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## TITLE PAGE

### **The service hub as bypassed social infrastructure: Evidence from inner-city Osaka**

AUTHORS: G DeVerteuil, Cardiff University

Reader of Social Geography, School of Geography and Planning  
Cardiff University  
Cardiff UK CF10 3WA  
Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 6089  
Email: [deverteuilg@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:deverteuilg@cardiff.ac.uk)

J Kiener, Saitama University

Associate Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Saitama University  
Shimo-Okubo 255, Sakura-ku, Saitama-shi, 338-8570 JAPAN  
Tel: +81 (0)48 858 3071  
Email: [johannes@mail.saitama-u.ac.jp](mailto:johannes@mail.saitama-u.ac.jp)

T Mizuuchi, Osaka City University

[Urban Research Plaza \(Global COE Program\)](#), and  
[Department of Geography](#), Osaka City University  
Sugimoto, Sumiyoshi-ku, Osaka-shi, 558-8585, JAPAN  
[toshio.mizuuchi@gmail.com](mailto:toshio.mizuuchi@gmail.com)

**TITLE: The service hub as bypassed social infrastructure: Evidence from inner-city Osaka**

We shed light on understudied social infrastructure by focusing on the service hub, those conspicuous clusters of voluntary sector organizations designed to help the most vulnerable urban populations. Using Kamagasaki, Osaka as an exploratory case study, we find that the service hub acts as a distinctly inner-city social infrastructure marked by very close proximity of clients and services, as well as high accessibility, mutuality and provisionality, and clear motivations to ensure day-to-day survival. But the conversation between service hub and social infrastructure indicates that our case study must be understood as a *bypassed infrastructure*, unsung and out-of-sync with the market (but increasingly less so with the state). Kamagasaki suggested as social infrastructure of castoffs, standing apart and increasingly incompatible with current urbanism and its emphasis on privatization, gentrification and neoliberal co-optation, or even with the older 'infrastructural ideal' of the Fordist era, with its emphasis on large-scale universality.

**KEYWORDS:** Infrastructure; social infrastructure; Japan; service hub; voluntary sector

## INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure has become an increasingly central theme within urban studies and urban geography, particularly in the wake of Graham and Marvin's (2001) *Splintering Urbanism*. In that landmark book, the authors studied networked infrastructure as a lens into current urbanity, a critical perspective on cities and their increasingly fragmented nature where only some areas are bounded together while others are bypassed. This contrasted sharply with the universalistic, bundled infrastructure of the immediate post-war period, when the state monopolized the provision of large-scale infrastructure. Building on these insights, some urbanists now talk of an 'infrastructural turn' (Dodson, 2015): of infrastructure underwriting urbanity and anchoring urban life (McFarlane & Silver, 2017); of infrastructure as a verb (Wiig & Silver, 2019); and of infrastructure as an essential component of citizenship (Lemanski, 2018). Running through these claims is the idea that infrastructure always represents "embedded instruments of power, dominance and (attempted) social control" (Graham and Marvin, 2001, p. 1) that continue to offer important clues to how cities are made and experienced.

In this paper, we explore instances of more unsung, bottom-up infrastructure that are distinctly *social* in nature. This social infrastructure is, according to Klinenberg (2018, p. 5), "informal, incremental, peopled...infrastructure that supports social reproduction in cities". He goes on to underline that social infrastructure are "physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact", not social capital "but the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbors; when degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves" (2018, p. 5). While certain social infrastructure has attracted some academic attention, ranging from public institutions such as libraries and social housing to commerce, recreational activities and religious facilities (Huron, 2019; Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019; Vasudevan, 2017), all of which are relatively commonly distributed across cities, we explore the 'service hub', which is far less common yet conspicuous.

We define service hubs as inner-city clusters of voluntary sector organizations designed to help the most vulnerable populations – the homeless, individuals with mental illness, the precariously-housed, and substance abusers in treatment (DeVerteuil, 2015). The voluntary sector usually consists of formal organizations that lie outside of the state, the market and informal local communities and families, usually focused on caring and sustaining the vulnerable (DeVerteuil et al., 2020). Like most (potential) social infrastructure, service hubs are very much "overlooked and undervalued" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 1), and part of this paper's mission is to focus more attention on 'poor people's infrastructure' (Blomley, 2008), of service hubs as (social) infrastructure of last resort but also of everyday survival. Specifically, recasting service hubs as social infrastructure enables a productive conversation and brings new insights to both concepts. Moreover, this paper is equally concerned with *how* and *why* the service hub may act as social infrastructure, once we have affirmed *whether* the service hub constitutes social infrastructure via the inner workings of its organizations.

Traditionally, the study of service hubs has focused on their ability to sustain the lives of the vulnerable, but also the hub's own survival in a context of rampant inner-city

gentrification and state-sponsored redevelopment (Dear et al., 1994; DeVerteuil, 2015; Evans & DeVerteuil, 2018; Evans et al., 2019). The ‘service hub as social infrastructure’, however, has so far eluded systematic scrutiny, and is certainly worthy of further investigation. Using Kamagasaki, Osaka as an exploratory case study, we find that the service hub acts as a distinctly inner-city social infrastructure marked by very close proximity of clients and services, as well as high accessibility, mutuality and provisionality. But it must also be understood as a *bypassed infrastructure*, out-of-sync with the market but less so with the state, which has partly co-opted the DIY origins of the service hub. The service hub is a social infrastructure of castoffs, standing apart and increasingly incompatible with current urbanism and its emphasis on privatization, gentrification and neoliberal co-optation, or even with the older ‘infrastructural ideal’ of the Fordist era, with its emphasis on large-scale universality and bundled services. In the conclusions, we advance a more nuanced, Japanese version of the service hub as social infrastructure.

