



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A copy is (not a simple) copy: Role of urban landmarks in branding Seoul as a global city



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Received 10 September 2018; accepted 22 December 2018

KEYWORDS

Landmark;
Urban branding;
Seoul;
Globalization;
Architecture

Abstract

This paper examines the role of urban landmark design in Seoul, after the structural adjustment in the late 1990s, in branding Seoul's image as a global city. The topic of urban branding through the use of works of well-known architects has generated much debate, with many arguing that this practice involves a mere culture of the copy, or a thin veneer for a neoliberal urban redevelopment agenda. The case study sites examined in this paper—Some Sevit (Floating Island), Dongdaemun Design Plaza, and Seoulo 7017—are examples of the “free-form” architecture commissioned by the Seoul city government in the hope of generating a “Bilbao Effect,” and thereby promoting tourism in the area. This paper argues that although contemporary urban landmarks in Seoul have the potential to become brandscapes, they do not all stop short at becoming mere copies or a temporary fad. Rather, the conditions under which each landmark is reproduced are deeply situated, and the gap between aspiration and reality brings in different results.

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1. Introduction

Cities in many developing countries have been seeking to build monumental structures to promote their image as a global metropolis. South Korea is no exception. In particular, the country's capital of Seoul has been targeted for the

continual effort of city planners and architects to change its image from a dull industrial city to a post-industrial service-oriented one. For example, the promotion of Seoul as a “World Design Capital” in 2010 was such a project geared to remake the image of the city. Recent effort to shift the image of Seoul from an industrial to a postindustrial city appeared to be different from previous urban development projects in valuing an emotional dimension rather than focusing solely on efficiency and rationality. The Design Seoul Committee, which is a team of designers, urban planners, and architects operating under the Seoul

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Peer review under responsibility of Southeast University.

city government, was formed in 2009, thereby suggesting that “design” would play an immense role in this city’s urban development. The reckless and sprawling urban development carried out between the 1960s and 1980s became the target for improvement. Moreover, constructing new urban structures that are mindful of residents’ emotional (and economic) well-being became imperative in the minds of policy-makers.

The fact that “design” has become important does not mean that previous urban projects lacked a design element. However, the context of the waning popularity of International Style architecture should be considered. Given the increased importance on emotional well-being and the protection of the natural environment, the so-called “International Style” architecture, the aesthetic of which is best described by simplicity and efficiency, became a target of criticism in the mid-20th century in the majority of developed countries. Although minimalist architecture has become less fashionable among experts, the stark simplicity of the International Style in the eyes of those without substantial knowledge of art or architectural history was often perceived as the result not of a design decision but a lack of one. The critique of the International Style architecture coincided with that of growth-focused urban policies. The formation of the Design Seoul committee and the related urban design project should be considered in such a larger cultural context.

The current study analyzes the role of urban landmarks constructed in Seoul since the late 1980s in promoting this city’s image as a global city. Case studies include Some Sevit (Floating Island), Dongdaemun Design Plaza designed by the late Zaha Hadid, and Seoulo7017, a recent urban regeneration project that involves a previously elevated highway. Although their designs differ, they were all commissioned by the Seoul city government to generate the “Bilbao effect,” thereby promoting tourism in the area. These projects reflect the previously mentioned stylistic change because they employ free forms and flexible designs in contrast to the straight-line-dominated International Style. Many scholars have questioned whether outlandish landmarks can promote tourism and invigorate a local economy because they are a “short-lived image of dazzling signature projects” (Klingmann, 2007). Are these free-form landmarks in Seoul also examples of an “elegance [that] works to conceal and doubly disavow labor” (Spencer, 2016) or a “city of quartz” (Davis, 2006), where even public spaces primarily function to satisfy a neoliberal agenda of using public resources to facilitate the maximizing of profit? Are these urban landmarks, constructed to resemble similar examples in the developed world, mere copies that are bound to result in the same side-effects of gentrification?

