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Urban Micro-Spatiality in Tokyo: Case Study on Six *Yokochō* Bar Districts

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research purpose and background

Inheritors of a disciplinary tradition of grand plans, monumental avenues and boulevards, urban planners and designers have all too often ignored the qualities of small urban spaces. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of those qualities by examining an extreme case of urban micro-spatiality in Tokyo: the (in)famous small bar districts known as *yokochō*. The purpose is not only to document these neglected spaces but also to understand the relationship between the physical setting and the activities taking place within it. This study argues that urban smallness, often considered in negative terms as a *lack of space*, can be seen in a positive light as a support for specific social informal interactions, diversity and creativity.

The goal behind this double purpose is to describe the *yokochō* space as a “behavior setting” (Barker, 1968). The *yokochō* space and its unit, the bar, are a stable combination of a recurrent activity and a particular layout of the environment, and can therefore be described as a behavior setting. The behavior in the *yokochō* space will be in part revealed through the interviews conducted in this study, but these will not be the main object of the investigation. For this research, it will suffice to mention that *yokochō* spaces are what Oldenburg defines as “core settings of informal public life” or “third places”: “a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg, 1999, p.16). The places here, bars and entertainment districts, might be considered as too ordinary or irrelevant for serious architectural and urban research. However, the sociological importance of third places (bars, cafés, taverns, etc.) in sustaining informal public life as a supplement to home and work routines has been widely accepted since the publication of Oldenburg’s seminal work.

Casual observation of *yokochō* districts reveals at least two prominent characteristics of their physical setting: smallness and low profile. The appearance of plainness, low profile, or lack of elegance is an attribute that Oldenburg also mentions in his description of third places. The aging and worn structures of *yokochō* spaces can be said, similar to third places, to have the function of “discouraging pretension among those who gather there.” (Oldenburg, 1999, p.37). But what about smallness? How does the small scale and its associated architectural configuration support informal public behavior in the *yokochō* setting?

This research aims to answer two questions: How small is the actual scale of the yokochō space and what is the meaning of that smallness for the persons managing them? By providing possible answers to these questions, this study aims to contribute to architectural design theory by documenting a case that can be inspirational for architects and planners. The more general goal, for which this study is but a small first step, is to extend to architecture the theory of smallness, proposed by Schumacher in the field of economics.

1.2 Theoretical framework

An early manifesto for smallness can be found in economist E. F. Schumacher's "Small is beautiful" (Schumacher, 1973). This collection of essays advocates the economic and social benefits of organizing human activities into small units. Several passages dealing with the abstract problem of size can be interpreted from the point of view of disciplines concerned with space. Although Schumacher does not defend smallness *per se* ("For every activity there is a certain appropriate scale"), he considers it necessary, insisting on the small scale as a value for contemporary times: "Today, we suffer from an almost universal idolatry of giantism. It is therefore necessary to insist on the virtues of smallness—where this applies." (Schumacher, 1973, p.70).

In architecture theory we can find one manifesto in the opposite direction, Koolhaas' essay on "bigness" (Koolhaas, 1994), in which he advocates sheer size as a new field for architectural potential. In spite of its ambiguity and the lack of examples to clarify its claims, the text is often cited and seems to have influenced newer generations of architects, such as MVRDV or BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group). This fascination with the mega-scale in architecture has a long history, and almost every culture has developed concepts of monumentality by using sheer size. Japan can be considered as an exception, especially if we follow Lee's observations (Lee, 1992) that small size in itself is a greatly appreciated value in Japanese aesthetics, from the *bonsai* to the *bentō* lunch box.

Additionally, in Japanese architecture we can find an interest in the small scale, which can be best exemplified by the 4.5 mat tea house or the garden pavilions of the Katsura Rikyu palace. In contemporary architecture, nonetheless, an important exemption is the metabolist movement, in which architects tried to solve the emerging problems of rapidly growing Japanese cities by creating architectural mega-structures. Today, the mega-structure has long disappeared from the architectural debate, and the idea of smallness is gaining much attention. One of the practices that clearly articulates their works around this idea is Atelier Bow-Wow. Their directors (Tsukamoto and Kaijima, 2006, p.85) list "smallness" among the leading concepts in their work. This concern with the mini-scale is undeniably cultural, but might be also related to the type of commissions that independent small offices tend to receive in Tokyo; that is, single-family houses in semi-suburban areas on very small lots that have undergone a process of gradual subdivision over the last few decades.

Either as a consequence of high density and small lots or of a cultural inclination, Tokyo offers a rich source of examples of successful urban micro-spaces. It could be possibly said that the Japanese have become accustomed to small spaces and therefore that conclusions from Japanese examples cannot contribute to the more general theory of design. However,

the same could be said about any urban space or phenomenon, from the American skyscraper to the Italian piazza. Even if a case is embedded in a specific cultural context, conclusions can always be inspirational and useful as objects of comparison, or as a foundation for understanding spatial manifestations of cultural difference. This paper is thus expected to contribute as a balance to the architectural debate and professional practice which, from the point of view of the authors, seems to forget the small scale too often and overlook its potential.

1.3 Method

The case study methodology is a way to examine complex contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts. Here, the cases examined are six prominent bar precincts in Tokyo called *yokochō*, famous for their small scale and their informal public life. The research question revolves around dimensions and how those dimensions are subjectively experienced. We combine a design survey (on-site measurements conducted during November and December 2011) with interviews conducted in January 2011. By observing both the physical reality and glimpses of the informal public life through the interviews, we expect to explain the role of smallness in the *yokochō* space as a behavior setting.

The overall structure of the six *yokochō* was documented and a total of 12 bars were investigated in detail. The areas documented are *Nonbei-yokochō* in Shibuya (2 bars), *Goldengai-Hanazono* (5 bars) and *Omoide-Yokochō* (2 bars) in Shinjuku, *Sakaechō-dōri* (1 bar) and *Mikuni-kōji* (2 bars) in Ikebukuro. The selected *yokochō* are those located in the three most remarkable commercial districts near major train stations. The *yokochō* in these three areas are constituent parts of larger urban centers encompassing major transit hubs or "transit-oriented centers" (Almazán & Tsukamoto, 2009).