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW: KEY COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Social infrastructure is a term promoted by Klinenberg (2018), but has antecedents in earlier work on self-provisioned infrastructure across a wide variety of urban contexts, especially the Global South (e.g. Roy, 2011; Simone, 2004). We isolate three prominent components from the wider (social) infrastructural literature that will be applied to the case study of the service hub. First and foremost, as a shared physical environment, social infrastructure binds the spatial and social, particularly important in this age of social fragmentation, and essentially acts as a key resource for the poor who tend to be more place-bound and dependent on their immediate urban spaces (DeVerteuil, 2011). This relates to Blomley (2008) and his focus on the (social) infrastructure of the poor, and Benjamin’s idea of ‘occupancy urbanism’ (2008, p. 719), in which

poor groups, claiming public services and safeguarding territorial claims, open up political spaces that appropriate institutions and fuel an economy that builds complex alliances...while engaging the state, these locality politics remain autonomous of it.

In this sense, the very materiality of the built environment underpins social cohesion: “social infrastructure is crucially important, because local, face-to-face interactions...are the building blocks of all public life” (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 5). It promotes a place-based understanding of sociality “where strangers can meet and mix with others with whom they share their neighbourhoods and cities” (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 2) and thus anchored to specific places. Taking this insight further, some have argued that social infrastructure is particularly attuned to the (denser) inner city (Simone, 2004), an “ill-defined territory [that] retains some usefulness when designating generally denser, older and more heterogeneous urban areas near the original core” (DeVerteuil, 2015, p. 12). Even in an age of polycentric and unbounded urbanism, the inner city acts as a deep reservoir of previous layers of public investment – social housing in particular - but also other ‘helping resources’ for the urban poor via the voluntary sector for the vulnerable, including homeless shelters, mental health drop-ins and treatment centers. This contrasts with the more exclusive nature of social infrastructure in wealthier areas – whether in the inner city or in the suburbs.

And so the density, proximity, concentration, diversity and accessibility of these services (and residents) continue to structure the ‘geographies of help’ in most major cities. As DeFilippis and North (2004, p.85) argued with regards to defending social housing in London,

at the heart of a global city, population density, geographical proximity, and the palimpsest of layered traditions of urban political action formed a dense and rich sedimented network of information, advice, support, and resources that community activists could call upon.

This inner-city proclivity is further borne out by the metropolitan geography of the voluntary sector (also known as the third sector, or non-profit sector), a key provider of social infrastructure. Inner London had 20% more voluntary sector organizations per capita than Greater London as a whole, while Inner Sydney had over three times more organizations per capita when compared to the metropolitan area as a whole (DeVerteuil, 2015, p. 63). In this sense, the socio-spatial nature of social infrastructure is multi-layered and hard-won, requiring enormous effort to replace and replicate. As Latham and Layton (2019, p. 3) emphasized, social infrastructure is always about dense social connection, and this connection must occur ‘somewhere’ for it to be especially effective.

Second, social infrastructure promotes access to the widest population possible. Vulnerable populations “need an environment that’s not like every other environment they’ve ever known, that judges them, that takes advantage of them, that doesn’t want anything to do with them, doesn’t understand their role in society” (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 124). In effect, social infrastructure promotes social bonding over social mixing, and provides a ‘safe space’ for certain groups that have been rejected by so-called ‘mainstream society’. This can be related, as Klinenberg does (2018), to Fraser’s (1990) notion of ‘counterpublics’. To Fraser, counterpublics hold a dual character (1990, p. 68),

on the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.

Here she argues that subordinate groups express themselves and resist hegemonic, overarching notion of a single ‘public’ in particular places. Klinenberg (2018, p. 160) reasons that “despite...their insularity [counterpublics] are essential tools for civic engagement in unequal societies, because they give marginalized groups the private forum they need before engaging other groups”. In practice then, social infrastructure may act not only as a ‘safe space’ but also “spaces for developing oppositional or alternative politics, with active participation in economic and political decision-making and social change as larger goals” (Sziarto & Leitner, 2010, p. 383). At the very least, social infrastructure is generally understood as non-excluding, though not always universally-provided, as the next component will make clear. Latham and Layton (2019: 8) argue that accessibility to a wide swathe of society is key to ensuring the publicness of social infrastructure.

Third, much (but certainly not all) current social infrastructure tends to be a holdover from a more publicly-funded time when infrastructure was more universal and accessible, and more equitably distributed across a wide variety of urban neighborhoods (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Latham and Layton (2019) underlined the importance of public provisioning

for social infrastructure – that the state, or some other collectivity (such as the voluntary sector), can provide social infrastructure for public and private use. Interestingly, the post-Fordist period has not seen an unbundling of certain publicly-provided social infrastructure, from hospitals to libraries to other forms of the ‘foundational economy’ (Bentham et al, 2013). The foundational economy distributes health services, education, utilities and food, and is intensely localized and largely sheltered from global economic gyrations, including off-shoring and boom-bust episodes. The foundational economy essentially underpins social infrastructure, providing the basics of life at the local scale and directly supported by a mix of state and voluntary resources in what some call the ‘grounded city’ (Engelen et al, 2017). By meeting the everyday needs of citizens for housing, utilities and mobility, the foundational economy is the part of a city’s economy that stabilizes urban development.

This stands in stark contrast with ‘accelerating’ infrastructure that has been unbundled from the public interest and the foundational economy, and through which locals are bypassed entirely in favour of serving (global) elites. In the post-Fordist era, large-scale, state-provided and universally-accessible infrastructure became increasingly fragmented, yielding a splintering of city spaces through new-built, parallel infrastructure networks that connects valued users but bypasses non-users and places (Graham & Marvin, 2001). The decline of the state-monopolized, modern infrastructural ideals of non-excludability, the provision of public goods, and collective consumption, marooned much mid-20<sup>th</sup> century social infrastructure as a residual of a previous ‘welfare’ city. In this regard, Lemanski (2018, p. 353) sees infrastructure as “tool of social power that can extend and perpetuate inequality”, while for Rodgers and O’Neill (2012, p. 402),

infrastructure is a key factor shaping people’s direct relationships both with each other and with their environment in cities...It demarcates both literally and figuratively which points in urban contexts can and should be connected, and which should not, the kinds of people and goods that can and should circulate easily, and which should stay put, and who can and should be integrated within the city, and who should be left outside of it, for example.