In answering these questions, this study first analyzed the literature on landmarks and discusses various theoretical perspectives on urban branding in the form of contemporary urban landmarks. Thereafter, this research evaluated the policy documents and spatial and architectural characteristics of the case study sites. Secondary sources, such as media articles and academic articles, are also analyzed. In addition, surveys and in-depth interviews with users were conducted to understand the nature of spatial use in the case studies. The ethnographic data became extremely useful in differentiating between everyday and exceptional

use because secondary sources do not clearly reveal how the spaces were used. The current study argues that although contemporary urban landmarks in Seoul tend to emphasize exceptional uses, not all of them necessarily become simple mimicry or temporary fad. Rather, the conditions under which each landmark is reproduced are deeply situated, while the gap between aspiration and reality provides different results.

2. Urban landmark and urban branding

An urban landmark has been defined as an object that provides “external points of orientation, usually an easily identifiable physical object in the urban landscape” (Lynch, 1960). In contemporary metropolises, such landmarks often comprise towers or high-rise buildings. However, a landmark can be anything, including features of a landscape or signage. The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission has defined a landmark as “a building, property or object that has a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation” (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2008: 405). To have the requisite “special character” or “aesthetic interest,” a building should be beyond visually conspicuous. Many people also agree that landmarks do not have to be huge to be impressive in the minds of local inhabitants (Eckbo, 1964).

Although landmarks serve the important functions of marking location and providing a sense of place, they have been criticized by architectural scholars for their negative impact. In particular, newly constructed have been criticized as being out of context, wasteful, and alienating. The case for the invigoration of the local economy through the construction of landmark structures and urban branding, as in the case of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, has been mimicked by many cities. However, the majority of these structures have become exemplars of a “culture of copies,” to borrow Anna Klingman’s phrase (2007), and have failed to generate substantial benefits to their respective communities. Critics of urban branding practices have argued that even seemingly successful urban branding projects rarely benefits the local community because branding effort is primarily aimed at promoting international tourism (Dinardi, 2017). Furthermore, Spencer (2016) argued that landmark architecture reflects the neoliberal governmentality, which assumes that the market is the ultimate system and that the job of the expert is to ensure that market flows are uninhibited. In addition, Spencer explained that the elegant curves of the free-form function conceal the hard labor associated with the construction of such buildings.

Other scholars have argued that urban branding does not constantly bring such negative externalities. A few scholars have concluded that planning procedures play a substantial role because similar buildings designed by a single architect produce considerably different urban effects (Ponzini and Arosio, 2016). Urban rebranding in certain districts of Barcelona has been evaluated as successful and reflects unique local characteristics (Ulldemolins, 2014). A few critics have argued that the urban branding process can follow a substantially participatory path and integrate

political activism (Julier, 2011). Scholars have recently started to focus on the internal dynamics inherent in branding strategies and argued that brand-making has the potential to become substantially collaborative (Anderson and James, 2018). Given such a debate, the following question should be answered: What can the case of Seoul tell us about the effects of urban branding? Although the general practice of urban branding through the construction of urban landmarks tends to emphasize economic development over the conservation of the urban fabric, the result of branding practices is not constantly the same because the contexts under which urban landmarks are built differ substantially. Landmarks constructed to promote international tourism can occasionally be utilized more by local communities than by tourists. This practice may also invite other daily activities into the area.

The Seoul city government is no exception in attempting to promote the image of the city as a global metropolis replete with exciting cultural activities and unique heritage. Many scholars have argued that the recent cultural turn has influenced Seoul's urban policy-makers as well (Kearns and Philo, 1993). Instead of portraying Seoul's image as an industrial city, policy-makers have started to promote the city as a place of global consumption, particularly with the increasing popularity of Korean dramas and movies overseas, which are considered an opportunity to enhance international tourism. The effort at branding Seoul is expressed in the use of numerous phrases, such as "Dynamic Korea," "Creative Korea," and most recently, "I. Seoul. U." (Marshall, 2017). Across Seoul, plans to use landmark structures to promote the city's image as a trendy and hip site of global culture are continually being formulated by policy-makers. Although occupying considerably less space and costing less than buildings, small-scale landmarks in Seoul, such as sculptures, have caused controversy among residents. For example, "Gangnam Style," a sculpture of a famous dance move performed by Korean pop singer Psy, has elicited substantial criticism. Policy-makers have argued that having a locatable and photographable object for international tourists familiar with Psy's song will benefit the city economically. The three case studies that this study analyzes should be considered in light of recent urban rebranding strategies that promote Seoul as an exciting venue for cultural tourism and consumption (rather than a site for the production of manufacturing goods). To achieve this goal, a crucial strategy that was formulated was to construct a new urban image through the deployment of a new urban aesthetic. In contrast to the modernist architecture that dominated the period of rapid economic growth from the 1960s to the 1980s, new architectural styles, including free-form architecture, have become instrumental in promoting the image of a global city.

