

NOVEL APPROACHES TO URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH KOREA? COMPARING SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN DESIGN IN THE SEOUL METROPOLITAN REGION

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South Korea is one of the world's most urbanized countries. While South Korea and Seoul are widely known for the past rapid economic growth and massive urban development it is often overlooked that over the last decade novel approaches to urban development, which noticeably differ from the earlier period, have taken place in South Korea. Although there seems to be a growing interest in the historic origins of urban change in South Korea and resulting economic, social, cultural and political consequences, little research has been done so far in the field of Korean studies on the changing nature of the recent South Korean urban development. The paper tries to fill the gap in the research on the urban change in South Korea by focusing on the recent urban design, discussed as an important instrument of urban policy and a subject of growing civic involvement, in the Seoul metropolitan region. In particular the paper deals with the social consequences of urban development and its impact on the everyday life in South Korean cities. In contrast to the massive urbanization projects, which used to be a consequence of rapid economic growth in the past, two seemingly novel approaches to urban development have emerged in South Korea over the last decade. The first approach is related to large-scale metropolitan projects, which are expected to promote the economic competitiveness and global appeal of cities. The second approach is related to smaller local scale projects and is mainly focused on the improvements in the quality of everyday life in cities.

By comparing four case studies of urban design in the Seoul metropolitan region in terms of addressing the local history and culture, quality of everyday life, economic competitiveness, public use, and civic participation in decision-making, the paper tries to understand and distinguish the recent approaches to urban development in South Korea. The Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park and Gwanghwamun Plaza are discussed as case studies of large-scale metropolitan projects, while Kkummaru Visitors Centre in Seoul and Bupyeong Culture Street are examined as case studies of smaller local scale projects. In the conclusion the paper argues that the urban design, which fails to involve public in decision-making, does not differ considerably in terms of its social consequences from the massive urbanization projects in South Korea in the past. Urban design, which seeks to engage actively with the public, can on the contrary successfully improve the quality of everyday life in cities. Such post-developmental approach to urban development suggests a transition from a massive urban development of the past towards a more sustainable urban development of South Korean cities in the future.

Key words: public space, quality of everyday life, sustainable urban development, urban design, urbanization in South Korea

1. INTRODUCTION

Global processes increasingly affect what used to be the national and local domain of social, economic and political life. Yet the national is not losing all the meaning nor have localities completely disappeared. On the contrary, the old social and spatial forms are being rearranged under the influence of global processes, establishing new relations and meanings. While the world is becoming more interdependent, there have never been so many opportunities for individuals, communities, cities or entire societies to create their own and distinct future. Our time is not only characterised by globalisation but also by growing individuation in society (Castells, 1996). Cities are the places, where globalisation and individuation take their most extreme forms, interacting in most unpredictable ways. They are increasingly influenced by national and transnational structures, such as the national and global economy, political systems, technological and media space, and global civic society. In this sense globalisation of cities is not a one-way process, where a

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particular city supposedly depends on global forces beyond local control. While the transformation of global economy, growing cultural and political integration at the cross-national scale and informatization of societies profoundly affect urban development around the world, such a view fails to recognize that cities are not merely places where global flows of capital, goods and cultures are localised. Cities are also the engines of global economy and reproduce the global order as much as they are affected by it (Sassen, 2001). As autonomous economic and political agents cities namely actively respond to pressures and opportunities of globalisation. It is the urban policy in cities – and not the global forces outside – that remains the main source of urban change (Short, 2004; Križnik, 2009b; Cho, 2010).

Economic and institutional changes at the cross-national and national scale are thus among the reasons for a growing competition of cities in order to attract new investments, corporations, events and tourists, which are on the long run expected to boost their economic growth and urban development and improve the quality of everyday life in cities. There is little evidence, however, that a successful competition always results in a long-term economic growth or urban development equally beneficial to all residents. Quite on the contrary, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that the actual benefits of competition are in fact distributed in a noticeably uneven way among different social groups. The emerging social polarisation, growing economic inequalities, decline of local communities or denied civic and political rights in cities are largely a consequence of *competitive urban policy*, which focuses on unrestricted economic growth and speculative urban development (Smith, 2002; Mayer, 2007; Harvey, 2012).¹

By competing against their rivals, many cities face difficulties to maintain their traditional spatial organisation and quality of public space, which has become increasingly fragmented and privatised. Speculative urban development namely considers public space as a mere economic asset, which can be turned into a commodity that can be easily consumed. In order to win the global attention of the investors and tourists, cities construct iconic projects, often imitating approaches found elsewhere around the world. Such urban development rarely shows a meaningful relation to the local history and culture. Growing commodification of history and culture results in exclusive public space, which resembles empty monuments rather than shared places of cultural exchange (Harvey, 1989; Short, 2004; Chung, 2009; Zukin, 2010). Growing concerns for public safety and security are at the same time an excuse to impose further restrictions on the use and meaning of public space with an aim to create seemingly unconflicting places for tourists rather than residents. Yet the public space in cities is far from declining. By claiming their right to the city, different urban social movements and post-traditional communities, such as the anti-globalisation groups, equal opportunity and political rights movements, life-style communities or neighbours associations produce new kinds of shared places (Mayer, 2007; Cho, 2008). While the competitive urban policy results in commodification and privatisation of public space, the latter is at the same time being reinvented as the Occupy movements have recently demonstrated.

