

Future Tsukiji

- An alternative vision for Tokyo's legendary fish market

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Tsukiji in Tokyo is the world's largest fish market and a prominent landmark, located a few blocks from the glittering shopping district Ginza. Early morning when the rest of Tokyo is asleep, the market is swirling with activity as tens of thousands of tons of seafood, from every ocean in the world, change hands. 60 000 people come to the fish market to work everyday and tourists queue for hours to get a glimpse of the notorious tuna auctions held before sunrise. Many vendors in the market are family businesses that have been there for generations. Much of the trade is therefore built upon trust and long-term social relationships.

The life and culture of the market has been formed and passed down from generation to generation of fish traders. It has survived natural catastrophes, wars, and significant economic change.

Tsukiji has a strong sense of community; in many aspects the market is like a city of its own. The market traces back to 1590 and was founded at Nihonbashi (literally "Japan Bridge") which was the commercial and symbolic centre of Edo and Japan, as well as the zero point from which all distances in the empire were measured. The market at Nihonbashi grew and prospered until the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed it in 1923 and it was relocated to its current location.

Photographs from the opening in 1935 depict a highly modern and functionalistic market building. However, rough working conditions and major changes logistically have resulted in today's inefficient and rundown market. As the facilities and equipment become more obsolete, the demands for efficiency continue to increase due to international competition. In order to keep prices down and sustain its position as the world's most important fish market, Tsukiji is in an acute need of modernisation.

Therefore, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government has decided to relocate the market to a site further out in Tokyo Bay where new, modern facilities are about to be built on the former site of a coal gasification plant. Extremely toxic soil has delayed the process and the plans on moving the market have led to public outcry and a strong opposition among the market workers.

This thesis challenges the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's relocation plans and proposes a future architecture for Tsukiji in its current urban context. The task raises questions about adaptability and identity; what makes Tsukiji Tsukiji? How can the spirit of this unique market place survive when the physical conditions inevitably have to change? Learning from the history of the market, Tsukiji has constantly transformed to survive dramatic change over the past decades, which highlights the question of how to design an adaptable market for unpredictable change in the future. The project takes on the challenge of modernising the market in a way that responds to contemporary needs while simultaneously embracing the highly appreciated and unique qualities of the current and historical fish market.