

Relações entre a  
**Península  
Ibérica** e o  
**Japão:**  
do séc. XVI aos dias  
de hoje

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Organização de

José Teixeira  
Hiroaki Kawabata  
Isabel dos Guimarães Sá



Centro de Estudos Lusíadas  
UNIVERSIDADE DO MINHO

RELAÇÕES ENTRE A PENÍNSULA IBÉRICA E O JAPÃO:  
DO SÉC. XVI AOS DIAS DE HOJE

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# Tangible and Intangible Contexts of the City as a Mediator of Change: Research Experience between Iberia and Japan

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## Abstract

As the entire world is being penetrated by the global economy, many people are seeking innovation in urbanism to help recover our pride in the city. To contribute to that collective task, a research team led by the author of this article has been working since 2013 on a project called the Spatial Codes Project (SCP). In the following pages, I will first briefly describe the post-war transformation of the Japanese city to set the whole issue from a Japanese perspective. Then, a short reference will be made to my research experience in Iberian cities, where I garnered many of the ideas that converge in the SCP. In the second half of the article, the framework of the SCP will be illustrated in some detail. Intensive

グローバル経済が世界の都市を席捲する今日、都市へのプライドを取り戻そうと多くの人々がアーバニズムの革新を探求している。筆者が代表を務める研究チームは、この市民共通の課題に寄与すべく、2013年以来、「空間コード研究」とよばれるプロジェクトを推進してきた。空間コードは、都市の基層をなす持続的空間文脈への認識を共有するために、プロジェクトチームが開発してきたコミュニケーションツールである。空間コードとして可視化されるのは、地形や植生といったランドスケープの有形の枠組みに限られない。それを舞台装置として共有する人々の繋がりのような、都市に蓄積されたいわば無形の文脈も含まれる。空間コード研究は、日本都市、とりわけ名古屋を研究実践の場とすることで編み出された方法論である。しかし、その発想

research activities focussed on Nakagawa Canal in Nagoya have allowed us to propose a series of spatial codes for that area from three basic perspectives: landscape, civil agents and space for linking.

のもととなったのは、筆者がイベリア都市での研究から得た理論的・実践的な知見である。そこで本稿では、イベリアと日本を往還してきた研究者としての経験の振り返りを通じて、空間コード研究の基本的な考え方とそれを着想するに至った過程を提示した。内容構成は以下のとおりである。

第一に、日本都市を実践場とする空間コード研究の出発点を明らかにすべく、震災によって物理的な表層を激変させた日本都市が、バブル経済期の大規模開発を経て、次々とイメージが移植される「俗都市化」の時代に入ったことを述べた。第二に、そうした表層変化の背後で都市の空間文脈が生きているならば、それを継承し、グローバルフローとの関ぎ合いのなかで進化させるべきであることを論じた。第三に、イベリア都市の調査から筆者が得た知見について、石の文化に象徴される物質的な持続性、そうした硬い器（形態）が許容した柔軟な中身（用途）の転換、器の利用者にして中身の発明者でもある都市のエージェント相互の繋がり、という3つの視点に即して説明した。第四に、イベリアでの経験をもとに着想した空間コード研究について、拙著『空間コードから共創する中川運河—「らしさ」のある都市づくり』に即してエッセンスを要約した。その過程で、ランドスケープ、都市のエージェント、繋ぎの空間という、空間コードを導出するための3つの視点に論及した。最後に、これまでの蓄積をもとにした今後の研究実践の方向性にふれて、締め括りとした。

## 1. Continuity and Discontinuity in the Japanese City

### The hidden city behind radical changes

During the Second World War, Japan underwent a massive destruction of its urban fabric. What was born in the modern times as an interesting mixture of vernacular wooden architecture and new Western-style buildings suddenly disappeared, giving way to post-war reconstruction or construction ex-novo from ashes and ruins. Then, functionalist urbanism was widely accepted as an effective mechanism for the development of land and the construction of a solid and promising national economy. Functionalist instruments, such as land use zoning, led to a technically efficient urbanism, which, however, was generally lacking in personality. If we compare the current landscape of a central street in Nagoya with pre-war photos of the same place, we can hardly find common elements between the two moments, except for the existence of a *torii* (gate) and a cluster of trees that tells us of the presence of a Shintoist shrine.

