



**Politecnico
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Doctoral Dissertation
Doctoral Program in Architecture. History and Project (36th Cycle)

**Modern Mass Housing as Legacy:
Investigating Contemporary Heritage-making
Processes of Japanese *Danchi***

By

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Abstract

The research aims to explore the history and transformations of Japanese *danchi* over the last two decades. It discusses a series of theories and practices of heritage-making and other forms of rehabilitation applied to these modern mass housing complexes.

In Japan, after the Second World War, state-sponsored housing represented a relevant boost for the country's recovery, bringing new social and life aspirations. This is the case of *danchi*, built between the mid-1950s and the 1970s by the Japan Housing Corporation (JHC) for the burgeoning middle class. Since their construction, *danchi* attracted significant attention from mass media and sociological studies, serving as an exclusive area of debate over the Japanese society of the economic miracle. The sum of criticisms, the recovery of the private real estate market, and the 1970s oil crisis marked the end of the *danchi* and JHC's *golden age*. They definitively unveiled problems and disillusionments that the "modern living" – not only of *danchi* – produced. Once promoters of innovation in construction technologies and housing development for the habitat of the greatest numbers, *danchi* are today considered negatively due to their functional, technological, and social obsolescence.

However, in the last two decades, a new interest in *danchi* heritage has emerged, prompting reconsideration and re-examination that extend beyond the amateur initiatives of architecture enthusiasts (e.g., blogs, photographic reports). The recent intervention by the Architectural Institute of Japan (AIJ) reflects this renewed attention. The AIJ urged the Urban Renaissance Agency (UR – successor to the JHC) to conserve four buildings as part of the urban regeneration of Akabanedai Danchi, built in the 1960s in Tokyo. This effort culminated in the designation of this modern legacy as Tangible Cultural Properties, thereby officially recognizing their historical, cultural, and architectural value. Concurrently, the UR Agency has embarked on a series of activities aimed at regenerating *danchi* stock to address their structural, technological, and social challenges. In contrast to this commitment, UR has decided to reduce the remaining assets of the *danchi* by 30% by 2048.

Therefore, the research focuses on groups of *danchi* that have undergone heritage-making processes or other forms of conservation and regeneration that enabled their survival within the expansionist logic of major Japanese cities. The study primarily examines *danchi* located in the main metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Kanagawa and Kyoto. The analysis and reconstruction of the history and transformations of these housing complexes pay particular attention to the last twenty years, a period partially explored by architectural historiography and criticism. The multidisciplinary investigation intends to identify technological, historical, and socio-cultural phenomena that have determined or could determine a specific form of renewal intervention rather than another or even the demolition. On the other hand, it examines both the effects of these changes on *danchi*'s architectural forms and their urban surroundings, along with emerging expressions of functional and social *mixité*. By following the activities of some organizations committed to modern heritage conservation and documentation, this work observes and discusses a series of interventions on Japanese *danchi* to contribute to the global discourse on the history, preservation, and rehabilitation of modern mass housing as a legacy.