The contradictions and limitations of competitive urban policy became rather evident during the present global economic and political crisis (Harvey, 2012). Many efforts were made over the past years to find alternative policies, which would lead towards a more balanced and just urban development in the future. Cities are namely realizing that unrestricted economic growth and speculative urban development can neither sustain their long-term competitiveness, nor improve the quality of everyday life. Sustainable urban development has become widely recognised as an alternative to the competitive urban policy in terms of balanced economic growth, with social and environmental costs and responsibilities shared equally by different social groups in a city. Sustainable urban development in this sense is no longer seen as limitation to the economic growth, but rather as contributing to it on long term (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011; Dempsey et al., 2011). Diverse *post-developmental* approaches to urban development focus, for instance,

¹ Harvey (1989:5) describes the historical conditions that resulted in the “rise of urban entrepreneurialism”, which not only leads towards the corporatisation of urban policy, but also to the domination of corporate interests in the urban planning and political decision-making. In his view the “mechanisms of intra-urban competition” became the driving force of urban entrepreneurialism, hence the term *competitive urban policy*. The latter has meanwhile become a characteristic of most cities around the world. Competitive urban policy, with foundations in the neoliberal ideology, prioritizes economic profits and efficiency, market driven urban development, uneven taxes and welfare cuts and individual responsibility over common benefits, balanced urban development, even distribution of resources and shared responsibility (Smith, 2002; Mayer, 2007).

on reviving local economies and job markets, strengthening social cohesion and solidarity among citizens, or on establishing ways for active participation of citizens in decision-making, all with an aim to overcome the limitations of competitive urban policy (Hoogvelt, 2001; Mayer and Knox, 2006).

The South Korean capital used to be no exception in promoting competitive urban policy in order to boost its urban development (Seoul Development Institute, 2003). However, due to recent social, political and institutional changes in South Korea, it seems that once prevailing unrestricted economic growth and speculative urban development are challenged by different post-developmental approaches. The present metropolitan government is for instance moving away from promoting “a clean and attractive global city” towards what they call “a hopeful Seoul” as “village community” (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006; 2012). Yet the changing attitude towards urban development is not only a consequence of political and institutional changes, but also reflects a growing interest of the civic society in urban development (Cho, 2002; Lee, 2006). The paper takes recent urban design, as an important instrument of urban policy in Seoul and a subject of growing civic involvement, as the case studies to understand the changing approaches to urban development in South Korea. The Kkummaru Visitors Centre, Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park, Bupyeong Culture Street and Gwanghwamun Plaza, built over the past decade in and around Seoul, are compared in terms of addressing local history and culture, quality of everyday life, economic competitiveness, public use, and civic participation in decision-making. Finally the paper tries to assess how much particular urban design projects contribute to the sustainable urban development of Seoul and South Korea in the future.

2. URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable urban development or *urban sustainability* remains a rather contested concept in urban theory and urban policy in spite of debates intensively taking place across disciplines for more than the last three decades. Although many conceptual differences continue to remain, it is generally agreed that sustainable urban development needs to be addressed in terms of the “three-E framework”, emphasizing that a sustainable long-term *economic* growth of cities should be balanced with the protection of *environment* and social *equity* (Mayer and Knox, 2006:324). Sustainable urban development therefore has an economic, environmental and social dimension. Balancing economy, environment and society at the same time requires negotiation between many stakeholders and their interests, which implies that sustainable urban development also has an inherent political dimension. Understanding of sustainable urban development used to be often reduced to its economic and environmental dimension, focusing on the environmental limits to the economic growth. Recently, however, a multi-dimensional approach, which recognizes the importance of social sustainability, became accepted (Dempsey et al., 2011). According to such view the social equity and civic participation in decision-making are as significant for the future of cities as the economic or environmental concerns. If one is to approach sustainable urban development in an integral way it is therefore necessary to recognize the interdependence and “dynamic relationship between the different economic, social and environmental processes within the broad policy umbrella of sustainable development” (Manzi et al., 2010:6).

Although there is awareness about the importance of *social sustainability*, the social dimension of sustainable urban development has received less attention so far (Dempsey et al., 2011). One reason may be the lacking agreement among different disciplines on the understanding and interpretation of social sustainability. Colantonio and Dixon (2011) nevertheless suggest that regardless of persisting conceptual differences two general approaches to social sustainability prevail in urban theory and urban policy. The first approach relates social sustainability to the basic needs of citizens, which should be met when cities strive for long-term sustainable urban development. Social sustainability can be in this case achieved by ample provision of employment opportunities, affordable housing, health care and education, which the authors recognize as “traditional social sustainability themes” (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011:25). Addressing the basic needs of citizens is seen as a way to resolve social and economic disparities in cities, which could otherwise hinder their urban development. The other approach emphasizes the importance of social equity and political rights in order to sustain existing social and cultural structures in the long run. According to this view the traditional understanding of sustainable urban development has to be complemented by concepts such as social cohesion, social inclusion, social capital, liveability, sense of neighbourhood, community attachment, quality of everyday life or civic participation in decision-making (Portney, 2003; Manzi et al., 2010). The other important reason for less attention that social sustainability gained in the past is due to the rather intangible nature of social and cultural consequences, caused by the unrestricted economic growth and speculative urban development, as well as the unclear relationship

between dimensions of sustainable urban development, which poses difficulties not only for the urban theory but also for the practical implementation of social sustainability (Portney, 2003). Colantonio and Dixon (2011:24) hence suggest that social sustainability can be approached in practical terms as the integration of “traditional social policy areas and principles, such as equity and health, with emerging issues concerning participation, needs, social capital, the economy, the environment, and, more recently, with the notions of happiness, well-being and quality of life.”

