

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
DIJ Social Science Study Group
Public Lecture



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“Inner city life, inner city pressure”

Thinking local urban spaces through senses and discourses

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The lingering scent of food served in small restaurants, the clattering sounds of commuter trains running along the tracks accompanied by a slight shaking of the uneven road — these and many more sensations are transmitted via the medium of public urban space. The (un-)determined shared spaces enable and channel movements and serve as a canvas on which the everyday urban life is painted. Even though this might sound idyllic, the local public sphere is not limited to harmony and sympathy but is also open to conflict, disturbance and unintended contact.

This presentation aims to shed light on the perception and construction of urban spaces and on how these social processes are enacted in Japan. The following questions stand at the center: How does public space as a medium frame perceptions and communication? And how do perceptions and communication construct public space in return? These questions are answered by applying mixed methods such as participant observations, interviews, sense walks and discourse analysis in two urban Tokyo neighborhoods (Kitazawa and Matsubara). In both areas, city planning projects as well as the modification of private railway tracks triggered discussions about how existing and new public spaces should be used, and who is entitled to advocate for them. Inhabitants, shopkeepers, activists and consumers share the streets but perceive the spaces from different angles and participate in divergent yet overlapping discourses. Preliminary findings of the fieldwork conducted during the last months reveal diverse cycles of production of spaces creating a fragmented discursive and spatial landscape.

Florian Purkarthofer graduated from the University of Vienna with a MA thesis on “Sociological Theories of Space in Contemporary Japan”. From 2014 to 2016, he was guest researcher in the field of urban studies at Tokyo Metropolitan University. Currently, he is PhD candidate and part-time lecturer in Vienna and holds a scholarship of the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo.

About:

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences. The event is open to all. Registration is not necessary but appreciated, online at www.dijtokyo.org or via ganseforth@dijtokyo.org.

Venue:

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