The Expo 70 as a debate for the creation of "democratic" cities

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Introduction

The Japan World Exposition, Osaka, 1970 was held at Senri Hills, in the northwestern suburbs of Osaka City in Osaka Prefecture, in an area of approximately 330 hectares (830 acres), during the period of 15 March to 13 September, 1970 (the 45th year of the Shôwa Emperor according to the Japanese calendar). It was under the responsibility of the Japanese National Government, represented by the authority of the Minister of International Trade and Industry, and the executive management of the "Japan Association for the 1970 World Exposition," a non-profit corporation established on 15 October, 1965 (JAPAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE 1970 WORLD EXPOSITION, 1972, vol. 1, p. 356). It was an event that marked the discussion on the future impact of the rapid modernization of the period and, consequently, it was orientated towards a vision of the future way of living in a wide perspective of social, cultural and concrete physical mode.

Following that tendency, the development of the Master Plan for the Expo 70 site had as an original premise the desire of making it a model of a future city development. The arguments, used to advocate this conception, point towards people as the original generators of cities, to and with whom cities should be thought and discussed, an original fundament of democratic cities development.

Unfortunately, the model future city concept did not advance to the extent of its final realization, but the Festival Plaza was one of a few elements which persisted from the first outline of the Master Plan until the execution of the final Expo Site. From the point of view of its original proponent, Professor Uzo Nishiyama, the Festival Plaza should gather both Western and Japanese essences of traditional public spaces and fulfill the function of the core of a future city model. Although it could not be realized as primarily conceived, it remained as the central core of the Expo 70 site (URUSHIMA, 2005).

Its persistent existence throughout the development process of the Expo 70 site planning process, suggests that there had been a generalized desire for such a kind of space. Symbolically, from the original concept, it is embodied with the image of a public meeting place to give voice to popular participation. It seems that this image was appealing enough to permit the Plaza to survive through the successive revisions done over the Site Plan. Thus, there was general common sense about the need for "democratic" cities, but the specific interpretation given by each of the interlocutors is unknown. Its specific interpretation is what gives the particular nuance of a local identity over the globalized (as in the case of Japan, compulsively enjoined) term "democracy." In this paper, the particular interpretation given by Chie Nakane (1970) provides an elucidative instrument to analyze how the final built Festival Plaza was possibly perceived by the people who had usufruct of it.

The site planning process of Expo 70

The significance of the Expo 70 event led to involve the most important specialists in the fields of Architecture or Urban Planning of that period. The realization of the Expo 70 project represented a challenge for its significance and also for the management and development of the project itself. It was a complex task to divide and distribute the goals and objectives of the project into a series of specialized plans, taken by different subgroups, and harmonize them into a final unity of the Expo 70 plan as a whole.

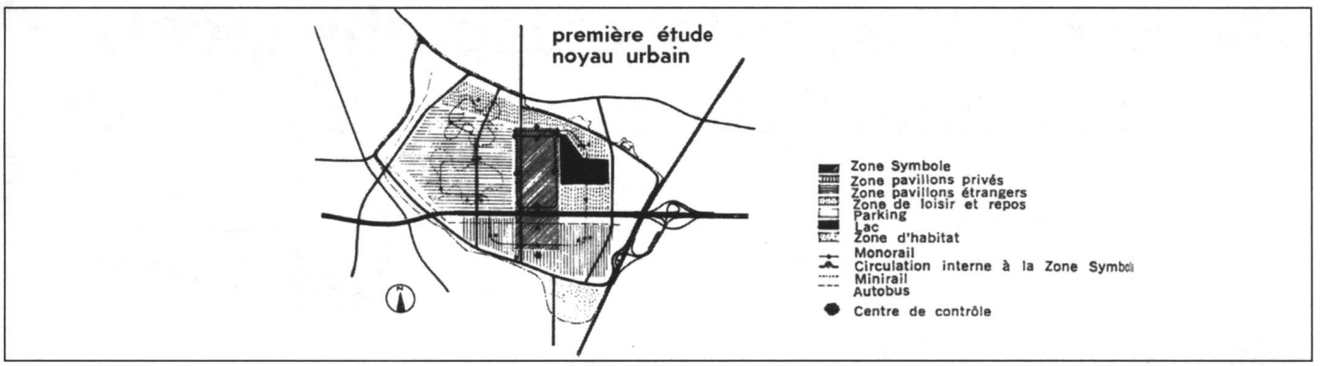

Fig. 1: First Draft Plan of Osaka Expo '70 Site. (*Source:* Renee Diamant-Berger, "Osaka 70," *L'architecture d`aujourd`hui,* no. 152, Paris, 1970, pp. 10-11).

