

CASE STUDY

How Seoul Is Meeting the Challenges of Urban Renewal



The Republic of Korea's capital city faced and resolved a series of obstacles to constructing a modern public building on a historic site.

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Overview

The Seoul Metropolitan Government decided to demolish the Dongdaemun stadium, which had become shabby and decrepit. The surrounding downtown area was also deteriorating into a slum. In its place, the city established the Dongdaemun Design Plaza as the center for the design and fashion industry and a history and culture park for citizens and international visitors.

The Dongdaemun Design Plaza now stands out as a major landmark of Seoul. Aside from its aesthetic value with a distinctively neo-futuristic design, it is also seen as the most successful urban development project ever attempted in Seoul. It not just revived the downtown area into a vibrant fashion hub and a popular tourist destination in the Republic of Korea, but it also successfully resolved conflicts between stakeholders.

Context

Built in 1925 on the site where part of the Fortress Wall of Seoul stood, the Gyeongseong Sports Complex (later known as Dongdaemun Sports Complex) was the first modern facility for athletics, baseball, tennis, and swimming. After the Republic of Korea gained its independence, it was renamed Seoul Sports Complex and served as a site for important national events. However, its use was diminished when the Jamsil Sports Complex was built in 1984 to host world-class sporting events, such as the Olympic Games.

The Dongdaemun commercial area started to develop at the same time a market emerged around Baegogae in the latter part of the Joseon Dynasty, the last and longest-lived imperial dynasty in the Korean peninsula. Gwangjang is Seoul's oldest market, and it was developed into a modern market in 1905. It became a hub for the clothing industry as well as a wholesale shopping district because of the numerous sewing factories built around the Pyeonghwa Fashion Town in the 1960s.

Solutions

The city developed Dongdaemun Design Plaza to boost economic activities in the downtown area, particularly the design and creative industries. It was envisioned to serve as an international exchange network for design and creativity, and as a hub of East Asian culture and tourism.

Rehabilitation of downtown area

The Dongdaemun Design Plaza was part of the 2006 General Downtown Creation Plan. Under the plan, the city would develop the downtown area into an attractive and active center where Seoul could meet the world and still be true to 600 years of cultural heritage. The plan suggested four South-North corridors and important arrangement points to promote the entire downtown area.

Dongdaemun Design Plaza was planned as a complex of cultural corridors to connect Daehakro, Heunginjimun Gate (Dongdaemun), and Mt. Namsan. Aside from being developed as a design hub, it was also to be transformed into a place of relaxation and recreation in downtown Seoul. The project would be a way to promote commercial and cultural activities in the four downtown corridors.

Meanwhile, the city conducted an archaeological field survey of cultural assets and a feasibility study to restore the Fortress Wall, and it developed a framework for the project.

Design and construction of Dongdaemun Design Plaza

Seoul held a contest to draw the interest of citizens and their ideas for the project. Based on the contest results, the city changed its original plan and removed the sports complex entirely. The revised plan provided for the partial preservation of the sports facility and the creation of the Dongdaemun Sports Complex Memorial Hall in Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

Seoul also held a design competition for the project, inviting local and foreign architects to submit their

proposals. This was to ensure fair competition and the best possible design for the project. The design guidelines included details of the design plaza, underground space, and history and culture park. The Metonymic Landscape design of renowned Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid won.

The city started the demolition of the Dongdaemun Sports Complex in April 2007. Samsung C&T started construction in March 2009.

The Dongdaemun Design Plaza opened its doors on 21 March 2014. It comprises three floors above ground and four floors underground. It is equipped with multi-purpose exhibition and convention halls, international conference halls, a design museum, design gallery, design playground, design lab, and amenities for visitors in three sections: Alimteoo, Baeumteo, and Salimteoo.

Development of Dongdaemun History and Culture Park

Structures and artifacts of the Joseon Dynasty (including the Fortress Wall of Seoul and Hadogam, which was a military training base) were discovered on the site of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza. The city decided to build the Dongdaemun History and Culture Park, which opened in October 2009.

Located on the east side of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza, the park connects the ring-shaped Downtown Green Field Corridor from Mt. Naksan to Mt. Namsan, and serves as a cultural space to exhibit historic and cultural assets of Seoul. It was originally planned as a design street to introduce the latest design trends but was later changed to the history and culture park.