In the next sections, we qualify the case study of the service hub as a social infrastructure following these three components: their inherently socio-spatial nature, high accessibility to the poor, and the degree of bundling/public provision. More specifically, we use interview material from service providers and their clients in Kamagasaki to better understand the extent to which the service hub is (1) a shared physical and social space, (2) accessible and non-excluding, and (3) a holdover from more public times when government were interested in providing blanket provision across the city. We explore these three components without any expectations that they will actually apply to the case study, only with the aim that the conversation between service hub and social infrastructure generates new insights into each, set within a distinctly inner-city, Japanese urban context.

## **CASE STUDY AND METHODS**

The case study of Kamagasaki, Osaka was chosen for its relatively understudied stature within Anglophone urban geography, but also more specifically as a conspicuous service hub that can expand (and perhaps challenge) our largely North American

understandings of service hubs, from Los Angeles (e.g. DeVerteuil, 2015; Stuart, 2014) to Edmonton (Evans et al., 2018), Vancouver (Burnett, 2014), and San Francisco (Murphy, 2009). All of these North American hubs began quite informally but have increasingly been managed by the state since the 1980s. Kamagasaki was also chosen because of its potential applicability as social infrastructure, structured by the three key components identified in the literature review. Located to the southwest of the elevated railway loop that encircles Central Osaka, Kamagasaki is a typical service hub, but one that operates not only at the scale of Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto urban region – which has as many people as Greater Los Angeles, yet disproportionately ignored in urban studies (Kanai et al, 2018) - but at the scale of Japan itself. Kamagasaki is literally a national-scale service hub for those without obvious support, yet it rarely shows up on map<sup>1</sup>. Its location is very much at the edge of redeveloping areas, in this case Abeno Redevelopment District in its east and the Hoshino Resort Hotel, which is built in its north.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Kamagasaki has always been a socially marginal area. Already at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the area held a considerable amount of cheap inns, the predecessor of flophouses which later dominated the area. After its destruction in the Second World War, it emerged again as a harbor for people who had lost their homes in the aftermath of the war. Day laborers and those workers displaced by containerization at the port began to flock to the area, drawn in by cheap housing and easy access to the day labourer market, which was especially boosted by the booming postwar construction industry. At the same time, however, the difficult conditions under which day laborers had to live led to social unrest. Exploited by crime syndicates and harassed by the police, their anger erupted in a series of violent riots. What came out of this crucial period was a hodge-podge of state interventions complemented by the voluntary sector that continue to shape the service hub to this day.

The severity and frequency of these riots, together with the heightened demand for cheap labour during the run-up to Expo 1970 allowed the state (Osaka Prefecture, Osaka City) to intervene to improve the well-being of Kamagasaki residents, but also to confine them to a particular area of the city (Haraguchi, 2003). In order to do so, in 1966 the area was designated as the ‘Airin District’ (see Figure 1) with all policies concerning day laborers concentrated in it. This was spearheaded by the Arin General Center, a large facility that opened in 1970, housing the Airin Public Job Office, the Nishinari Worker Welfare Center and the Osaka Social Medical Center (Haraguchi, 2010). In addition, in 1971 the Municipal Rehabilitation Counselling Center was moved to the Airin District. It evaluated the eligibility for certain medical assistance services and provided practical advice and referral to medical and welfare facilities to people without address (Saga, 1998). In order to provide housing for day laborers, flophouse owners were encouraged to construct smaller rooms, resulting in the densification of the flophouse stock (Haraguchi, 2003). At the same time, the day laborer movement became more systematic and unionized. While they demanded more support from the government, they started to become active in support of their own community. The activities of the day laborer unions thereby spurred a more comprehensive survival infrastructure in Kamagasaki.

These union-provided DIY services, alongside tentative state interventions, were joined by an emerging (faith-based) voluntary sector (Shirahase, 2017). During the 1960s

Kamagasaki was discovered by foreign missionaries, marking the starting point of their contemporary activities (Saga, 1998). While these organizations were operating in the beginning separately, in 1970 they strengthened their cooperation by forming the predecessor of today's Kamagasaki Christian Cooperation and Friendship Organization. Based on the Christian philosophy of charity, they cater to the needs of the vulnerable and actively deal with the structures that create poverty and discrimination. In the beginning they provided services for day laborers and elderly people, like support for alcoholics or hospital visits. But by 1975 they joined the day laborer unions in their struggle for the "liberation of day laborers" and the "restoration of humanity". From then on, they became political active supporting petitions towards the government.

The 1990s and the bursting of the 'bubble-economy' produced crisis levels of homelessness nationally, many of whom flocked to the services in Kamagasaki (Saga, 1998). This led initially to a strengthening of its service function, when in 1994 a work program for elderly day laborers was introduced to mitigate spreading homelessness. A coalition of day laborer unions and the Kamagasaki Christian Cooperation and Friendship Organization was entrusted with several projects to support the homeless, such as temporary shelters and work support programs (Mizuuchi, 2016). This community organizing occurred alongside the strengthening of independent welfare support for homeless people. Initially the national 2002 Special Law on Temporary Measures to Support the Self-Reliance of Homeless People formed its basis. Under this law homeless self-reliance support centers were created which aimed to integrate clients into the regular job market. Although many of them could find only contract or part-time work, they were channelled away from day labor associated with service hubs. During the 2000s the scope of public assistance was adapted several times, making housing benefits more available for homeless people. In Kamagasaki, many flophouses were converted into apartments, catering to public assistance recipients, and sometimes taking the form of supportive housing that provides a wide range of welfare services to more long-term residents (Kiener, Kornatowski & Mizuuchi, 2018). In an attempt to reform the public assistance system in 2015, the Self-Reliance Support Law for Needy People was introduced as an additional layer of support alongside public assistance. This law provided the framework for homeless support, taking over the previously created homeless self-reliance support centers (Kiener & Mizuuchi, 2018). This development led to a gradual decrease in the number of homeless individuals, not just in Osaka but across Japan, and in direct contrast to growing numbers in places such as the USA (Marr, 2015).

