

Identifying Community Places by Mapping Subjective Perceptions: A Case Study of Tokyo's Peripheries

January 2025

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Thesis Abstract

No. _____

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Thesis Title Identifying Community Places by Mapping Subjective Perceptions: A Case Study of Tokyo's Peripheries			
Thesis Summary Metropolitan peripheries worldwide are facing new social and spatial challenges. After WWII, many metropolitan regions experienced rapid economic growth that triggered the hasty expansion of their peripheries over rural land to accommodate a growing population. As a result, the peripheries of these metropolitan areas transformed into sprawl: a patchy, scattered, and discontinuous urban form that often lacks clear community spaces. In addition, today, these peripheries face worsening factors like demographic decline and aging. Although these peripheries are often considered unstructured sprawl, there are spaces used informally by residents that function as community places. This thesis aims to identify these places and shed light on their character by mapping the residents' subjective perceptions. It focuses on Tokyo as a metropolis with hastily developed peripheries grappling now with the effects of population decline, a phenomenon expected to happen in many other countries in the coming decades. This thesis, organized in the following five chapters, maps community places in two peripheral cities facing these challenges. Chapter 1 introduces the research background, aims, and relevance. It also describes the thesis methodology, the selection of case studies, and the thesis structure. Chapter 2 addresses the urban growth of Tokyo's peripheries after WWII, the configuration of their urban fabric, and their current population decline through morphological and statistical maps. Chapter 3 features the first case study: Chōfu (Tokyo Prefecture). It develops a methodology to trigger conversations with local stakeholders about the places they feel attached to and could be considered community places. The results indicate that although Chōfu is usually considered a bedroom town with weak community life, there are specific places that local stakeholders consider relevant as community places, particularly informal gathering spaces like urban farms, undertrack spaces, and markets. Chapter 4 presents the second case study: Minamiashigara (Kanagawa Prefecture). Through in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, it maps relevant places neglected by tourism maps that nevertheless play a crucial role in the residents' everyday lives, like informal small green spaces between buildings and formerly abandoned houses renovated into restaurants. Chapter 5 comprises discussions and conclusions. It confirms the effectiveness of analyzing subjective perceptions of place to achieve two goals in peripheral areas: identifying community places—primarily small, informal, and seemingly ordinary gathering places—and unveiling urban nodes and structures. The chapter discusses the potential and challenges of these community places. They can play a vital role in the revitalization plans of Tokyo's peripheries, particularly those facing population decline. However, they also face challenges, such as limited access to public transportation and insufficient resources for maintenance. This section references theories from other national contexts and connects the situation in Tokyo to international urban literature, suggesting that the method of identifying community places and the ensuing discussions can serve as a reference for developing revitalization plans in other metropolitan peripheries worldwide.			