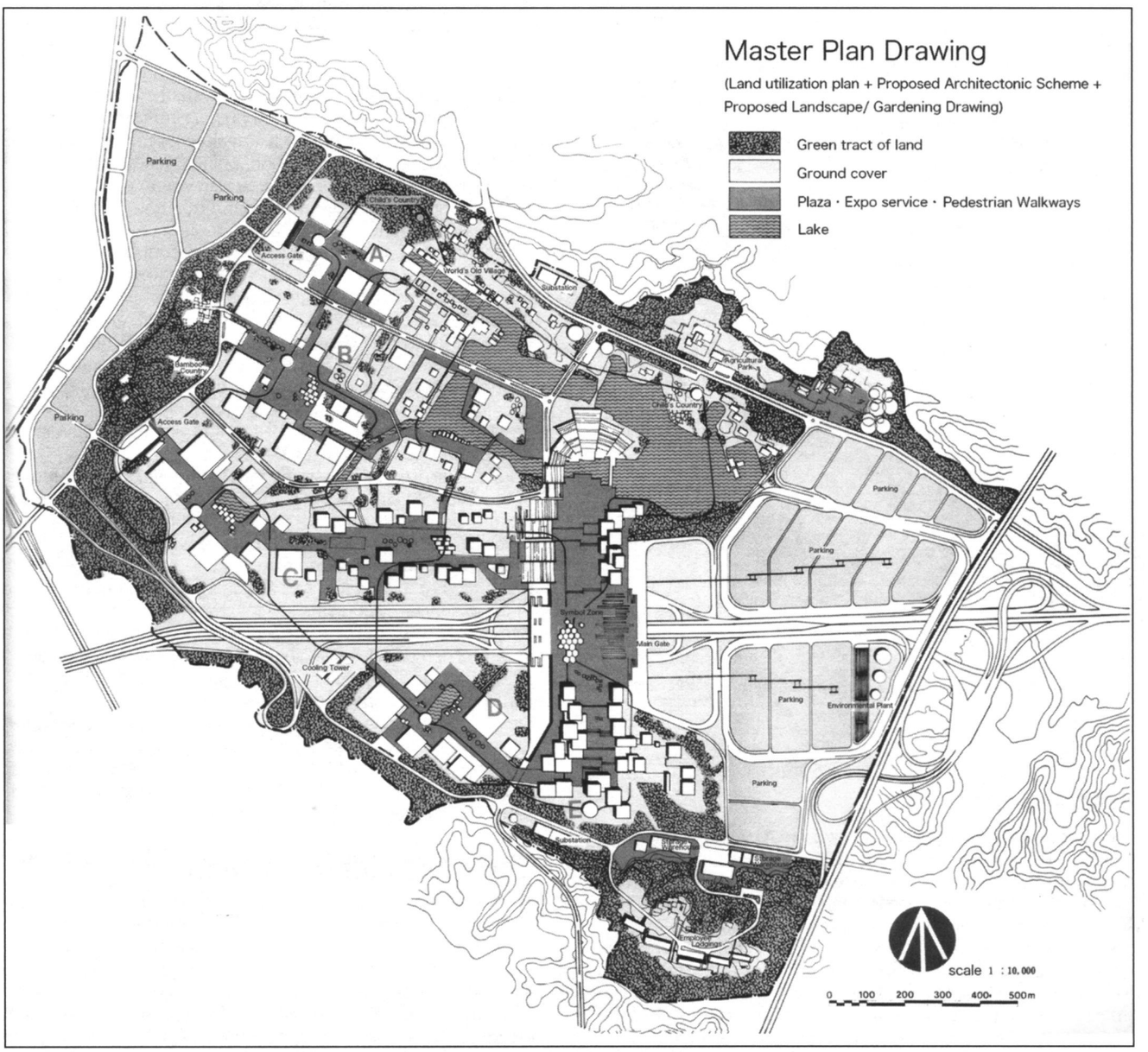

Fig. 2: Second Draft Plan of Osaka Expo '70 Site. (*Source:* Shinkenchiku (Tokyo, Shinkenchikusha, 1966), pp. 213-218). Translated by the author from the original in Japanese.

As for the development of the Master Plan, it is very difficult to clearly divide the responsibility of the groups and individuals involved in the process. Nevertheless, from a careful reading of facts it is possible to reach some conclusive remarks on how the Master Plan was conceived and developed.

Informal initial discussions about the Master Plan had started since August 1965, and officially, the collection of fundamental data and diagnosis on the Expo site, entitled "Master Plan Basic Survey," started in November that year. It was under the responsibility of the "Japan World Exposition Research Group of Kyoto University" headed by Professor Uzo Nishiyama. By recommendation of this Basic Survey, a "Site Planning Committee" was organized in December that year, by inviting notable specialists from the fields of Urban Planning and Architecture. This committee had the presence of prestigious figures such as Kazumi Iimuma, Eika Takayama, Uzo Nishiyama, Kenzo Tange, Junzo Sakakura, Togo Murano, Kenzo Tohata and Akira Sato, among others (JAPAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE 1970 WORLD EXPOSITION, 1972, vol. 2, p. 158).

The committee appointed Professor Tange and Professor Nishiyama as the "Original Master Plan Creators" and both of them became responsible for the drafting of the Master Plan. To realize such a difficult task of drafting a Master Plan with the orientation of the different approaches of those two professors, it was decided that the work should be divided into stages of subsequent draft plans to be submitted to the appreciation of the Site Planning Committee and the Japan Association for the 1970 World Exposition. In this way, the first and second draft plans (figs. 1, 2 and 3) were developed between January and May 1966 at Kyoto University under the responsibility of Prof.