Urban policy, concerned with social sustainability, should therefore provide a decent quality of life and equal opportunities to social groups with different economic, social and cultural background, promote their integration by addressing economic, social and political exclusion, sustain existing social and cultural structures in cities, encourage participation of citizens in decision-making, and open ways for self-management of cities (Manzi et al., 2010:228). Practical implementation of social sustainability thus affects a broad scope of urban policy areas from economic policy, social and well-fare policy, educational policy, environmental policy, urban management and decision-making, to transportation and urban planning and urban design. Urban design, as an instrument of urban policy and subject of civic involvement, can contribute to social sustainability by addressing the local history and culture, quality of everyday life in cities and civic participation in decision-making, including the urban design process (Mayer and Knox, 2006).

Speculative urban development never paid much attention to local history and culture. With the growing globalisation and individuation of cities the local history and culture became important economic and symbolic assets, which are expected to distinguish cities from their rivals. Yet the competitive urban policy too shows little meaningful relation to local history and culture, while the gentrification has virtually become a global urban strategy (Smith, 2002). Under the pretext of urban regeneration local history and culture become increasingly commodified, leading to displacement of local residents in traditional neighbourhoods and decline of local culture (Chung, 2009; Zukin, 2010; Križnik, 2011). Urban design, which on the contrary aims for the preservation of local history and culture and restoration of historic urban areas, is important not only for rational long-term use of resources, but also for playing a vital role in sustaining existing social and cultural structures, such as local community, sense of neighbourhood, collective identity, and in improving the quality of everyday life in cities, contributing in this way to their social sustainability (Križnik, 2009b).

Quality of everyday life in cities also depends on a variety of other factors. From the perspective of sustainable urban development, however, the important factors contributing to the quality of everyday life in cities are shared values and civic culture among citizens, social equity, solidarity and trust, social order and control, social interaction among different social groups, and sense of neighbourhood and collective identities, which are all at the same time the key dimensions of *social cohesion*. Cities with higher social cohesion are hence believed to have a better quality of everyday life (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Dempsey et al., 2011). Urban design can contribute to social cohesion by creating inclusive and shared places, where social groups with different economic, social and cultural background meet and where the local everyday practices and values are maintained and reproduced, affecting in this way the civic culture, social control and collective identities. In practice urban design often becomes instrumental in facilitating social cohesion by creating opportunities for social interaction and by strengthening the sense of neighbourhood and community attachment (Manzi et al., 2010). Yet the use and meaning of places also depend on dominant social groups that urban design itself cannot easily overcome or, like in the case of competitive urban policy, intentionally reproduces (Smith 2002; Cho, 2010; Križnik, 2011).

Many cities, which aim for long-term sustainable urban development, try to encourage citizens to take an active part in decision-making in order to improve social interaction between different social groups and mediate between their interests and needs. By building partnership between public, private and civic society stakeholders, urban policy can help a wide range of actors to work together and determine their own goals, deal with dominant economic, social and political arrangements, or overcome social exclusion, which eventually makes civic participation in decision-making a key component of social sustainability. Such partnerships are namely based on shared responsibility among the stakeholders and decrease dependence of cities on the outside resources (Manzi et al., 2010:15). Civic participation in decision-making is also an important issue of *community-based urban design*, which focuses on the neighbourhood scale of urban development. Urban change namely affects the citizens most directly at the local scale, which at the same time best represents their interests and needs. Since they are often better aware of particular problems and opportunities in their neighbourhoods, active involvement of citizens in decision-making can significantly improve the quality of urban design. Citizens consequently better perceive, use

and maintain urban design projects, built with their help, which not only improves the rational use of resources, community attachment or quality of everyday life for instance, but also strengthens the political legitimacy of urban policy and local governments in general (Križnik, 2009b; Dempsey et al., 2011).

3. METROPOLITAN AND LOCAL SCALE URBAN DESIGN IN SEOUL

Seoul is the capital of South Korea and one of the world's largest cities. Together with the metropolitan region it is home to twenty two million residents, which accounts for almost half of the population of South Korea. While the city is known as the "Miracle on the Han River" for its successful economic growth and urban development in the past, the recent urban development remains internationally relatively unacknowledged. Seoul used to be managed by the national government, which instrumentalised the economic growth and urban development of the city to strengthen the national economic and political power. The metropolitan government used to have little control over Seoul due to the dominance of the *developmental state* (Hill and Kim, 2000; Kim and Yoon, 2003). However, after the introduction of local autonomy in South Korea the metropolitan government became the main actor affecting the urban change in Seoul (Lee, 2006). In order to deal with the pressures and opportunities, caused by the growing economic, cultural and political integration at the national and cross-national scale, and to improve the weak structural position of Seoul, compared to the rival cities, the metropolitan government commenced an increasingly competitive urban policy during the past decade (Choe, 2005; Cho, 2010; Križnik, 2009b; 2011). The urban policy thus gradually shifted from unrestricted urban development towards what the metropolitan government promoted as a "balanced urban development of global Seoul" (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006:38).

