

The Role Of Convenience Stores as Public Space

学籍番号 47-106817
氏 名 Burgess, Andrew Ian
指導教員 大野 秀敏 教授

In the 1990's reform of the public sector was initiated under Prime Minister Hashimoto to incorporate aspects of private management into public services in an effort to take advantage of perceived efficiencies. The *Declaration of "New Public Commons"* introduced by the Hatoyama government calls for a deepening relationship between private and public sectors to solve local issues by building a society of mutual support. *Distribution Systems in the Context of Local Communities* published in May 2010 by Study Group on the Role of Distribution Systems in Community Infrastructure, set up by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry recognises the role of the distribution sector as a social infrastructure with the potential to address current social issues faced by Japan concerning the aging society and shrinking population. This document outlines the distribution sectors relationship to the National Spatial Planning and the integration of public services under the New Public mandate. Convenience stores are cited throughout the document.

Typologically speaking, convenience stores are in a unique position to resist pressures caused by population shrinkage and an aging society that face modern Japan. The ontology of convenience stores is in decentralisation and coverage; while other commercial and public entities tend to centralise and concentrate, convenience stores by their nature spread and disperse. They are able to transcend suburban and urban, commercial and residential boundaries. However, while thousands of convenience stores are scattered across Japan, they are neither universal nor uniformly distributed. As such they exist as an architectural space finely balanced between community accessibility and market forces.

The goal of this research is to understand the role of convenience stores as public space, the role convenience stores play as social infrastructure, and assess the ability of convenience stores to act as public spaces in an effort to understand how convenience stores, as a mechanism and as a form, contribute to the idea of public space.

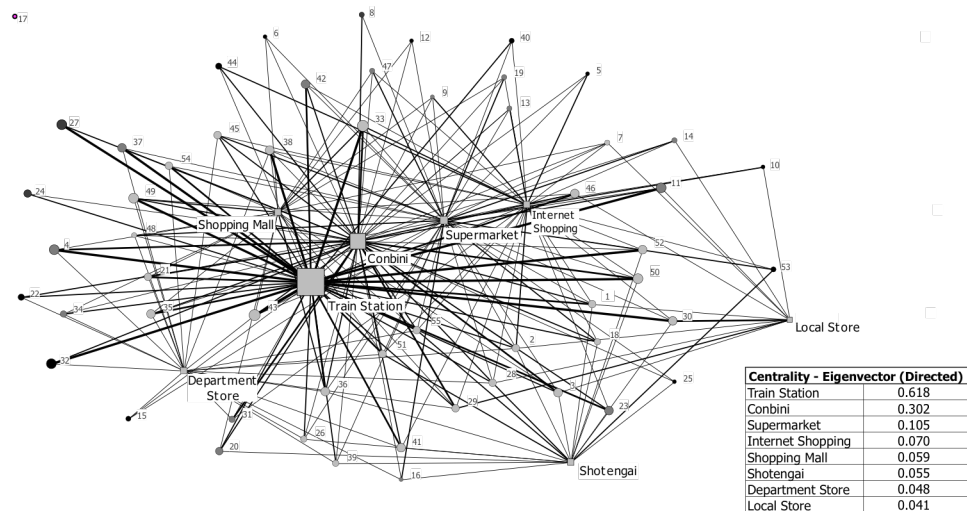


Figure 1. Social Network Diagram of Everyday Spaces by Number of Visits.

Created with Ucinet 6 and Netdraw (Spring-embedded scaling). Node size reflects centrality (eigenvector). The thickness of the lines reflects the weight of the ties, in this case valued by number of visits. (source: online survey conducted 1 June 2012 - 30 June 2012).

As Japan continues to transform from a production-based society, as manufacturing moves offshore and the service sector increases, towards a consumptive society the role of retail and leisure space as generators of social relations continues to grow in importance. Japan has one of the highest rates of commercial space in the world and convenience stores make up a large part of this. Their ability to transcend commercial/residential, urban/suburban/rural boundaries and resist pressures caused by shrinkage has great influence on contemporary Japanese life.

One important aspect of public space is its role in forming networks. Networks are the basis of social structure. Therefore how networks are formed, our position in them, and our ability to influence them are key

aspects to the construction and functioning of society. This research analyses the structure of public space, and what it enables or restricts us from doing.

Everyday spaces are important for the construction of weak ties. A survey of 56 people with known ties was carried out. Respondents were asked to provide information on their use of everyday spaces over the previous week in terms of the number of time each space was visited and the amount of time. From this social network analysis was carried out using a two-mode analysis to understand the underlying structures that these spaces support. The analysis showed train stations (0.618) and convenience stores (0.302) have high (eigenvector) centrality (Fig. 1).

