



BEYOND MONUMENTS: RETHINKING HERITAGE THROUGH THE MUNDANE AND THE EPHEMERAL IN TOKYO

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ABSTRACT: As global cities rapidly evolve, conventional approaches to architectural heritage conservation struggle to address the complexities of contemporary urban landscapes. This paper critically examines the limitations of the Venice Charter's monument-centric principles in recognizing the cultural significance of vernacular architecture, ephemeral spaces, and community narratives that shape the lived experiences of Tokyo's residents. Grounded in critical heritage theory and ethnographic research, it proposes an alternative set of principles that acknowledge the inherent value of the mundane, the utilitarian, and the ephemeral aspects of the built environment.

Case studies, including the Yanesen neighborhood's grassroots preservation efforts and Studio Gross's PARK-PLATZ placemaking intervention, illustrate the principles in action. While acknowledging the Venice Charter's historical relevance for exceptional monuments, the paper calls for an expanded, community-centric paradigm that resonates with Tokyo's ever-evolving urban fabric.

By advocating for inclusive frameworks that value the dynamic interplay between residents and their surroundings, this study offers a nuanced critique of traditional top-down conservation models. It highlights the urgency of developing responsive strategies that honour the multivalent realities and lived heritage embodied in the intricate tapestries of contemporary cities.

KEY WORDS: vernacular heritage, ephemeral spaces, adaptive reuse, community narratives, urban landscapes, Tokyo

“Each citizen must construct his own special relationship to various small parts of the seemingly chaotic, contextless city of today. The contemporary city is a unique reality for each individual. The landscape does not exist as such; it must be conceptualized and constructed by a subject”¹.

1. Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of urban architecture, Maki's insight challenges conventional paradigms, emphasizing the subjective relationship each citizen forms with the myriad elements of the contemporary city. This inquiry expands the traditional boundaries of architecture into the domain of everyday life, a perspective deepened by photographer Ryo Suzuki², who posits that as buildings are immovable entities, individuals must engage with them, thereby integrating architecture into their daily urban experiences. In contrast to Maki's and Suzuki's emphasis on subjective interactions with the built environment, the 1964 Venice Charter takes a classical approach to understanding and preserving exceptional monuments, prioritizing material integrity based on an undefined notion of authenticity³.

However, this narrow scope neglects vernacular and ephemeral environments that are deeply embedded in communities' socio-cultural fabric. Contemporary discourse highlights the need for inclusive frameworks that reflect the complexities of urban experiences and how individuals and communities engage with and construct meaning from their surroundings and how this experience supports the protection, preservation and maintenance of identity and cultural memory of the place. This paper proposes the recognition and appreciation of the mundane and ephemeral aspects in urban contexts, such as Tokyo. It is grounded in critical heritage theories and charters such as the Burra Charter, advocating for principles that acknowledge the value of everyday spaces within the urban fabric.

This paper advances three interconnected arguments about heritage conservation in contemporary urban contexts, particularly in Asian cities. Heritage value emerges through everyday interactions between residents and their built environment, challenging monument-centric preservation frameworks. Community engagement and temporal interventions create meaningful heritage experiences that transcend traditional approaches. Effective heritage conservation in Asian urban contexts requires frameworks accommodating both physical presence and intangible cultural practices. Through detailed analysis of grassroots preservation in Yanesen and Studio Gross's PARK-PLATZ intervention, this study demonstrates how both Maki's notion of individually constructed urban relationships and Suzuki's concept of daily architectural engagement manifest in concrete preservation practices.

¹ Maki F. (2008). *Nurturing Dreams: Collected Essays on Architecture and the City*. The MIT Press.

² Suzuki R. (2012): *The Experience of Architecture*, [in:] Takeuchi M (Ed.) (2018). *Silence and Image*. Akaaka-sha. (pp. 102-104).

³ cf., Article 9, and Article 11 of the Venice Charter.

As the 60th anniversary of the Venice Charter approaches, this investigation offers a timely reconsideration of how we understand and preserve urban heritage. By examining Tokyo's dynamic urban landscape through the lens of both personal engagement and community practice, this study contributes to an expanded understanding of heritage that embraces both the mundane and the monumental, the permanent and the ephemeral, the individual and the collective.