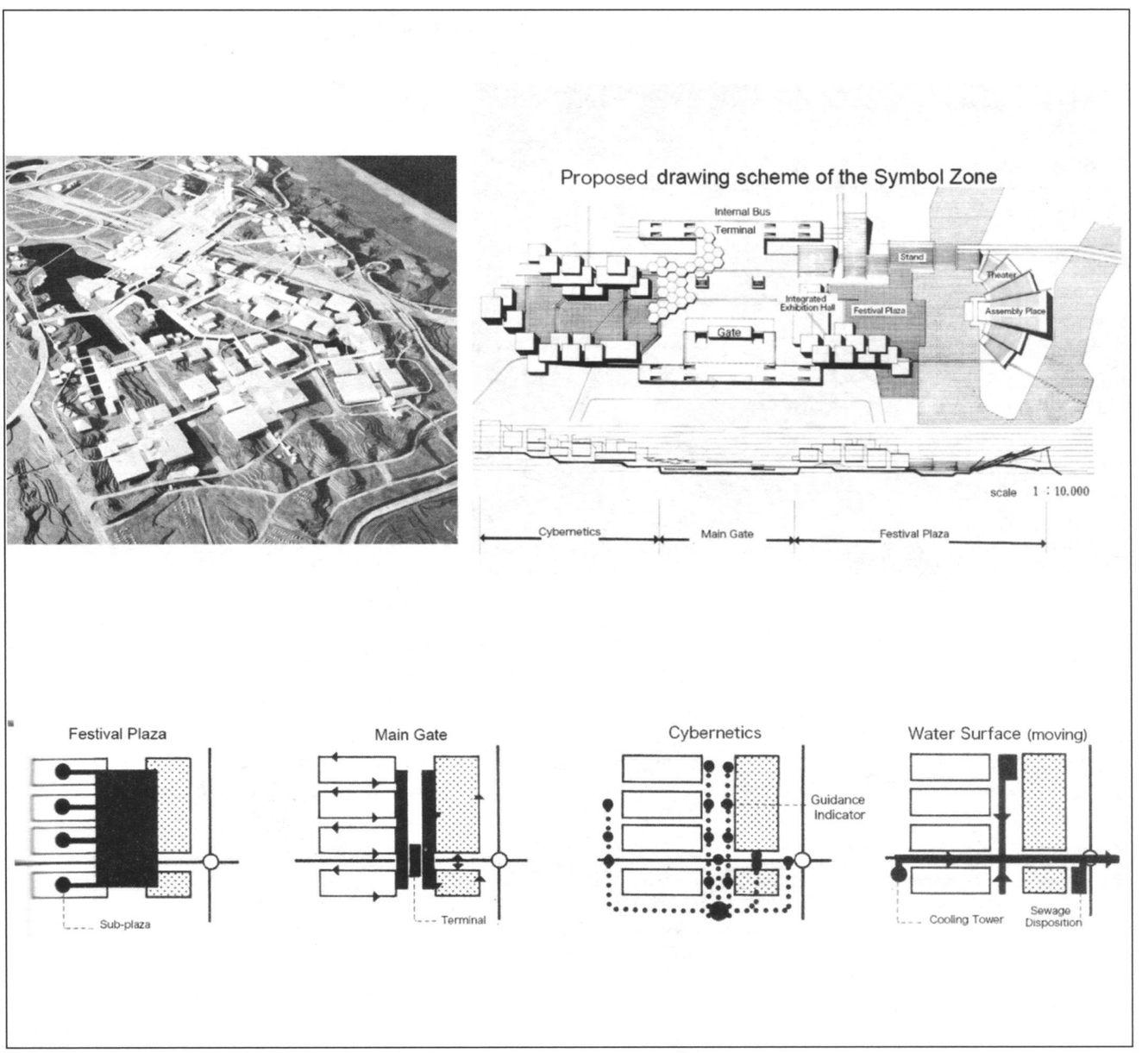

Fig. 3: Second Draft Plan of Osaka Expo '70 Site. (*Source:* Shinkenchiku (Tokyo, Shinkenchikusha, 1966), pp. 213-218). Translated by the author from the original in Japanese.

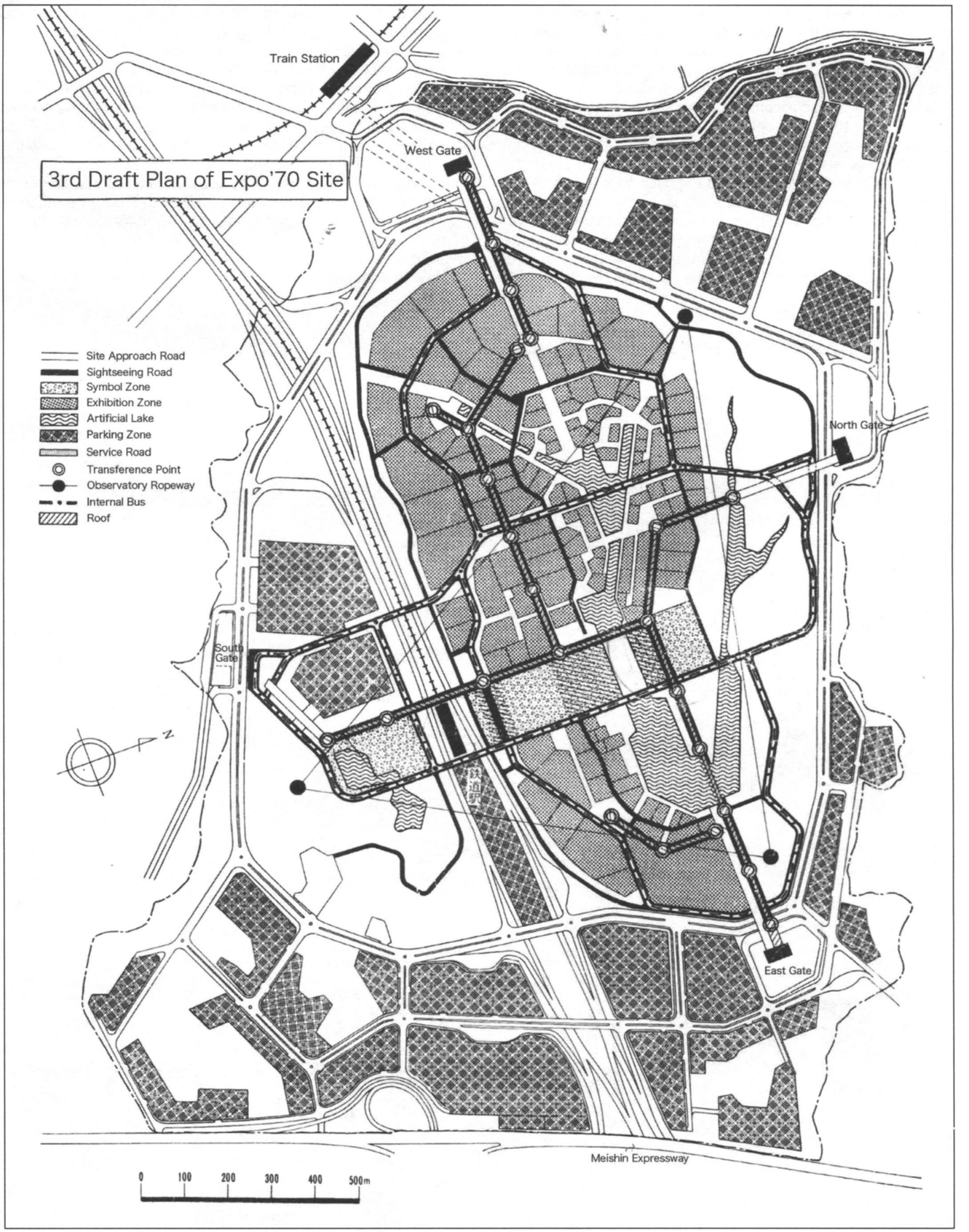

Fig. 4: Third Draft Plan of Osaka Expo '70 Site. (*Source:* Nishiyama Uzo, document collected at the Uzo Nishiyama Memorial Library, with no clear publishing reference entitled "From the first site's plan," p. 5). Translated by the author from the original in Japanese.