The physical aspect of the built environment has greatly changed, but not the underlying landscape. This continuity behind radical change has been carefully interpreted by Hidenobu Jinnai, a Japanese expert in history of architecture. In his masterpiece, *Tokyo, A Spatial Anthropology*, Jinnai showed how the Japanese city retains its basic features in landscape, such as contrasts between ridge and valley, or residential high city and seaside downtown.<sup>[1]</sup> Despite all kinds of destruction and scrapping and building, this hidden city remains largely unaltered. The positive acceptance of this book among a wide range of readers has justified its translation into English.<sup>[2]</sup> For me, it is one of the most important works in contemporary urbanism that connect Japan and the Western world (Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Jinnai, Hidenobu (1985). *Tokyo no kukan jinruigaku*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo.

<sup>2</sup> Jinnai, Hidenobu (2008): *Tokyo, a spatial anthropology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

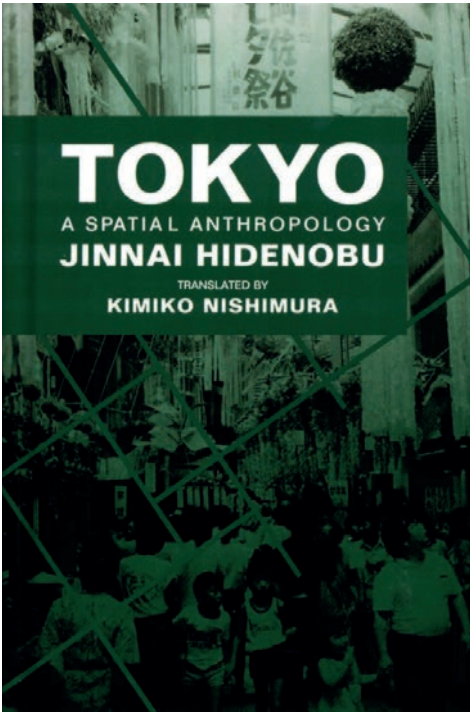


Figure 1: H. Jinnai: *Tokyo, A Spatial Anthropology* (English edition)

### Global architecture conquering the city

In the late 1980s, the real estate bubble prompted by neoliberal doctrines had a strong impact on the Japanese city. Standardised designs and logo architecture conquered large areas of the urban centre and subcentres, which benefited from deregulation measures led by the central government. In Nagoya, global architecture appeared, first next to the central railway station and it is now expanding to Sasashima canal wharf, where the main unloading dock of Nakagawa Canal was located. As the redevelopment of the city's waterfront is ongoing, Sasashima has become a focus of public attention, with a few new additions such as a new skyscraper built for business and international conventions, TV station and high-class residential blocks.

The proliferation of global architecture and logo cities prompted an acute critique of the contemporary city by the Spanish geographer, Francesc Muñoz. Originally from Cádiz, south of Spain, his professional career has been in Barcelona. So we can consider him in some way an 'Iberian' geographer. The



concept of *urbanisation*, introduced in his outstanding work, *Urbanización: Paisajes Comunes, Lugares Globales* (*Urbanisation: Common Landscapes, Global Places*) refers to the multiplication of pseudo-cities as a consubstantial process to globalization.<sup>[3]</sup> According to Muñoz, that dynamism can eventually reduce the city to a mere commercial image, which can be easily copied and reproduced. In fact, we see how cities around the world are falling into the temptation of urbanisation to sell themselves in the global capital and tourist markets. Muñoz's work was translated into Japanese, in this case by the author of this article.<sup>[4]</sup> For now, it is the only book of a Spanish geographer available to Japanese readers, which justifies us in considering it a bridge linking the geographic sciences of both countries (Figure 2).



Figure 2: F. Muñoz: *Urbanisation* (Japanese edition)

<sup>3</sup> Muñoz, Francesc (2008): *Urbanización: Paisajes comunes, lugares globales*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.

<sup>4</sup> Muñoz, Francesc (2013): *ZokuToshika: Arifureta keikan gurobaru na basho*. Kyoto: Showado.