However, what is unique with Seoul's urban development and its policy-makers' effort at urban branding is that the strategic change from the image of an industrial city to a "post-industrial" one was substantially abrupt to reflect realities and lived experiences. Evidently, Seoul remains an industrial city, although manufacturing activities have decreased in response to cheap labor overseas. The Guro and Gasan digital industry complexes continue to function as manufacturing industry production centers despite the

introduction of information service industries in the area. At present, work hours resemble those of the industrial system more than the advertised post-industrial economy that was to be based on flexible and relatively short work hours. The contribution of travel and tourism to South Korea's GDP is 4.7%, which is considerably lower than those of Italy (13%), the US (7.7%), and Japan (6.8%) (World Data Atlas, 2018). In this context, urban branding strategies aimed at international tourism do not constantly succeed. Consequently, this mismatch between aspiration and reality can bring unanticipated results.

This study now turns to analyze three recently completed public landmarks in Seoul to show the different effects of urban branding. Case study sites were judiciously selected as examples of urban landmarks initiated by the city government after the 2000s, with architecture that is free-form or at least not considered belonging to the International Style.

3. Case studies: Sevit Island, Dongdaemun Design Plaza, and Seoulo7017

Sevit Island (Some Sevit) is a project that was first proposed by a resident of Seoul to make the Han River waterfront visually interesting. This project fits well in the urban redevelopment of the Han River that then-Mayor Oh Se Hoon was promoting in the mid-2000s. The Han River Renaissance Project was Oh's main project and the goal was to make "the Han River an international attraction" and remake the image of Seoul as an "eco-friendly and innovative city" (Seoul Metropolitan City, 2012). The effort to redevelop the riverfront space was not simply a local issue. Studies on the Han River branding have compared foreign examples, such as the Seine (France), Rhine (Germany), and Thames (England) rivers, as successful branding precedents (Lee and Lim, 2016). Various strategies for changing the image of the Han River from a mere landscape to be gazed on to a considerably active space for tourism were discussed by local and national government officials. In 2015, the Korean Research Institute for Human Settlements published a special issue of its monthly magazine *Gukto* on future policy directions that concern the development of the Han River. One of the articles in this issue presented a survey result showing that the Han River was considered by respondents the most representative landmark in Seoul (Choi, 2015). However, the same article also indicates that the respondents had difficulty accessing the riverfront and a few of them regarded the space not as a destination in and of itself. The plan to redevelop the Han River was favorably received in business media with *Maekoung Economy* publishing celebratory articles titled "Korea's Landmark Han River: Not Envious of the Thames" (2008) and "From Urban Eyesore to Seoul's Landmark" (2014).

The construction of Some Sevit should be considered in the context of such lively scholarly and popular discussions on changing the riverfront from a passive open space to a considerably dynamic tourist destination. The design of Sevit's physical structure also emphasizes the landmark qualities. Professor Choy from Hanyang University, who was involved in the project, noted that "The first architectural plan was not landmark-like enough, and thus it was to