Second, the Nishinari Special Ward Initiative was launched in 2012 by the former major Hashimoto Tōru, with the declared aim to transform Kamagasaki. This initiative allowed a certain amount of input from representatives of the local community and welfare organizations (Suzuki, 2016). Nevertheless, it was pointed out that critical voices were systematically excluded (Aoki, 2018), and that major decisions were made without public participation (Watanabe, 2019). Some of these policies were concerned with the creation of employment opportunities for homeless people and aged day laborers, and opportunities for social participation of public assistance recipients. But they also involved counter-measures against the illegal dumping of garbage, the illegal parking of bicycles (Shirahase, 2019), as well as the installation of CCTVs with the declared aim of reducing drug dealing. Some of these counter-measures were realized by a newly founded limited liability company. The police supported these activities by raising the fines on illegal garbage disposal in

Kamagasaki, or crackdowns on the day laborer second-hand market in order to prevent the selling of illegal copied DVDs (Suzuki, 2016). This was accompanied by the closing of the Municipal Rehabilitation Counselling Office in 2014 and the Airin General Center in 2019. Although the services that were provided by these facilities are still operating on a smaller scale today, the closings marked the dismantling of the Airin District’s original state interventions and major community pillars. In the community-building vision proposal published in 2018, the service hub was one of five programs for the area, further involving the creation of a better environment for children or the revitalization of commercial areas (Shirahase, 2019).

In September 2018, a total of twelve organizations were interviewed, alongside six client interviews. These organizations were selected to cover the range of support organizations in Kamagasaki, including those directly catering to the state as part of the Airin District (6, 9), those who had developed out of social movements such as the day laborer unions (3, 5, 8), the faith-based sector (2, 4, 10, 12), those providing for public assistance recipients (7, 11) and a local art organization (1). Three client interviews were done at the shelter of Organization 5, representing rough sleepers who use support mainly sporadically, and further three client interviews were done at the supportive house of Organization 7 representing people who receive more permanent support. In both cases the clients were selected by the staff. The interviews were conducted solely by us in the common room of the facility or the client’s private room. Taken as a whole, these twelve organizations and six clients act as a proxy for the entire Kamagasaki service hub. Given the focus of the case study, however, we did not interview other, non-helping agencies in the service hub (e.g. businesses).

Table 1: Organizational sample

No.	Primary services	Average number of clients per year	Funding sources	Organization type
1	Expression, counselling, health check ups	1,000-1,500	Funding from Osaka City, fees for café, guesthouse and expression	NPO
2	Lunch box, garage sale, place to stay during the day	6,500	Donation, umbrella organization	Church
3	Housing provision, sheltered employment	NA	Funding from Osaka City, apartment and other business	Stock company
4	Day center, home and hospital visits, legal and medical advice	91,000	Donations	Social welfare corporation
5	Sheltered employment, night shelter, day care center	NA	Funding from Osaka Prefecture and City, donations	NPO
6	Counselling and networking	1,200	Funding from the state	Social welfare corporation

7	Supportive housing	114	Housing business	Self-employed, NPO
8	Housing facilities for aged and handicapped people, home care, job support, medical facilities	2,000	Insurance and tax money designated for welfare services	Social welfare corporation
9	Work referral, job training, company counselling	150,000	Fundings from Osaka Prefecture and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare	Public interest incorporated foundation
10	Soup kitchen, housing, haircutting and shower	18,200	Donations, housing business, other churches	Church, stock company
11	Supportive housing	90	Housing business	Self-employed
12	Addiction services, outreach	8	Donations	Church

The interview instruments were translated from the original English text into Japanese, the language in which all the interviews were conducted. Transcripts were created from audio records, which were translated back into English. These English translations were the base for the subsequent analyses.

Analytically, we mapped our data collection onto the three key components of social infrastructure derived from the literature. First, in terms of the overlapping social-spatial aspect, we focused on the density of services in the service hub, and their relationship to the survival geographies of clientele. This involved asking organizations and clients to present their views on the spatiality of their organization and the service hub as a whole. Second, in terms of access, we asked about the degree and process of commodification versus de-commodification. This involved asking voluntary sector organizations and their clients about charging for services, the degree of non-excludability, clientele income, and the degree of integration with property system/ownership model (rent? own?), but also whether the spaces of the organization could constitute ‘counterpublics’ away from mainstream society. Third, the degree of un/bundling of social infrastructure was measured by asking voluntary sector organizations and their clients about threats from outside, such as gentrification, but also threats from inside such as welfare state interference and co-optation (or withdrawal and absence), access to services and the health of the service hub – is the service hub holding its ground, receding or expanding? Alongside these, we asked voluntary sector organizations about funding, the role of the state, different management models (self-governance and user-managed/owned model or more top-down), as well as the level of competition across organizations versus a common pooling/interdependent model.

## RESULTS: SERVICE HUBS AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

### *The socio-spatial nature of social infrastructure*

For the first key component – the combined social-spatial quality of social infrastructure – we not surprisingly found that the service hub acted as a densely-networked, connected place but deeply insular and isolated from the rest of the city. Of the twelve organizations we interviewed, all but two were closely connected to other organizations in Kamagasaki. All spoke of the clustering, density and proximity of services as major advantages to service provision, but also served as a disadvantage due to accumulated stigma:

this neighbourhood was already since its beginnings a special place...I think it is convenient because of the concentration. The disadvantage however is probably its history. Since it has a negative image of being the last place to go, the people who come here think only that they have failed in life. (Organization 1)

But to Organization 4, this stigma was clearly outweighed by the building of local networks and connections to other allied services that in turn provide crucial support for clients:

I think this area is not the same as other areas in Osaka. As expected, here poverty is urgent and there are many people who are in need for more. They come here, right? It is not a question of coming or not coming, they cannot work and they cannot become active, right?

