



Aesthetic Issues of Railway Stations in Japan and Europe

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Summary

Aesthetics has been described as an important factor of railway infrastructure. The paper characterizes policies of railway companies in Japan and Europe during recent period of “station renaissance” when aesthetics became important issue. It compares Japanese and European railway stations and introduces strategies to improve design process and stations in Japan, such as strengthening of the relationship between city planning, station planning and management; reinforcing the advanced community-based planning; introducing the measures to increase public awareness of aesthetics; promoting of a comprehensive station design; enforcing of landscape and aesthetic control; conducting design competitions for railway stations and maintaining stricter control of advertising in public places.

Keywords: Railway station; aesthetics; station renaissance; “Context Sensitive Design”.

1. Introduction

Since 1980s in Europe and 1990s in Japan, railways have been at the stage of recuperating their previous glory, particularly due to the development of high-speed trains greatly improving travel by train. Sophisticated trains required modern stations, thus originating new trends in station design. “Station renaissance” promoted by railway operators to enliven railways included wide range of activities and policies related not only to new railway lines and stations, but also to station refurbishments and to introduction of a new image of railway travel, a station and a rail operator. In Europe new railways have focused considerably on customers’ expectations, particularly in regard to aesthetic and functional station spaces. Though in Japan “station renaissance” has produced some splendid stations, majority of stations have been still problematic and needed to be improved. In Europe sensitive station planning and design have been often promoted by urban planning policies and complied with participation of urban authorities, private developers and local communities. In the USA during late 1990s emerged a new trend in transportation planning and design, known as the “Context Sensitive Design” (CSD). Among various objectives of the CSD are aesthetics of transport facilities and environmentally sensitive design, realized through the efforts to increase understanding of environmental and aesthetic issues within the engineering community and society, and to enforce practical involvement of local residents. CSD seems to be a universal tool for all kinds of public transport, including railways, and can be mirrored in a new approach to station planning and design.

2. “Railway landscape” and aesthetics of railways

2.1 “Railway landscape” (RL)

The concept of “railway landscape” (RL) refers to the landscape of railway stations and their facilities – railroads and train cars. It includes as its elements the agreeability of the station (depending largely on the form, function and aesthetics of the station) as well as the safety and accessibility (convenience) of the station. Railway stations are important public buildings, which besides giving an access to trains, perform a variety of functions – of meeting places, shopping