On-site measurements were both applied to *yokochō* streets and to each bar sample. As for the *yokochō* streets, measurements were realized on the actual street to check their widths. The obtained widths were compared with the dimensions represented in a digital map obtained through GIS software (ArcGIS version 9.1). The planimetric drawings of the sample bars (realized using the CAD software called Vector Works) were entirely based on-site measurements, from the dimensions of exterior and interior architectural elements to the sizes of furniture and fixtures.

As for interviews, the authors conducted a series of in-depth interviews to the owners of the 12 sample bars, who were informed that the survey was developed for purely academic purposes. Interviews contained the same five questions, shown in Table 4, so that replies could be compared and key themes could be identified. Interviews were conducted after several visits realized to each bar for the on-site measurements. This allowed the authors to establish a certain personal contact with the interviewees. The authors believe that this previous contact contributed to create a relaxed atmosphere in which interviewees expressed sincerely their points of view.

Combining the two sources of information gives a response to the questions posed in the introduction of this research. How small is small (objectively)? And what are the advantages of smallness (subjectively)? The second question was explored through interviews with bar owners, considered to be the key informants. Owners maintain these spaces, keeping them

vibrant with their lifestyles and their resistance against redevelopment. In the interviews, our main concern was to know what makes owners choose these establishments and what their opinion is on smallness.

2. Case study

2.1 Definition: About the yokochō

Yokochō [横町 or 横丁] refers to one, or a group of, small street(s) that intersect a main street, and form a semi-hidden location filled with bars and restaurants (*yoko* means “side” and *chō*, “street, block or town”). Yokochō areas, a usual presence in the entertainment districts around main transit hubs in urban Japan, are often considered as old-fashioned, unsafe, and crowded with people of dubious reputation.

Most yokochō emerged as temporary black markets during the post-war rationing period. Tokyo contained an estimated sixty thousand black market stalls (Seidensticker, 1991, p.153). Every station along the commuter lines had a small market of illicitly acquired foreign goods. Although wholesale rationing finished in 1950 and retail rationing in 1968, the black markets had long become meaningless. Seidensticker offers the example of rice, a measure for other prices, to illustrate this, and says that in 1959 the black-market price of rice fell below the rationed price (Seidensticker, 1991, p.159). Hence, illegal market stalls gradually transformed into bars for snacks and drinks. Some of them changed their location from the station approach to other areas still within walking distance from the station. With fast economic growth starting in late 1950s and continuing up to the 1970s, plots of land lots around stations were rapidly developed into large office and commercial buildings. The multiple-ownership land of the former black markets was difficult to redevelop, since all proprietors had to be convinced to sell their lots in order to form a unified piece of land. This may be one of the reasons why a number of centrally located yokochō have survived up to the present.

Current yokochō have become an urban relic, and some are facing problems. Their wooden structures built in the 1950s are deteriorating, in spite of structural reinforcements and renovations. There is a lack of successors to continue the family business. Regular customers, most of them of the so-called baby boom generation, are close to retirement, which also often means retirement from late night drinking. Narrowness, and an image of dirtiness and danger add to the problems (Ogawa, 2008).

2.2 The feasibility of smallness: Yokochō revival

Yokochō spaces face diverse problems. However, there are also signs of a recovered interest in this type of area and its potential as an activator for urban regeneration (Maeda, 2009). The year 2008 saw the demolition of the famous *Jinsei Yokochō* [人世横丁], active in the Ikebukuro Station area since 1950 (Fig. 1), but also the opening of a *yokochō*-like multi-restaurant in the fashionable district of Ebisu. This *Ebisu Yokochō* (Fig. 2) intends to reproduce not only the visual atmosphere of the old post-war *yokochō* but also its actual management, since the Ebisu Yokochō is run by multiple young chefs in charge of their mini-bars. The small size of each stall allows them to pay the rental fees and affords them the opportunity to develop their own independent business.



Fig. 1. *Jinsei Yokochō* (Ikebukuro) was demolished in 2008

These *yokochō*-like commercial spaces were planned with the aims of convenience, humanity, and manageability—the type of attributes that Schumacher found in smallness. The business planner Maeda lists four cases of recent commercial initiatives directly inspired by the *yokochō* model (Maeda, 2009). The first case, mentioned above, is Ebisu *Yokochō*, which is also extensively covered in *Gekkan rejaa sangyō shiryō* (2009), and the second case is a *yokochō* project in Akasaka (Tokyo). Maeda also mentions two more cases in provincial cities in Hiroshima prefecture, and cases of renovations of large-scale *izakaya* (a type of Japanese tavern) into *yokochō*-like subdivided spaces. Advantages of the *yokochō* model, according to Maeda, can be found in economy, management, and creativity. In the catering trade, the cost of the initial investment is large, and there is an extremely high risk of failure. The new *yokochō* spaces that she describes are based on the sharing of certain infrastructure or equipment, and therefore the investment for each individual is smaller. Additionally, floor areas are small, and consequently so are the rental fees. For instance, in the Ebisu *Yokochō* shops have an area of 3-5 *tsubo* (9.93-16.55 m²) (Maeda, 2009). Since shops are small and run independently, they are an attractor or incubator of young entrepreneurs in the catering business, becoming a ground for creativity and innovation in the sector. As Maeda proposes, the *yokochō* projects offer an alternative to franchised *izakaya*. In the *yokochō* projects, the diversity of atmospheres, the communication among customers, and the "retro" atmosphere of the small shops seems to offer opportunities for budding entrepreneurs within the current economic situation of recession.



Fig. 2. Ebisu *Yokochō* (opened in 2009), a reinterpretation of the *yokochō* space

3. Results from fieldwork observation and measurements

Through on-site measurements, the overall plans of the yokochō and 12 sample shops have been drawn. Table 1 summarizes the main results from this study, and the plan and location of each yokochō are shown in Fig. 3. Several data are highlighted from Table 1 to understand the scale and character of the yokochō spaces.