The limitations of the Venice Charter, although seminal, require re-evaluation. According to Jokilehto the Venice Charter is, “historical foundation and a fundamental reference for understanding the evolution of international conservation policies”⁴. However, the Venice Charter can serve as a starting point for future preservation strategies. As the 60th anniversary of the Venice Charter approaches, it is important to reflect on its significance. In the words of Wilfried Lipp, anniversaries are complex acts of reconstruction. Therefore, the keyword for this occasion is “reframing”⁵, which should be included in our thinking. As discourses change, new preservation methods are required to meet the needs of current society, it is important to note that protecting living heritage may require a different approach than musealisation of the past. This tension between preservation and living culture is particularly relevant given what Hartog identifies as our contemporary impulse to “museify” our surroundings with an increasingly presentist perspective. As he notes, we have begun to “prepare, starting from today, the museum of tomorrow, assembling today's archives as if they were already yesterday's”⁶. This suggests that preservation strategies need to balance the imperative to protect heritage with the need to allow cultural practices to remain dynamic and evolving.

2. Question of Monumentality

2.1 *Limitations of the Venice Charter*

Tokyo's dynamic urban fabric, characterised by a rich tapestry of vernacular architecture, temporary structures, and repurposed spaces, exemplifies the limitations of a rigid, monument-focused approach, but even these sites are on the verge of dramatic change⁷. “The modern notion of heritage explicitly links particular spatial environments to temporal notions of the past through connections with history and identity”⁸, hence there is a scholarly need for reevaluating and reconsidering previous standard-setting documents and understand them in the face of the

⁴ Jokilehto J. (2021). Observations on Concepts in the Venice Charter. *Conversaciones...*(11). (p. 362). [fecha de Consulta 18 de Marzo de 2024]. ISSN: 2594-0813. Disponible <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/317/3173864024/>.

⁵ Lipp W. (2024). *60 Years and not a Big Quiet: Reflections on the history of time and ideas for an anniversary*. (p. 1). [Unpublished manuscript].

⁶ Hartog F. (2005). *Time and Heritage*. *Museum International* 57(3). (p. 14). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2005.00525.x>.

⁷ Almazán J., Studiolab. (2022). *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City*. Oro Editions.

⁸ Salemink O. (2021). Introduction: Heritagizing Asian cities: space, memory, and vernacular heritage practices. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27(8). (p. 769). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2021.1890186>

current discourses. As discussed by Salemink⁹ and Imai¹⁰ a feeling of nostalgia emerging among certain resident groups due to the disappearance of local neighbourhoods. The Venice Charter is missing the connection between the spatiality and the monuments the Charter wishing to preserve, so it is important to consider and include thoughts on how to deal with the living heritage, not only as spectral entities of the past which belong to a museum.

2.2 Towards an Ethnographic Approach

Contemporary charters and conventions such as the Burra Charter (1979, revised in 2013), the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), the Faro Convention (2005), and the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Recommendation (2011) among many others reflect this paradigm shift, expanding heritage concepts to account for intangible cultural expressions, living traditions, and the dynamic relationships between people and their built environments.

International doctrines are guiding principles that should be applicable in diverse cultures globally. However, as the Nara Document on Authenticity teaches us, heritage is relative^{11,12}. The standard-setting documents have Janus-faced characteristics that create tension between global and local actors¹³. These tensions are what create shifts in the authorised heritage discourses, and call reevaluation of the heritage preservation practices. Reductive narratives obscure the nuanced, everyday lived experiences of Tokyo's residents and the heterogeneous ways in which they inhabit, navigate, and derive meaning from the city's spaces¹⁴.

In the context of architectural heritage and preservation a more nuanced approach is needed – one that acknowledges the dynamic nature of the city's spaces and the role of decay, transformation, and adaptation in shaping their cultural significance. To truly engage with and learn from Tokyo's urban landscapes, one must step beyond the city's perceived façade and immerse oneself in the quotidian realities of its communities. It is through this grounded, ethnographic approach that the rich complexities, localised practices, and diverse meanings ascribed to Tokyo's built environments can be unveiled and understood¹⁵.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Imai H. (2017). *Tokyo Roji: The Diversity and Versatility of Alleys in a City in Transition* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315669281>.

¹¹ cf., Article 11 and 13 of Nara Document on Authenticity.