The park consists of the Fortress Wall of Seoul and Igansumun water gate; two outdoor structure exhibition spaces; Dongdaemun History Museum, which exhibits discovered artifacts; Dongdaemun Sports Complex Memorial Hall; a small-scale Igansumun Exhibition Hall; and Gallerymun.

The commercial districts were integrated by connecting the eastern and western districts, which were separated by Jangchungdanro-ro Street, with underground space. In addition, the project provided a more conducive walking environment underground by connecting the Euljiro Underpass and Lines 2, 4, and 5 of the subway. The underground space also serves as a venue for cultural activities.

Excavation and preservation of the Fortress Wall of Seoul and Hadogam

Seoul planned to restore the remains of the fortress wall at the site in conjunction with the entire 18.6-kilometer fortress wall restoration project. The restoration started in April 2009. Test-pitting, which assesses the archaeological potential of a site, was first performed at the baseball and football field sections of the sports complex. Many artifacts were discovered through excavation. Abiding by the preservation guidelines for the fortress wall, the city government decided to preserve the site and perform the restoration work later.

Meanwhile, a full-scale excavation started as artifacts related to life and culture in the Joseon Dynasty were found at the site of government buildings, including Hadogam. The authorities planned to relocate excavated structures to their original locations, restoring them to their original state based on historical

research.

Project management

Seoul formed three departments to manage the Dongdaemun Design Plaza project.

Design and Construction: Cultural Facility Project Unit

The Dongdaemun Design Park Manager of the Cultural Facility Project Unit was in charge of designing and building the Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

The Cultural Facility Project Unit was responsible for building large structures of important city projects. It managed the design, construction, and supervision of the design competition for Dongdaemun Design Plaza as well as civil engineering and equipment.

Preparation of Operation and Promotion: Design Seoul Headquarters

The Design and Planning Officer and Promotion Officer were responsible for preparing the operation and promotion of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

The Design Seoul Headquarters was responsible for general administration of the Design Seoul policy. It ensured that the Dongdaemun Design Plaza followed this policy.

Post-development Operation: Seoul Design Foundation

The city formed an autonomous and financially independent organization to operate and manage the facilities of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza. Established in March 2009, the Design Seoul Foundation plans and implements various programs to support the design industry and promotes a design culture in Seoul.

It was very complicated and difficult to draw up the blueprint for the Dongdaemun Design Plaza because of the structure's curves and slopes. Therefore, Seoul made an agreement with the designer to use construction administration, which entailed the designer supervising the construction as the city's representative.

Conflict resolution

The project faced opposition from some stakeholders. The city government deployed negotiating teams to resolve conflicting interests.

Conflict with sports enthusiasts

The Civic Network for Justice of Sport (CNETJS) opposed the demolition of the Dongdaemun Sports Complex. They demanded that it be remodeled and used as a stadium during baseball season and as an open sports complex for citizens during the off-season. The Korea Baseball Organization and Korea

Baseball Association, however, had already agreed to the demolition.

A joint task force of the CNETJS and eight other civil society associations issued “the Declaration of 100 People to Oppose Demolition of Dongdaemun Sports Complex” with some members of the National Assembly and famous baseball players. The declaration stressed the historical and cultural values of the Dongdaemun Sports Complex as the country’s first sports and cultural facility in its modern history. They demanded that it be remodeled into a stadium, a sports museum, or a park.

Seoul formed a team with members from the Sports Promotion Department and Seoul Sports Council to contact the opposing groups through official and unofficial channels and to convince them of the necessity of the project. The city tried to gather opinions and find solutions, such as development of an alternative stadium, partial preservation of facilities, and construction of a memorial hall.

Conflicts with merchants

Because of the project, merchants at the Folk Flea Market of the Dongdaemun Sports Complex, street vendors, sporting goods stores at the complex, and the underground shopping area in front of the baseball stadium had to move out.

The city government had face-to-face meetings with them and suggested feasible solutions to individual merchant groups.

This was the second time the merchants at the Folk Flea Market were to be relocated. The city had set up this temporary market in the football stadium of Dongdaemun Sports Complex for street vendors who were affected by the Cheonggyecheon stream restoration project in 2003.

City authorities had more than 1,500 meetings with the merchants to convince them of the merits of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza project. They also studied the requirements of the vendors.