- *Density.* All 6 cases show a great concentration of shops. In order to make the quantitative data more meaningful, density has been expressed in number of shops per are (are=100 m²). The *are* is not a common unit of area, but it suits the scale of the yokochō and it is easy to visualize since it corresponds to a square of 10x10 m. Densities expressed in Table 1 are gross densities, they include paths, open spaces, and vacant lots. Results in Table 1 show densities reaching 11.73 shops/are in Nonbei Yokochō and 8.8 shops/are in Hanazono. As an illustration, in the 3,265 m² of Goldengai-Hanazono (equivalent to about half of an international football soccer field) there are 253 establishments.
- *Time.* All 6 examples are clearly catering for dinner or late-night drinking. Opening times can be said to be related to the habit of Japanese office workers, who go drinking after work and before commuting back home. The three stations (Shinjuku, Shibuya, and Ikebukuro) are main hubs to transfer from inner-city office areas to suburban residential areas.
- *Dimensions.* Streets (width between 1.3 and 2.8 m) are pedestrian. In the narrowest sections, walls can be touched by extending both arms. Shops dimensions follow Japanese traditional modules (much contemporary wooden construction still does). Building footprints are from 4.83-66.1 m² (an enlarged planimetric study is shown in next section). Except for the two yokochō in Ikebukuro, all others share toilets, which saves considerable space within the limited dimensions of the shops.
- *Character.* The type of catering is simple food and drinks, and does not require an ample kitchen for cooking. The character of the bar can be read through its degree of permeability. While Omoide Yokochō does not have facades and is completely open, most shops in Golden gai are closed and interiors are barely visible. The degree of visibility acts to filter customers. High permeability facilitates a random visitor, whereas low permeability makes a newcomer hesitant to enter.

Density and time		Dimensions in plan		Character	
a. Total Area		f. Street width (m)		h. Location and character	
b. No. shops		g. Shop footprint dimensions: front by depth (F m x D m)		i. Type of catering	
c. Gross density				j. Visibility from exterior	
d. Opening time					
e. Shared toilet?					
Nonbei yokochō (Shibuya)					
a. 324 m ² (3.24 ares)		f. 1.5		h. Located in an area popular among young people. Used by all ages, including young people.	
b. 38 shops		g. Two types			
c. 11.73 shops/ are		• 2.3 x 2.1 (4.83 m ²) → [SHOP 1]		i. Yakitori ¹ , oden ²	
d. 5 pm to 12 pm		• 2.1x2.6 (5.46 m ²) → [SHOP 2]		j. Different levels of permeability	
e. Yes					

Density and time		Dimensions in plan		Character	
a. Total Area		f. Street width (m)		h. Location and character	
b. No. shops		g. Shop footprint dimensions: front by depth (F m x D m)		i. Type of catering	
c. Gross density				j. Visibility from exterior	
d. Opening time					
e. Shared toilet?					
Goldengai (Shinjuku)		f. 2.0-2.7		h. Most stores only offer drinks and appetizers. Rather than the food, customers come to meet the store owners who have developed a distinctive character for each bar. Bar hopping is common. Included in many guides, many tourists visit including foreigners.	
a. 1271 m ² (12.71 ares)		g. Diverse sizes			
b. 76 shops		• 2.8-5.6 x 5.3	(14.84-29.68 m ²) → [SHOP 6]		
c. 5.98 shops/are		• Exception → [SHOP 7]			
d. 9 pm to dawn					
e. Yes					
Hanazono (Shinjuku)		f. 1.7-2.5		i. Mainly alcoholic drinks]	
a. 1994 m ² (19.94 ares)		g. Most common types		j. Not visible. Some small windows in some cases allow glimpses of the inside.	
b. 177 shops		• 2.7 x 4.2	(11.34 m ²) → [SHOPS 3 & 4]		
c. 8.88 shops/are		• 1.8 x 3.8 (6.84 m ²) → [SHOP 5]			
d. 9 pm to dawn					
e. Yes					
Omoide Yokochō (Shinjuku)		g. 1.3-1.6		i. Shops have counters on the first floor and tables on the second. Sitting in large group is also possible.	
a. 828 m ² (8.28 ares)		h. Diverse sizes		j. Yakitori ¹ , motsu ³	
b. 43 shops		• 2.2-4.0 x 5.3	(11.6-21.2 m ²) → [SHOPS 8 & 9]	k. Open type, completely visible. Storefronts do not have walls or doors, completely open.	
c. 5.19 shops/are					
d. 11 am to 12 pm					
e. Yes					
Sakaechō-dōri (Ikebukuro)		f. 2.4		h. Some bars oriented to young customers and some well known yakitori shops. A certain atmosphere of decay was observed with a number of shops apparently closed.	
a. 318 m ² (3.18 ares)		g. Diverse sizes		i. Yakitori ¹ , alcoholic drinks	
b. 14 shops		• 4.9- 8.9 x 3.5	(17.2-31.2 m ²) → [SHOP 10]	j. Not visible	
c. 4.40 shops/are					
d. 7 pm to 11 pm					
e. No					
Mikuni-kōji (Ikebukuro)		f. 2.8 (4 in parts)		h. Regular customers rather than bar hopping. Intimate atmosphere, difficult to enter for new-comers.	
a. 869 m ² (8.69 ares)		g. Diverse sizes		i. Agemono ⁴	
b. 20 shops		• 2.9 x 3.8	(11.0 m ²) → [SHOP 11]	j. Not visible	
c. 2.30 shops/are		• 2.9-5.8 x 5.0	(14.5-29 m ²) → [SHOP 12]		
d. 5 pm to 11 pm		• 2.9-8.7 x 7.6	(22.0-66.1 m ²)		
e. No					

1. Chicken pieces grilled on skewer. 2. Japanese hodgepodge. 3. Giblets. 4. Deep-fried food

Table 1. Dimensions and characteristics of the yokochō space

From each yokochō area, two or three representative shops were chosen. The selected samples fulfill two criteria: they can be considered representative of each type of shop identified in Table 1, and their owners have shown willingness to collaborate with this survey by allowing the researcher to measure their establishments and by participating in the interviews. Once the shop owners willing to collaborate were identified, sample shops (see Table 2) were selected using the following process:

- *Nonbei Yokochō*. In this yokochō there are two types of buildings in terms of dimensions. According to the author's observations, Shops 1 and 2 can be considered representative of these two types in terms of size and character.
- *Hanazono and Goldengai* are in fact one area having the same character. For each building dimension, one building has been selected. However, shops 3 and 4 have the same dimensions, but are located in different areas and, therefore, both have been investigated. Shop 7 was chosen as an exceptional case in terms of its size and location.
- *Sakaechō-dōri* and *Mikuni-kōji* are two adjacent yokochō that can be treated as a single area. For each building size, one sample shop has been chosen. The largest type (in Mikuni-koji) has dimensions that can be considered usual in Tokyo and thus has not been included.

