

iCon

e-zine for architecture, culture and media

no. 2

Research in Japan #1

tokyo

a short contemporary analysis

Tokyo, world's largest metropolitan area by population, a city with an 'empty center' (Roland Barthes), a city of chaos yet with a 'hidden order' (Yoshinobu Ashihara), a city for 'urban nomads' (Toyo Ito), full of 'pet architecture' (Atelier Bow-Wow), that has inspired architects, novelists and filmmakers equally. Authors tend to either praise it as a model city for the future or damn it as uninhabitable. Interestingly, both sides use often enough the same or similar arguments.

But apart from the like theoretical analysis with very often stunning insights, how does Tokyo compare to other cities in the world? To get some impressions I did an Internet search with the term "most livable cities" and I was wondering what the results might be.

According to the Monocle ranking ("Top 25 Most Livable Cities 2009", 2009), Tokyo is on place 3 as the "world's most livable megalopolis". Reasons given include "efficient public transport, commitment to plant one million trees by 2016, service culture and great food". Number 1 city is Zurich. According to the Mercer Top 50 ranking (Mercer Human Resource Consulting, 2009) in terms of quality of live, Tokyo is on place 35, the second Asian city after Singapore on 26. Tokyo scores 102.2 points. Number 1 is Vienna with 108.6 points, base city is New

York with 100 points. In a separate ranking in terms of city infrastructure, Tokyo is on place 12 (103.4 points), the third Japanese city behind Tsukuba on place 4 (105.5 points) and Yokohama on place 5 (105.1 points). Number 1 city is Singapore with 109.1 points.

In our contemporary ultra-mobile and towards sustainability oriented society, a major focus seems to be on good public transport, which sheds a completely new light on the fact, that Tokyo has been shaped to a great extent by railway companies. It is often said that developers lacked a vision, but they were driven by a simple and economic impetus, how to bring as many people as possible in the shortest amount of time from home to work, time-savings passing through shopping centers and the like. Here the paradigm of efficiency rules. That this has produced not only efficient means of transport but even well integrated solutions for mass transport becomes obvious, if compared to the excrescences of the metropolitan motorway network, that runs elevated through street canyons, above water canals and low-rise buildings, in front of glazed office buildings, casting shadow and polluting the air with exhaust fumes and noise. A feature correctly analysed and promoted in the 'fibercity' project from Hidetoshi Ohno is to increase the number of

written
on February 8,
2010

following the
lecture

Towards the Livable
City: Beyond the
100 Years
Experience of
Modernization

by Assistant Prof.
Yu Nakai,
Landscape and
Civic Design,
Department of Civil
Engineering,
The University of
Tokyo
<http://www.civil.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp/lab/inst-nakai.html>

as part of the
lecture series

Sustainable Urban
Regeneration B
(winter term
2009/2010)

a lecture series
offered by
Department of
Architecture,
Faculty of
Engineering, The
University of Tokyo
<http://www.arch.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp/>

commuter stations, to make access along the railway lines ubiquitous and private cars even more obsolete.

The other three reasons given in the Monocle ranking can be divided into urban streetscape, which will become greener and cleaner once the one million trees, one per 9 inhabitants are planted, and interior amenities as good service and great food. Both are important for our mental and physical well-being.

That “Greening Tokyo“ can be a guiding principle for the next decade was showcased during the 2016 olympic bid (Meinhold, 2009). Even though Tokyo lost the bid, the vision of a greener, cleaner, nature-infused megalopolis of the 21st century has great potential to become reality.

“If it [the issue of sustainability of cities] is going to be solved, it will be solved there [in Japan]“ (“The Role of Architecture in Contemporary Society“, 2004).

REFERENCES

- Meinhold, B. (2009, October 1). *Tokyo’s 2016 Olympic Bid Includes Stunning Solar Powered Stadium*. Retrieved February 8, 2010, from <http://www.inhabitat.com/2009/10/01/tokyos-2016-olympic-bid-includes-stunning-solar-powered-stadium/>
- Mercer Human Resource Consulting. (2009, April 28). *Mercer’s 2009 Quality of Living survey highlights - Global*. Retrieved February 8, 2010, from <http://www.mercer.com/qualityofliving>
- The Role of Architecture in Contemporary Society. (2004, February 26). In *Japan Society*. Retrieved February 8, 2010, from http://www.japansociety.org/architecture_contemporary_society
- Top 25 Most Livable Cities 2009. (2009, July-August). In *Monocle*. Retrieved February 8, 2010, from <http://www.monocle.com/sections/edits/Web-Articles/Top-25-Cities/>
- List of metropolitan areas by population. (2010, February 8). In *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved February 8, 2010, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_metropolitan_areas_by_population