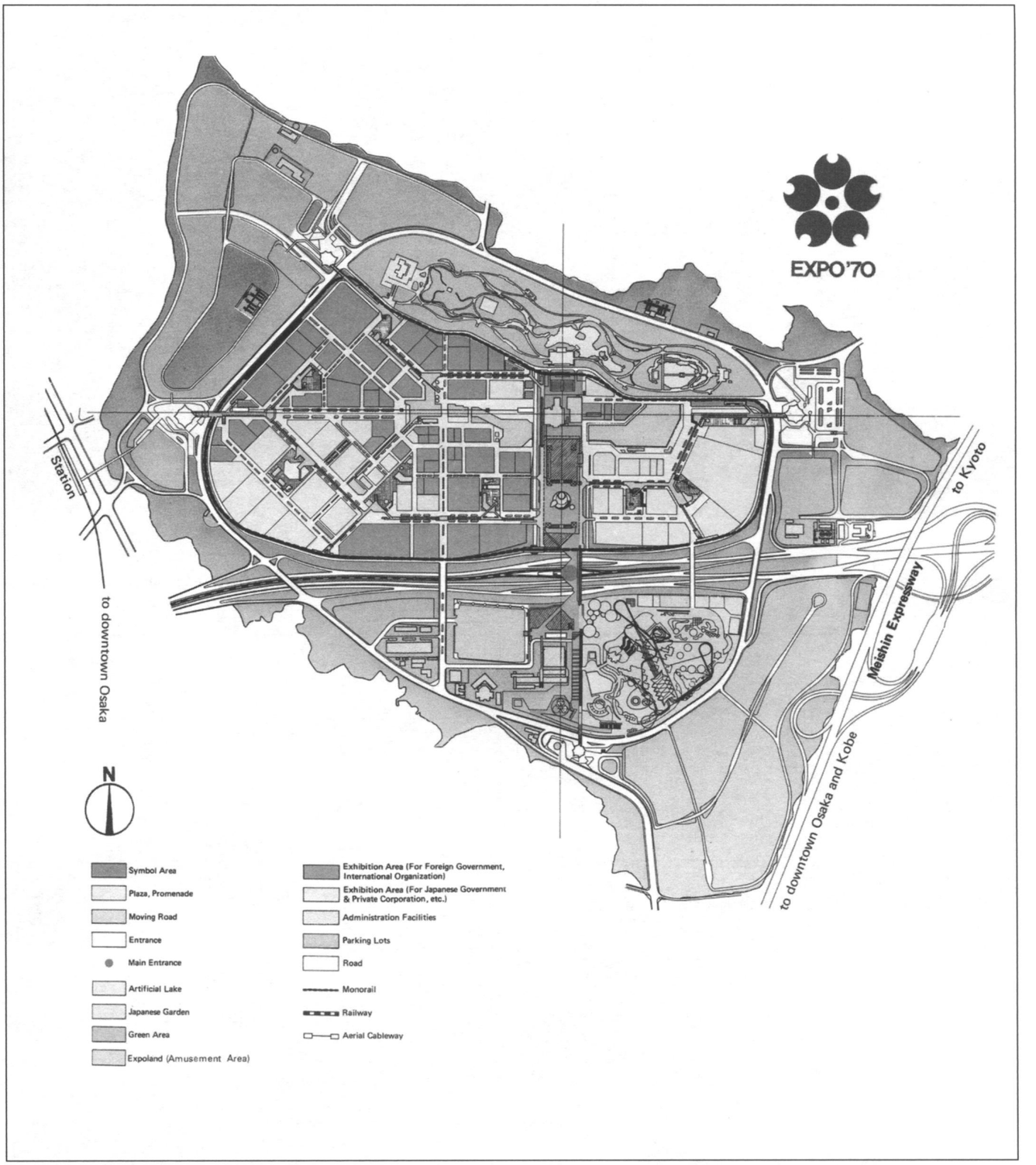

Fig. 5: The final plan of Osaka Expo '70 Site. (Source: OSAKA, Municipal Office, The City of Osaka and its Planning. (Osaka, Comprehensive Planning Bureau, 1969), 2nd edition).

Nishiyama. Between May and October 1966, the third and fourth draft plans and a final plan (figs. 4 and 5) were defined at Tokyo University under the responsibility of Professor Tange. After this, the Site Planning Committee was dissolved and the whole work was reorganized into a "Producer System" aimed at giving a tri-dimensional concrete shape to the Master Plan.

Amidst the intense process of site planning development, it is necessary to remark that one of the few proposals that remained persistently from the Basic Survey until the final construction of the Expo 70 Site, was the Festival Plaza.

Fig. 6: Portable temples' parade, as part of the celebrations of the Festival of Kamigoryo Shrine. (Source: Photograph taken by the author in Kitaoji street, Kyoto, May 2003).