As a result of the selection process, there is a sample of 12 shops, each representing a specific building size and location. For each sample, floor plans and section views have been drawn, including furniture and fixtures (see Fig. 4 to Fig. 8). By itself, this collection of planimetric drawings represents a visual tool to understand a scale that would be considered too small by normal standards. The most characteristic data and dimensions from the sampled 12 shops are summarized in Table 2.

From the survey summarized in Table 2 we observe the following commonalities:

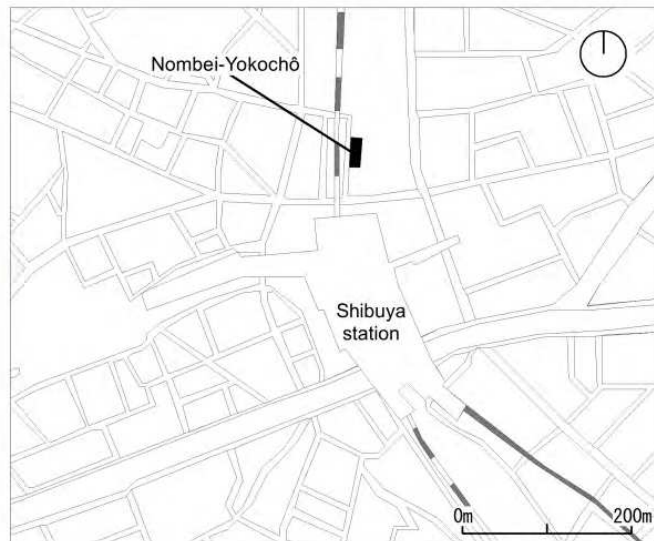
- Shops are primarily managed by one person, with areas open to the public ranging between 3.8 and 10.5 m². This manager serves 5 to 13 customers.
- Counters are on the first floor and the second floor has diverse uses; on occasion to accommodate bigger groups of customers, and other times for private use.
- Catering is simple, and does not require a large kitchen or working space.

Location	Shop no.	Name	Type of catering	No. staff	1st floor		2nd floor		Total area m ²
					Seats	Area m ²	Seats	Area m ²	
Nombei Yokochō (Shibuya)	01	Yoshinoya よしのや	<i>Oden</i>	1	8	3.8	8	3.8	7.6
	02	Tanukō たぬ公	Japanese casual dishes	1	8	4.5	Not public		4.5
Hanazono (Shinjuku)	03	Okutei 奥亭	Drinks & appetizers	1	11	8.3	Not public		8.3
	04	Nakachan 仲ちゃん	Japanese casual dishes	1	7	9.0	Not public		9.0
	05	Kikuko 紀久子	Drinks & appetizers	1	6	4.8	Not public		4.8
Golden-gai (Shinjuku)	06	Kojima 小島	Fish dishes	1	6	12.4	Not public		12.4
	07	Bihorogawa 美幌川	Drinks & appetizers	1	5	5.9	None		5.9
Omoide-Yokochō (Shinjuku)	08	Hinatori ひな鳥	<i>Yakitori, motsu</i>	1 or 2	10	9.9	Not public		9.9
	09	Saitamaya 埼玉屋	<i>Yakitori, motsu</i>	2 or 3	11	8.6	20	8.6	17.2
Sakaechō-dōri (Ikebukuro)	10	Edoichi 江戸一	<i>Sushi</i>	1	10	10.9	Not public		10.9
Mikuni-kōji (Ikebukuro)	11	Hagure はぐれ	Drinks & appetizers	1	6	7.0	Not public		7.0
	12	Ochahana 茶花	Okinawan food	1	13	10.5	Not public		10.5