¹² Jokilehto J. (2006). Considerations on authenticity and integrity in world heritage context. *City & Time* 2(1), (pp. 1-16); Labadi S. (2010). World Heritage, authenticity and post-authenticity: International and national perspectives, [in:] S. Labadi, C. Long (Eds.), *Heritage and Globalisation (Key Issues in Cultural Heritage)*. Routledge.

¹³ Jokilehto J. (2015). What is modern conservation? Some thoughts about the evolution of modern conservation policies. *Conversaciones con.* (1), (pp. 29–38). Recuperado a partir de <https://revistas.inah.gob.mx/index.php/conversaciones/article/view/10875>.

¹⁴ Almazán J., Studioblab. (2022). *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City*. Oro Editions.

¹⁵ Hosei University Research Center for Edo-Tokyo Studies, Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering and Design, Hosei University, SCI-Arc, Politecnico di Torino (2019): *Edo-Tokyo, Challenging the Urban Fabric Ueno Hongo Yanaka Nezu Shitaya*. Shokokusha Publishing.

3. Challenging the Urban Fabric in Tokyo

3.1 Spectrals of the Past in Today's Tokyo

The conservation philosophy in Asian cities represents a distinctly different worldview from that found in European contexts where the Venice Charter originated. In Japanese architecture, regular maintenance, and periodic reconstruction of wooden structures, like the ritual rebuilding of Ise Shrine every 20 years, emphasizes preserving technique and spiritual continuity over original materials. This approach emerged from both cultural preferences and practical necessity given Japan's climate and natural disasters.

Furthermore, these practices stem from a unique conceptualization of time. As Ogino¹⁶ explains, while European historic monuments and museums help people acknowledge a linear notion of time through their presence, Japan has developed a different understanding where the past is brought up to date in the present - what he terms “the logic of actualisation”.

While UNESCO representative Hiroshi Daifuku participated, the Charter's drafting committee had minimal Asian representation - only one out of 23 drafters¹⁷. This resulted in a document that did not fully capture Asian approaches to heritage preservation. The Japanese concept of authenticity focuses on preserving traditional techniques through “Living National Treasures” (Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Properties), recognizing that tradition exists in the making rather than finished works¹⁸.

While European cities emphasize preservation, Asian cities have shown greater acceptance of renewal and modernization¹⁹. This is particularly evident in Tokyo, where the urban fabric displays constant renewal through natural disasters, war, and redevelopment. As Brumann²⁰ notes, traditional Japanese practices of dismantling and reassembling wooden buildings challenged European notions of authenticity.

¹⁶ Ogino M. (2016). Considering undercurrents in Japanese cultural heritage management: The logic of actualisation and the preservation of the present, [in:] A. Matsuda (Ed.), *Reconsidering Cultural Heritage in East Asia* (pp. 15–16). Ubiquity Press. <https://doi.org/10.5334/baz.b>.

¹⁷ Brumann C. (2018). Anthropological Utopia, Closet Eurocentrism, and Culture Chaos in the UNESCO World Heritage Arena. *Anthropological Quarterly* 91(4), (p. 1211). <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2018.0063>.

¹⁸ Ogino M. (2016). Considering undercurrents in Japanese cultural heritage management: The logic of actualisation and the preservation of the present, [in:] A. Matsuda (Ed.), *Reconsidering Cultural Heritage in East Asia* (pp. 17-18). Ubiquity Press. <https://doi.org/10.5334/baz.b>.

¹⁹ Waley P. (2012). Who Cares about the Past in Today's Tokyo?, [in:] C. Brumann, E. Schulz (Eds.), *Urban spaces in Japan: Cultural and social perspectives*. (p. 148). Routledge.

²⁰ Brumann C. (2017). *How to Be Authentic in the UNESCO World Heritage System: Copies, Replicas, Reconstructions, and Renovations in a Global Conservation Arena*. In *The Transformative Power of the Copy*. (pp. 276-277). Heidelberg University Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.17885/HEIUP.195.C1640>.

In Tokyo, the apparent lack of preservation stems more from neglect than intentional strategy²¹. The city's historical landscape exists primarily in areas that survived 20th-century disasters²². According to Jinnai Hidenobu, Tokyo's historical framework persists in its road networks, waterways, urban tissue, and land use patterns²³.

