

# Solutions from Seoul

Sharing experiences in sustainable urban policy



## Dongdaemun Design Plaza Revitalises Downtown Seoul

Over the years Seoul's old Dongdaemun Stadium<sup>1</sup> had become shabby and obsolete, and the surrounding downtown area was deteriorating into a slum. To revitalise the area, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) decided to demolish the stadium and create the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) – a complex to house a centre for the design and fashion industry as well as a history and culture park for citizens and visitors.

The Dongdaemun Design Plaza now stands out as one of the city's major landmarks. Besides the aesthetic value of the distinctively neofuturistic design, it is also considered to be the most successful urban development project ever in Seoul. The DDP not only transformed the obsolete downtown region into a vibrant fashion hub and popular tourist destination, but it also shows how to successfully coordinate the intricately tangled conflicts between interested parties involved in the process.

**The Dongdaemun Design Plaza is considered to be Seoul's most successful urban development project, both in terms of outcome and coordination among stakeholders.**

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<sup>1</sup> The Dongdaemun Stadium was a sports complex in Seoul. Located near the Dongdaemun or Great East Gate, it had many vendors selling athletics-related

### Background

#### Design: a key to future city competitiveness

Design can function as a tool to enhance urban space; it refreshes the landscape and enhances the conveniences of city life. The SMG noted that it lagged behind in terms of design capacity and devised measures to support the industry.

#### A prime location for fashion and design

Since the 1960s, a fashion cluster has spontaneously grown in the Dongdaemun area. Handling the industry's entire process from design to production and distribution, the area has played a pivotal role in turning fashion into one of South Korea's key industries.



[동대문 디자인 플라자(DDP)의 아름다운 전경]

Frontal view of DDP

goods, but was demolished in 2008 to make way for the Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

With 52,000 employees and sales of KRW 10 trillion in 2006 alone, Dongdaemun now stands out as a leading fashion and culture centre that houses more than 28 per cent of Korean industrial design companies and designers.

### Triggering the revival of the dreary downtown commercial district

The Dongdaemun stadium, located at the centre of the Dongdaemun commercial district, was not only losing its original function as a sport facility, but also damaging the region's image as a fashion district due to the reckless sprawl of street vendors selling low-priced fashion and athletic goods. Even with the risk of deteriorating into a slum, the task to rejuvenate the lackluster district grew more pressing.

### Goals and Objectives

- Invigorate the district by turning it into a multi-complex where commerce and culture blend and prosper together.
- Establish infrastructure to support the design industry and raise its potential

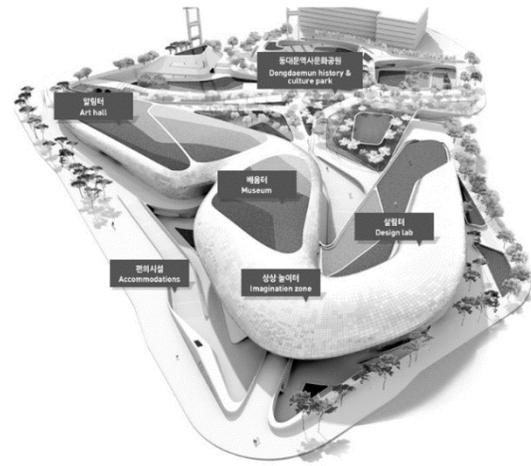
### Implementation and Expertise

#### Map out a plan to create a public park

Along with the Dongdaemun area recreation plan released in July 2006, discussions on building a public park in the area began picking up steam. A plan was mapped out to build the Dongdaemun History and Culture Park that would replace Dongdaemun's old baseball and soccer stadiums, their adjoining flea markets and street vendors, as well as the Underground Cultural Plaza, exhibition and performance halls.

The project was estimated to cost KRW 24.3 billion with extra expenses set aside; KRW 40

million for cultural property investigation, and KRW 180 million for a feasibility study and basic research.



Space planning for the DDP

### DDP design and construction

In December 2006, the SMG arranged a contest in which the citizens submitted ideas for promoting the DDP project. The ideas collected through the open contest were used in drawing up the project guidelines. In April 2007 a contest was held inviting candidate designs for the plaza, and the winning entry – by architect Zaha Hadid – was selected in August of the same year.