During the developmental period the economic growth and urban development of Seoul therefore used to be characterised by comparatively low social inequalities, low environmental and living conditions, and undeveloped local democracy. However, the intensive neoliberal economic restructuring, triggered by the economic crisis in South Korea in the late nineties, resulted in a growing economic and social polarisation and large-scale speculative urban redevelopment, which brought questionable benefits to the citizens and dissatisfaction with the quality of everyday life in Seoul. At the same time the improved material conditions led to cultural changes, where many citizens became less concerned about meeting their basic needs and more interested in pursuing the so-called *post-materialist values and culture* (Suh, 2003; Cho, 2008). The negative social consequences of competitive urban policy in Seoul and changing cultural values in South Korean society, which emphasized the importance of environment, social equity, local history and culture or civic participation in decision-making, were together with the higher awareness of civic rights among the reasons for the growing civic involvement in urban development. The latter also affected urban design, which paid more attention to sustainable urban development. The metropolitan government namely used to see urban design merely as an instrument that was to affect the economic competitiveness and global appeal of the city, while its importance for the quality of everyday life often came second (Chung, 2009; Križnik, 2009a; Cho, 2010). It is thus not surprising that over the past decade civic groups increasingly engaged in the community-based urban design in order to address what they saw as a lacking quality of everyday life in Seoul and civic participation in decision-making (Community Design Centre, 2009; Kim and Moon, 2010).²

The paper takes *Kkummaru Visitors Centre, Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park, Bupyeong Culture Street, and Gwanghwamun Plaza* as the case studies of urban design in order to understand the changing approaches to urban development in South Korea. Case studies vary in terms of urban design approach, scale and actors involved, which is expected to show how different urban design approaches affect urban development. Two urban design projects are examples of architectural urban design, while the other two deal with the urban design of open space. While the two selected case studies address the metropolitan scale, the other two deal with the local scale of urban design (Table 1).³ All the case studies

² The scale and scope of the growing civic involvement in urban development in South Korea became obvious on the 8th International Conference of the Pacific Rim Community Design Network, which recently took place in Seoul. Numerous successful cases of civic initiatives such as environmental preservation and local community movements, neighbourhood regeneration initiatives, or urban gardening cooperatives, which started over the past years in South Korea, were presented.

³ The selected case studies should be seen as illustrative rather than representative examples of urban design, since only a limited number of urban design projects, constructed over the past decade in the Seoul

were built with public funding and are managed by public institutions, except for the Bupyeong Culture Street, which is financed and managed by a civic group. The later and Kkummaru Visitors Centre are also the examples, where the civic stakeholders played the major role in decision-making and urban design process. In other two case studies the local government was the main actor involved (Chun 2009; Kyung-eun Lee, 2009; So Yeong Lee, 2009; Kim, 2011). In order to see how urban design relates to urban policy and civic involvement the selected cases studies are compared in terms of how they address the local history and culture, quality of everyday life, economic competitiveness, public use, and civic participation in decision-making. Finally, in order to see the social consequences of urban design in the Seoul metropolitan region the selected case studies are compared in terms of their contribution to the social sustainability in the city. The comparison across the case studies is expected to show whether it is possible to talk about novel approaches to urban development in the Seoul metropolitan region and South Korea.

TABLE 1. Selected urban design case studies in Seoul

	Local scale	Metropolitan scale
Architecture urban design	Kkummaru Visitors Centre	Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park
Open space urban design	Bupyeong Culture Street	Gwanghwamun Plaza

3.1 KKUMMARU VISITORS CENTRE

Kkummaru Visitors Centre (Kkummaru Bangmunja Center) is a newly opened public facility in the Children’s Grand Park, a large public park located in the Neung-dong in eastern Seoul. The visitors’ centre is located in an old modernist building, designed by the architect Na Sang-gin, which was preserved against the demolition and carefully restored to accommodate new facilities for the visitors of the park and park administration. The building went through several remodelling phases during the past decades after it was initially build as Seoul Country Club in 1971. The original building was remodelled into a cultural hall, after the national government decided to remodel the golf course into a public park. Due to functional, maintenance and safety concerns, the Green Seoul Bureau (Purndosiguk), an affiliated office to the metropolitan government responsible for the management of public parks, made a decision in 2009 to demolish the ageing building, and prepared a plan for construction of a new management facility on its site. However, the Seoul Metropolitan Government Design Committee decided to review again the state of the former Seoul Country Club. At the same time some civic groups became aware of the historic and cultural value of the old modernist building, and different possibilities for the restoration of the former Seoul Country Club were discussed by civic organizations such as Docomomo Korea and Icomos, which eventually convinced the metropolitan government to preserve and restore the old building. The architect Joh Sung-ryong prepared a restoration proposal with the architect Choi Choon, and the old building was opened to the public as the Kkummaru Visitors Centre in 2011 (Kim, 2011).