In an interview, Kengo Kuma describes Tokyo as consisting of multiple “Tokyos”²⁴, suggesting a multi-layered urban identity that operates beyond single planning principles. This Eurocentric framework of the Venice Charter, developed primarily for post-WWII European monuments, lacks the necessary means to approach the cultural practices, traditions, and community narratives that characterize Asian urban contexts. As Brumann²⁵ notes, while the Charter has been influential, its principles exhibit clear biases toward monumental aesthetics and material integrity that fails to adequately address the multifaceted nature of cultural heritage in contemporary urban landscapes like Tokyo.

4. The commons of Yanesen

In the Yanaka, Nezu and Sendagi areas (collectively Yanesen), preservation occurred through machizukuri (community development). The Local Magazine YaNeSen [Chiiki Zasshi Yanaka Nezu Sendagi] played a vital role in fostering historical awareness and developing a shared identity among these localities. The magazine and its writers led a machizukuri in the area, independent of government initiatives²⁶. It established an imagined community among the three neighbourhoods based on their historical and local significance.

As part of this research, an ethnographic methodology was employed to examine the mundane and ephemeral aspects of Yanesen's urban fabric. Field observations were conducted throughout the neighbourhood to document the physical characteristics, everyday uses, and evolving nature of these spaces. The purpose was to gain a grounded understanding of how residents engage with and ascribe meaning to the built environment. Top-down, expert-driven conservation models often overlook the nuanced narratives, practices, and place-based meanings ascribed to urban

²¹ Waley P. (2012). Who Cares about the Past in Today's Tokyo?, [in:] C. Brumann, E. Schulz (Eds.), *Urban spaces in Japan: Cultural and social perspectives*. Routledge; Sand J. (2013). *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²² Muminović M., Radović D., Almazán J., (2013). On Innovative Practices Which Contribute to Preservation of the Place Identity: The Example of Yanesen, Tokyo. *Journal of Civil Engineering and Architecture* 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.17265/1934-7359/2013.03.009>.

²³ Hosei University Research Center for Edo-Tokyo Studies, Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering and Design, Hosei University, SCI-Arc, Politecnico di Torino (2019): *Edo-Tokyo, Challenging the Urban Fabric Ueno Hongo Yanaka Nezu Shitaya*. Shokokusha Publishing.

²⁴ Radović D., Boontharm D. (Eds.). (2012). *Measuring the Non-Measurable 01*. Small Tokyo. flick studio.

²⁵ Brumann C. (2018). Anthropological Utopia, Closet Eurocentrism, and Culture Chaos in the UNESCO World Heritage Arena. *Anthropological Quarterly* 91(4), (p. 1210). <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2018.0063>.

²⁶ Sand J. (2013). *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

environments by local communities²⁷. Additionally, an analysis of the YaNeSen magazine was conducted to identify where the cultural memory of the city can be found through the lenses of local citizens.

The success of the civil society's local preservation movement can be seen in the case of Shinobazu Pond, located south of Yanaka. In 1986, officials from Taito Ward published a redevelopment plan in a local magazine²⁸. The initial plan proposed the construction of a new car park beneath the lake, which would have necessitated the draining of the lake. However, due to strong opposition, a smaller-scale car park plan was put forward. Despite this, the influential residents of the Yanesen area remained steadfast in their opposition to the municipal government's development proposals, citing concerns over potential damage to the pond's wildlife. They argued that car park construction was unnecessary in the area. Due to strong local resistance and opposition to the development plans, the proposal for parking construction was dropped in 1997. However, this is a unique case in the preservation history of Yanesen.

YaNeSen magazine made the local community an object of aesthetic and intellectual interest by writing history, investigating, interviewing, and chronicling the neighbourhood. Its focus on locality, both as a bounded place on the map and as a framework for action, defined its purpose and impact. The publication redefined the local area by carefully selecting its boundaries and name. The magazine demonstrated a strategy of promoting and preserving local culture through its production and distribution. Residents were interviewed, essays were solicited from writers in the area, and illustrations were featured by artists from the community.

The preservation practices in the Yanesen area of Tokyo are heavily influenced by the local society, which fosters a powerful sense of local identity and attachment to the living environment²⁹. However, the current situation in the three neighbourhoods demonstrates that civil society's efforts and machizukuri movements are not all-powerful entities that can withstand governmental initiatives.