## 2. Towards a New Urbanism

Urbanisation and continuity in landscape are simultaneous processes, in an age when many cities are exposed to the forces of the global economy. Containing the former to rescue the latter is a mission shared by researchers inside and outside Japan and many other agents of civil society. David Harvey, the geographer, claims the right to the city as a right of all citizens to transform the city and asserts that this change depends on the exercising of the collective power to remodel the process of urbanisation.<sup>[5]</sup> Every action to reaffirm our right to the city cannot be undertaken from a closed and static view of the city. If a socially sustainable and strategically viable project can emerge out of our collective effort, it is when these actions are directed at managing the ever-changing urban context, trying at the same time to absorb the enormous power of global flows.

Here, we have an exponent of the rapidly changing aspect of the Japanese city, an example from Nakagawa Canal (Figure 3). A series of photographic works by Clemens Metzler, a member of the SCP, catches the same place in three different moments: 1965, when transport by water was reaching its peak; 1989, when Japanese economy was going through the real estate boom and 2014, when the wastewater treatment plant was in the phase of a total remodelling after being in operation for 35 years. Beyond the obvious changes, we should ask: Is there really any continuity in the basic landscape patterns? Is it something worth inheriting as a collective asset of the city and is it capable of evolving towards the future?

These simple questions marked the starting point of the SCP. When a step is taken for a new project like this, the work of the pioneers should always be kept in mind. To note only a few of the valuable examples from which I have learned a great deal, the well-known work of urban planner Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, approached the concept of civic identity by analysing the public image of the city, which he reconstructed from interviews with

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey, David (2008): The right to the city. *New Left Review*, 53, 23-40. The original concept was introduced by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in the following book: Lefebvre, Henri (1968): *Le droit à la ville*. Paris: Éditions Anthropos (2nd ed.). Japanese edition (translation by Mori Kazuo) published in 1969 by Chikuma Shobo.

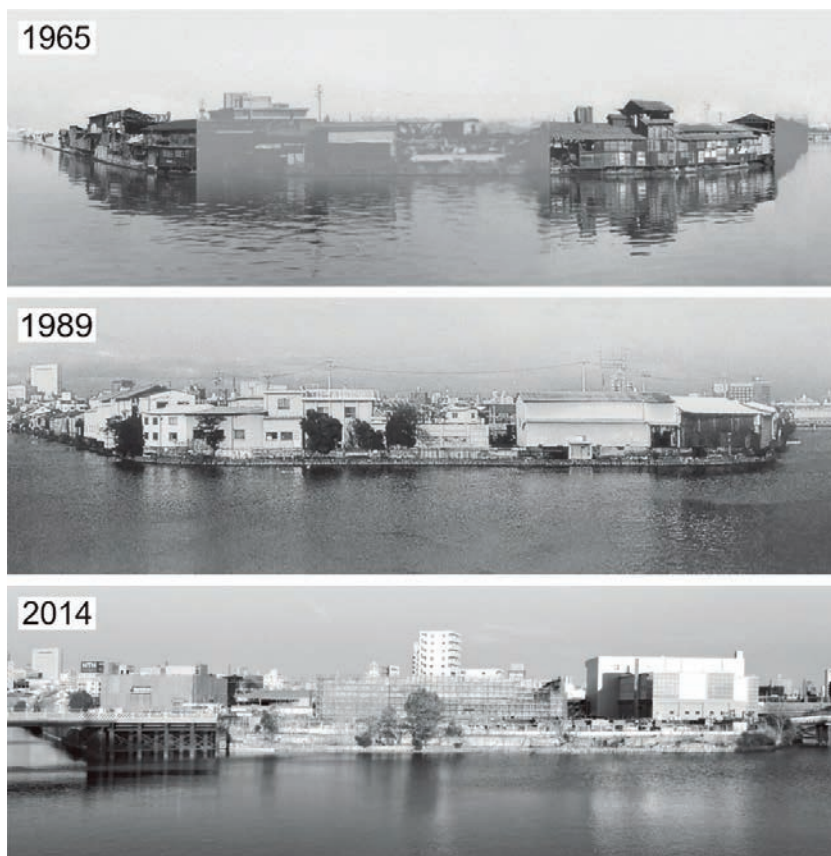


Figure 3: Images of Nakagawa Canal (Elaboration by Clemens Metzler)

people of different profiles.<sup>[6]</sup> Years later, Christopher Alexander published his *Pattern Language*, compiling basic ideas for architecture design. The quality of urban space, identified by Lynch with analytical values like legibility or imaginability, was reformulated in Alexander's work under more constructive criteria, as something like a generative grammar.<sup>[7]</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Lynch, Kevin (1960): *The image of the city*. Cambridge: Technology Press. Japanese edition (translation by Tanghe Kenzo and Tomita Reiko) published in 1968 by Iwanami Shoten.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander, Christopher (1977): *A pattern language: Towns, buildings, construction*. New York: Oxford University Press. Japanese edition (translation by Hirata Kanna) published in 1984 by Kajima Institute Publishing.