The intensely localized nature of social infrastructure is on full display in Kamagasaki – to the point where it becomes rather isolated from the rest of the city, a parochial place (DeVerteuil, Yun & Choi, 2019) with strong feelings of belonging between organizations and between organization and client. To Organization 5, which provides employment (re)training and support for people on the verge of becoming homeless, services *must* be located in Kamagasaki, as the “problems of this area can only be solved in this area. We cannot do it if we were located in another place”. Yet interestingly, this contrasts with the national-level scale of many of the services, which attract clients from across Japan – as some of the organizations stated. To the director of Organization 3 (supportive housing), the service hub “operates on a national scale in the sense that it is said that public assistance recipients get one-way tickets to Kamagasaki. It absorbs people who want to start their lives fresh again”. This also speaks to how being located in Kamagasaki can provide a platform for connecting to far-flung networks. Organization 12 spoke of being connected to other (smaller) service hubs in Japan, including San’ya in Tokyo, Kotobuki in Yokohama, Sasajima in Nagoya and Chikkō in Fukuoka. Without the Kamagasaki address, they would have found it difficult to be taken seriously not just in Osaka but elsewhere as well – although this is essentially a product of the designated co-location of services and clients dating back to 1966.

All the organizations were interested in improving client well-being, and in so doing the overall quality of the service hub itself. This proceeded in a bottom-up fashion and without any overall direction from the top, enabled by the clustering and co-location with clients. For Organization 3, improving the living environment was fundamental:

We have two projects that are our major pillars, both concerned with the living environment....the first pillar is that we provide in this area good housing through

something like third-type public housing...The other one is to develop employment possibilities for handicapped and homeless people.

When we spoke to clients, all six were very much tied spatially and socially to the service hub. It was in effect their entire world and upon which their day-to-day survival routine was based, producing a distinctly confined time-space routine. At the same time, however, the six felt that Kamagasaki had become 'nicer' over the years, with less street crime and less difficulty in accessing services, a point we will turn to in the next subsection. For them, everyday survival revolved around a tightly-circumscribed set of services, including housing, food, and drop-ins for socializing and medical referrals. At no point did they mention wanting to leave Kamagasaki, or that it constituted some kind of prison. Rather, they grasped the limited nature of their lives but were equally appreciative of the proximity of services, either as a 'one-stop' shop or spread across a variety of complementary organizations close to each other. This relates to a key advantage of the service hub more specifically, and social infrastructure more generally – the co-location of agglomerated services and the clients who depend on them. However, Dear, Wolch & Wilton (1994) were concerned that *too many* services in one place could create saturation effects and make it difficult for clients to rejoin the 'mainstream'. In Kamagasaki, this fear seemed subdued, given that four of the six clients were elderly and no longer saw a reason to 'escape' the service hub to rejoin the labor market, or even their families and former homes. Rather, they saw Kamagasaki as their present and future home, having long ago lost connection with their former worlds.

#### *Accessibility and non-excludability*

Another reason clients were wedded to services in Kamagasaki was its highly accessible and 'no-strings' attached nature. Bearing in mind that many clients had already been failed by other systems (e.g. employment, housing, health), the welcoming environment and general non-excludability becomes a key part of the social infrastructure, especially for the poor. As Organization 1 noted, "in Japan there are a lot of systems but there are also a lot of people who drop out. For instance, there are homeless people with serious disabilities, but for them there is only little support through welfare. Further, I work also as a volunteer for prisons, and those people who commit crimes are often socially isolated". For this organization, but very much speaking for the majority,

it is important that the people who are involved feel comfortable and to create a place in which everybody can express oneself. Because every single person is cherished...everyone can come, but if somebody becomes violent...I tell them that they should think well about what they have done...there are no preconditions...for the guesthouse we have something like a 'sleep-in' system, this means that people who want to stay there but have no money can work here a little bit instead of the rent.

Few rules were in place to exclude clients who had fallen through the cracks – usually no violence and no drunken behaviour (but alcohol was frequently tolerated). Moreover, for those groups excluded from the formal labor market – such as the physically and mentally disabled – the service hub operated as a linchpin. According to Organization 3,

in the Japanese system the employment of handicapped people cannot be provided by the market. If employment for handicapped people or employment for homeless people compete in the market and private companies actively employ these people, they do not

become a strategic workforce and in the end the company will face difficulties. Therefore in this sense we became a mechanism to actively employ handicapped people and homeless people.

The duty to serve ‘people of last resort’ also strongly resonated with Organization 4, which runs a day center: “our base is homeless workers here in Kamagasaki. Among others elderly people who hardly work, people who can’t find day labor”. Many of these people do not have strong familial ties either, or are hiding from debts to criminal syndicates. For Organization 5, eligibility is focused on those over 65 on public assistance, as well as aged workers over 55 years. But these eligibility requirements are only loosely applied: “how can we determine if someone is a day labourer or not? There are no rules...it is enough if someone is living here, came to this area and sleeps here”. And to further underline the no-strings-attached ethos,

if we would work according to market logics, it would not be possible to survive...In this neighbourhood live only people who cannot be included according to market logics. If you try to include these people according to market logics, it would utterly fail. (Organization 5)

Certainly there are organizations, especially those who operate supported housing units, who impose stricter eligibility to help subsidize their day-to-day operations. For instance, Organization 8 insists that all clients pay for the subsidized rent, which in turn pays for the everyday services and upkeep, from their own pockets via public assistance, retirement funds or funds from work. There are no eligibility criteria beyond that, and clients on public assistance have a livelihood allowance for everyday expenses and housing allowance for rent. The organization further emphasized that Kamagasaki is an accepting place that “many of the people who came here to work cannot go back to their hometown. But many stayed here considering it as their second hometown”. Of course, this high accessibility is more about day-to-day survival than tackling the root causes of destitution, which is perhaps a larger drawback to social infrastructure more generally – getting by rather than agitating for fundamental change.

