



JOURNAL OF THE ACADEMIC SOCIETY FOR QUALITY OF LIFE (JAS4QoL)

2022 Vol. 1(1) 1:1-2

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IT IS NOT EASY TO FIND A CLEAN AND FUNCTIONAL PUBLIC TOILET IN MANY COUNTRIES: LESSONS TO LEARN FROM JAPAN

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Citation: SATO, A. It is Not Easy to Find a Clean and Functional Public Toilet in Many Countries: Lessons to Learn from Japan *JAS4QoL* 2022, 1(1) 1:1-2.

Online: <https://as4qol.org/xAJT1>

Received Date: 2022/12/16 Accepted Date: 2022/12/17 Published: 2022/12/31

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The 2019 International Conference on Quality of Life was held at Kyoto Pharmaceutical University from Sept 28-29, 2019. Further information can be found at <http://as4qol.org/icqol/2019/>
- We have moved to continuous publication. Beginning January 2019 the editing committee has decided to adopt a continuous publishing model for Journal publication. Individual articles will be released online as they become ready, allowing a steady stream of informative quality articles. We will also be moving to a calendar year issue cycle. In traditional terms, each volume will encompass a single year and consist of a single issue. Publishing on a just-in-time basis allows authors to present their results in a timely fashion, and our readers, students, and colleagues to access our content and cite articles more quickly and free from the restrictions of a predefined timetable. As a result of these changes, the look and style, as well as the function, of the Journal will be different, and hopefully improved.
- The 2019 International Meeting on Quality of Life was held recently. Proceedings as well as photos and other information can be found at <http://as4qol.org/icqol/>

MORE INFORMATION AT [HTTP://AS4QOL.ORG/ICQOL/2018/](http://as4qol.org/icqol/2018/)



Wisdom (Philosophical) Note

It is Not Easy to Find a Clean and Functional Public Toilet in Many Countries: Lessons to Learn from Japan

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Abstract

Traveling in Europe, the United States, and most countries in Asia, it is always a painful and embarrassing moment when nature calls. For people living in Japan especially, the situation maybe unbearable when a language barrier arises as well. All these come back to the one and one only question: Why are public toilets or washrooms not readily available outside Japan? The answer to this question goes back to the 19th century when a well-meaning reformer, Augustus Gardner spoke out in 1862: “Any man, and far more, any woman may walk from one end of this city to the other, in the most dire torture, without finding the relief to the necessities of the body, without such indecent exposure of the person as would render the individual liable to arrest and fine by the civic authorities.”

Then the next question comes: Why don't those government bodies or city and county offices do something to make life more pleasant for everyone, using tax revenues. It is difficult to understand why these civic organizations find it so difficult to build toilets for the public when there is always some money left over from what's allocated in the budgets. These leftover monies are usually used for paving roads, which actually don't need any paving. Or they use the leftover money for buying additional equipment or facilities, of which they already have more than enough. This situation seems neither logical or fair-minded to many people, including those who often have no choice but to urinate in public places, making themselves a nuisance and making public places odorous and unhygienic. The stench may be bad, but that is nothing compared to the urgent issue of men exposing themselves in public: a disgusting act that ladies can't avoid witnessing.

In the early 1870s, there were alternatives; saloons offered the closest thing to restrooms for men, but only if they bought booze. However, this drove men to drink. On realizing that such a social problem existed, civil offices started to promote public toilets to reduce immorality, keep men sober, curb disease, and restore public hygiene. But the problem remains – even to today – that public toilets are filthy, and have walls scribbled with the vilest

Citation: SATO, A.; ISHII, (SecondAuthorInitials); THIRD AUTHOR LAST), ThirdAuthorInitials) It is Not Easy to Find a Clean and Functional Public Toilet in Many Countries: Lessons to Learn from Japan. *JAS4QoL* 2022, 1(1) 1:1-2.

