

# Reinventing the Inner City

## Urban Land, Entrepreneurship and Everyday Practice in Osaka City

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### 1. Research aim and background

Osaka city experiences since the 1960s a loss of population. Combined with an advancing deindustrialization this led to a crisis of many areas and to the perception of Osaka as a suffering city. Although in recent years in the central city areas a new urban lifestyle is promoted through the construction of condominiums, especially areas outside of the Osaka Loop Line that were urbanized before the Second World War and areas with a strong working class context stay problematic for redevelopment. Despite these problems in some areas revitalization through reuse of old buildings by individuals or small companies can be observed. This research aims to reveal the mechanisms that lead to neighborhood changes in the inner city, and tries to uncover the effect these changes have on the area, by analyzing four areas: Northwest Nishinari ward, Nakazaki-chō in Kita ward, Kitakagaya in Suminoe ward and Shikanjima-Baika in Konohana ward;

### 2. The discourse on Osaka's inner cities

On the one hand Osaka's inner city came to be preserved as area with an inferior living environment. Small narrow roads that make it difficult to pass by car and aging wooden row houses which do not fit the needs of modern life are perceived as problematic. Especially after the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 the vulnerability to disasters became to be the main concern of public authorities and most actions dealing with the inner city focus on the reconstruction of the built environment. But on the other side there is also an increasing literature that takes Jane Jacobs (1992) stance, and focus on the humane scale of these areas as well as social and economic activities associated with them. For instance Masubuchi Toshiyuki (2012) analyzed the role of the backstreet for the creative industry, and argues that a diverse urban environment with inner city areas is necessary for its development. In the case of other cities it was also argued that diverse urban spaces are necessary for the formation of an inclusive city that provides space for many different kinds of people (Wong and Kornatowski 2014).

### 3. Research Method

The research is divided into three parts. The first part is an analysis of the formation of Osaka's cities inner city. By looking on its genesis in the urban landscape and its emergence as a discourse, the differences and similarities to inner cities in other countries and their discourse is examined. The second part focuses on the four research areas and the local revitalization that can be observed there. Based on interviews with organizations and individuals who renovate and reuse old buildings, possibilities and methods of local revitalization are observed. These are not only methods of renovation and business models for revitalized buildings but also changes in the landlord's attitude towards contract conditions and building maintenance. The last part is based on interviews with people who use the revitalized buildings. By recording

their everyday practices their influence on changes in the whole area are observed.

#### 4. Tentative results

In Northwest Nishinari small real estate companies renovate buildings for welfare recipients and foreigners doing working holidays or stay for a few months in Osaka. While the housing for welfare recipients triggered a flourishing welfare business that reinforces the areas stigma, the foreigners show only a low interest in the area and use it only for lodging. In Nakazaki-chō old houses were converted into small coffees, stores, boutiques etc. frequented by young people. The low rents and the good location enable the shopkeepers to work on an experimental basis that gives space for creativity. But many of them earn not enough money to make a living from the shop alone.

#### Renovated buildings in the four research areas



Variety stores in Nakazaki-nishi (Kita ward)



Eventspace in Kitakagaya (Suminoe ward)



Guesthouse in Northwest Nishinari ward



Shared shop in Baika (Konohana ward)

#### Literature

Jacobs, Jane (1992) *The death and life of great American cities*, New York: Random House.

Masubuchi Toshiyuki (2012) *Rojiura ga bunka o umu! Saigairo to sono kaiwa no henyō.* (The backstreet is creating culture! Narrow streets and neighborhood change) Tōkō: Aoyumisha.

Wong, Tammy and Geerhardt Kornatoeski (2015) "Domination and Contestation in the Urban Politics of Shenzhen", *disP – The Planning Review* 50-4, 6-15.