



European Research Day 2017

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T02 - Mr. Jon ALVAREZ, PhD Candidate, Spanish Waseda University, Faculty of Science and Engineering

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My research project:

My research project is on the valuation, preservation and management of cultural townscapes in Japan. The Japanese case is very specific of its territory, since Japan is the only Asian country that was engaged in architectural preservation activities at the same time as many European countries, but at the same time Japan developed its own set of values to appreciate their traditional architecture. In addition, Japan has a very systematic approach to townscape preservation, led by central government, which has to deal with the peculiarities of Japanese law, such as the constitutional right to private property. Thus, Japan had to develop management models which were not based on top-down urban planning such as in European countries, but in the coordination of scholars, governmental workers and local communities. My research analyses the effects of this approach in Japanese towns, and aims at showing what Japan and Europe can learn from each other.

My career path:

The employment conditions in Japan are generally speaking less skill-oriented than in Europe. Internal mobility in institutions and companies is high, thus workers cannot develop specialist careers because they shift their positions every two to four years. I had to deal with this problem during my research, since many public workers in charge of preservation programs in local governments were not-specialist workers which had been at that position less than three years, and thus, their knowledge of the problems inside the protected townscapes was limited. In the near future, I would like to work in Japan for some years, to apply the knowledge I acquired during the last four years. However, I do not see myself in building a lifetime project in Japan. I consider that Japanese academic world is still not welcoming foreigners, and the access for foreigners to researcher or teaching positions is yet limited to 3 to 5-year contracts.

My relation to Europe:

I have no relationship with any research institute or university in Europe. I was teaching part-time at university in Spain, and I was fired because of lack of funds to pay my wages. The situation in Spain is that of full-time professors being paid a part-time wage, while part-time teachers have been swept away from university. I have been in contact with some privately managed research groups; however their goal was not to introduce me to their structure in Spain, but rather the other way around. Since the funds for research in Spain have been severely cut down, all the researchers I contacted so far want me to help them 'internationalise' their project, which is just a soft way to say 'help me going out of Spain to somewhere I can work'.