

Advocacy and Research Centre for Homelessness (ARCH)

By

Nao Kasai, Takuya Kitabatake and Masato Dohi

ARCH is a project team whose members are mainly from the laboratory of Dr. Masato Dohi, the Department of Social Engineering, Tokyo Institute of Technology. Our academic background is urban design, community design and landscape architecture, and thus we take a view that homelessness and rough sleeping are issues of urban design and public open space and need to be tackled through spatial as well as social approaches.

In the past six years, we have developed a database system of rough sleepers in the City of Kawasaki, Japan, and have conducted research trips to six cities in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. Also, we have recently started seeking to actively engage in advocacy work towards the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

In the context of addressing homelessness and rough sleeping in Japan, we are a unique team having our own root in urban design since homelessness is almost always treated as an issue of human services/social care in Japan.

Homelessness and Its Measures in Japan

In Japan, it is widely accepted that the major source of (street) homeless population* had traditionally been those who engaged in the construction industry. The industry employed many day laborers to meet the growing market needs during the high economic growth and these laborers typically lived in a shanty town built around a market where laborers were picked up every morning by construction brokers. Homelessness was common among such day laborers since their forms of employment and housing were unstable— for instance, when a day laborer got so injured that he could not perform heavily physical

work, he could easily lose his housing that was rented on a daily payment system.

While homelessness among this population had been relatively small or geographically concentrated in a hidden area during the economic growth era, it suddenly soared in the 1990s when the bubble economy collapsed and the availability of construction work shrank considerably. Homelessness was now a visible issue for major cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Yokohama. Because of this historical context, even today, homelessness in Japan is regarded as a problem common for single male adults. It is sometimes pointed out that youth and women's homelessness in Japan has been overlooked, though there is not much evidence to prove it.

In terms of public measures to address homelessness, the first Japanese law specifically targeting street homeless population was established in 2002. The Special Law concerning the Support for the Independence of the Homeless has provided able-bodied homeless people in major cities with short to medium-term shelters focusing on employment and skills services. Partly because of this provision, the number of street homeless people has decreased from its peak of 25,296 in 2003 to the most recent figure of 7,508 in 2014.



However, these official figure only counts those who are seen bedding down on one day (sometimes the count is conducted during the day) and some homeless service providers claim that there actually exist twice to three times of rough sleepers. Also, there are no comprehensive statistics on broader homeless population who, for instance, stay in 24-hour internet cafes or in temporary accommodation provided by the government. The lack of a database system contributes to the difficulty of capturing the overall picture of homelessness and rough sleeping in Japan.

In recent years, the impact of the global financial crisis and long-lasting recession seems to have produced new types of homeless people – those who are much younger than their counterparts in the early 2000s and have never worked in the construction industry. The existing public homelessness services are inclined towards employment assistance but we are feeling that we need to look at complex needs of long-term rough sleepers and share the ownership of the problem with the housing and urban development sector as it is currently dealt with by the human service sector.

We aim to achieve the social and spatial inclusion of homeless people without any exclusion. To achieve this goal, our first step is going to be the implementation of our own street counts and the operation of a database system to grab the overall picture of rough sleeping in Tokyo.

ARCH Tokyo Street Count 2016 – 2017 in 11 Central Wards

In Tokyo, official street counts are conducted during the daytime twice a year – one in summer (August) and the other in winter (January). While



Tokyo Street Count 2016-2017		
Ward	Government	ARCH
Shinjuku	140	370
Shibuya	85	181
Meguro	2	4
Shinagawa	13	20
Minato	41	63
Chiyoda	38	98
Chuo	42	82
Daito	79	287
Sumida	68	171
Bunkyo	19	49
Toshima	35	87
Total	562	1,412

these counts are useful to some extent, especially in grasping the size of the less-mobile rough sleeping population with well-established structures such as cardboard shacks, a more realistic and neutral picture of entire rough sleeping would be provided through a night time count. The Street Count is therefore conducted during the night time around the same time of the year as the official counts and attempts to complement them by providing a night-time snapshot, which hopefully encourages improved policy making and raises public awareness of the actual situation of rough sleeping in Tokyo.

We are also investigating the amount of available social resources such as care services and housing and thinking to compare it to the estimate of required resources to help existing rough sleeping population. For instance, we want to make an estimate of the number of apartment units needed to accommodate existing rough sleepers in Tokyo and clarify what kinds of services will be needed for varying rough sleeping population with different needs.

We also recognize the need to involve the housing and urban development sector in the efforts to tackle rough sleeping in addition to the human services sector, which has been playing the central role in addressing rough sleeping and homelessness.

This action is driven by our will to create

momentum in Tokyo's homelessness sector in the years leading up to the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We acknowledge that hosting an international event like the Olympics could trigger hostile attitudes towards rough sleepers, but also a great amount of energy to improve their situation. ARCH is determined to see to the latter,

and Tokyo Street Count 2016 is one of the first actions towards that goal.

For further information:

English website URL:

<http://archcd.wix.com/arch#!blank/dbf9c>

