Honors thesis

MASTER COURSE OF ARCHITECTURE

CONSTRUCTION CITY

Abstract

Rediscovering Urban Waters – A Project for the Local Community in West Kyoto

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by

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      The thesis work is part of a recent line of research on the urban form of contemporary Japan. Going to analyze specifically the case of Kyoto, the aim is to understand, through the study of morphological and cultural evolution of the city over time, the connections with social life, assuming an architectural intervention that can reconnect the urban environment extremely compact and dense, but at the same time fragmented into small units not communicating with each other. The focus is on the two-way relationship between urban morphological changes and the metamorphosis in the lifestyle of those who live in the city, noting how much social life is the author of formal change, but at the same time completely subordinate to the shape of the city itself.

      The transition from the first utopian urban plan of the then capital Heyan-kyo shows how a formal imposition coming from above is always opposed by a reformation, which instead comes from those who settle in the city. It is a controlled adaptation, a slow metamorphosis that takes place over time according to new housing needs. The ideal distribution of land based on the social rank of belonging, and therefore an easily administrable structure, is opposed to an approach that focuses on the road, which becomes the place of urban everyday life.

      The slow and constant morphological change that sees the consolidation of the sense of community defined by the road, is interrupted by the Second World War, which causes an inversion of the course of which the legacies are still accused. The need for a quick and economic reconstruction sees the triumph of prefabricated houses, strengthened by the following rejection of traditional forms and materials, which are now considered obsolete. Moreover, the economic development of Japan in the twentieth century generates a great internal migration that, in response to the lack of housing in urban centers, causes the inclusion of large multi-storey residential buildings, upsetting not only the interaction with the outside, but the man-city proportions maintained until then.

      The consequences are visible not only on a material level. An introversion mechanism dictated by architecture is generated. Post-war reconstruction marks more than ever the involution of the city as a social space. The interaction between inside and outside is annihilated. The historical relationship with the road is broken. It is no longer a place for socializing, but a place for mobility. The density of the districts increases and it is nullified the possibility of cutting out social spaces.

      Despite the criticality described, the community claims the right to live its past in everyday life, the right to find it in the urban environment. The Kyoto municipality works assiduously with the awakening of social awareness and with the preservation of the historical landscape of the city, but it seems to dwell on the material aspect such as the standardization and safety.

      The aim of the thesis is instead focusing on social regeneration, proposing a way out of high density that prohibits the revenue of spaces for the community. The intent is therefore to investigate an alternative to the road as a place of interaction. Although forgotten, another place in the city was historically linked to the social life, the river. The thesis project then fits into a high-density residential district, Kamigyo, and traces the banks of the Tenjin River, inserting spaces for the community between urban voids and the river itself. Following a dual theme, water and the community, recalls ancient places of sharing in the neighborhood and along river. The work insists on the reciprocity between form and society, this time imposing a form on which social life will be reshaped, giving expression to a clear intention of communities. With a European approach, which does not want to erase history even when it takes on a formal and questionable ideal, it aims to re-functionalize what already exists, inserting new pieces into the void that can rehabilitate the full.

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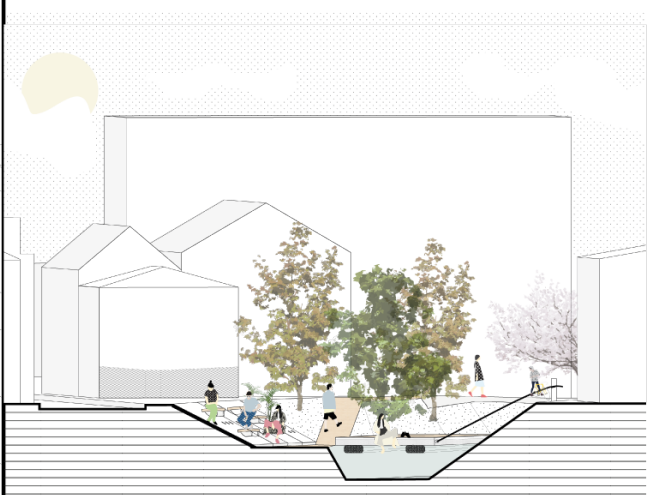
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