²⁷ Muminović M. (2014). Ordinary Place Identity: Conservation of Identity in Tokyo, [in:] H. C. Kiang, O. C. Garcia-Villalba, Z. Ye (Eds.), *Asian Urban Places*. Great Asian Street Symposium GASS2014 (p. 238). National University of Singapore; Sand J. (2020), Introduction: Asian Cities and Urban Settlers. *City & Society* (32), (pp. 368-374). <https://doi.org/10.1111/ciso.12294>; Salemink O. (2021). Introduction: Heritagizing Asian cities: space, memory, and vernacular heritage practices. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27(8), (pp. 769-776). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2021.1890186>.

²⁸ Waley P. (2012). Who Cares about the Past in Today's Tokyo?, [in:] C. Brumann, E. Schulz (Eds.), *Urban spaces in Japan: Cultural and social perspectives*. Routledge; Sand J. (2013). *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁹ Sand J. (2013). *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

5. Participatory observation at temporary public places with Studio Gross

5.1 *PARK-PLATZ-Urban Walks in Tokyo*

This case study employed participatory observation techniques through direct engagement with Studio Gross, an architectural atelier in Tokyo's Kumano-mae Shopping Street. Studio Gross's multidisciplinary approach incorporates artistic interventions while prioritizing connections with neighbourhood residents, providing insights into the lived experiences and socio-cultural dynamics that shape Tokyo's urban landscape. By combining field observations and participatory observations, this study aimed to develop a more nuanced and grounded understanding of the significance of Tokyo's mundane and ephemeral built environments, going beyond traditional architectural expertise.

Studio Gross collaborated with the Goethe-Institut East Asia to organise an event titled PARK-PLATZ³⁰ in Tokyo on 24 September 2023 as an entire day event and intervention. This event was inspired by the Strollology movement, which was developed by Annemarie and Lucius Burckhardt in Germany. Strollology is a field of study that examines the perception and meaning of urban landscapes through walking-based interventions and artistic actions. The PARK-PLATZ event aimed to create temporary public spaces by re-appropriating parking lots in a local neighbourhood where the atelier is located. The objective was to transform these typically private spaces into opportunities for placemaking, allowing people to linger, sit, rest, mingle, chat, and experience their urban environment in a more mindful way.

For PARK-PLATZ, Studio Gross designed and constructed a special vehicle to traverse the numerous parking lots of their neighbourhood. During the process of their movement, they created temporary public spaces as a form of occupying the parking lots. The event featured artistic interventions and interactive elements that disrupted the everyday routines of urban life and prompted a shift in how people perceive and engage with the city around them. By reclaiming these residual parking spaces, even if only temporarily, PARK-PLATZ aimed to foster community connections, enable placemaking, and critically examine Tokyo's unique urban morphology where public space is limited. The event embodied the principles of Strollology by using design interventions to construct new narratives and experiences within the built environment.

5.2 *Observation and Analysis*

PARK-PLATZ challenged the monument-centric biases of the Venice Charter by temporarily transforming parking lots into vibrant public spaces through a specially designed vehicle. Where the Charter emphasizes permanent preservation, PARK-PLATZ created ephemeral social spaces that gained significance through community interaction rather than architectural permanence. The project's artistic interventions and interactive elements disrupted everyday urban routines, demonstrating how cultural value can emerge through temporary use and transformation

³⁰ More information can be found on the Goethe-Institut East Asia website: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/tw/en/m/kul/sup/urb/ppl.html#slide0> (retrieved April 23, 2024).

rather than static preservation. Through this approach, PARK-PLATZ showed that heritage significance can reside in the dynamic ways communities engage with ordinary spaces, rather than solely in the physical preservation of monumental architecture. Instead, it celebrated the ephemeral, vernacular, and community-embedded aspects of Tokyo's built heritage that are often overlooked. This placemaking intervention demonstrated an acute understanding of the localised narratives, everyday practices, and socio-cultural dynamics that imbue the city's spaces with meaning.

Furthermore, PARK-PLATZ's participatory approach, facilitated by Studio Gross's embeddedness within the local context, reflected the proposed need for multidisciplinary and community-centric practices that extend beyond insular architectural expertise. By fostering direct engagement with residents and tapping into localised knowledge systems, PARK-PLATZ unveiled nuanced dimensions of Tokyo's lived urban heritage that traditional, top-down conservation methodologies often overlook. PARK-PLATZ's ephemeral yet impactful nature materialised an alternative paradigm for architectural heritage conservation. This paradigm resonates with the complexities of Tokyo's ever-evolving built environment and the multivalent ways in which its diverse communities inhabit, navigate, and ascribe meaning to space. By temporarily transforming parking lots into vibrant public spaces, this intervention challenged the Venice Charter's emphasis on permanence and material authenticity, instead celebrating the ephemeral and adaptive nature of Tokyo's urban fabric.

