

Whose culture is promoted by the creative city policies? A case of neighbourhood change in Osaka

Meric Kirmizi

URP Platform for Leading-Edge Urban Studies Special (Young) Research Fellow
Osaka City University 3-3-138 Sugimoto, Sumiyoshi-ku, Osaka-shi, 558-8585 JAPAN

PhD candidate, Department of Sociology of Culture
Graduate School of Human Sciences, Osaka University
merickirmizi@gmail.com

This paper asks: what is the role of “culture” with respect to urban regeneration policies. The creative city promotes creative and cultural industries for growth, and depends on the work of a creative class in fields such as arts, publishing, and design. Scholars argued against culturalization of the city on several grounds. Firstly, investment in cultural places invited gentrification and its negative consequences for the long-term inhabitants. Secondly, the culture-led urban regeneration pursued mainly economic ends through activities which comply with the official meanings or “the hegemonic imagery” of culture. Thirdly, what was deemed culture was actually limited to consumption. On the other hand, there is a scholarly debate on how to protect the “intangible cultural heritage” of urban communities. This study is an attempt to find, in a Japanese case, alternatives to urban redevelopment outside the convergent commercial or cultural routes.

The target of my analysis is the commercial redevelopment of the Horie area in Nishi Ward, Osaka that resulted in the replacement of furniture shop owners with a white-collar, new middle class, leading a separate life with different consumption patterns. The analysis is based on interviews with cultural entrepreneurs and real estate agents from Horie, besides participatory observation of local events, deemed potential sources of “counter-narratives” of culture. A photographer, who is working in the area, said that “there is not much culture” in Horie, since everything is about turning things into money. I interpret the ideas of respondents in the context of homogenization and commercialization of culture as remedies for contemporary urban problems in a wide geography.

Keywords: post-industrial urban change, Japan, creative city, commercialization of place, commercialization of culture

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