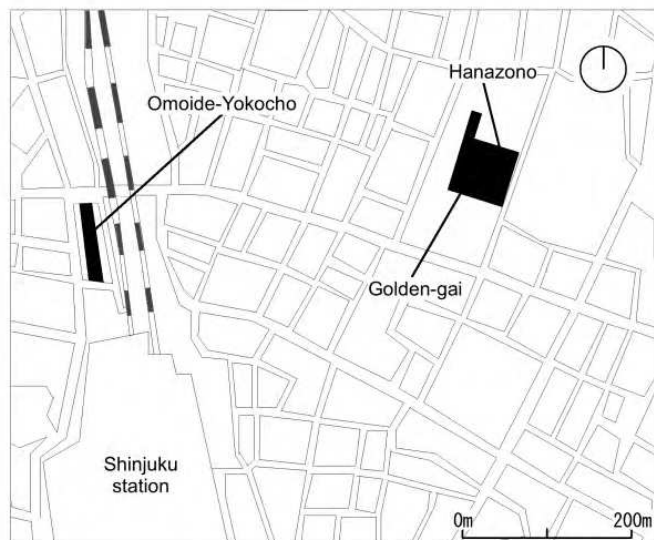
Table 2. Dimensions of sampled shops



Photographs in Nombei Yokochō



Photographs in Goldengai



Photographs in Sakaechō-dōri

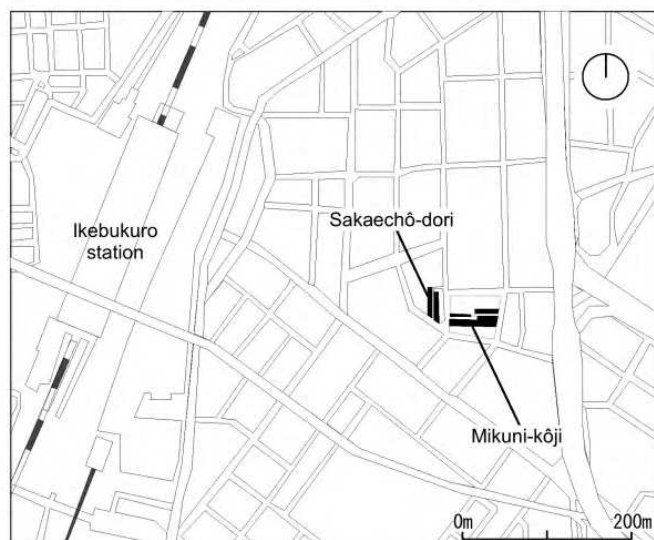
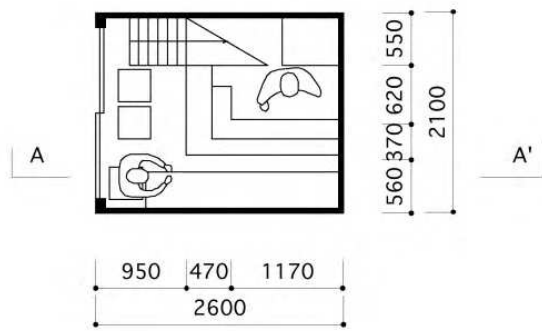
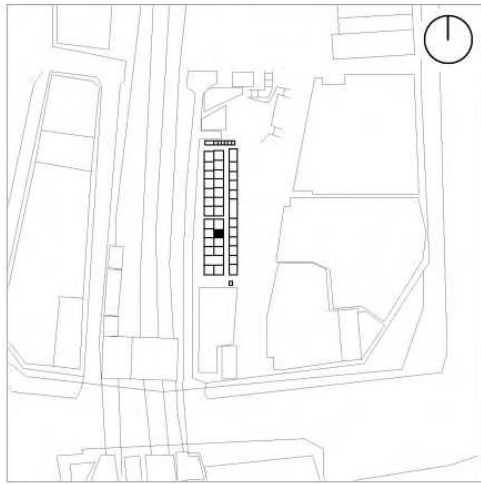
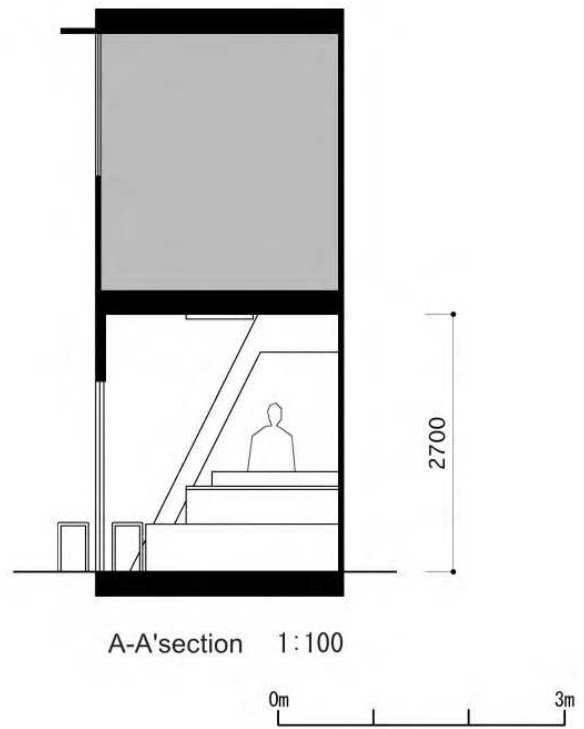


Fig. 3. Site plans of the 6 yokochō, located near train stations

Bar name : Tanukou
 (Nombei-Yokochō / Shibuya)



1Fplan 1:100

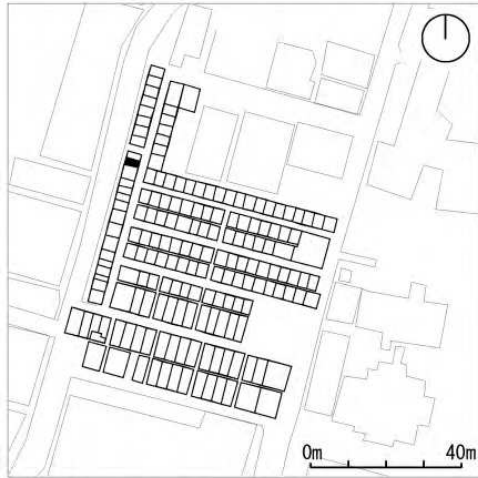


A-A'section 1:100

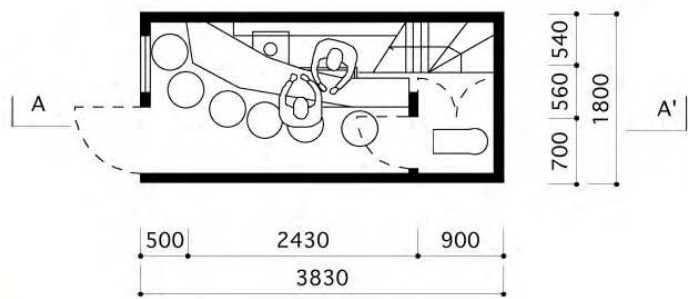


Fig. 4. Shop 01 *Tanuko*, in Nombei Yokochō (Shibuya). Plans, sections and photographs on January 18, 2011 (dimensions in mm)

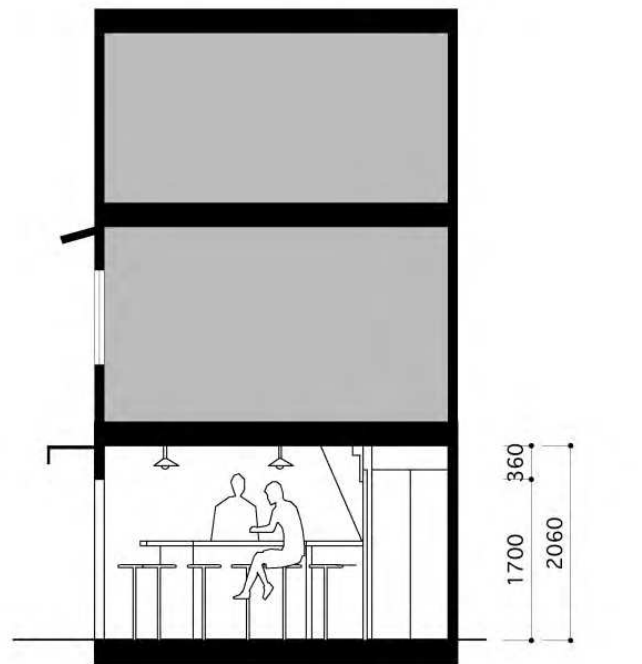
Bar name : Kikuko
(Hanazono / Shinjuku)