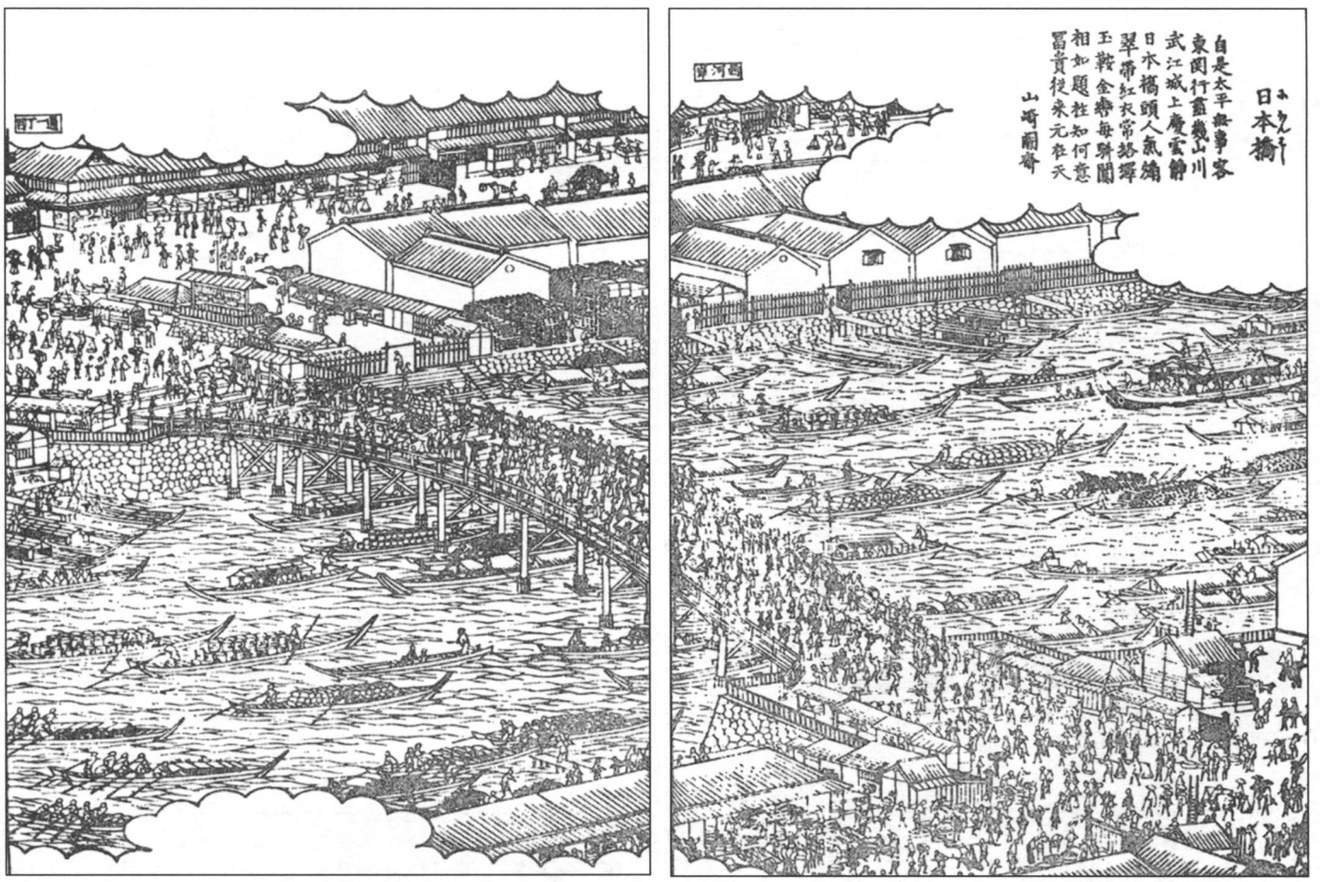

Fig. 7: An illustration of the famous Sakariba of the Edo period in the entrance of the Nihonbashi Bridge. (*Source:* Haruhiko Asakura et al. (ed.), "Views of celebrated places in Japan," Nihon Meisho Fuzoku Zue, vol. 4/II (Tokyo, Kadokawa Shoten, 1980), p. 19).

The Festival Plaza as core of the "model of a future city"

It is interesting to note that Nishiyama, since the Basic Survey, highly defended the idea of making the Expo 70 like a model of a future city core. He argued that it is the unavoidable human need for physical encounter and exchange of ideas that makes cities grow. Furthermore, it is the main argument to explain the existence of obsolete events such as World Fairs in modern times. In fact, the number of people concentrated in a limited area of the Expo site and the technical implications for a proper functioning of it could be comparable to that of existing city centers.[1] At the same time, the fast and uncontrolled urbanization process of the Japan of the 1960s had brought problems of traffic jams and pollution, among others, to city centers which called for solutions in the near future.

Moreover, Nishiyama criticized that the decision to hold a World Exposition was taken by the Central Government without an expanded popular consultation, while the project required a huge amount of public investment in it. Thus, in order to maximize the application of this investment, the Master Plan should consider the use of the site for an expanded period of time much longer than that of the six months of the event. Finally, that idea was embraced due to the similarity of the Expo site with that of a city center; the need to propose an example of a better environment for future cities; and the fact that planning the site as a future city, altogether, would justify the huge investment (NISHIYAMA, 1970).

In this way, since the Basic Survey, Nishiyama maintained the central installation of a Festival Plaza (Matsuri Hiroba) on the site, as an instrument for personal and cultural exchange of information and sensations. It should be conceptually modeled after ancient traditional western city centers, such as the Agora, Forum and Medieval Plaza; also after the traditional Japanese use of public spaces in the Matsuri[2] (fig. 6) and Sakariba[3] (figs. 7 and 8). Those ancient occidental models were regarded as the original essence of western cities, and a catalyst of information and exchange. At the same time, the Festival Plaza should incorporate the vitality of the traditional Shrine Festivals of small rural villages around Japan, where people participated, not in passive ways, but actively and independently. Thus, the Festival Plaza should be a creative experiment bringing the street character of traditional festivals together with the emblematic ideal achievement of a real public space similar to that of the Greek Agora, using the modern technology of the period (NISHIYAMA, 1967).