#### Dongdaemun History and Culture Park

The Dongdaemun History and Culture Park, located at the back of the DDP, is a public theme park offering refreshing green space and cultural experiences. It was intended to be an ordinary for-profit park, but the usage changed to a historical and cultural theme park as relics of the Joseon Dynasty, such as part of the Seoul Fortress Wall and Hadogam (a military camp site), were excavated from the site during the construction.

#### Utilizing underground space and providing greater convenience for pedestrians

One notable aspect of the project is that it makes the most of the underground area to enhance connectivity between the regional market districts that are bisected at the ground level. With the subway network of lines No. 2, 4 and 5 physically linking the plaza with nearby shopping districts as well as the park and exhibition halls, the regional commercial districts attract more visitors, while the pedestrians benefit from a safer and more convenient environment.



Underground passage linking the Plaza with subway lines No. 2,4 and 5

## Challenges and Solutions

### Challenge 1: Conflict with the sporting community

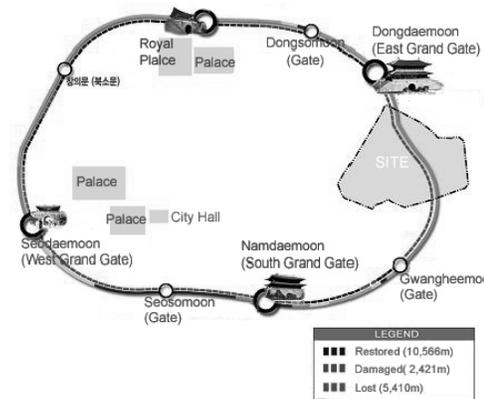
Leaders from the state-run sports and athletic groups and civic activists released a statement opposing the plan to demolish the stadium. They proposed remodeling the facility instead of tearing it down, in order to preserve its historical and cultural values.

**Solution:** In response, SMG launched a task force team to devise different strategies for the civic groups and the sporting community. For the sporting civic groups with strong fighting will, it tried unofficial contacts, while trying to persuade the others with less aggressive approaches through face-to-face contact.

### Challenge 2: Opposition from street vendors

Since its renovation in 1996, the stadium had many vendors selling sports-related goods. On the brink of their livelihood being taken away, they gathered to claim the right to occupy the area in exchange for their effort to promote the market district and demanded compensation. The government found the occupancy claim illegal and took a strong stance to file an eviction suit. Faced with counter claims from the occupying vendors to drag out the negotiations further, however, the local government had no choice but to change its strategy.

**Solution:** The SMG assigned a different role to each division in charge: negotiation, negotiation support, relocation support and legal support, and conducted an in-depth investigation. It formulated negotiation strategies based on the analysis, and persuaded them while pushing for legally-compelling measures such as eviction and seizure. Finally, their strenuous efforts paid off to iron out the long-running conflict in February 2008. The experience made the city realise the importance of public property management and social conflict coordination. Particularly, the city came to realise that more negotiation experts and the standard manual should be fostered as well.



(서울에 있는 성벽의 복원)

Concept Map for Restoration of the Seoul Fortress Wall

### Challenge 3: Strife with the Cultural Action and the Cultural Heritage Administration

Many civic organisations, including the Cultural Action, were opposed to the DDP, citing the historic value of the existing facility. The Cultural Properties Committee also expressed a similar view as it was always at the centre of the nation’s turbulent historical scenes, such as the Japanese colonial area, the Liberation and subsequent national division. However, the preservation claim had another dilemma, as it also conflicted with the old fortress wall restoration project.

**Solution:** Following lengthy discussion, the SMG ended the dispute with a mediated arrangement: demolish the stadium and conserve the remains of the Joseon Dynasty with the old castle walls in Seoul. On the city’s consistent recommendation, the administration took a step back and proposed to retain some symbolic parts of the stadium. The municipal government accepted the idea.