Available online at
<https://as4qol.org/xAJT1>

Received: 2022/12/16
Accepted: 2022/12/17
Published: 2022/12/31

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obscenities. Some people suffered from the lack of accessory devices, such as mirrors and chains, installed in these toilets. In addition, women were usually not catered to as well as men: in terms of numbers of buildings and urinals. Often men used toilets for free, while women had to pay for this privilege. In fact, London in the late 1920s had three times more facilities for men than women. This was probably due to the general perception of women belonged in the home.

Then in the 19th century, there came the well-intentioned service of businesses offering luxurious facilities, for women of the middle and upper classes, in urban department stores. This option is to this day still the best option in many European cities. Paris is a typical example: it is very difficult to find a public toilet in Paris; however, one can ease oneself in a restaurant or department store rather comfortably. In some places-of-interest (POIs) in Paris, unless one has bought a ticket to enter the facility, there is practically no restroom in the vicinity of the POI. Even if there is a facility nearby, it is not cheap to use the facilities (2 French francs per visit). In many train stations in Paris, using public toilets doesn't come easy.

Governments in many countries are not very proactive in building public toilets even though they know the people much desire such facilities. However, the difficulty of providing for the cleanliness of such facilities by hiring conscientious and responsible staff (not a rewarding job to many), and the fast deterioration of these facilities into stinky dirty places is what deters many with originally good intentions from following through. In many European and certain Asian countries, people need to pay to use public or shopping mall toilets: this way, funding for the management of these facilities can be established in order to keep the facilities clean and hygienic. In certain Asian tropical countries, they even air-condition the facility – for a handsome fee – for users to enjoy nature's call. Practical and comfortable toilets with clean and sparkling appearance require commitments from both managing staff and public users: a lesson many can learn from Japan.

Given all the uncomfortable circumstances that one encounters in Paris and other cities, Japan seems like a high-achiever as far as providing sanitary toilets. In Japan, any place where crowds are expected or where people are present, public toilets are always there to serve people's nature's needs: at train stations, in parks, near POIs, in rural settings, and even public mountain trails. For festivals and festive events, mobile units are there to make sure the public is happy.

In Japan, not only are public toilets found everywhere, but these facilities are also continuously kept clean by maintenance staff (though exceptions are found in remote or rural settings). One impression that many tourists in Japan have is that toilets are so clean and pleasant that going to ease oneself brings relief not only of human bodily needs, but also a refreshing feeling lingers long in the mind.

Japan was no different from America or Europe before and after World War II; however, the need to provide a clean and pleasant experience when visiting what was a conventionally stinking and unpleasant toilet was probably triggered by the first Olympics organized in Japan in 1964. The issues of the number as well as the cleanliness, appearance and atmosphere of a Japanese public toilet were put worth to the public for consideration, and the government started clean-looks campaigns to make the toilet a pleasant place to visit. The education given since then seems to have persisted and is continuously promoted even to this day. A toilet in any household is clean and neat with all accessory items provided and well maintained and adequately stocked. The rest room is viewed as a place to relax and read while doing what is necessary, making a visit to a toilet a positive and healthy habit. In public places toilets are usually managed by the staff of the Public Services department. One often sees staff members cleaning toilets very diligently; they take pride – the result of public health education on having clean toilets for general use – in their work of keeping these places clean and sparkling. Users (with similar education) too, make sure the facilities retain their clean looks after they are used, with care and consideration for the next person coming to use the same facility. This is the kind of mentality people have in making the toilets clean and sparkling, although some drunkards just abuse this, out of intoxication or loss of alertness. The extent of this traditional cleanup mentality by the Japanese may be observed in present-day cleanup after a matches at tournaments such as the international soccer tournaments or the World Series in baseball.

All in all, toilets in Japan – private or public – care usually clean and pleasant. It takes diligent homemakers and dedicated staff to maintain the hygienic conditions, but the users themselves are also involved in thinking along the same lines: care and consideration for the next person in line to use the facility.