siteplan 1:2500



1Fplan 1:100

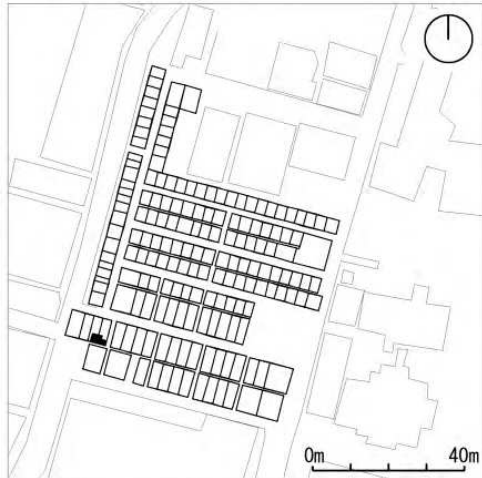


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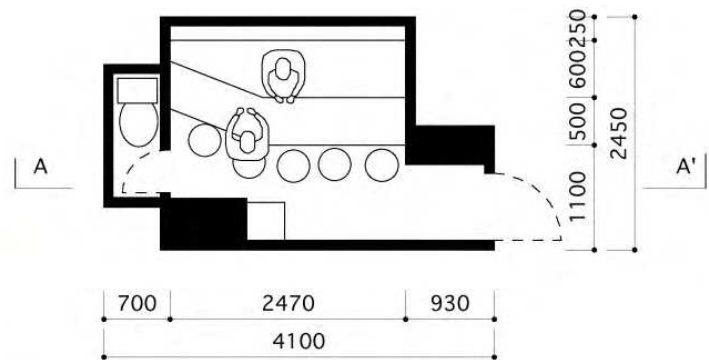


Fig. 5. Shop 05 *Kikuko*, in Hanazono (Shinjuku). Plans, sections and interior photograph on January. 17, 2011. Exterior photograph on February 25, 2011 (dimensions in mm)

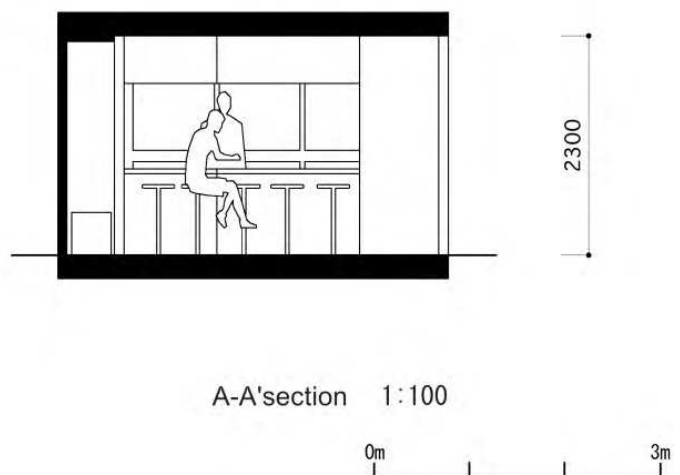
Bar name : Bihorogawa
(Golden-gai / Shinjuku)



siteplan 1:2500



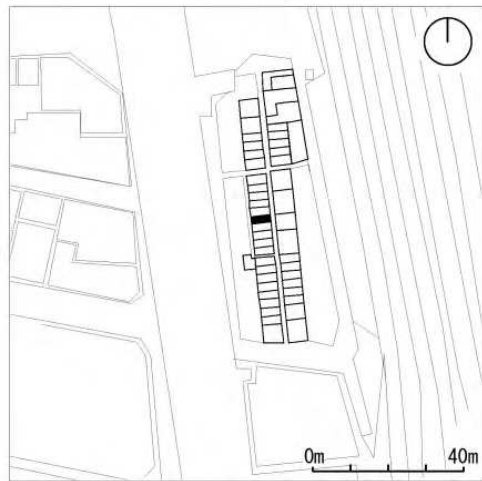
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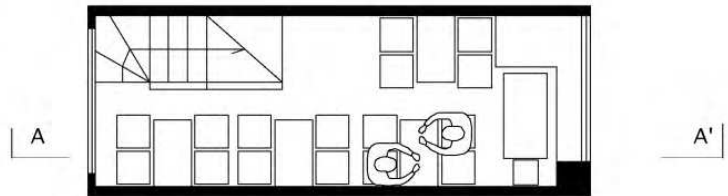
A-A'section 1:100

Fig. 6. Shop 07 *Bihorogawa*, Goldengai (Shinjuku). Plans, sections and interior photographs taken on January. 18, 2011 (dimensions in mm)

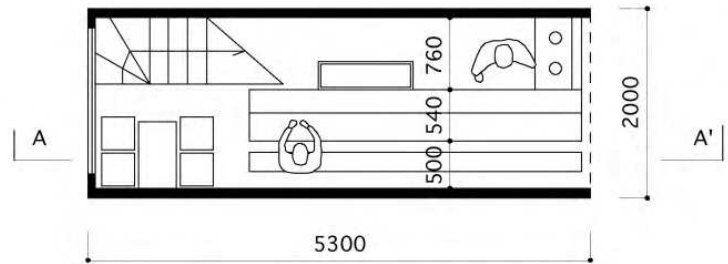
Bar name : Saitamaya
(Omoide-Yokochō / Shinjuku)