It is also possible to find suggestions in Nishiyama's texts about the Expo 70 site planning process that express a query about the relation between cities' formulators (among those, the specialists on Urban Planning are included) with the popular appropriation of the cities. Cities have their origin in primordial social organizations. The historical development of technology and culture have turned them into a complex system and promoted the appearance of specialized technicians. It appears, in his considerations, that the role of such specialists should be to orient and propose solutions for the quality of life of people who use the cities. This approach is, actually, a modern concept intensely discussed and developed at the beginning of the 20th century in Europe and America. Not by chance, Nishiyama is regarded as playing a remarkable role in

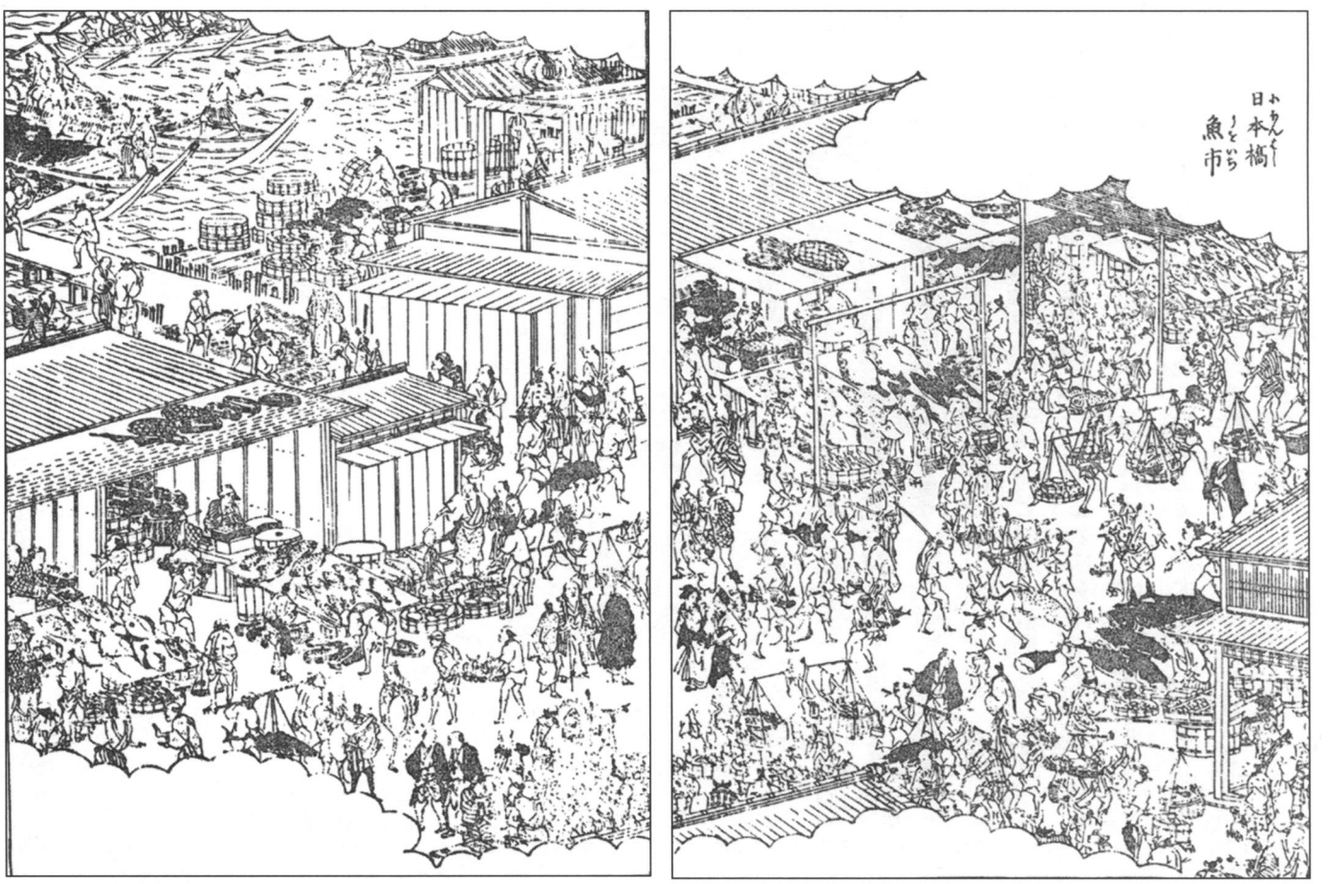

Fig. 8: The fish market of the Nihonbashi Sakariba. (*Source:* ASAKURA, *op.cit.,* 1980. p. 20).

