VOID Spaces and Public Open Spaces in Shimokitazawa and Taishido, Tokyo (Japan)

ABSTRACT The contemporary urban paradigm has started to focus the capabilities of urban communities to support, participate in, and develop creative regeneration methods that promote the integration of local socio-cultural features, along with the competitiveness and attractiveness of ideas, in the international panorama (Pratt, 2010). The purpose of this research is to dissertate the importance of Public Spaces for the success of urban regeneration trends that integrate cultural features, and simultaneously, contribute to the promotion of local identity and creative public engagement.

Considering the scarcity of open space per citizen in Tokyo, in comparison to other cities, Tokyo VOID is a research project (Rahmann, H. - The University of Melbourne; Jonas, M. - RMIT University) that focuses the importance of promoting flexible public uses in temporary vacant spaces, towards the reinforcement of sustainable principles in the city's open spaces network (Rahmann and Jonas, 2010).

Keywords: Open Spaces, Public Spaces, Void Spaces, Temporarily, Seasonally, citizen engagement and participation, urban identity, modality, creativity, and conviviality.

1 Setting: Shimokitazawa (Distinctive urban identity in the transformation of places) and Taishido (Strong social movement for the Regeneration of Public Open Spaces)

Shimokitazawa
- Public activism against the redevelopment project proposed by Tokyo Metropolitan Government that integrates drastic urban changes.
- Clear Urban Legibility (Lynch 1960) - easy to be recognised and identified in Tokyo’s context.
- Particular trend of Urban Regeneration: Proposal of a redevelopment project of regional scale (TMG) that highly contrasts with the local human scale of the urban spaces.
- Specific Social trends, and Conviviality in Public Space: Creative business oriented area.

Taishido
- Strong Urban Planning framework for citizen participation in the 80’s and 90’s regeneration process (Nakamura 2008).
- Existence of Urban Legibility (Lynch 1960) - easy to be recognised and identified in Tokyo’s context.
- Particular Trends of Urban Regeneration: Network of Public Spaces implemented from the 80’s (Nakamura, 2008).
- Particular Social Trends, and Conviviality in Public Space: Convivial/Local community oriented neighbourhood (Shaftoe 2008).

2 Research Need, Objectives, and Methodology

RESEARCH NEED
- Research lack of holistic perspective in the evaluation of the potential of Public Spaces and urban Voids, for the reinforcement of local cultural identity, creativity, and public engagement.
- Culture-led Regeneration research has been particularly focused on a broader urban scale, while the preponderance of local culture that leads to success of regeneration remains nearly unexplored.

OBJECTIVE I Evaluate existing Public and Void Spaces:
- Within a network of Open Spaces (relation between Public and Void Spaces).
- Integrating efficiency and sustainability of space’s physical attributes.
- Considering the attractiveness and the performance of Public Spaces and Voids.

OBJECTIVE II Examine the Potential of Public Space and Voids:
- To create new, and support existing behaviours of conviviality within a community (Shaftoe 2008).
- To be considered in local engagement, creativity; and cultural valorisation (Evans et al. 2011).

OBJECTIVE III Examine the differential between Urban Regeneration Trends and the Potential of Public Space and urban Voids:
- Identify the discrepancies between Urban Regeneration trends and the verified potential of Public Spaces and Voids.
- Identify the factors that catalyse or restrain the praxis of Public and Void Space’s full potential.
- Dissertate social, creative and cultural enhancement of Public and Void Spaces.
Survey of Public Spaces and Void Spaces in Shimokitazawa and Taishido

Realized in June 2011

39.1% of the total area of Open Spaces in the study area correspond to Public Spaces, while 20.4% correspond to Void Spaces. Exceeding the percentage of Public Spaces area, Parking Spaces occupy 40.5% of the total area of Open Spaces. Within the group of Void Spaces, 89% of the area correspond to Expectant Voids. Other 8.9% of the Void Spaces correspond to areas that resulted from Land Readjustment, in order to widen streets in a long time term, leaving spaces also expectant, with no clear function or occupation. Within the group of Void Spaces within the study area, only 0.5% of the total area of Voids have an appropriation phenomena, and only 0.2% of the Voids area present temporary uses.

Within the open areas consumed by parking, the most significant groups correspond to Coin Car Parking (30.9%), Monthly Rental Car Parking (23.7%), and Other types of Car Parking (40.9%).

Typical Situations

Neighbourhood Parks in Shimokitazawa. Restrictions in Public Spaces, recurrent within the entire study area.

Atypical Situations

Convivial pedestrian corridors in Taishido.

Expectant Void in Shimokitazawa, temporarily occupied by food stands.
4 Open Spaces in Japanese Tradition
From Edo to Tokyo: Seasonally and Temporarily modified urban environments

Main Events for the modality of Japanese Public Space

Spring:
• Hanami - Appreciation of Cherry Blossom in Parks
• Taue - Field planting

Summer:
• Obon - The return of the ancestors
• Hanabi - Appreciation of Fireworks in Riverbanks

Autumn:
• Tsukimi - Appreciation of the harvest moon
• Kouyou - Viewing Red Leaves in Parks

Winter:
• Yukimi - Snow viewing
• Shougatsu - Visiting Temples and Shrines to pray for a good New Year

(Hori 2005, Trede and Bichler 2010)

Variability verified in Public Spaces and Void Spaces in the last year (2010 - 2011)

5 Next Research Steps: Evaluating the Potential of Public Open Spaces and Void Spaces
for the production of creative, innovative, cultural, and local participation towards city making

In Japanese tradition, the notion of Public Space strongly relates with temporality, resulting in flexible environments that change through time, according to particular seasonal events (Hidaka and Tanaka 2001). Therefore, the conviviality of Japanese Public Space much depended, and still depends in historical areas, of Public events such as festivals.

Mostly due to a particular notion of the relation between public and private, Japanese tradition of Public Spaces contains flexible adjustments between both spheres (Hidaka and Tanaka 2001), which traditionally integrated a strong community engagement in the creation of the space’s atmosphere.

This research aims to restore and enhance the connection between Open Spaces and urban Voids, with temporary and flexible interventions. Additionally, aims to verify the preponderance of urban Voids to reinforce local culture, creative engagement, identity and sense of local pride.

Thus, it is planned to conduct several experiments as events, urban art or installations, to involve, provoke and observe local reaction and interest. Although in these areas, the potential of these spaces to strengthen social conviviality remains unrevealed, it is possible to identify some current trends that reveal local pride, creativity, and informal appropriation in the Open Spaces.

Experimental activities

Examples of local pride, creative engagement, and cultural oriented transformation of urban spaces in Shimokitazawa and Taishido.

Involving Local Residents

Promoting innovating event delivery

Citizen Participation based implementation

Observation of response

References


Nakamura J. (2008) Progressive Improvement of the urban environment through public participation (pp.312-315). Sustainable Site Design 100 Cases, Edited by CSUR, The University of Tokyo.


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