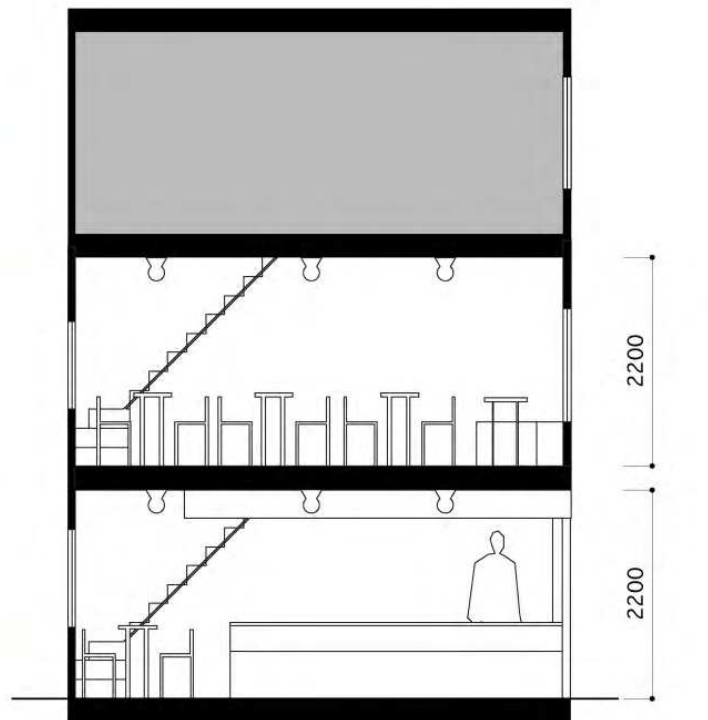
siteplan 1:2500



2Fplan 1:100



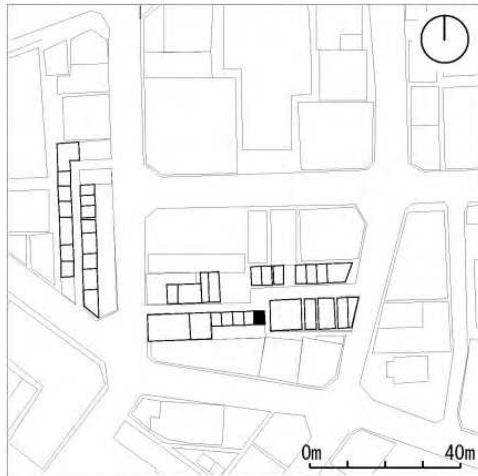
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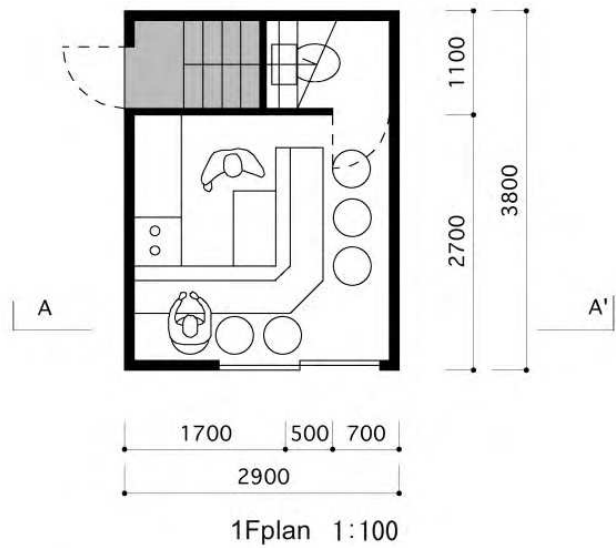
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Fig. 7. Shop 09 *Saitamaya*, Omoide-Yokochō (Shinjuku). Plans, sections on November 29, 2010. Interior photographs on January 19, 2011 (dimensions in mm)

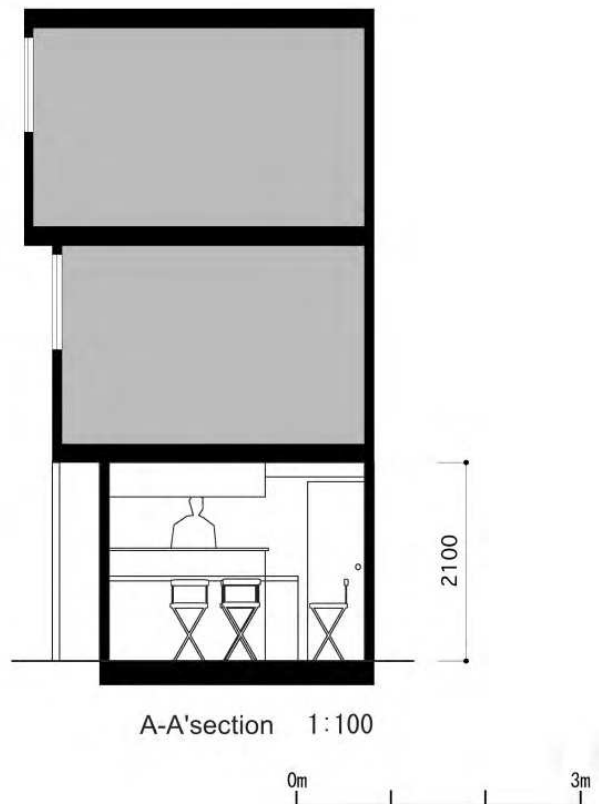
Bar name : Hagure
(Mikuni-kôji / Ikebukuro)



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A-A'section 1:100

Fig. 8. Shop 11 *Hagure*, Mikuni-kôji (Ikebukuro). Plans, sections, and photographs taken on November 26, 2010 (dimensions in mm)

4. Results from interviews

In the previous section the character of each *yokochō*, and the dimensions of bar samples were investigated. Even when compared with other small shops in Japan and, specifically Tokyo, these *yokochō* bars seem exceptionally small. The results of the interviews conducted with the owners of the 12 establishments in Table 2 are summarized in Table 3, and extracts of their statements are reflected in Table 4. Replies on the perceived advantages of smallness have been organized into seven categories. According to the number of times that those categories were mentioned by the owners, they are organized into the order of importance in Table 3.

	Perceived advantage		No. of responses by different owners
1	(C)	Communication	11
2	(M)	Manageability	9
3	(E)	Economy	3
4	(AS)	Atmosphere of the shop	3
5	(AC)	Atmosphere of the context	2
6	(I)	Incubation of entrepreneurs	1
7	(U)	Urban location	1

Table 3. Summary of attributes perceived by owners

The results showed that communication is the most appreciated attribute. Communication is then followed by manageability, in the sense that a single person can look after an independent space, without hiring extra staff. To a lesser extent, these two attributes were followed by others such as the atmosphere of the shop. Smallness itself, as a spatial condition, was described as "warm", being in a "cave" or feeling "relaxed". This responses suggest that smallness is not only a practical way to make spaces more economic and manageable, but also has positive psychological effects (protection, relax, and warmth) and a proxemic quality that generates conversation. The *yokochō* district itself, and its power to attract tourists, were also mentioned. One respondent mentioned that he wishes to move to another location once his business improves, which coincides with Maeda's idea of the *yokochō* as an incubator of entrepreneurs.