On the client side, the sense from the six interviews is that most organizations are very open, that “everybody can come”, charging only for rent and sometimes food. As such, some clients cycle between flophouses and shelters, an enduring pattern for those who came from outside of Osaka for work since the 1960s. Their life in Kamagasaki is now understood to be permanent, having lost connection to their families. As one client mentioned; “if this place did not exist, nobody would let me live in his apartment”. There has also been a decided shift away from day labor – which according to Organization 10 has gone from serving 5,207 registered workers in 1989 to only 853 workers in 2018 – towards supportive services, including soup kitchens and addiction treatment. As a soup kitchen, Organization 10 is open to all, especially those rejected from other places such as drug users, the mentally ill, alcoholics, and younger homeless people in their 30s and 40s for whom there are not a lot of services in Osaka. Finally, Organization 12 provides addiction services, and again was open to all who need sober living and counselling. As the director mentioned, there was no ‘tough love’ at the facility, but “as long as a person wants to stop, we keep on supporting him”. More than just open access, there was a real sense of service and duty to the clients, but this produced a certain isolation and insulation from the vagaries of the real world beyond

Kamagasaki, and also created dependency among clients. This tension will be further explored in the next sub-section.

### *Service provision and infrastructural un/bundling*

The interviews revealed that Kamagasaki's service provision and degree of infrastructural un/bundling was very much in tension, between those organizations that eschewed state intervention and those reliant upon it. This may be explained through Kamagasaki's mixed origins, which combined a state-demarcated and state-sanctioned service hub with bottom-up organizations to provide services for an all-male, day laborer population, and gradually becoming oriented towards more dependent populations. Crucially, Japan did not experience the same bundled social infrastructure built during more publicly-funded Fordist times in the Global North, including big-ticket items such as mass-produced social housing. Rather, infrastructure was strictly tied to economic growth, and as such places like Kamagasaki were very much DIY affairs within a state-sponsored shell. As such, we cannot say that current social infrastructure is a holdover from a more publicly-funded time. Instead, the state has only incrementally, and sometimes grudgingly, showed more interest in condoning the service hub.

Accordingly, many of the organizations we interviewed had emerged organically, even if now half were funded by the state (by Osaka City or Osaka Prefecture). State penetration into the service hub was mixed, with the direct interventions of the Nishinari Special Ward Initiative alongside more indirect public assistance payments and land ownership. As the interviews showed, there remains a sense that the service hub continues to be marginal to the state. In that sense, the service hub has remained fragmented, and was never 'bundled' during the Fordist era (especially 1945-1975), and certainly has not been 'unbundled' during the post-Fordist one. In particular, there was no sense of a unified management model across the service hub, as each organization followed its own governance approach, ranging from volunteer-led and user-oriented to more top-down models. So while organizations largely collaborated with each other, and even mutually pooled resources to a certain extent, there was no strong direction of the service hub dictated by any one entity.

We begin with organizations who maintain an arm's-length independence from the state. For example, Organizations 2 and 5 are deeply reliant on volunteer labor and close collaboration with other organizations, while Organization 3 stays essentially neutral, neither cooperating nor opposing other voluntary sector organizations but certainly eschewing state intervention. Organizations 10 and 12 do not take state funding and are critical of the public assistance system. However, Organization 11 would like state funding but there is none, and even said that "Osaka City is very cold-hearted. They do not support our organization". Organization 4 relies entirely on donations, ensuring a complete lack of state interference. From the perspective of these organizations, the rejection of state funding can spur a more collaborative model with other Kamagasaki organizations, rather than a competitive one, although some of their clients will still be state-funded via public assistance. Moreover, the ability to reject state funding is sometimes down to what services are actually provided. For instance, certain social welfare corporations are entrusted by the state to provide certain services; the provision of said services is strongly regulated and are provided with limited autonomy. And then there are faith-based organizations (e.g. Organization 10) who follow a completely different, strongly altruistic logic. The same altruism can also be found with the

day laborer unions, yet they are also dependent on some state funding. Finally, there are social enterprises that push a social agenda (e.g. Organization 8), but remain embedded in both the market and the state.

For those organizations that do take some state support, it is usually indirect in terms of relying on clients' public assistance or retirement payments, or renting state-owned land. For Organization 3, the rent on their six buildings is subsidized by the City of Osaka, as is rehabilitation of older buildings, using an old land trust scheme that recycled city land for local organizations. With more direct funding and oversight, Organization 6 basically characterized itself as an extension of the state, and saw the current service hub as a state creation. To them, the "government approved this neighbourhood... [Kamagasaki would] not be possible without the power of the government". However, even organizations who did receive state funding think, as Organization 5 does, that the (local) state should actually do more and be more directly involved in the management of the service hub, to 'bundle' the service hub into something more coherent. Similarly, Organization 8 rented from city-owned land, and thought more state support would make life easier for clients and create an easier funding environment. Interestingly, Organization 2 thought that Kamagasaki was fading due to welfare state largesse: that with greater welfare coverage the numbers of truly desperate clients had declined since the 1990s, and that some could live elsewhere due to the generous state welfare payments and housing subsidies. To them, this was further consolidated by the closing of the Airin General Center in 2019.

Finally, recent gentrification at the edges of Kamagasaki threatens to deconcentrate the intricate client-organization-state relationships noted across the three components, but especially the second one. All twelve organizations thought that gentrification was an emerging issue in Kamagasaki, given that *doya* are easily converted to backpacker accommodations, and rents are already rising fast, albeit from a very low base. Organization 5 feels that there were more tourists, more catering to foreigners, while Organization 6 senses that backpackers were drawn to the convenience of Kamagasaki: "You can go there without transfer from the Kansai Airport. The Loop Line connects you also to Kyoto and other places close by". Organization 3 had this to say:

I don't think that it has reached the point we can call it gentrification. But it might become like that. People who own land are already very old. Thus when it is handed down to the next generation, I think a lot of it will go on the market. This is really frightening...many owners have only low commitment to the land, and it is easy for them to sell.

