

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture
Honors theses

Urban renewal project for Azabu Juban, Tokio

by Simona Della Rocca

Tutor: Paolo Mellano

This thesis is the synthesis of a design experience and a basic research aimed at understanding a socio-cultural context very different from the Western model. The intense documentation process, useful to understand Japanese traditional principles of space and architecture has been enriched by a direct experience in Japan, especially through the participation at AIJ 2010 Architectural and Urban Design Workshop, and a staying as visiting student at the Waseda University in Tokyo, period in which were laid the basis of this design work.

The work is divided into two parts, firstly a critical reading of the city and its dynamics of transformation explain the operating mechanisms of high-density areas. Secondly, a project proposal is elaborated for a piece of the city, characterized by urban types widespread in Tokyo. This design proposal uses a methodology that seeks to identify a set of guidelines that can be applied to those pieces of the urban fabric, with similar features to the analyzed neighborhood.

The first part of the paper aims to provide a regulatory and historical framework useful to the understanding of a different urban form which often leads to a definition of Tokyo, or more generally of Asian cities, as places with no organization.

The complexity of historical layers of history of a city, still readable despite the dramatic changes that have affected the city (earthquakes, fires and WWII destructions) have been studied to understand the urban fabric.

The short life cycle of buildings and their rapid replacement, has been taken into account. On one side, this practice does not respect the historical value of places, but also represents the primary resource of a changing society.

This Metabolism interprets the city as an organism replacing its diseased parts, following a logic of efficiency that overshadows research and architectural quality. A "palette" of standardized building types, is repeated throughout the city, therefore issues apparently constrained to some neighborhoods are in fact common to most places.

Certain dynamics of planning, that often favor private investors interests, reveals how urban planning is managed by private hands and that the dynamism of the overall image of Tokyo is a faithful reflection of its economy.

As examples, real estate transactions that transform entire areas characterized by a urban fabric tightly woven, vertical multipurpose complexes, entirely promoted by private sector in accordance with the public.

The critical reading of the city and its development mechanisms brought attention to another relevant issue, which is the quality of life and space in high density metropolitan areas.

How should we re-think density? What does it mean to choose the density, in a dispersed city like Tokyo?

Speaking of urban density in terms of quality, means suggest a *mixed use* strategy (especially at the micro scale) as a necessary requirement for any intervention in a context of medium / high density as in the case of Tokyo.

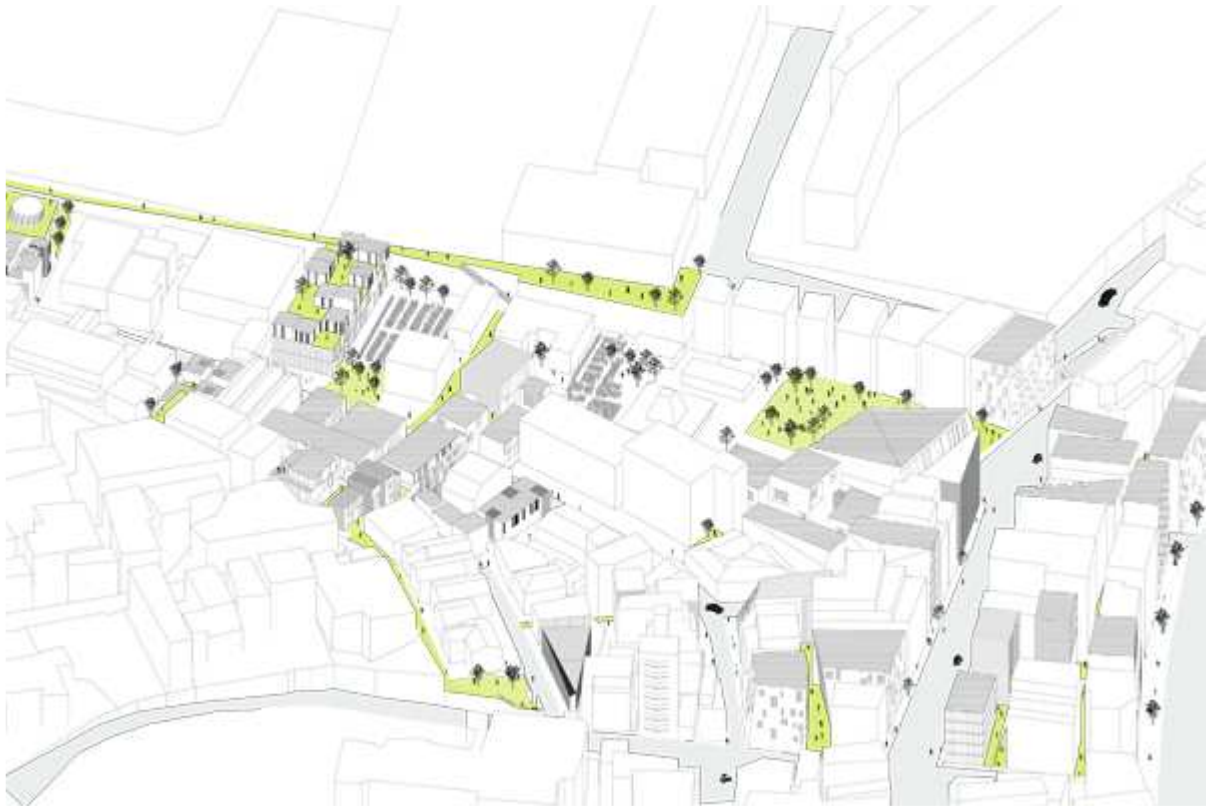
The lack of a widespread mixed use strategy, have turned many parts of Tokyo in monothematic and compartmental places.

It's the case of shopping districts such as Shibuya, invaded by mega structures or clothing-dedicated skyscrapers, of the electric cities, technology products-selling neighborhoods, and yet, of the financial centers, of the entertainment neighborhoods etc.

Tokyo is certainly a complex metropolis, a large container that holds real (and futile) needs of the modern era. However, most of the urban area is dedicated to living spaces.

In other terms, the main objective of any architectural and urban planning intervention, should be the people who live the city, and the spaces must be designed on the basis of community life "which is the same reason why cities do exist."

Based on these considerations, this thesis project aims a urban redevelopment, considering the site social needs and choosing a method that differs from large scale merging-lot strategies and from the idea of bigness.



Project proposal, Azabu Juban, Tokio

For further information, e-mail:

Simona Della Rocca: simona_dellarocca@hotmail.it