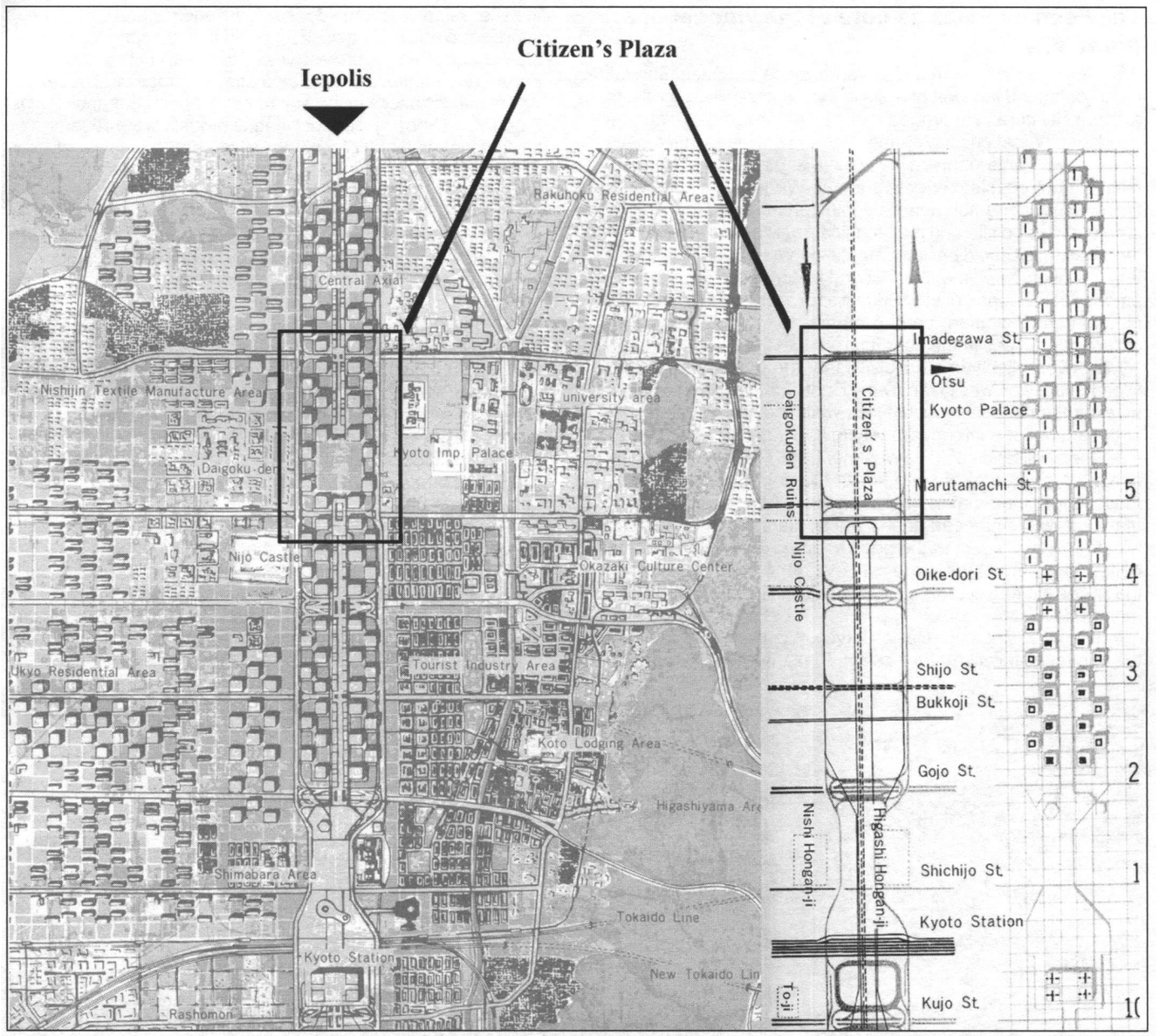

Fig. 9: A section of the "Plan of Kyoto," proposed by Nishiyama and his team, showing the central axis of the "Iepolis" and the Citizen's Plaza, placed on the left side of the Imperial Palace. (*Source: The Japan Architect.* Tokyo, Shinkenchikusha, Feb. 1965. pp. 64-65/ 77).

the importing and diffusing of Western models of urban planning to Japan, as already enunciated by Hein (HEIN, 2000 and 2003).

This last consideration could be reinforced by another previous example: his Plan for Kyoto of 1965.[4] The Plaza, as an ideal public space core, is recurrent in this project and a civic plaza, strategically but questionably, is placed near the Imperial Palace (fig. 9). Moreover, the desire to combine elements of Japanese tradition with western models of cities in search of a modern Japanese city drew him to other different suggestions. In the Kyoto Plan, Nishiyama compares the city to a Japanese house and the main monumental central axis of the project is called "Iepólis" (the "Ie" from the Japanese word meaning house; and "polis" from the Greek word meaning city). However literal and naïve it might appear, in the description of the project he proposed an interesting metaphor that, as far as shoes are instruments by which people dislocate outside the house, the car should be used outside the center of the city.

"At the front entrance of the Japanese houses a stone called the 'stone for taking off shoes' awaits visitors who must divest themselves of footwear before entering the house. In a similar way, at the entrance to the new city of Kyoto, a vast parking lot will be waiting to receive the automobiles of visitors who must enter the city without them. People in the center of the city will walk, or they will use the city's facilities. This system will be feasible in the center of Kyoto serviced by subways, monorails, belt roads and rotation buses." (*The Japan Architect,* 1965).

The traditional idea of keeping dirt away from the house by a concrete and symbolic action of taking off shoes, is expanded to another collective urban action of city-scale. The car at that time was considered a public nuisance. It was one of the highest symbols of modernization but also the main source of noise, pollution and traffic annoyance in public space. This metaphor was an attempt to domesticate inescapable modernity along

with the tradition of a living pattern. Other elements of modernity appeared in the monumental scale of an urban axis conformed by 10-storey buildings, which posed a question about the future of the Japanese city. The civic Plaza of the Kyoto Plan furthers the same suggestion found in that of the Expo Festival Plaza: the future image of the modern Japanese city, drawn by Nishiyama, can be forecast with the appearance of such an ancient concept of public space borrowed from western cities which, in other terms, symbolically claims that a public space should be opened for civic use and interaction.

The appealing permanence of the Festival Plaza

The difficulties to realize in Expo 70 the model of a future city core came from the shortage of time and unclear program of the site during the Master Plan Development. Also, there was the fear that this future model would compromise the proper functioning of the Expo 70 itself while a temporary event. The model of a future city as a motto was left behind after negotiations between the Master Plan Creators, Site Planning Committee (the technical unit of the project) and the Japan Association (the governmental unit of the project, in the last instance direct representatives of citizens' interests).

In fact, since the Basic Survey one of the few propositions that received general agreement from all the different interlocutors was the Festival Plaza: not only was the space itself kept as part of the Expo Site until the final execution, but also the name which was proposed during an early period of the Site Planning. It is possible to conclude from this consideration that the idea of a vital public space similar to that of the Plaza was desirable and, also, that it encountered positive acceptance from the entire and varied spectrum of technicians and governmental figures involved in the project. Additionally, it suggests that the Plaza as a metaphor for public space was generally known and commonly accepted. Certainly, the concrete form and use of it for the Japanese city would depend on each person involved in the project. In the case of Expo 70, the final prospective vision of a Plaza, covered by a megastructured roof, came from an absolutely peculiar interpretation by Kenzo Tange.