Yet the dominant presence of services and place-bound clientele in Kamagasaki can slow down gentrification, in that its ultra-marginal land uses may not entirely appeal to gentrifiers. If there is outside interest, it is through the unbundling of the low-end housing market and certain key community pillars (Airin General Center in particular). If this trend continues, the service hub will likely be diluted by new hotels, student dormitories or apartments, but its role as social infrastructure will remain resilient so long as most organizations remain *in situ*. In the next section, we conceptually discuss the results in light of the three key components of social infrastructure, but also with a wider perspective on 'poor people's' infrastructure (Blomley, 2008), counterpublics (Fraser, 1990), the foundational economy (Bentham et al., 2013), and the broader utility of considering a Japanese context.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: THE SERVICE HUB AS BYPASSED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In this section, we are particularly concerned with *how* and *why* the service hub acts as social infrastructure, beyond simply affirming that the service hub constituted social infrastructure (which it did). For the first component, service hubs as social infrastructure depend crucially on a tight coupling of the social and spatial. The very obvious advantages of co-located voluntary sector organizations and clients largely explains how the service hub is a case of social infrastructure. This was quite apparent for Kamagasaki, with its close and obligatory braiding of organizations and clients, and mutual support and collaboration across organizations. This confirms a longstanding advantage of service hubs, but with the caveat that too many services can produce a monochromatic neighborhood. Stepping back, we can argue that service hubs are so dense that they have pushed out other land uses and act as a bulwark against incursions of different uses, including gentrification (DeVerteuil, 2015). This relates directly to the shielding effects of the infrastructure of the poor (Blomley, 2008) and Benjamin's idea of 'occupancy urbanism' (2008). In these ways, the very density and visible presence of the Kamagasaki service hub subverts the high-end infrastructure around it and protects it from existential threats. Using Kamagasaki as case study, we find that the service hub acts as a distinctly inner-city social infrastructure marked by close proximity of clients and services, as well as mutuality among organizations and clients.

In terms of access, the Kamagasaki service hub acts as a "forgiving context" (Marr, 2015) in the face of so-called individual deficits, allowing vulnerable populations to *simply be* without a lot of strings attached. This was particularly evident in the fact that few organizations placed stringent entry requirements upon clients, and fewer rules again once clients were using services. These services were provided in, and underpinned by, a spirit of caring and sustenance among voluntary sector organizations, thereby explaining why service hubs act as social infrastructure. Returning to Fraser's (1990) 'counterpublics', we can argue that the service hub very much acts as a 'safe space' for individuals rejected by larger society, the market, the state, informal communities and family. Yet the service hub seems, from analysis of the third component, a less than robust platform to make demands on the state or to challenge the state in terms of its treatment of vulnerable populations. This is not to say, however, that the service hub managed homelessness and destitution in a revanchist or punitive way (DeVerteuil, 2015). In effect, recasting service hubs as a crucial social infrastructure further veers us away from one-sided understandings of the voluntary sector as punishing, or at least expediently containing and controlling, vulnerable urban populations. Rather, it consolidates the sense of service, duty, caring and sustenance. However, easy access, non-judgemental organizations and service saturation had created a small group of clients who have become dependent and place-bound. Just the same, this social and spatial stability is crucial to everyday social reproduction.

Finally, in terms of service provision and un/bundling, the service hub must be understood as a *bypassed infrastructure*, unsung and largely out-of-sync with the market (less so with the state), which stands in contrast to Graham and Marvin's (2001) idea of infrastructural bypass, where communities are bypassed locally, glocally and virtually in favour of new infrastructure for more valued users. Rather, the service hub is disconnected from valued users of new infrastructure but remains tightly connected to non-paying users and the downtrodden, a piece of the foundational economy and grounded city whose residual

presence can subsequently slow down redevelopment and re-commodification. The service hub is a social infrastructure of castoffs, standing apart and increasingly incompatible with current urbanism and its emphasis on privatization and neoliberal co-optation. It is also apart from the older 'infrastructural ideal' of the Fordist era, with its emphasis on large-scale, monopolized universality. In effect, Kamagasaki as service hub was more of a provisional DIY social infrastructure, initially and increasingly propped up by the state, and remains largely disconnected from other infrastructure in Osaka. This is similar to other existing service hubs in North American cities, where the original service hub emerged organically but came under increasing state scrutiny as the number of homeless clients ballooned from the 1980s onwards – or in the case of Kamagasaki, the replacement of day laborers with a more dependent clientele. Using a Japanese example has underlined how the service hub becomes social infrastructure – in very obvious ways, revolving around the social-spatial clustering, and the maintenance of high accessibility to services – but also in less obvious ways, in terms of moving away from an expedient or even revanchist approach to managing vulnerable clients and to validating a deep-seated urge to care and sustain clientele. However, the Japanese case study also highlights the relatively fragmented decision-making apparatus alongside a weak voluntary sector. It also highlights the focus of organizations on enabling day-to-day survival (their own, and their clients), which arguably fosters dependency and status quo over tendencies towards transformation.

When the two concepts are put together, we can also generate new insights around how service hubs slow down gentrification, but also how they are unlikely to tackle the root causes of vulnerability among clients. The Kamagasaki service hub did not fit into the 'infrastructural ideal' of the post-war period (although it was certainly non-excluding) in the Global North, given very selective state investment in the initial build-up in the 1960s and 1970s. However, this is less true today as the state has gradually taken more of an interest in supporting and shaping the service hub, in lockstep with a more interventionist and generous Japanese welfare state (Marr, 2015). The service hub is therefore not a residual of a time when welfare was universal, but more a residual of a time when welfare was quite limited, designed to manage populations that were excluded from the market *and* the welfare state, providing them with but the bare minimum to quell social unrest. This moves the service hub beyond merely fulfilling the instrumental needs of day-to-day survival into a more politicized and contested realm, to the extent that the Osaka City is now aiming to redevelop Kamagasaki in a way that no longer concentrates welfare services in such a place-bound manner.

