

## THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE: SEOUL

### *Design Intervention and Heritage Conservation towards an Era of U-cities*

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**Abstract.** The main objective of this paper is to search for a practical solution that integrates creative design with sound heritage principles amid diverse and rapid changes in the built environment of the global community. These changes are at the crossroads of development and conservation, requiring a new approach for understanding the quality of the heritage architecture of our cities. Only with this approach can the true character and appeal of our cities be unveiled in this changed environment.

The concept of value, the test of authenticity and the condition of integrity --in short, "outstanding universal value"-- is needed to meet the qualification for the World Heritage List. However, the State Parties of the World Heritage Convention concentrate only on what is supposed to be the most important determining factor as to whether a site should be inscribed. A creative urban design may result in a lack of continuity and identity if the city's cultural heritage is not properly taken into consideration. To meet this challenge a new educational and cultural approach for protection of historical townscapes and cultural landscapes should be considered to better integrate the need for heritage conservation and the need for urban change.

Sophisticated visitors do not always want to experience a city of continuous fireworks and new designs, but a city with layers of historical traces. A "world cultural heritage city" is not sustainable as such unless the concept of "intervention" is properly integrated and implemented as part of its heritage conservation policy. It should be understood, by policy makers as well as the general public, that heritage conservation not only constraints but also improves urban development when property implemented with design intervention.

This paper deals with the issues of design intervention and heritage conservation in the era of U-cities, or "ubiquitous cities," with a focus on the case study of

the historic city of Seoul, Republic of Korea. Seoul is a suitable case for this study as it is struggling to balance historic conservation while pursuing to transform itself into "a creative city." The three main focus areas of this paper are 1) a review of Seoul's vision as a World Design Capital; 2) a review of Seoul's heritage conservation policy, or lack thereof; and 3) a proposal to develop a new policy of design intervention in heritage conservation in an era of ubiquitous cities.

The study suggests a new approach in examining the historic and historical buildings in a city as cultural resources. Also examined will be the best use of such valuable historic architecture. While new designs can be and should be delivered in the city core, there should be an understanding of the need to conserve heritage architecture and the natural settings of particular buildings, whilst remembering that the historic past cannot be re-created.

### 1. Introduction

Design Intervention in heritage conservation, which refers to both non-intervention and minimum intervention, ensures the authenticity and historical integrity and provides a sustainable source of future growth. Heritage Conservation is an integral part of urban planning and development in Seoul, providing a vital link to the past. Until recently Seoul has singular policy of economic growth and development. Conservation of historic sites and monuments, and maintenance of the city's cultural landscape, has

now become a growing concern of both the city government and the general public. A wide spectrum of campaigns has been initiated to overhaul the city administration and its policies to turn into a city of cultural heritage.

## **2. Design Intervention and Heritage Conservation in the Era of U-cities**

### **2-1 Seoul's vision as a World Design Capital**

According to a document from the Metropolitan City of Seoul, the ultimate value of design is in improving the quality of life for the people and in creating a harmonious world in which communication flows seamlessly. Universal Design, which provides simplicity, convenience, and happiness to all users, emphasizes the philosophy of social equality and materializing higher human values. As a design for everyone it promotes design as a social solution for sharing common values, eliminating barriers, and promoting communication.

Seoul's vision for the World Design Capital was "Design for All" summarized its "4U" catch phrase: Universal\_ A comfortable and sustainable city that is people-centred; Ubiquitous\_ A city that allows seamless communication anywhere, anytime; Unique\_ A city that expresses what is uniquely Seoul through its distinct characteristics; by U\_ A creative city that is being formed by participation of all its citizens.

### **2-2 Seoul's heritage and its heritage conservation policy**

Seoul is steeped in cultural heritage, many of its prominent historic buildings and remains dates back to 14th Century. With its 11 million inhabitants, the city is modern mega-polis that is one of the largest in the world. Having been the capital city from the time of the Joseon Dynasty, it is also a historic city whose architectural remains are still prominent within the old Fortress Wall and in the vicinity of the city. In terms of heritage conservation, and in particular, the conservation of the Royal Palaces, the Royal Shrine and Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty, a new angle should be considered to look at them as a whole, rather than as three separate entities. One must also see the triangular relation it forms. The palaces were the lifetime residences of the royal families, while their corpses are interred in the tombs and their spirits are housed in the royal shrine. The following should also be considered: the relationship between nature and human beings, balance between Yin and Yang, and spatial organisations between the buildings

and courtyards.

Although Seoul's cultural heritage is vast and extensive, the city does not yet have its own heritage conservation policy. Protection of the city's historical architecture is based on the Cultural Heritage Protection (CHP) Act (amended by Act No 105625, April 6, 2011), which is a law that was legislated to designate and safeguard historic buildings at the national level.

### **2-3 A design intervention policy towards an era of U-cities**

As one of the most advanced cities in terms of IT infrastructure, the City of Seoul is also a knowledge-based city and intends to be reborn as a "soft city" centered on diversity of culture and design. Seoul is utilising the dynamic force of its creative industries to enhance its brand value, culture and economy.

Recently, major heritage restoration and urban development projects in and near Seoul's historical city center brought significant changes to the areas surrounding those projects. Also, in the past several years, the city has taken the important initiative of utilising disused industrial complexes as cultural resources. However, at the policy level, these important restoration and development projects affecting major heritage properties and historical sites took place without comprehensive heritage conservation guidelines. Today, as we look toward an era of "ubiquitous cities," a comprehensive policy of heritage conservation with design intervention as an integral component is urgently needed.

According to the aforementioned Korean CHP Act, the basic principle for conservation, management and utilisation of cultural heritage assets is to preserve them in their original state (CHP Act Article 3 - Basic Principles of Protection of Cultural Heritage Assets). To supplement this law, the city should initiate a new design intervention policy. The initiative can start with a document, "The Seoul Manual of Design Intervention and Restoration towards an Era of Ubiquitous Cities." Such an initiative should also be accompanied by an establishment of a "Seoul Heritage Center" where residents and visitors would be welcome.

## **3. Conclusion**

Rapid economic development, social mobility, changing mores, and increasing tourism, both local and international, are taking place, with various impact on heritage conservation in the city of Seoul and in its vicinity. The rights of property owners and people's desire to improve their lives should be respected; at the same time, the city's cultural past should also be respected, and its cultural heritage

sites must be protected accordingly.

Sponsoring symposiums and seminars will not conserve and manage the city's cultural properties. The city needs its own guidelines and principles for conserving and restoring cultural heritage under its jurisdiction. They should be developed, especially for the "serial" heritage sites such as the Royal Palaces, Royal Shrine and Royal Tombs, as well as for the other sites of the rich heritage.

A constructive thought for us all would be to consider the idea of design intervention as a conservation and management strategy and to consider developing principles and guidelines accordingly. Suggestions for an effective adoption and application of improvements and advancements in Seoul's policy of conservation and management of its cultural heritage include the following: integrate the design intervention approach with the existing Ubiquitous City Strategic Plan; incorporate individual heritage sites as a linked whole; and initiate and develop principles of design intervention that would meet the special conditions and needs of Seoul.

To fulfill this idea would be to suggest in a constructive manner: 1) the establishment of an "Authority of Sustainable Architectural Heritage, Seoul" where historic conservation in a proper manner of design intervention would be the focus; 2) the documentation of a "practical manual of Design Intervention and Restoration, Seoul"; and 3) the establishment of a "Heritage conservation and management system based on the ubiquitous technology, Seoul".

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