6. Considerations on the Cases and Their Applications

The case studies of Yanesen and PARK-PLATZ illuminate how heritage conservation practices in Tokyo challenge and transcend the monument-centric approach of the Venice Charter. Through careful examination of these cases, we can trace how community engagement, everyday spaces, and temporal interventions contribute to meaningful heritage preservation in contemporary urban contexts³¹.

The Yanesen case proves how cultural significance often resides in vernacular spaces rather than monumental architecture³². The YaNeSen magazine's documentation of local businesses, residences, and community spaces revealed how cultural memory becomes embedded in the fabric of daily life. This was particularly evident in the magazine's approach to neighbourhood documentation – through interviews with residents, features on local artists, and careful

³¹ Salemink O. (2021). Introduction: Heritagizing Asian cities: space, memory, and vernacular heritage practices. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27(8), (pp. 769-776). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2021.1890186>; Taylor K. (2004). Cultural heritage management: A possible role for charters and principles in Asia. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 10(5), (pp. 417-433). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1352725042000299045>.

³² Sand J. (2013). *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

attention to ordinary spaces that might otherwise be overlooked³³. The successful preservation of Shinobazu Pond (1986-1997) further illustrated this point, as residents mobilized to protect not a historic monument, but a natural space integral to their neighbourhood's identity and daily life³⁴.

The PARK-PLATZ intervention provides compelling evidence for an alternative approach to urban heritage – one that embraces transformation and temporary activation rather than permanent preservation³⁵. By successfully transforming parking lots into vibrant public spaces, the project demonstrated how cultural significance can emerge through creative reuse rather than static conservation. Studio Gross's embedded position in the Kumano-mae Shopping Street allowed them to understand and respond to local contexts in ways that traditional preservation approaches might miss³⁶. Their integration of Strollology principles with architectural intervention showed how cross-disciplinary approaches can enrich our understanding and activation of urban spaces.

Together, these cases suggest that effective heritage conservation in contemporary urban contexts requires a fundamental shift from the Venice Charter's emphasis on material authenticity and expert authority³⁷. The success of both Yanesen's preservation efforts and PARK-PLATZ's interventions demonstrates that heritage value emerges through active community engagement with space rather than passive preservation of physical structures³⁸. This understanding points toward a more inclusive and dynamic approach to heritage conservation – one that recognizes the cultural significance of everyday spaces, embraces transformation as part of the urban heritage process, and prioritizes community narratives and needs³⁹.

³³ Sand J. (2013). *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Muminović M., Radović D., Almazán J., (2013). On Innovative Practices Which Contribute to Preservation of the Place Identity: The Example of Yanesen, Tokyo. *Journal of Civil Engineering and Architecture* 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.17265/1934-7359/2013.03.009>.

³⁴ Sorensen A. (2009). Neighborhood Streets as Meaningful Spaces: Claiming Rights to Shared Spaces in Tokyo. *City & Society* 21(2), (pp. 207–229). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-744X.2009.01022.x>.

³⁵ Smith L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263>.

³⁶ Almazán J., Studioblab. (2022). *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City*. Oro Editions.

³⁷ Jokilehto J. (2021). Observations on Concepts in the Venice Charter. *Conversaciones...*(11). (pp. 353–363). [fecha de Consulta 18 de Marzo de 2024]. ISSN: 2594-0813. Disponible <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/317/3173864024/>; Labadi S. (2010). World Heritage, authenticity and post-authenticity: International and national perspectives, [in:] S. Labadi, C. Long (Eds.), *Heritage and Globalisation (Key Issues in Cultural Heritage)*. Routledge.

³⁸ Zukin S. (2012). The social production of urban cultural heritage: Identity and ecosystem on an Amsterdam shopping street. *City, Culture and Society* 3(4), (pp. 281–291). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2012.10.002>.

³⁹ Salemink O. (2021). Introduction: Heritagizing Asian cities: space, memory, and vernacular heritage practices. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27(8), (pp. 769-776). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2021.1890186>.