The Japanese version of the service hub therefore differs from the North American context in that it was never bundled properly during the Fordist era given the lack of an alternative market and markedly high levels of institutional unruliness and fragmentation, and for the same reasons never subject to un-bundling in the post-Fordist era. The state played a caretaker role to establish service hub, lending a veneer of formality to an otherwise DIY creation that had splintered itself off from the rest of the city, a sort of self-provisioning (see also Fairbanks, 2009). Kamagasaki is very much linked to the foundational economy, once a center of labour resistance and radicalism. But since day labourer work has declined, the service hub has catered increasingly to those on public assistance. With the threat of gentrification, the service hub remains palpably close but painfully disconnected from other infrastructure and increasingly incompatible with urban trends towards hyper-

commodification and the promotion of infrastructure built to serve the dominant. Kamagasaki is a testament of an older age, a contrast to the current age of dwindling social infrastructure for the poor, and one that is not easily replicated or replaceable. It remains resilient, however, by the very density of its services and the co-presence of clientele, despite the incremental dismantling of certain key sites of state intervention in the 2010s, particularly the Airin General Center, within the service hub itself.

Graham and Marvin (2001, p. 384) did admit that splintering urbanism is by no means hegemonic – our focus on the service hub as unsung and initially self-made social infrastructure clearly shows that this kind of splintering may be older and more organic than those authors proposed. If, as the authors understood back in 2001, that not every infrastructure gets unbundled and splintered, then what does that mean for the contemporary city and its radically discontinuous/messy nature, within and below the scan of globalization? Future research ought to focus on these ‘let go’ areas that Simone (2004) described in inner-city Johannesburg that take advantage of proximity, yet severely circumscribed and where cooperation and interaction is both informal and invisible, leading to mutual dependence (Dear & Wolch, 1987). Future research could also attend to the trajectories of service hubs as they cycle from DIY self-provisioning to state-supported social infrastructure to re-commodified, partly gentrified landscapes.

Future research also ought to attend to the limits of applying North American constructs, such as service hubs and splintering urbanism (and perhaps even social infrastructure) to other contexts, including the Global East more generally and Japan more specifically (see also DeVerteuil et al., 2019; Shin & Kim, 2016). This is especially crucial given that such places never experienced the sequence of Fordist/post-Fordist, bundled/unbundled infrastructure in the same way. For instance, in Japan much infrastructure remains bundled to this day, albeit primarily for economic rather than social reasons, and social fragmentation remains relatively muted when compared to many nations in the Global North, with the voluntary sector playing a relatively minor role (DeVerteuil et al., 2020). Further, neoliberalism sits uneasily in the Japanese context, given that the state remains steadfastly interventionist. And so service hubs and social infrastructure in places like Japan present perhaps more a hybrid in a unique and vexed relationship to the state.

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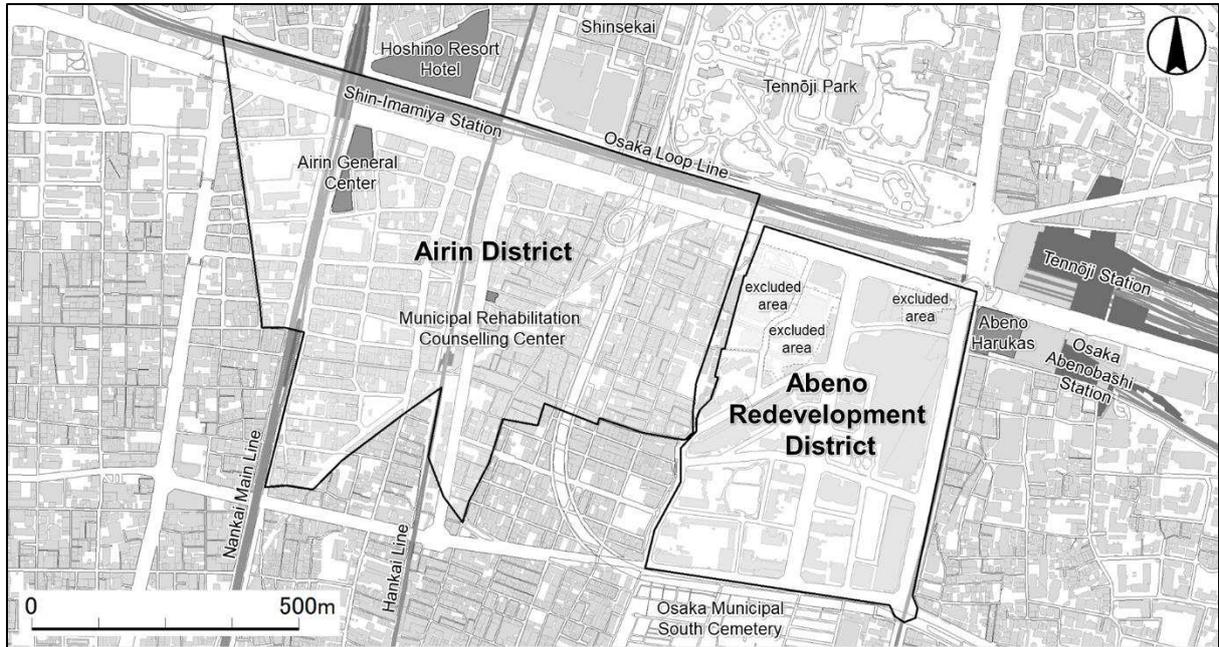
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# FIGURES



## **FIGURE CAPTIONS**

**Figure 1: Locator map of Kamagasaki, Osaka (August 2020), Airin District and Abeno Redevelopment District**

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<sup>i</sup> The official place name Kamagasaki disappeared in 1922, and “Kamagasaki” is today only used by day laborers and associates to refer to the area. Therefore, it cannot be found on maps.