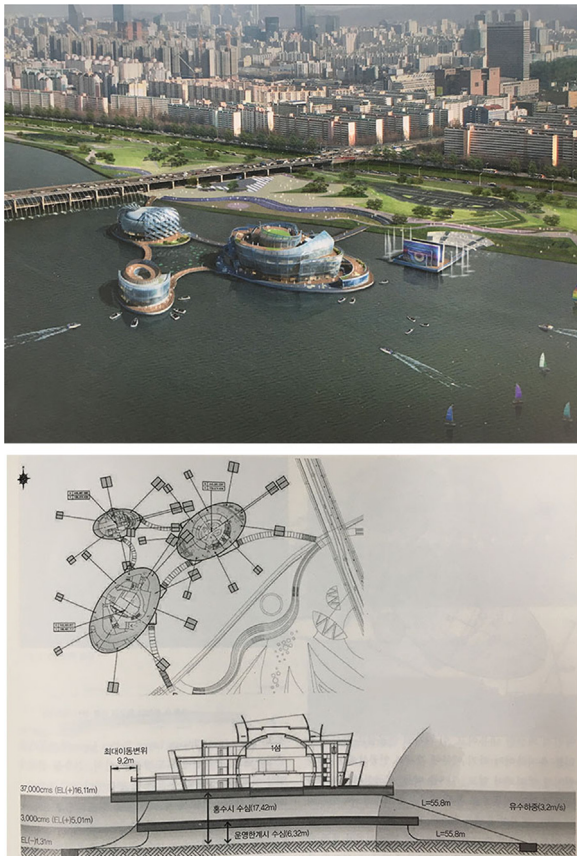


Fig. 1 Sevit Island in Seoul.
(Source: Courtesy of Opus Pearl)

be redone with the following conditions. It had to be at least as landmark-like as Guggenheim Bilbao, and the floating spherical structure should be secure” (Choy, 2016).

The final design featured four main structures, namely, Gavit, Chavit, Solvit, and Yevit, connected by bridges (Fig. 1). After the idea was first conceived in 2006, the project was completed in 2011. The project is an example of “build-operate-transfer” (BOT), a form of public-private partnership. All but one building has a round-shaped plan and is constructed on a floating dock rather than standing on solid ground. Gavit is the largest structure and has glass panels “designed to embody the shape of a flower in full bloom” (according to the explanations written on the panel adjacent to the building). The slightly smaller Chavit also has a glass façade with two screen-like structures partially covering the glass panels similar to a shell. Solvit is a nest-like structure with a round plan and is the smallest enclosed space of the group. Yevit is a stage space, where different outdoor concerts and cultural events can take place. From a distance, either from one of the bridges crossing the Han River or from the highway, Sevit Island looks ephemeral, particularly with its silhouette hidden beneath the high-rise buildings and mountains in the back. At night, its glass skin acquires substantial definition with colorful lighting that reflects on the water. Upon the project’s completion, various media reported in a celebratory tone that this new development would trigger a new phase of the Han River’s waterfront development and provide much-needed leisurely space for area residents (Chang, 2011).

However, the project received negative publicity when, soon after its completion, it was revealed that it faced financial difficulties. Many stakeholders, including Oh’s successor as mayor, Park Won Soon, blamed the former for supposedly being motivated mainly by the desire to attract attention to his own effort rather than acting on judicious policy considerations. A few people have argued that the maintenance cost of the building would be substantially high and that the structure was unsustainable. The negative publicity on the project forced Hyosung, the conglomerate group, to renegotiate its terms, thereby reducing the extent of the free-of-charge operation that it was offering (Kang, 2014). Contrary to the popular belief that tax money is the principal source of funding, the bulk of the fund was private, with only a small percentage of public funds being used for the construction. After a certain period of operation to recover the cost, the company operating Sevit Island is currently expected to donate its profits to the city government.

Issues and questions on the public nature of the place remain. Apart from the issue of sustainability, Sevit Island has received ambivalent responses in the media because its use as leisure space is extremely limited. This artificial island, which is used primarily as a site for parties and occasionally for international conventions, caters to the upper- and upper-middle-class population who can afford its high service costs. Unlike parks or libraries, the interior of Sevit Island has high-end restaurants suitable for wedding parties and other celebrations. Brochures and advertisement panels in the building indicate that this place is suitable for special occasions, such as marriage proposals, wedding parties, and first-year birthday parties for babies (see Fig. 2). When I visited Sevit Island in April 2017, patrons of one of the restaurants mentioned that they visited the island to consider hosting a party. One news article recounted the interesting story that personnel of Hyosung, which is the company overseeing the project, were supposedly upset at a comment made by a politician that the place had re-opened as a place loved by Seoul residents, whether they have a bottle of beer or *bindaetteok* and *maggoli* (bean pancake and turbid rice wine, which often means cheap popular food), when they can only make a profit by selling tenderloin steak and wine (Lee, 2014). This incident reveals that the spatial uses imagined by the city government and the company operating Sevit Island were nearly polar opposites. One envisioned the place as an easily accessible space that all citizens could enjoy, whereas the other imagined it as an exclusive place that involves the consumption of expensive products and services.