During the restoration process the architects decided for what they call an “interpretative restoration” rather than following a more conservative historic restoration. Such approach apparently allowed them to adapt the original design of the architect Na Sang-gin to the new functional requirements and emphasize “the co-existence of the traces of the past with new additions” (Choi, 2011:84). According to Choi such approach also allowed the architects to make visible historical fragments in their present state, while maintaining the identity of the building without any radical transformation, which could otherwise have been required due to the new functional requirements. Another important aim of the restoration process was to preserve the building’s “social value as a repository of memory”, which the citizens have accumulated over the years, when the building was used as a cultural hall (Choi, 2011:85). The new use of the building, which includes a restaurant, book cafe, observation deck, exhibition halls, picnic area as well

metropolitan region, were initially studied. Governmental documents, newspaper, magazine articles, and academic research were the sources to study the background of urban design projects. Interviews with public officials, urban designers and civic organizations’ members were also conducted from 2009 to 2012.

as administrative and management offices, is namely organized in a way that does not significantly alter the old building. Considerable effort was also made to integrate the new Kkummaru Visitors Centre with the park and to open the building for easy public access and use (Kim, 2011:97). The new urban design adds in this way diverse public space to the surrounding Children's Grand Park and the city.

3.2 DONGDAEMUN DESIGN PLAZA AND PARK

Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park is a large urban development, located on the site of the former Dongdaemun Stadium near the East Gate in Seoul. The sport complex with football and baseball stadium and several other sport facilities was built in 1926 as the Gyeongseong Stadium. The latter was renamed as Seoul Stadium and was continuously expanded. In 1984, when the Jamsil Sport complex was opened as the venue for the upcoming Asian Games and Summer Olympic Games, the stadium was once more renamed as the Dongdaemun Stadium. During that period the sport complex used to be one of the most important national sport facilities and Chung (2009:162) rightfully calls it the "birthplace of Korea's modern sports" for its great historic and symbolic significance for South Korean sport. Yet the Dongdaemun Stadium was in the past not only a sport complex but also an important venue for large national cultural and political festivals, rallies or protests. At the same time the nearby area became widely known for its textile and fashion industry and bustling wholesale markets, which date back to the eighteenth century and had more than thirty thousand fashion shops at its peak (Ahn and Kim, 2001). Yet the area faced an economic decline, which partly resulted from the relocation of sport events to the new Jamsil Sport Complex and partly from the economic and social changes of the time. In 2003 a part of the Dongdaemun Stadium was converted into a parking lot and a large flea market was opened on its ground a year later. In 2006 the newly elected metropolitan government announced an ambitious plan to build a "world's fashion Mecca" on the site of the Dongdaemun Stadium due to its run-down state and the need to revive the local economy (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006:74). An international urban design competition was held in the next year and a spectacular proposal for the new Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park, designed by the British architect Zaha Hadid, was selected for construction (Chung, 2007).⁴

Although there were concerns among the civic groups regarding the demolition of the Dongdaemun Stadium the metropolitan government ignored opinions, which favoured the preservation of the old stadium for its historic and symbolic value (Chung, 2009:172). The latter was finally demolished to make space for construction of the new Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park in 2008. The urban design project consists of two parts. Dongdaemun History and Culture Park is a public park, located next to the plaza on the site of the historic Seoul city wall and Igansumun floodgate. It displays various historic relics found during the construction of the plaza and hosts museums and galleries related to the local history and culture. The central part of the complex is an unconventional building of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza, which is still under construction, and will have several exhibition and convention halls, design museum and experience hall, media lab, education and information centre, digital archive as well as administrative and management facilities. According to the metropolitan government the spectacular appearance of the new building will transform the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park into "the symbolic icon of Seoul" and "world's design hub where knowledge and information on design are generated, gathered and disseminated" (Seoul Design Foundation, 2011:10). While the park is already opened to public since 2010, the new plaza is scheduled to open in 2013.

3.3 BUPYEONG CULTURE STREET

Several traditional markets developed in the past around Bupyeong, a town located along the Gyeongin railway line. Today Bupyeong is a municipal district of Incheon and a part of the Seoul metropolitan region. Expansion of the new shopping centres around the Bupyeong station and the economic crisis in the late nineties resulted in decline of the traditional markets; local merchants and street vendors, some of them having worked in Bupyeong for more than thirty years, faced a danger of closing the business. In order to revive the market and protect their jobs the Bupyeong Market Merchants Cooperative (Bupyeongsjang Sangin Beonyeonghoi) presented the local government a petition in 1996, asking for a plan to reconstruct

⁴ As a part of the so-called Seoul's "creative corridor" the new Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park was optimistically expected to attract about 3 million foreign tourists a year and create 10.000 new jobs. Its importance for improving the local economy and quality of everyday life in the area was thus central to how the project was initially promoted (Seoul Development Institute, 2007; Chung, 2009).

the market in Bupyeong 4-dong into what they called “pedestrian and cultural street” (So Yeong Lee, 2009:32). The reconstruction was expected to revive the local economy and improve the quality of everyday life in the area. The local government reconstructed the old street, which was opened to public in 1998 and became known as the Bupyeong Culture Street (Bupyeong Munhwau Gori). However, after the opening of the reconstructed street the merchants ran into maintenance problems as well as into intensifying conflicts with illegal street vendors, which the local government was unable or unwilling to resolve. The local government did little but offer the administrative support to the merchants. They established a committee with a goal to independently manage the street and direct its future use (Kim and Moon, 2010). At the same time the merchants succeeded in achieving a mutual agreement with the street vendors on joint use and management of the street, which eventually opened the way for its future transformation.