Conclusions

It seems paradoxical to envision that ancient western models such as the Greek Agora or the Roman Forum could represent the future of the Japanese city, but it is necessary to consider that their traditional inexistence in the frame of Japanese cities determines it to be an innovative feature. It is clear that there has always been an intrinsic and effervescent need for public spaces to exchange information and congregate people and the existence of the "sakariba" and "matsuri" are expressions of it.

However, the process of decision and intervention over the cities has usually been determined at the governmental level, with strong preponderance of a central government orientation. The decision to hold the Expo was settled by central government without any public counsel, in spite of the huge amounts of public money invested in it. This was directly criticized in most of Nishiyama's texts (NISHIYAMA, 1966, 1967 and 1970). Thus, more than envisioning the Festival Plaza as a formal innovation brought into Japanese cities, it could be a symbolic claim for new directions to realize urban planning in Japan. It was a symbolic desire to establish in the corpus of the city a physical instrument to give a voice to its living population. Also, if Expo could leave a Plaza for the future city, a Plaza for the citizens, the decision to invest large amounts of public money in this event would be partially justified.

Actually, the Festival Plaza lost any possibility of matching those expectations not so much because of its spatial configuration than because of its final use. Certainly the image of an open space defined by a huge roof has nothing to do with the square idea of the Agora, Forum and Plaza. In ancient urban structures those spaces were defined by a void surrounded by constructions, and it is the intentional action of shaping a void that makes the square significant (ZUCKER, 1959). But in the case of the Festival Plaza, the surrounding mass of edified limits did not exist, yet in its place a large scale roof was built.

The roof in traditional Japanese architecture is very important for shaping the immaterial presence of space and if there were any possibility of creating a representative place similar to that of a square in Japanese cities, it could probably be done in this way. It is exactly the same way by which Noh play stages and Sumo stages define the limits of their space. Instead of shaping the void inside masses of permanent built walls, the void is shaped by the tenuous and temporal delimitations of shadow and light and, on rainy days, between water and air, which the roof permits. This kind of analysis deserves more attention, but implies that this is not what demerits the possible realization of a Japanese Plaza on the Expo' 70 site.

In fact, more crucial to this analysis is the way that the space had been used. Although it was conceived not to become a hall inside a building, it was finally converted into a closed space. It was used as a private area that had the entire schedule and use of the space organized and controlled by the Japan Association: it was not literally a Plaza. The spontaneous and fluid occupation of the space forecast by Nishiyama in analogy to the vitality of the "Sakariba" could hardly take place there. All the movable audiences and high technology in the programming of light and sound, apart from the big robots created to allow exchange and communication between people, turned out to be a monologue of what the Association wanted to show.

At this point I should remark what Nakane (1970, pp. 143-144) says about the specific Japanese interpretation of the concept of "Democracy." This term was imported to Japan after the Second World War and became very fashionable at that moment, but it had a very different connotation from that known in the west. Instead of referring to a form of government it referred to a form of relationship and

"The reasons why 'democracy' became so fashionable after the war seems to be that the Japanese found it a useful term for demeaning the old 'feudal' or 'authoritarian' pattern of the Japanese social and political systems. 'Democracy' represents a negative reaction against the operation of the pre-war system, which gave authority to a higher sector in an organization ... It is used particularly as a charge against the monopoly of power by a privileged sector or a stronger faction in an organization. It is interesting to observe, however, that the form in which this charge is stated is identical with that through which authoritarian power has been exercised. The change from 'feudalism' to 'democracy' is not structural or organizational; it is rather a change in the direction of the motion of energy within the same pipeline, this energy exerted by the same kinds of people."

This consideration makes one wonder which specific Japanese interpretation is given to the comprehension of "public" spaces. If Nishiyama's suggestion of a Festival Plaza embodied by the democratic spirit of the Greek Agora and the Roman Forum was an appealing argument to the general view of people involved in the realization of Expo 70, then, the above-mentioned analysis becomes reinforced. Since "democracy" became fashionable during the post-war period, it would be expected to have it symbolically represented in the image of the modernized Japan shown by Expo 70, even though the whole event was strictly controlled by a central organization.

The idea of a Festival Plaza made for the citizens but controlled by a group of people that represents those citizens "democratically," implies the conclusion that it is a democratic public space in terms of that interpretation of "democracy," as analyzed by Nakane. If her interpretation remains true for the whole society of that time, it could be that the visitor's perception of the Festival Plaza was as a real "public" space. This consideration opens the path to a discussion of how "public" the plazas of large Malls and other similar private enterprises are, and how much of the future could be forecast by the Expo 70 Festival Plaza.

Notes

1. A total number of 64,218,770 people visited the event during the 6 months. The most crowded day was September 5th, with 835,832 people and the least crowded day was March 16th with 163,857 people.
2. Matsuri, the reading of the Japanese word for festival, are events of effervescent communal energy celebrated since ancient times as part of religious shintoist ceremonies.
3. The most famous Sakariba of the history of urban life in Japan is the Edo Sakariba, an entertainment district originating from the informal occupation of open areas around the Nihonbashi bridge. Also, a cheerful concentration of popular character as depicted by H. Jinnai, *Tokyo: a spatial anthropology* (Berkekey, University of California Press, 1995).
4. It is probably due to the monumental and modern character of this Plan that Nishiyama became a central figure in the discussion about the Japanese city renovation during that period, and later, allowed him to participate in the 1970 Expo project. The Plan for Kyoto received some critiques insinuating that it showed some similar features to the Plan of Tokyo of 1960, designed by Kenzo Tange. However, it is a characteristic of the Japanese architectural movements of that time to have difficulty in keeping themselves avant-garde or absolutely original because the new ideas were rapidly appropriated and transformed by the established architectural circles. Even Tange's Plan of Tokyo made references to the previous project of Kikutake's Marine City Plan launched beforehand in 1958, as remarked by Boyd (1968, 22). Boyd perceived that the young architects of the 1960s in Japan had difficulties in challenging the established leaders in their field as they were all more or less evolving in the same directions.

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