Although the policy-makers who supported the construction of Sevit invoked the Guggenheim Bilbao, Sevit Island lacked program contents that could attract a wide array of visitors. Many scholars have explained that the Bilbao effect was the result of a fortuitous combination of different conditions rather than of architectural design alone (Moore, 2017a). In addition, Sevit Island does not connect to other urban fabrics because it is located in a relatively secluded riverfront space. The majority of the users interviewed replied that they used private vehicles to go to Sevit Island rather than using mass transportations, such as the metro or bus (interviews conducted in April 2017). Policy-makers who seek river branding have failed to consider such



Fig. 2 The rooftop garden (left) advertisement flier (right), with a red carpeted staircase leading to the rooftop, suggests that the place is suitable for special occasions rather than daily leisure activities.
(Source: Photo by author, Flier by Hyosung TNC.)

factors as the width of the Han River and the nearby transportation network. Although the Seine is approximately 120 m wide at its widest point and the Thames is approximately 30 m, the Han River at this point is nearly 1 km across with bridges designed primarily for vehicular traffic. Accordingly, touring this place on foot is considerably difficult. Thus, many are no longer surprised that Sevit Island alone did not substantially change the national and international tourist industry associated with the Han River.

Such a mismatch between the expected use and actual practice can be observed in the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), which was completed in 2014 (Fig. 3) as part of the Design Seoul project. Dongdaemun Market, which is one of the largest markets in Seoul that specializes in clothes and fashion accessories, has been assessed as lacking urban amenities, such as resting areas and public bathrooms. As part of the Design Seoul project, the construction of DDP was part of an effort to redesign the Dongdaemun Market area by demolishing the Dongdaemun Sports Stadium. Although the lack of amenities was the first proposed reason for the construction of DDP, the necessity of having a landmark to “reinvigorate” the area was emphasized by policy-makers and planners from the beginning.

After an open competition, Zaha Hadid's free-form, non-standard design was selected by the Seoul city government. DDP features curved walls that comprise silver-colored aluminum panels that defy the conventional perpendicular joining of walls and floors. The building's free-form structure was made possible by parametric design. Accordingly, the media praised Samoo, the firm that carried out the construction, for its fine quality. The construction of DDP was controversial because of the demolition of the stadium and eviction of street vendors who had previously been

relocated to DDP from the Cheonggyecheon area. An anticipated effect of the building's construction was to provide additional space for shoppers and other pedestrians to relax and enjoy the diverse cultural events within the area. Others expected that the presence of a signature landmark building designed by a “starchitect” (star architect) would bring additional visitors to the area, thereby reinvigorating the local economy.

At first glance, the project appears to address the aforementioned expectations. The total DDP floor area is 86,574 m², the majority of which is devoted to art exhibitions and stores related to the fashion industry. The lower floor, particularly the Market Zone, includes a series of small businesses, thereby bringing commercial activities within the building and encouraging pedestrians to enter the place. However, the building's atypical free-form structure also had unforeseen consequences. For example, despite the building's visually stimulating and unique form, locating a specific room or interior space becomes extremely challenging for users familiar with a Cartesian organization of space. In this respect, DDP sacrifices convenience for aesthetics. A recently completed study on the user experience of the building has determined that this structure's free-form floor plan has resulted in poor usability (Kim and Pan, 2015). Another problem is that the unconventional dimensions of the majority of the spaces render them awkward and empty spaces that are difficult to use or enjoy (Fig. 4). Exhibitions often need many panels for the display of objects on walls or partitions that surround viewers circulating through their rooms. In this building, the entrances to exhibitions and design labs are difficult to find and the majority of which are located on the upper or lower levels. By contrast, the convenience and cosmetic stores are



Fig. 3 Dongdaemun Design Park in Seoul.
(Source: Seoul Design Foundation)

relatively easy to find. This situation limits the realization announced in the building's original plan of the promotion of "cultural activities" within the structure.

