

A model for urban life in demographic change: „Less is more (space)“

- A intercultural Comparison of Changing Regions in Japan and Germany

Grassroots Movements and Urban Development

- the Cases of Kitakyushu, Japan and Leipzig -

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1. Short Summary (170 Words)

As a result of the “shrinking” societies in Germany and Japan, cities and regions are facing different challenges. While metropolitan areas like Berlin and Tokyo are growing quickly, intermediate cities like Leipzig and Kitakyushu can only keep their population or grow slowly. After a process of deindustrialisation, these cities still carry dozens of empty buildings and vacant spaces. There is a demand to struggle with such unoccupied spaces. But while the urban planning as the usual “top-down” method is limited, various grassroots movements by local activists create vivid urban life styles. A city with empty spaces has a lower economic pressure on its inhabitants and a climate for alternative modalities is created. It is intended to focus on the possibilities of our future life by learning from the study of Leipzig and Kitakyushu.

Keywords: Leipzig, Kitakyushu, De-industrialization, alternative modalities

2. Long Abstract (1200 Words)

A) Introduction

Our post-industrial societies have been changing demographically. Due to deindustrialisation these cities carry lots of vacant spaces. During the expanding phase, it was aimed to use them in their intended way, but now it is important to allow for creative and alternative uses. We would like to analyse the two cities of Leipzig and Kitakyushu as they have a similar size and urban background. They both grew quickly during industrialisation, following a long decline in economic power and inhabitants.

B) Case of Kitakyushu

The city Kitakyushu is located at the south island in Japan and was founded in 1963 merging of five municipalities (Moji, Kokura, Tobata, Yahata and Wakamatsu). Through the rapid development by the steel industry, the city Kitakyushu suffered serious pollution. By addressing these problems the local government, the city was designated as an environmental model city. In the 1970s the moving of the main steel company from Kitakyushu triggered the shrinking process.

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In 2010 the city Kitakyushu and activists formulated a plan „House Lizard Kokura“, which initiated new uses of empty spaces, and helps to maintain the buildings. Since then the „Renovation School“ has been held each half a year and the participants propose and develop ideas for the existing buildings. Until now 21 ideas have been suggested an 11 of them have been realized or are in planning.

C) Case of Leipzig

After the Second World War and through deindustrialisation Leipzig population has been shrinking, but has started to grow again since 2000. There are still thousands of empty flats and vacant plots, which allow for new activities beyond commercial exploitation.

The garden movement in Leipzig can be an example of testing and widening of life in the city. Leipzig is already a city, which offers a range of public green spaces and is to be called as the birthplace of „kleingarten (small garden)“ in Germany. There are still number of kleingarten in the city and close to the daily lives of ordinary people.

But through urban gardening movement new common spaces like “Annalinde” or “Querbeet” have emerged in a couple of years by young activists in Leipzig. They create a totally new atmosphere in vacant spaces, which is open for the public.

The green network „Parkbogen Ost (Park Bow East)“ is the long-term urban project, which is initiated by Mr. Berninger and the city of Leipzig. Along the 5km long route, there are traditional kleingarten, the historical park and cemetery of the Grassi museum and new green area, which will be restructured of the previous railway zone. This green concept will be connected for the jogging or cycling, creating a new kind of urban space. They include many local activities in a scale of the urban planning.

D) Conclusion

The cases in Leipzig and Kitakyushu show how the grassroots activities connect the urban development and how important will be. The purpose of this session is to learn methods and to deliver the possibilities for our future life in the city.