, that the growing interest and concerns about public places are caused by (1) the rediscovery and nostalgia for traditional urban forms (Tibbalds, 1992); (2) the growing demand of a new middle-class for attractive and pleasant public places to enjoy diverse leisure and open air activities (Loukaitiou-Sideris, 1993; Madanipour, 2003); (3) the increasing interest of cultural institutions such as museums and galleries to create new public places to attract tourists and other consumers; and (4) increasing concerns as to how to create public places for diverse users and social interaction. This results in increasingly contested inner city areas as diverse actors, stakeholders and users re-appropriate different forms of urban places to promote their strategies and ideas. Thus, the challenge consists in finding a more sensitive urban design approach to achieve the urban revitalization of vernacular urban forms, like the alleyway, without creating sanitized, mono-functional urban pathways or historicizing replicas of traditional urban life (Barker, 2005).

Tokyo's contemporary urban and cultural landscape - the Case of Yanaka and Kiyosumi Shirakawa

This paper moves in the small niches attracting different forms of urban lifestyles. Much more, the chosen approach is not concerned about big issues such as urban design, but rather aiming to understand small urban spaces, everyday urban life and new evolving practices.

In the case of Yanaka, newcomers - like artists or other alternative businesses - appreciate the unique atmosphere allowing them to express their alternative lifestyle, perform different kinds of subcultures or to combine life and work. They open ateliers, galleries, cafes or small fashion stores that attract different kinds of customers to visit and enjoy the area. In Kiyosumi Shirakawa, different alternative shops opened and are profiting from the increasing popularity of the neighbourhood promoted by different cultural institutions. In this sense, small urban niches fulfil new roles and are desired and needed to express local voices, thoughts and personal opinions about political, economic or social changes.

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Outlook - Student Analysis of *Tokyo - Leipzig - Berlin*

A new understanding of urban resilience opens up promising perspectives for research about urban transformation and change. Conceptualising a 'sustainable urban community' as complex multidimensional and adaptive system and thinking of cities - as Leipzig, Berlin and Tokyo studied and understood as self-organized system as a key feature of resilience studies – could steer us to look for the interaction of different dynamic and hybrid processes in the cycles of marginality, vulnerability, decline and recovery. Such a perspective is closely related to the argument that resilient cities are creative cities with an innovative milieu or clusters attracting new entrepreneurs and local agents increasing the local economic dynamism . In this process in which businesses are facilitated by new social and informal networks that develop in a place, often reliant on diverse exchange, trust and reciprocity, we can understand the aim to create a sustainable community not just as instrumental but essential in attracting diverse people to a place. Much more, the interplay between diverse DIY activities and the efforts of the community to achieve self-reliance and urban resilience is necessary to promote a debate about the relationship between creative capital, social empowerment and resilient dynamism to achieve sustainable development.