A Thesis for the Degree of Ph.D. in Engineering

From Personal Space to Intimate Space: A Socio-Spatial Study of Domestic Urban Environments in Contemporary Tokyo

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Despite an inevitable and constant presence of others, everyday life in a metropolis tends to be described as solitary and alienated. Such paradoxes are among the main features of the complex urban conglomerations which attract more and more individuals. How attached to these complexities can we become? To what extent is our attachment and, consequentially, the lifestyles and habits, imposed by the characteristics and the affordances of the spaces we dwell? And is it possible for planning to generate urban spaces that afford interaction? This research addresses these questions through the set of multidisciplinary explorations of intimate spaces which emerge from the relationship between the self and the city.

An integrated methodological approach, which originate from different research fields, addresses those arising questions within the context of contemporary Tokyo. The conceptual framework is defined and selected methods customized for two distinct segments of the research: the sociological and the ethnographic methods are used to define socio-cultural and spatial characteristics of the concept under examination. The sociological study helps define the network of significant places which construe the dispersed home and, within this network, it identifies “another place” (also defined as the “fourth place”) – the place of rest and solitude where people do not necessarily interact with others. The ethnographic study exposes two predominant meanings of “another place”, as an intimate space in Tokyo downtown area, which are defined as the utilitarian and the decorative.

Intimate spaces, as meaningful spaces within metropolises, afford engagement with the environment through a broad range of activities. This research uses concrete socio-spatial characteristics of such spaces for an exploration of their possible integration into the planning practices. The key conceptual aspects of a hypothetical, culturally sustainable metropolis are compared with the existing multi-levelled planning system of Tokyo. An integrated methodology, aimed at introducing the potential for planning to make places imbued with meanings useful to practitioners and decision-makers, is developed. As an example of possible application of that tool, intimate spaces in Taito Ward are identified in the Geographic Information System (GIS) and inserted as an additional layer into the Land Use Plan. That is in recognition of both (1) an existing phenomenon which needs to be acknowledged and (2) the necessity for its strategic inclusion in spatial planning of a sustainable metropolis.