### 3. Learning from Iberian cities

Along with this theoretical background, research experience in Iberian cities inspired me to attempt a methodological innovation in Japan. I will comment on some of the most relevant aspects of that experience.

The urban fabric of Iberian cities is for me a useful guide for learning the long-lasting contexts of the city. A paradigmatic example is Tarragona, an ancient Roman capital city. Discovering and deciphering time layers accumulated underground and even inside houses is an intellectually exciting act for not only archaeologists or historians of art but also geographers. Moreover, these time layers do not overlap in a simple manner. Construction materials, taken from Roman ruins, were reused in the Middle Ages to build the new city. Vaults of the Roman circus support the weight of the buildings that today make the facade in the central square.

The Iberian culture of stone, however, shows a surprising elasticity in terms of use of space. Many elements of the built environment seem to be nailed to the ground, such as the configuration of streets and squares or monumental buildings. Paradoxically, this robustness is what allows the *containers* to accommodate different *contents*, as society's need for the same corner of the city changes over time. In the field research I conducted in Santiago de Compostela with my students from Aichi Prefectural University, we saw how the old containers can be renewed in their usefulness and how these new uses are inspired by the previous ones. If we know how to give the right use to the right place, we can also activate the sleeping contexts of the city.

Urban agents are users of containers and generators of contents. Those agents get linked together, if they can access a common space in the city. This is where different actors get to know one another, conduct conversation, share ideas and sometimes take joint actions. I discovered in Iberian cities a wide variety of spaces working in that way, from streets where festive representations take place to large public facilities created during the real estate boom. After the municipal budget shrunk severely because of the crisis, these facilities revealed their real utility in accommodating activities of different civic groups, which are again claiming their active role in city building. All those people's courage in creating synergy between old and new pieces has been filling me with desire to continue working in the city.

## 4. Spatial Codes Project

### Co-creation of the city

The SCP was launched in 2013. To show the progress of the project so far, I present some key aspects from a book published in 2016, under the title of *Co-creating Nakagawa Canal from Spatial Codes: Recognising Identity for City Building* (Figure 4).<sup>[8]</sup> The methodology proposed in the book is the fruit of an intensive collaboration among experts in geography, architecture, urban planning, landscape analysis and communication design. Our commitment to a common goal is symbolised by the illustration on the book cover with a reconstructed view of the canal. The image of barges and old warehouses standing on the waterline is combined with a new image placed to the right, where spontaneous growth of green on the canal banks calls attention.



Figure 4: K. Takenaka (ed.): *Co-creating Nakagawa Canal from Spatial Codes*

<sup>8</sup> Takenaka, Katsuyuki (Ed.) (2016): *Kukan codo kara kyoso suru nakagawa unga: Rashisa no aru toshizukuri (Co-creating Nakagawa Canal from spatial codes: Recognising identity for city building)*. Tokyo: Kajima Institute Publishing.

The concept of co-creation does not mean a mere conservation policy centred on specific monumental elements alone. Nor is it a redevelopment project based on models of public–private partnerships available in the market, such as the Private Finance Initiative or Japanese Designated Manager System. Our efforts are intended to recognize the tangible and intangible contexts of the city to visualise them as spatial codes, which are organised in the following three categories: landscape, civil agents and space for linking. The task proposed is not exclusively for specialists. All civil agents with a positive concern for the city can participate in code searching and, above all, in its application to the urban design.

### Landscape

When we speak of landscape, we are not discussing only the aesthetic value of the view we enjoy. Landscape in its geographical conception means the visual expression of the territory organized in a specific manner, an organization in which the interaction between nature and the human being occupies a central position. Even when we analyse urban landscapes, natural conditions such as geomorphological or hydrographic factors, which, in turn, are subject to the intervention of intense human actions, can never be neglected. In particular, civil engineering infrastructure, like ports, canals or railway lines, overlies or is merged into the natural landscape, conforming a long-lasting context of the city. In this way, mutual response between the natural environment and human actions attains a new equilibrium, which we can call *second nature*.