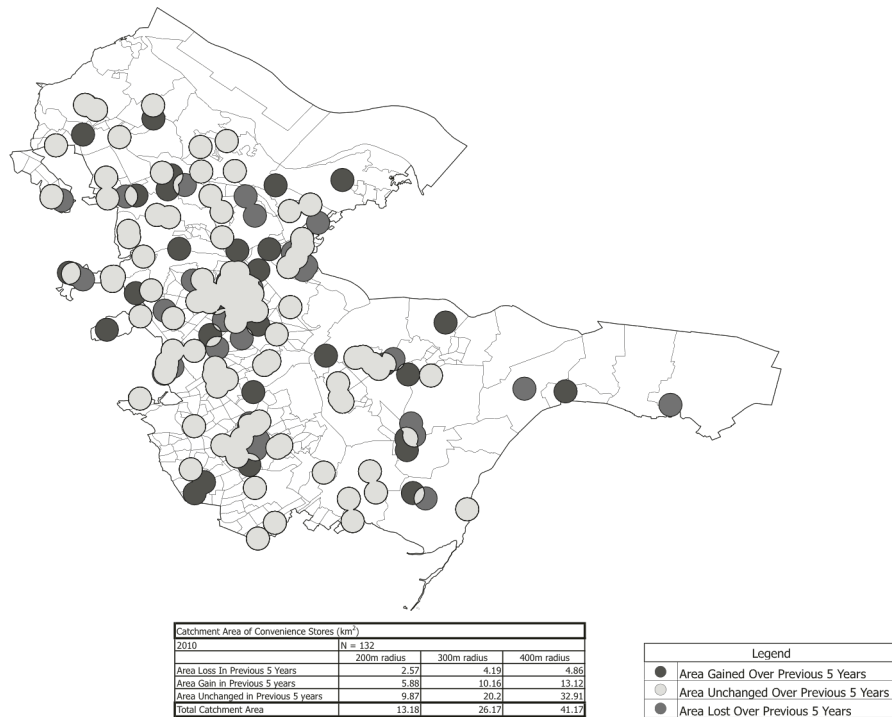


Figure 2. The Catchment Area of Convenience Stores (Kashiwa City 2005)

The effective coverage of convenience stores shows the movement of the catchment area of convenience stores. The diagram shows a catchment area of 300m radius (source: NTT Townpage Business Phone directory 2005).

Secondly convenience stores were analysed in terms of their location. On average convenience stores are more dispersed than supermarkets and grocery stores by calculated Nearest Neighbour Index values. However, convenience stores were located closer to transportation routes than supermarkets and grocery stores by 52m on average suggesting that they are used en route rather than as destinations in themselves. The ongoing movement and transformation of convenience stores can be seen in an analysis of catchment area which shows the accessibility of convenience stores in real terms (Fig 2.).

This suggests that convenience stores occupy a paradoxical position by being both central and peripheral at the same time. This has some similarities with Amino's concept of the public sphere which is based on social non-attachment. Washizu also notes that relationships in convenience stores are similar to *keitai* conversations in that they are temporary and never reflected on afterwards. This is the opposite of conventional commercial space where shop owners try to establish long-term relationships.

Convenience stores resist this kind of interaction which helps to make them more accessible. This, as well as standardised design allows the public to appropriate them

for their own use. One example of this in Safe Station, which is now a formalised activity by convenience stores to provide refuge for people in danger.

This research searches for the location of convenience stores to try understand the position that convenience stores occupy in the community. By understanding the potential of convenience stores to adapt and be appropriated we can understand their relationship to community. Understanding this kind of commercial space is important for understanding the nature of contemporary Japanese society.

The socio-cultural space of convenience stores occupies a contradictory central but peripheral role in Japanese society which suggests the emergence of a new kind of public space. Understanding the way in which convenience stores act as public space is essential in the planning of cities in a shifting economic and political landscape.

Selected Bibliography

Hatoyama, Y. et al. (2010) **Declaration of “New Public Commons”** (June 4, 2010) New Public Commons Roundtable, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan.

Hayashi, K. (2006) **The ‘Public’ in Japan**. *Theory, Culture & Society* 23(2-3) pg 615-616.

Jacobs, J. (1992) **The Death And Life of Great American Cities**. Vintage Books 1st ed. Random House, New York 1961.

Sennet, R. (1992) **The Fall of Public Man**. W.W. Norton & Co., New York.

Simmel, G. (1903) **The Metropolis and Mental Life**. Cited in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. ed. Leach, N. Routledge, Oxon 1997.

Washizu, T. (2008) **Koukyou Kukan Toshite No Konbini: Shinka Suru Shisutemu 24 Jikan 365 Nichi**. Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., Japan.

Konbiniensu Sutoa Manuaru (1972) *The Distribution Economics Institute of Japan*, Japan.