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Conceptualizing Superdiversity and Intersectionality in Urban Japan

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Sakura Yamamura

Thursday
2025-11-27
18⁰⁰~19³⁰



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Amid the rapid diversification of contemporary urban Japan, new ways of understanding how people live together are becoming essential. Approaching Tokyo through the combined lenses of superdiversity and intersectionality offers a pathway into this emerging complexity. Drawing on the monograph *Spatial Diversity in the Global City: Transnational Tokyo* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), this talk reframes the city as a constellation of overlapping mobilities, identities, and spatial practices that exceed conventional narratives of homogeneity in the context of urban (super-) diversity.

Superdiversity, rather than referring only to an increase in migrant numbers or countries of origin, captures the diversification within migrant populations themselves. It highlights the growing complexity of individual characteristics—such as gender, language, ethnicity, and religion—as well as migration-related dimensions including legal status, migration type, and the channels through which people move. This expanded understanding provides a lens for recognizing the multilayered

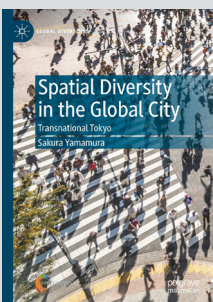
heterogeneity emerging across Tokyo's urban landscape.

However, while superdiversity has often been invoked as a celebratory concept associated with conviviality and multicultural encounters, this talk moves a step further by examining how superdiversity and intersectionality intersect conceptually and spatially within specific contexts. This reveals not only sites of encounter but also the uneven power relations, institutional structures, and socio-spatial dynamics that shape everyday urban life.

By approaching superdiversity through an intersectional spatial lens, the talk uncovers how differences are simultaneously produced, negotiated, and contested in Tokyo's neighborhoods. It shows that superdiversity in global cities is not merely a demographic trend but a lived, relational condition embedded in urban space. Taken together, superdiversity and intersectionality offer a nuanced framework for understanding how urban coexistence is being reconfigured within Tokyo and across the wider network of global cities.



Sakura Yamamura is Professor in Human Geography (Social and Cultural Geography) at RWTH Aachen University and Senior Research Partner at Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, specializing in migration and urban studies. She studied geography, sociology and cultural/social anthropology at the University of Hamburg, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and University of California Berkeley. She previously worked for the Migration Research Group at the Hamburg Institute of International Economics (HWWI), in the International Migration Division of the OECD, and at the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). Her research focuses on the socio-spatial experiences and practices of transnational migrants in cities, analyzing particularly the multi-scalar contexts and the spatialities of superdiversity and intersectionality. Her work has appeared in journals, including *Urban Studies*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Global Networks*.



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