The expectation that the construction of DDP would reinvigorate the local economy by increasing pedestrian traffic has yet to be realized. Although the completion of



Fig. 4 The interior view of the “Design Pathway” shows a vast empty space because of the absence of programs, at least partially generated by the space's unconventional dimensions.
(Source: Author)

DDP has brought substantial media attention and increased the number of visitors to this site where a sports stadium once stood, such development has not resulted in increased sales in Dongdaemun Market. Although the popularity of Korean movies and TV dramas has played a role in promoting international tourism, whether these newly added built structures will contribute substantially to the local economy has yet to be clarified.

DDP has encouraged the global consumption of Korean fashion through the hosting of activities, such as fashion shows by well-known designers. The majority of the large exhibition spaces are reserved for renowned artists instead of being used by local designers or unpopular artists and artistic groups. Even the section that promotes locally produced goods encourages urban entrepreneurship by piggy-backing on the phenomenal increase in teenage fashion retail commerce since the late 1990s, when the rest of the South Korean economy appeared to plummet because of structural adjustments. The history of successful niche marketing in the area in the late 1990s has contributed to the assumption that clever and interesting designing sells even in a bad economy. However, the success of Dongdaemun Market in the 1990s and the construction of large-scale shopping centers also had a negative impact on small shops. Large conglomerates, such as Doosan, opened their stores with duty-free shops. A concern by one merchant was raised in an interview: “why would Chinese tourists who purchased duty-free products on the top floor bother to come downstairs to look at smaller shops?” (Lee, 2015: 39). Exhibitions and conventions held at DDP, although providing several interesting cultural activities, do not in and of themselves help to increase economic gains for local residents or improve social solidarity among them. The assertion that the construction of DDP would facilitate cultural exchange and result in the development of the local design industry was also questionable given recent research results on the factors that influence DDP visitor satisfaction. Among the four factors that the study considered (i.e., architecture, program content, business

attraction, and design industry development), architecture and business attraction were the two main factors that contributed to satisfaction levels (Kim and Kim, 2015). That is, visitors were principally attracted to the unusual design of the building and its shops, rather than the cultural programs housed within it or opportunities to encounter new design industry-related developments.

Thus, the effects of Sevit Island and DDP appeared to confirm the suspicion of urban scholars that urban branding generally produces negative externalities, such as gentrification and alienation. The development of the Han River riverfront through the construction of Sevit Island did not enhance tourism, although it provided additional commercial venues for luxury dining and special events. Despite being host to programs, such as art exhibitions, DDP has not produced a “Bilbao effect” partially because Seoul is a relatively large city with numerous attractions. However, the construction of DDP has brought a gentrification of commercial spaces because small-scale merchants found themselves competing against large firms, such as Doosan and Lotte, which opened new stores. Moreover, the case of Seoullo7017 suggests that there is more to the functioning of urban landmarks. Urban branding through the construction of landmarks is a complex process and situated difference accounts for the different outcomes of similar formal structures.

Seoullo7017 is an urban regeneration project that utilizes an old elevated street near the Seoul train station. This project was started in 2015, when the existing elevated street built in 1970 had become structurally dangerous. Mayor Park Won Soon initiated a plan to reuse, rather than demolish, the street following the example of the High Line in New York. Unlike the previous two examples, Seoullo7017 is a street and not a building. As such, this area may be categorized as a non-architectural landmark. Although Seoullo7017 is less visually conspicuous partly because of its horizontal orientation, its central location in the capital and heavy use give it an importance as a construction and place. From the

start, the Seoul city government has emphasized that apart from helping to regenerate existing structures, Seoulo7017 could become an “urban landmark that contributes to the economic revitalization and development of the vicinity” (Seoul Metropolitan City, 2016: 25). In the same policy plan, utilizing Seoulo7017 to promote Seoul's brand image was presented by proposing media art festivals and invoking precedents sites, such as Times Square in New York and the media façade of London's Piccadilly Circus (Ibid.: 86).