Since 2005 the Bupyeong Market Merchants Cooperative worked closely with the Urban Action Network (Dosiyeondae), an NGO from Seoul with a long experience in community-based urban design, which organised several workshops with merchants and residents in order to improve urban design and management of the Bupyeong Culture Street (Community Design Centre, 2009). The most visible result of the cooperation between the merchants and Urban Action Network was the construction of the small pocket parks along the street, which attracted a lot of attention.⁵ The project received stronger financial support from the local and national government, which allowed for its continuous improvement over the years. In this case the urban design should not be seen as a finished project but rather as an on-going process, where different elements of the street were adopted according to the changing needs of users. The main aim of the process was to create a pedestrian street, which is now mainly closed for traffic and offers several pocket parks, fountains, large performance stage, photo zone, different facilities for community events and street vendors area. Various cultural events, which are regularly organized by the merchants, take place on the street most of the year. The reconstruction successfully revived the local economy and the Bupyeong Culture Street now attracts hundreds of citizens daily. Yet the efforts of merchants did not only affect their business, but also resulted in a new public space and civic culture, which promotes walking and bicycling and shared responsibility among different social groups. In recent years the Bupyeong Culture Street became widely known in South Korea and abroad for its successful civic involvement in urban design process (So Yeong Lee, 2009).

3.4 GWANGHWAMUN PLAZA

Gwanghwamun Plaza (Gwanghwamun Gwangjang) is the most important public space in Seoul, located in the very historic centre of the city. The name is related to the Gwanghwamun Gate, which connects the plaza with the nearby Gyeongbokgung palace. The history of the plaza is long and turbulent and Cho (2008:194) calls it the “prototype public space in Korea.” The plaza was formed soon after Seoul was founded in 1394, when six royal offices were located along the central open space in the city, and was called Yukjo Street at that time (Kim, 2009). During the Japanese occupation the colonial government built the General Government Building between the royal palace and plaza, destroying in this way the traditional symbolic relation between the two. Later on the South Korean government also built one of the administrative complexes right next to the plaza. The Gwanghwamun Plaza was therefore always an important symbolic place, where the state institutions were located and their power was represented. Yet the plaza is also a place where citizens contested the state power. Several historic events took place on the Gwanghwamun Plaza including the student revolution in 1960, democracy movement in 1987, candlelight protests in 2002 and 2008, as well as the popular World Cup street cheering, which has been taking place since 2002. The history of the Gwanghwamun Plaza is therefore not only related to the national state but also to the South Korean civic society. Cho (2008:209) suggests that the changes in civic society are directly reflected in the changing symbolic meaning of the plaza, which “has undergone a change from a typical resistant space to an emergent festive space coupling with the maturing of civic society in Korea”.

Yet after decades of rapid urbanisation the Gwanghwamun Plaza resembled a large expressway rather than a public space. The metropolitan government announced in 2006 construction of a large pedestrian plaza as a part of the “street of history and culture from Gyeongbokgung to Sungryemun”,

⁵ The national broadcasting corporation covered the construction of the so-called *Hanbyeong parks*, which attracted not only the attention of public but also of the local government. The media coverage was instrumental for the political support of the project. Nowadays the local government considers the Bupyeong Culture Street as one of the main public spaces in the city.

following a successful construction of three other public plazas in downtown Seoul (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2006: 29). The metropolitan government also followed the plans of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea to restore the historic centre of Seoul. The urban design competition was organized in 2007 and the new Gwanghwamun Plaza was opened after fifteen months of construction in 2009 (Kyung-eun Lee, 2009).⁶ The new plaza has three main sections, stretching from the Gwanghwamun Gate to the Sejong-ro. The central pedestrian section of the plaza is divided into four thematic zones and features imposing statues of the King Sejong and Admiral Yi, fountain with waterways, meadow, and underground passageway with public facilities that connect the plaza to the subway (Seoul Development Institute, 2007:163). The organisation of the new plaza allows flexibility in terms of adopting its use to the changing requirements in the future. Both sides of the main pedestrian section face the two five-lane road sections, which prevent a direct access for pedestrians to the new plaza from the surrounding area.

4. COMPARING URBAN DESIGN IN SEOUL

Selected case studies show a rather different attitude towards the local history and culture (Table 2). Only in the case of Kkummaru Visitors Centre the historic and cultural heritage was fully restored and preserved. The Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park and Bupyeong Culture Street are essentially newly constructed projects that partly integrate local history and culture into the overall urban design. While historic fragments are an important part of the Dongdaemun History and Culture Park, there are no clear references to the historic and cultural heritage nor is there any continuity with the existing social and cultural structures in the case of Dongdaemun Design Plaza, although the new building is supposed to integrate “historical, cultural, urban, societal and economic features” into a single landscape according to the architects (Seoul Design Foundation, 2011:12). Chung (2009:170) suggests that metropolitan government in fact instrumentalised the historic narrative in order to legitimate the urban redevelopment of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park in “an attempt to manipulate culture, history and placeness for the sake of increasing inflow of capital”. The so-called historic restoration of the Gwanghwamun Plaza also lacks a meaningful relation to the local history and culture for similar reasons. Although it refers to many important personalities and events in the Korean history, the actual implementation of urban design superficially resembles a theme park for tourists rather than the most important public space of Seoul and South Korea (Kim, 2010). A careful historic restoration and preservation of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park and Gwanghwamun Plaza seem to have come second to the construction of new tourist attractions and marketing of global Seoul, which results in the commodification and decline of local history and culture (Chung, 2009; Križnik, 2011).

The Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park and Gwanghwamun Plaza are primarily expected to attract new international events and tourists and to improve the economic competitiveness and global appeal of Seoul. The metropolitan government clearly emphasised their strategic role as the new icons of Seoul that will “help boost the economy” and allow the city to become “one among the global 10 top cities” (Seoul Design Foundation, 2011:7).⁷ By providing new public facilities the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park and Gwanghwamun Plaza also aim to improve the quality of everyday life in the city. Yet not everyone seems to benefit equally from such approach (Table 2). Many local merchants, street vendors and residents were evicted or had to relocate to other parts of the city due to the construction and growing living costs, caused by the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park (Chung, 2009; Kim, 2010). Rather than sustaining the existing social and cultural structures and integrating social groups with different economic, social and cultural background, the former metropolitan government aggressively promoted tourism that does not add much to the social cohesion of the city. On the contrary the local scale urban design projects focus on the

⁶ The Seoul Metropolitan Government selected the basic urban design through a popular voting, which favoured a reconstruction of the plaza with two roads on its both sides. While civic participation can be an important part of urban design process, it is uncommon to replace the designing process with a popular voting. Lee Kyung-eun (2009) suggests that in the case of Gwanghwamun Plaza the political decisions were often at odds with the design process, which questions the very purpose and meaning of the latter.

⁷ The metropolitan government optimistically claimed that due to the construction of Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park, for instance, “the design competitiveness of Korea will be enhanced up to the level of 90% of advanced countries”, while the sales of local fashion industry “will be increased up to 30 billion dollar” (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2009).

quality of everyday life in the city by improving social amenities, creating new opportunities for social interaction and strengthening the sense of neighbourhood and community attachment. Kkummaru Visitors Centre attracts different social groups by offering new public facilities for daily use, while the Bupyeong Culture Street, once packed with traffic, is transformed into a green pedestrian street, where intensive commercial and cultural exchange regularly takes place. Its reconstruction considerably improved the quality of everyday life in the area and positively contributed to its local economy and social cohesion (So Yeong Lee, 2009; Kim, 2011). Both case studies, however, do not add much if anything to the economic competitiveness or global appeal of the city.

TABLE 2. Comparing urban design projects in Seoul

	Kkummaru Visitors Centre	Dongdaemun Design Plaza	Bupyeong Culture Street	Gwanghwamun Plaza
Urban design approach	Restoration of old building.	Construction of new building.	Reconstruction of existing street.	Reconstruction of existing street.
Construction period	2010 ~ 2011.	2009 ~ 2013.	1997 ~ ongoing.	2008 ~ 2009.
Preservation of local history and culture	Full.	Lacking.	Partial.	Lacking.
Quality of everyday life in the city	Contributes.	Limited.	Contributes.	Limited.
Economic competitiveness and global appeal	No contribution.	Contributes.	No contribution.	Contributes.
Public use	Full.	Partial.	Full.	Partial.
Civic participation in decision-making	Partial.	None.	Full.	None.

The Kkummaru Visitors Centre and Bupyeong Culture Street are fully open for public use, though a public administration manages the former, while a merchants' cooperative manages the latter. Since the Dongdaemun Design Plaza is still largely under construction, it is difficult to assess which facilities will be open for public, although it is likely that part of them will be restricted for public use due to the entrance fees or limited access. On the other hand, the nearby Dongdaemun History and Culture Park and its facilities are already used by public. Although the Gwanghwamun Plaza has a long tradition as a public space, its public use is rather restricted. The place can be accessed individually with certain restrictions; however, the metropolitan government banned all public gatherings from the plaza in the past with an aim to create a non-conflicting place for tourists instead of promoting an inclusive and shared public space (Table 2). The Gwanghwamun Plaza still remains under a strong control of the riot police. Kim (2009:113) suggests that its urban design and management are actually affected by what he calls *agoraphobia* of the former metropolitan government, which did not want to "permit a space where people could naturally gather and share public opinions." It is hence not surprising that both sides of the plaza face a heavy traffic, which prevents citizens a direct access from the few nearby public buildings. The public use of the metropolitan scale urban design projects seems to be an instrument of competitive urban policy in Seoul, which reproduces interests of dominant social groups. Such approach to urban design has little to do with the social sustainability of the city.