With the opening of Seoul Folk Flea Market in Shinseldong in April 2008, Seoul started negotiations with street vendors for their relocation and offered a comprehensive solution, including support for equipment modernization, change of business types, and marketing strategies for those who agreed to relocate.

Sporting goods stores opened at the Dongdaemun Sports Complex after it was remodeled in 1966. The merchants were operating under contract with the Seoul government. They argued that they had possessory rights to the shopping district as a reward for their efforts to promote it and that they were entitled to compensation from the city. Seoul took a hardline stance by filing eviction suits against the stores because their demand for possessory rights was unreasonable. The city tried to find a more flexible solution as the stores filed a counter suit, and it seemed like the negotiations would take a long time.

The city took several actions to resolve the issue. First, the negotiations, negotiation support, relocation support, and legal support operations were assigned to different departments. Second, it performed a detailed analysis of the relocation subjects. Then, guided by the results of the study, it carried out

individual negotiations in line with the requirements of individual merchants and actively convinced them. At the same time, negotiators engaged in more active discussions with association representatives. As a result, the merchants agreed to relocate in February 2008.

The conflict resolution process emphasized the necessity of systematic management of shared assets and measures to prevent this type of conflict. Also, it showed the need for a negotiation manual, fostering negotiators, and other efforts to manage public conflicts.

The Dongdaemun Design Plaza project included the development of the underground space of Heunginmunro and Euljiro, as well as the underground shopping area in front of the Dongdaemun Baseball Stadium that was managed by the city government. The merchants demanded to be permitted to open stores under the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and to continue the rental agreements to guarantee their livelihood.

Seoul, however, started to evict the stores and return rental deposits to shop owners. It also suggested that the merchants relocate to the underground passageway of Euljiro 1-ga and City Hall Square or a private shopping mall in the Jamsil area. After several negotiations, the merchants eventually agreed to move to the underground shopping area of Euljiro section 4. However, this was met with opposition from the store owners and merchant association of Euljiro section 4. The city ordered the corporation that was managing the underground shopping area to negotiate with the merchants. It finally convinced them through continuous communication, including a marathon meeting lasting 12 hours.

Conflicts with culture supporters

Culture Solidarity and other civil associations staged an anti-demolition campaign, arguing that the Dongdaemun Sports Complex be registered as a cultural asset. The members of the Modern Cultural Asset Committee under the Cultural Heritage Administration also pushed for its preservation because it was, in and of itself, part of the history of the Japanese colonial era and the independence and division of the Korean peninsula. However, the city had already initiated the restoration of the Fortress Wall of Seoul, connecting the four main gates and four sub-gates. The arguments for the restoration of the fortress wall and preservation of the Dongdaemun Sports Complex overlapped.

Through a series of discussions, the city government initially convinced the Cultural Heritage Administration that it was reasonable to restore the remains of the Joseon Dynasty around the Fortress Wall of Seoul and demolish the Dongdaemun Sports Complex. The Cultural Heritage Administration accepted the proposal but demanded a partial preservation of the ballpark, and Seoul agreed. Consequently, it was decided that two light towers were to be preserved north of the football stadium and that the eastern flame holder be relocated to the park site. A separate exhibition space would have a miniature model and 3D video of the Dongdaemun Sports Complex.

However, the Cultural Asset Committee of the Cultural Heritage Administration later insisted that the site of the fortress will be fully excavated and restored because of its high value as a historical site. But the city wanted to perform a trace restoration only because full restoration would require changing the

framework of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza project.

After some negotiations, the city and the Cultural Heritage Administration finally agreed on the following:

- preserve the site of the Fortress Wall of Seoul and Igansumun with minimal, emergency restoration;
- relocate Hadogam and other building sites to a new Structure Exhibition Hall on the east side of the fortress wall; and
- preserve part of the Hadogam site of the baseball stadium in the underground square of the main building of the design plaza.

The city government also reached an agreement with the Cultural Heritage Administration to call the park the Dongdaemun History and Culture Park. In this way, two difficult problems—preservation of cultural assets and implementation of the project—were resolved harmoniously.

Results

Promotion of design and creative industries

Seoul held the biggest ever Seoul Fashion Week with the opening of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza in March 2014. This provided opportunities for rising designers to raise their profile and for top designers to enhance their competitiveness and expand their business at home and abroad. The city plans to hold other fashion events at the design plaza to promote and help expand sales of the Dongdaemun commercial district.