Shop no.	What is the typical age of your customers?	Why did you decide to open a store in a such a narrow space?	Do you want to increase or decrease the area of your shop?	What are the advantages of the small sized spaces in yokochō?	What are the disadvantages?
01	30s or older, mostly men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because of the warmth of small shops (AS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't want to increase the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can meet and have contact with customers (C) 	
02	40s or older	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because it is convenient since I can manage it alone (M) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't want to increase the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers can get acquainted with each other (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bumping into things I need more space to store the plates
03	From 20s to 60s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because I like the atmosphere of being in like a cave [穴倉] (AS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't have any particular intention of increasing it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can attend the customers well, even if all seats are occupied (M). Customers coming alone can get acquainted with others (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The space behind the counter is narrow
04	From 50s to 60s, mostly men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since it is so small, I can attend to every nook and corner (M). I can become friends with customers easily (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To properly attend to the orders of drinks from the customers, 8 seats are the limit. In fact 6 would be best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleaning is easy (M) 	
05	Diverse ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a small place where I can work in a relaxed way (AS) Cheap rent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don' have any intention of extending the shop 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The kitchen has only one burner. I can only work by shuffling sideways

Shop no.	What is the typical age of your customers?	Why did you decided to open a store in a such a narrow space?	Do you want to increase or decrease the area of your shop?	What are the advantages of the small sized spaces in yokochō?	What are the disadvantages?
06	From 30s to 50s, mostly men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because it is a size that I can manage alone (M). • Because the initial investment is small (E) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since it is my first shop, if it works well, maybe I want to increase the size or go to a bigger place (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It easy to talk with customers, even the ones who enter the store for their first time (C) 	
07	From 40s to 50s, mostly men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because I was doing a part-time job in Goldengai and I was told about an available shop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 5 people can enter, but if I don't let 7 in, it will be hard for me economically. Personally, I prefer to have a bigger space. 		
08	From 50s to 60s, mostly men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This yokochō has become a tourist spot; many customers come (AC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have 3 more shops of the same size in this yokochō catering the same food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can talk a lot with the customers, and customers can also talk to each other (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bumping into things
09	From 40s to 60s, mostly men. Also tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many people come because the area is a tourist spot now (AC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have two more shops in this yokochō 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication between customers. Even customers who come alone, end up bar hopping together (C) 	
10	From 50s to 60s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because this is just the size to manage the show alone, without hiring employees (M, E) 	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The atmosphere makes it easy to come alone (AS). Customers can become friends (C) 	

Shop no.	What is the typical age of your customers?	Why did you decide to open a store in a such a narrow space?	Do you want to increase or decrease the area of your shop?	What are the advantages of the small sized spaces in yokochō?	What are the disadvantages?
11	From 20s to 70s, mostly men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since I opened the shop after my retirement, this is the right size to manage without working too hard (M) 	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am in close proximity to customers (C) 	
12	Mid-30s to mid-50s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I moved from Jinsei-yokochō, which was demolished. • This is the right size to work alone (M) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, I am managing 12 seats alone. Someday, I hope to have 40 seats, served by 2 people. • Economically it is ideal (E) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is convenient because everything is within the reach of my hand (M). • It is good to be only a short distance from customers (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have only two burners in the kitchen, I would like two more.

Table 4. Overview of responses by shop owners

5. Conclusions and considerations

This study documents yokochō spaces in Tokyo, famous for their small scale and the informal public life they accommodate. On-site measurements of the streets were conducted and planimetric drawings were developed for 12 sample shops. This documentation reveals the actual scale of "smallness" in numbers (density of shops, areas, interior dimensions) and its organization in plan and section. The owners of those same selected samples were interviewed to understand their opinion on the small scale. In order of the importance, the communication both with and among the customers and the manageability of the spaces were clearly the central factors. To a much small degree, these two principal factors were followed by economic advantages, the atmosphere, the possibility of business incubation, and the location.

Although the shortcomings of such small sizes were also mentioned by the owners, their responses pin-pointed advantages that can be fully attributed only to smallness. Spontaneous conversations afforded by proximity or the intimacy of a small space can be found in the architectural precedent of the 4.5 tatami mats tea house, where smallness plays a fundamental role. Smallness also has the attribute of manageability, which in the case of yokochō permits owners to run their bars alone.

At least three further aspects can be highlighted, which were discovered through the development of this study. Although systematic research was not conducted on these aspects, they may be relevant as suggestions in current urban and architectural debate and for future research.

- *Coopetition*. Accumulation of multiple shops of the same type seems to facilitates *coopetition*, that is, simultaneous cooperation and competition, and this appears to be enhanced by the small size of each unit. Responses did not directly refer to the aspect of coopetition, but they did mention the practice of “bar hopping” –where customers go to several establishments in quick succession to enjoy a diversity of menus and ambiances. This practice suggests the existence of a networked spatial practice, and the working of the district as an emerging entity that has a bigger effect than the sum of its units.
- *Sharing*: some facilities, such as toilets, are used in common. Smallness seems to be feasible through a balance between individual practice and shared spaces and rules. New ways of sharing can be learn from the yokochō districts in order to preserve urban smallness in the city centres, all too often redeveloped into large sterile complexes or kept as gentrified historic centres.
- *Behavioral architectural values*. The success of the yokochō seems difficult to understand from the point of view of traditional architectural values, which are based on visual qualities (such as views, proportions, treatment of light, detail, etc.). In order to describe the unsightly yokochō spaces as successful, architecture theory needs to develop a new vocabulary not based on visual but on behavioral qualities.

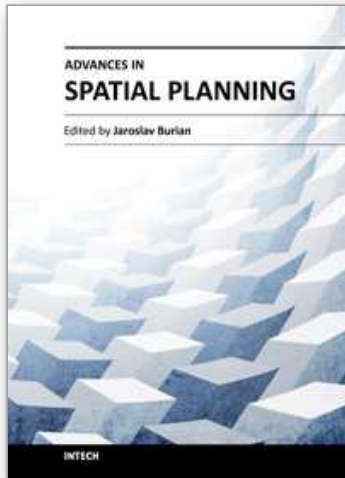
The studied yokochō are in a state of physical decay and in danger of being lost to redevelopment, but they can be considered a model of exploiting smallness while under the tremendous pressure resulting from their central location. These types of establishments may have a bad reputation as drinking places for middle-aged salaried men, but they have managed to create a micro-culture of third places. Furthermore, they might be held up as a good illustration of how to fulfill, in the field of architecture and urban design, the three conditions that Schumacher puts on technology (Schumacher 2010, p.35): "cheap enough so that they are accessible to virtually anyone, suitable for small-scale application, and compatible with man's need for creativity".

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