The Bupyeong Culture Street is the only example of community-based urban design, where the citizens were actively involved in the decision-making from the beginning on. The resulting urban design directly reflects the interests and values that the local merchants, street vendors, residents and visitors attach to the place. It is also the only example where urban design is seen as a process rather than a form, which remains continuously adapted to the needs of users. The civic involvement was crucial for the development,

construction and management of the project following the interests of different stakeholders (So Yeong Lee, 2009; Kim and Moon, 2010). Although the citizens were not directly involved in urban design, public concerns about the preservation of the old building were reflected in decision-making, and have consequently affected the urban design process of the Kkummaru Visitors Centre (Kim, 2011). The Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park and Gwanghwamun Plaza are on the contrary the cases, where the metropolitan government took most of the decisions unilaterally. Although a popular voting was organized in order to select the location of the new Gwanghwamun Plaza and many workshops were held to collect the public opinion about the facilities on the new plaza, citizens had little influence over the decisions of the metropolitan government (Table 2). Public concerns about the restoration of the Gwanghwamun Plaza or the preservation of the old Dongdaemun stadium had no effect on the final urban design. Due to the instrumental role of both urban design projects the metropolitan government seems to have systematically excluded social groups, which objected to or questioned their urban policy, from decision-making, in order to complete the projects in shortest time possible (Chung, 2009; Cho, 2010).

5. CONCLUSION

Urban development of Seoul used to be characterised by massive urbanization, which paid little attention to the environmental and social consequences or the preservation of local history and culture. Unrestricted economic growth and speculative urban development were instrumentalised by the so-called developmentalist state in order to strengthen the national economic and political power. The local democracy was undeveloped and the civic society was denied participation in decision-making until the nineties (Hill and Kim, 2000; Lee, 2006). In the eighties the “wholesale clearance [of traditional urban areas] led by private investment was the distinct feature of Seoul’s urban redevelopment policies” and was commonly followed by massive evictions of local residents, which eventually finished in the construction of large residential or office complexes (Kim and Yoon, 2003:587). Public spaces in Seoul used to be heavily restricted in terms of public use, yet those places played a key role in the development of civic society in South Korea (Cho, 2002). Selected case studies of recent urban design in Seoul therefore show many differences in terms of addressing the local history and culture, quality of everyday life, economic competitiveness, public use, and civic participation in decision-making as compared to the prevailing urban development approach of Seoul in the past. At the same time there is an important difference between the metropolitan scale urban design projects, which seem to promote the economic competitiveness and global appeal of Seoul, and the community-based urban design projects, focused on improving the quality of everyday life at the local scale.

Considering the differences between the past and recent approaches to urban development in Seoul, it is possible to talk about three distinct models according to the main actors involved and to strategic goals of urban development (Table 3).⁸ While the national state and the strengthening of national power was characteristic of the urban development of what can be referred to as the *modern Seoul*, the prevailing role of the metropolitan government and corporate growth characterizes the urban development of the so-called *global Seoul*. Consequently the approach to urban design changed from massive urbanization to mega urban projects, such as the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park or Gwanghwamun Plaza. Strategic goals and approach to urban design of the two models nevertheless seem rather similar compared to the third approach to urban development, which can be called the *sustainable Seoul*. While the modern Seoul and global Seoul are based on the developmentalist and neoliberal ideology, the third approach is based on the premises of sustainable urban development. The main actors involved come from the civic society, while the strategic goal of sustainable Seoul is about improving the quality of everyday life for all citizens. Examples of community-based urban design are the Kkummaru Visitors Centre and Bupyeong Culture Street. Because the three approaches to urban development are different in terms of the actors involved, strategic goals and approaches to urban design, it is not surprising that they also considerably differ in terms of addressing the local history and culture, public use and civic participation in decision-making.

⁸ Three ideal type models help us understand similarities and differences between different approaches to urban development in Seoul. While models of modern Seoul and global Seoul are based on the past and present-day urban policy, sustainable Seoul is to some extent an imaginary model used as a reference for the two others. It is important noticing though that the urban policy of the present metropolitan government is rapidly moving away from the mega urban towards community-based projects (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2012).

TABLE 3. Urban development in Seoul

	Modern Seoul	Global Seoul	Sustainable Seoul
Ideology	Developmentalism.	Neoliberalism.	Sustainable development.
Main actors	National state.	City and corporations.	Civic society.
Strategic goals	National power.	Corporate power.	Quality of everyday life.
Approach to urban design	Massive urbanization projects.	Mega urban projects.	Community-based projects.
Preservation of local history and culture	None.	Partial.	Full.
Public use	Partial.	Partial.	Full.
Civic participation in decision-making	None.	Partial.	Full.
Examples	Saewoon Sangga, Yeouido 5.18 Plaza.	Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park, Gwanghwamun Plaza.	Kkummaru Visitors Centre, Bupyeong Culture Street.

Source: adapted from Hill and Kim (2000) and Križnik (2009a).

While the comparisons of recent urban design projects, as important instruments of urban policy in Seoul and subjects of growing civic involvement, show important differences compared to the urban development of the city in the past, and therefore confirm the existence of novel approaches to urban development in South Korea, they also show that the metropolitan scale urban design projects, such as the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park or Gwanghwamun Plaza, seem to have more in common with the developmentalism of the past than sustainable urban development as a possible alternative for the future. Contrary to the metropolitan urban design projects, the local scale projects, although limited in their scale and scope, are much more concerned with preserving the local history and culture, strengthening the social cohesion in the city, creating places of intense social interaction, and fostering civic participation in decision-making. The Kkummaru Visitors Centre and Bupyeong Culture Street may in this way provide successful examples of community-based urban design, which improves quality of everyday life and affects the social sustainability of cities. In this way urban design can become an operative instrument of urban policy, concerned with the sustainable urban development in South Korea in the future.

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