Promotion of tourism

It was reported that the floating population increased by at least 10% after the opening of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza. The number of foreign visitors is continually increasing. Seoul expects that more than half of the tourists to the city will visit Dongdaemun in the future.

Thanks to Dongdaemun Design Plaza, the district is expected to earn about KRW 881.7 billion and create 5,129 jobs. Moreover, the revenue of neighboring commercial districts is expected to reach about KRW 210 billion.

Conflict management

Opposition from some stakeholders had an enormous impact on the project. Seoul organized different negotiating teams for each stakeholder group.

The project provided an important lesson for public conflict management: it is essential to reach agreement through negotiations with multiple parties by expanding civic participation.

The traditional conflict management policy focused on dealing with the problems only after conflicts

arose. The project showed that this approach was not efficient. The city recognized that it is crucial to prevent conflicts instead of taking action later.

The project provided an opportunity to build a better conflict management system. The city started to operate conflict management teams for public projects. It produced a document on how to manage public conflicts. It has also nurtured expert negotiators.

New paradigm for urban planning and design

Implementing the project required public consultation and participation. The city actively gathered the opinions of citizens through public policy workshops and contests. The project was carried out through the participation of different groups and agencies, including Dongdaemun merchants. Indeed, it suggested a new paradigm for urban planning and design.

The project was the first case to introduce a design competition in the public sector, helping upgrade the quality of public construction. It also adopted new management methods, such as construction administration and construction management, for fair and transparent management of the entire process. The project contributed to the development of a standard system for public building procurement.

Limitation and Challenges

Promotion of Dongdaemun commercial district

Local traditional business people point out the lack of programs to promote industries in the Dongdaemun area. The original objective was to develop the Dongdaemun area as a global fashion hub by using Dongdaemun Design Plaza as a base where young designers and skilled sewers in Pyeonghwa Market and Changshindong can collaborate. In reality, it only serves as a venue for Seoul Fashion Week but not for other fashion programs. Moreover, its programs are focused only on attractions, such as exhibitions. There is growing criticism that if it continues to operate as it is now, it will be difficult to promote the Dongdaemun commercial district and transform it into a design hub.

In 2014, Dongdaemun Design Plaza had just opened and it was understandable that it did not have sufficient programs to promote the neighboring commercial district. Starting 2015, it planned to actively promote the Dongdaemun commercial district and support marketing in cooperation with neighboring commercial districts; provide a tour of the design plaza in conjunction with its tourism and historic resources; and create added value and jobs by recycling (or upcycling) leftover pieces of fabric and leather from sewers and combining them with new designs.

Preservation and creation of historicity and locality

There is criticism that despite its architectural value, Dongdaemun Design Plaza destroyed the historical and spatial value of Dongdaemun. There is only a small memorial hall for the sports complex at Dongdaemun History and Culture Park. Critics also pointed out that the Fortress Wall of Seoul has not

been fully restored, and history could not be fully understood by relocating the Hadogam out of the fortress wall.

It would have been difficult to restore the site to its original state during the construction of the design plaza. But it is essential to preserve the historicity and locality as much as possible through the efficient management of the Dongdaemun History and Culture Park, Dongdaemun History Museum, Dongdaemun Sports Complex Memorial Hall, Igansumun, and Structure Exhibition Hall. On the other hand, continuous efforts are required to create a new and dynamic history of Dongdaemun Design Plaza as a global source of design and creativity and through cooperative programs with neighboring districts.

Balancing public benefits and profitability

After Dongdaemun Design Plaza opened in 2014, its operator, the Seoul Design Foundation, increased its estimated income to KRW 32.1 billion from KRW 19.2 billion in 2010 while reducing expenditures to KRW 32.1 billion from KRW 39.8 billion. To reinforce the financial independence of the design plaza, the Seoul Design Foundation changed the objectives of the organization from preparation and facility development to operations while focusing on creating businesses, including branding, venue marketing, and advertising in addition to key businesses (e.g., leasing, rental, exhibitions).

However, Dongdaemun Design Plaza is regarded as a public facility more than as a for-profit enterprise. Therefore, it faces the challenge of balancing public interests and profitability. It needs to be accessible to citizens at a reasonable price and at the same time make its operation financially sustainable.

Resources

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