This evidence from Tokyo's urban context suggests a framework for heritage conservation that better serves contemporary cities⁴⁰. Such an approach would recognize that cultural significance often resides in the ordinary and ephemeral aspects of urban life, that transformation and adaptation can enhance rather than diminish heritage value, and that community engagement is essential to meaningful preservation⁴¹. While this represents a departure from the Venice Charter's principles, it offers a more nuanced and effective approach to preserving the complex cultural heritage of contemporary urban environments⁴².

7. Conclusion

The case studies demonstrate how contemporary cities require preservation frameworks that can accommodate both physical and intangible aspects of cultural heritage. In Tokyo, where the urban fabric is characterized by constant renewal and transformation, the rigidity of traditional conservation approaches proves inadequate⁴³. Instead, successful preservation efforts emerge through community engagement, adaptive reuse, and recognition of vernacular spaces as repositories of cultural memory⁴⁴.

As we approach the 60th anniversary of the Venice Charter, this research suggests that while the Charter's historical significance should be acknowledged, its principles require substantial reframing to address contemporary urban realities⁴⁵. The examples from Tokyo illustrate how heritage conservation can move beyond material authenticity to embrace the dynamic relationships between people and their built environments⁴⁶. This shift necessitates multidisciplinary approaches that can capture the nuanced ways communities engage with and derive meaning from their surroundings.

⁴⁰ Imai H. (2017). *Tokyo Roji: The Diversity and Versatility of Alleys in a City in Transition* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315669281>; Gibert-Flutre M., Imai H. (2020). *Asian Alleyways: An Urban Vernacular in Times of Globalization*. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463729604>.

⁴¹ Sand J. (2020), Introduction: Asian Cities and Urban Settlers. *City & Society* 32), (pp. 368-374). <https://doi.org/10.1111/ciso.12294>.

⁴² Jokilehto J. (2021). Observations on Concepts in the Venice Charter. *Conversaciones...*(11). (pp. 353-363). [fecha de Consulta 18 de Marzo de 2024]. ISSN: 2594-0813. Disponible <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/317/3173864024/>; Rojas E. (2014). Historic Cities and the Venice Charter: Contributions to the Sustainable Preservation of Urban Heritage. *Change Over Time* 4(2), (pp. 196-203). <https://doi.org/10.1353/cot.2014.0013>.

⁴³ Almazán J., Studiolar. (2022). *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City*. Oro Editions.

⁴⁴ Muminović M. (2014). Ordinary Place Identity: Conservation of Identity in Tokyo, [in:] H. C. Kiang, O. C. Garcia-Villalba, Z. Ye (Eds.), *Asian Urban Places*. Great Asian Street Symposium GASS2014 (p. 238). National University of Singapore; Imai H. (2017). *Tokyo Roji: The Diversity and Versatility of Alleys in a City in Transition* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315669281>.

⁴⁵ Jokilehto J. (2021). Observations on Concepts in the Venice Charter. *Conversaciones...*(11). (pp. 353-363). [fecha de Consulta 18 de Marzo de 2024]. ISSN: 2594-0813. Disponible <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/317/3173864024/>.

⁴⁶ Zukin S. (2012). The social production of urban cultural heritage: Identity and ecosystem on an Amsterdam shopping street. *City, Culture and Society* 3(4), (pp. 281-291). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2012.10.002>.

The experience of Tokyo teaches us that authentic urban heritage lies not just in exceptional monuments but in the intricate tapestry of everyday spaces, community practices, and evolving urban narratives. As cities worldwide face increasing pressures from globalization and development, this expanded understanding of heritage becomes crucial for preserving the cultural vitality of urban communities. Through this lens, heritage conservation becomes not just about preserving the past but about sustaining the living cultural traditions that give cities their distinctive character and meaning.

In the words of Fumihiko Maki that opened this exploration, "The contemporary city is a unique reality for each individual"⁴⁷. This research proves that heritage conservation must similarly embrace the multiplicity of urban experiences and meanings, moving beyond singular narratives of architectural value to recognize the diverse ways in which communities construct and maintain their cultural heritage. In doing so, we can develop more responsive and inclusive approaches to preservation that truly serve the needs of contemporary urban societies.

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⁴⁷ Maki F. (2008). *Nurturing Dreams: Collected Essays on Architecture and the City*. The MIT Press. (p. 91).

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