From this viewpoint of landscape, we found four spatial codes for Nakagawa Canal. The first, **‘city layers progressing towards sea’**, recognises geographical strata corresponding to different historical periods. These layers appeared successively in Nagoya Plain not only with the changes in sea level, but also as result of colonisation of polders and the construction of the modern port. The second code, **‘water surface in a locked canal’**, refers to the mixed character of water course and pool, typical of a canal with both ends closed by a lock. The third code is **‘artificial natural levees’**. This paradoxical expression is justified by the ground made of the soil dug up from the canal, as if it were natural levees of a streaming river. The landscape block closes with the fourth code, **‘the green corridor’**, in reference to the green belt that grew spontaneously along the elongate infrastructure for industrial use.

### Civil agents

If contemporary society is full of complexity, those who know best how to recover people's ties to the place should play the leading part in city building. Such agents, however, are not always visible. The profiles of agents also vary from one place to another. In Nakagawa Canal, the entire infrastructure, including the land reserved for industrial use, is public property, belonging to the municipality. Therefore, the leadership of the city government is essential to reactivate the area, but it needs to be ensured by the collaboration of investing companies.

The first code of the block, **'the vena cava of Nagoya'** sheds light on those agents working in and around the canal, mainly companies of the industrial and distribution sectors and their workers. The second code is dedicated, under the header of **'water and land interacting'**, to analysing the functioning of logistic space along the canal, where warehouses and workshops have their gates open towards both the canal and the road constructed in parallel. When, decades ago, transport on barges stopped working, the narrow space reserved for loading and unloading began to be transformed into a green corridor with trees growing spontaneously or planted by neighbouring companies. This unexpected reunion between the human being and nature is shown in the third code, **'sociability with nature'**. The fourth code, **'space for creation'**, gives an account of the rising artistic scenes we witness in Nakagawa Canal. In Japan, the neighbourhood around a Shintoist shrine has long acted as a device to create sense of place. People are now seeking an alternative method of place making, a process in which artists, with their sense of creativity, could take an important part.

### Space for linking

The last block of codes highlights those spaces where human and non-human elements get together and interact. When this interaction is supported and favoured by a specific configuration of the built environment and repeated many times, it can function as a kind of infrastructure for an evolving civic identity. Spaces where multiple contacts are likely to arise are usually publicly owned land, such as streets, squares, parks or water surfaces. However, the concept of public space is now too contaminated by the control, often invisible, of the state or other kinds of institutions. Space for linking is something

to be achieved and kept through actions of society. It is, therefore, closer to the concept of urban commons in its political dimension.

The first code of this block, **'face to face over the canal'**, captures the crossing sight between both borders. The symmetrical design defined by the central axis of the canal, the two parallel roads and the industrial lots with double gates to the water and the street has given rise to a particular landscape of interaction. That is the basic concept of the second code, **'the industrial space'**, in reference to union between artefacts and natural elements, as well as the third, **'urban green brought by birds and wind'**. The block closes with the fourth code, **'aesthetics of the continuity'**, analysing our perception of what we can call *boatscape*. The sequence of small units on both sides of the canal is hardly perceived unless we are shipped along the canal, but that landscape can be stored and shared in human memory.

#### For the future city

Visualising the not very visible contexts of the city is, in my opinion, essential for creating motifs for how the future city can be and how it deserves to be. Spatial codes are the main instrument we propose to recognise and communicate such contexts. From this basis, we are now working in different lines, such as the following:

First, we try to develop a visual communication tool to make spatial codes more accessible to a wide range of agents. The series titled 'Canal Architecture Reviving' (Clemens Metzler) is a re-composition of past landscapes. The designer interprets the spatial codes, taking us to a virtual scene, where our expectation for this place is represented. Second, we have been organising open discussions on Nakagawa Canal, for which we proposed a set of spatial codes to focus the debate. A central objective of these meetings is to identify different agents concerned in the area, sometimes very active and visible, but often waiting for an opportunity to come. Third, we can propose competitions in urban design, drawing on specific spatial codes. And finally, we now explore the possibility of extending our research to other areas in Japan. Experience in different geographical contexts in Japan and eventually in Iberia would aid the evolution of the SCP to become a more reliable methodology to innovate urbanism.