## Resources

### Financial resources

The DDP project cost a total of KRW 492.4 billion, which marked savings of KRW 10.6 billion in construction and KRW 24 billion in preparation for operation.

(Unit: 1 million KRW)

Classification	Sum	'06-'09	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total	492,446	141,899	75,789	92,006	72,630	98,959	11,163
Construction	422,562	134,134	72,367	74,063	72,200	69,798	-
Operation preparation	69,884	7,765	3,422	17,943	430	29,161	11,163



*Fashion show held at DDP during the 2014 Seoul Fashion Week.*

## Results and Evaluation

### Boosting the design industry

The SMG held the largest-ever Seoul Fashion Week to mark the opening of the DDP in 2014. The event offered a valuable opportunity for rising designers to obtain public exposure and publicity, and also to sharpen their competitiveness. Aiming to help identify more future business potential at home and abroad, the city government continues to organise more fashion-related events such as fashion shows. This initiative is expected to invigorate the region’s business activities and sales.

### Invite more tourists with spectacle and enjoyable attractions

Since the opening of the plaza, the area’s floating population has risen by 10 per cent along with the increasing number of foreign visitors. The authority projects more than half of foreign tourists to Korea will visit the Dongdaemun area, and this rejuvenating inflow will boost production and employment, respectively worth KRW 881.7 billion and 5,129 jobs. Neighbouring commercial districts are expected to be positively affected too, with growing production of KRW 210 billion.

## Criticism over the loss of historicity and regionality

Although the construction is recognised for its high quality, the DDP is criticised for burying the historic significance and unique regionality. The critics say that a small memorial hall containing memories associated with the site fails to breathe new life to the relics and nearby historic sites. The old castle walls have yet to be restored, but skepticism is rising over the inadequate measures taken amidst relocation of the structures inside.

## Financial independence and operation

Right after the DDP's opening in March 2014, the government adjusted the operation plan drawn up in 2010 aimed at achieving total financial independence. While hiking the target revenue from KRW 19.2 billion to KRW 32.1 billion, it cut the estimated expenditure from KRW 39.8 billion to KRW 32.1 billion.

Additionally, the Seoul Design Foundation, which has taken charge of the DDP operation, has put a bigger focus on managing operation rather than on construction. It also strives to create new sources of profit – brand business, place - marketing and advertising – beyond the existing ones, such as leasing the space.

Still, such a profit-seeking operation inevitably clashes with the pursuit of public benefits, highlighting that achieving a proper balance between public interests and profitability is still a big challenge for the DDP to tackle.

## Applicability

### Paradigm shift for urban regeneration

Many cities face this question: if old infrastructure in existing urban settlements

remains outdated and abandoned, how can we transform it while conserving the environment? Ceaselessly seeking answers and solutions, the SMG finally came up with the idea of the DDP: regenerate the outmoded urban infrastructure, provide green, cultural and recreational spaces for citizens, and invigorate the sluggish market districts.

### A model for settling urban regeneration issues

Through the DDP project, the SMG pushed its own boundaries by going beyond the bureaucratically pessimistic stance. It avoided relying on legal enforcement, rather acknowledging the contribution of interested parties and trying to reflect their voices in the implementation of the project.



#### ● 동대문역사문화공원 : 서울의 어제와 오늘 그리고 내일을 담다

1. Seoul Seonggwak (Fortress Wall) 멸실될 것으로 알려진 이간수문을 포함한 서울성곽 발굴 중 조선시대 하도감터 등 건물지 중요유구를 이전 전시한 동대문근현대 스포츠육성의 요람으로 기억될 동대문운동장기념관
2. Dongdaemun Stadium Memorial 발굴된 도자기, 명문기와 등 유물전시로 서울의 역사를 만나다
3. Dongdaemun Relic Area 전시회 및 음악회, 컨퍼런스 행사를 위한 이벤트홀
4. Dongdaemun History Museum 디자인전문작가의 전시와 디자인행사 관련한 전시공간
5. Event Hall 시민과 함께하는 다양한 공연과 문화행사가 펼쳐지는 곳
6. Design Gallery
7. Open Air Theater

*Utilization of the Dongdaemun History and Culture Park.*