

Research Note

Chasing the Locals in Urban Japan: An Anthropocentric Approach to Conceptualizing Multilayered Locals in Contemporary Tokyo

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Summary

The term “local” often has positive associations, adding a warm familiarity to ordinary phenomena and items and creating “a sense of home.” Local communities, locally produced products, and local traditions carry sentiments of belonging, often capitalized on through branding strategies, policies, or even political propaganda. In contrast, this paper takes a closer look at dissonance and conflicting conceptions of the local. Because it is essential to critically rethink what constitutes locality, our central question is: How can we define a type of “local” that is not based upon the demands of a single (scientific) discipline or ideology like the “idealized image of the local community,” but on qualitative parameters and factors of influence? The goal of this research project, in which this paper is only a small but significant step on a long journey, is to get one step closer to an analytical understanding of the local in an anthropocentric sense, by rendering the local and existing conceptions through the layer of sensory possibilities and affective processes. This anthropocentric and sensory-sensitive approach to the local is achieved by analyzing empirical data from fieldwork in urban neighborhoods in Tokyo.

Keywords: urban space, local, anthropocentric, human scale, Tokyo, Japan

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