After a process of invited design competitions, the proposal made by MVRDV was selected as the final design. Winy Maas's submission titled “the Seoul Arboretum” proposed building an urban forest as a symbolic gesture. The submission reads as follows:

Maybe the elevated and central position demands a much more symbolic suggestion. Why can't we show in the very heart of the city all plants that are plant-able in Seoul? And creating a true Arboretum, a library of plants. And that can act as a pure reference for the whole city... (Seoul Metropolitan City, 2015: 105).

Thus, the project aimed to generate a landmark by engineering a certain type of landscape that is filled with lush greenery that comprises all plants that can grow in Seoul. Maas also suggested arranging the plants according to the Korean “alphabetical order” to emphasize the reference to the city. This project was evidently about generating a different type of spectacle, which is based on the diversity

of plant life. Although the project description does not specifically mention sustainability as the prime goal of the project, the fact that “park or pedestrian-oriented green space” was recommended suggests that a “green” branding was considered important for the project (Seoul Metropolitan City, 2017: 202).

Amid controversies that included the possibility of exacerbated traffic congestion, Seoulo7017 opened in May 2017. The street is open to pedestrians only and features many circular planters with various vegetation and other public art objects. Seoulo7017 connects the Seoul Train Station to other places of interest, such as the Namdaemun (South Gate) Market, which is an outdoor market with a long history and Namsan Tower, another landmark and a vista point with an impressive view of the city (see Fig. 5).

The project triggered various responses from the residents of Seoul. A few of them supported the idea of having a pedestrian-friendly environment by regenerating the existing infrastructure. Others were worried that the project would cause traffic congestion. Although architectural scholars support the policy direction of promoting a pedestrian-friendly environment, they explained that the building's short length (1 km) and high level (17 m high) make it closer to a pedestrian overpass than a street (Lee, 2017). Others have expressed regret at the fact that the original plan of connecting the street to the plaza in front of the Seoul station was not implemented after the deliberations of the cultural heritage administration (Kwon, 2017). The fact that the project took only two years to complete was controversial as well. A few critics have argued that the



Fig. 5 Official rendering of Seoulo7017 showing the adjacent Seoul Train Station and apartment buildings. (Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government)

project's rapid completion was due to a lack of social agreement and reflected the mayor's impatience to show off his achievements (Kim, 2017). Others praised it as an example, given that the majority of urban constructions dragged out considerably and burdened everyone involved (Moore, 2017b).

Although policy documents mention New York's High Line as a precedent project that inspired Seoullo7017's development, simply regarding Seoullo7017 as a copy of New York's High Line ignores the differences between the two cities and to mistake aspirations for reality. The High Line first opened in 2009 on the formerly abandoned site of a railroad on the West Side of Manhattan as the result of the undertakings of the Friends of High Line organization. In response to the impending demolition of an abandoned railway, the Friends of High Line initiated a campaign to save the old railway by turning it into an urban park. Despite being located in Manhattan, the High Line was on the periphery of the island borough and was considered dilapidated compared with the majority of the highly used commercial spaces in the rest of Manhattan. Although the High Line was widely considered a successful example of urban regeneration, critics have explained that the gentrification and rapid urban redevelopment of the area represents the "neoliberalization of park space that privileges high-profile parks over the broader provisioning of green space" (Millington, 2015: 2327). Darren Patrick observed an ironic homogenizing effect of the High Line revitalization project, critically noting that gritty factors of the High Line are sanitized to pave the way for the "creative class," whereas "bodies marked as abject, particularly queers of color and the urban poor, are all too frequently displaced" (Patrick, 2014: 929). In fact, the opening of the High Line Park has triggered increased global tourism, which was followed by the construction of luxurious real estate developments in the area. Far from being an abandoned park space, New York's High Line has become a highly-engineered urban park where tourists outnumber local residents. After the success of High Line, the Lower East Side neighborhood in the same borough initiated a similar project called "Lowline," which proposed to reuse a historic trolley terminal, similarly to High Line's reuse of an old railway. Ironically, the success of regenerating an old railway called attention to the perpetual need to redevelop areas near historical sites, taking away the notion of urban wilderness.

Seoullo7017 was previously an elevated highway for automobiles that was in use until it was decided to demolish it for safety reasons. The project of turning it into a park started immediately after the decision to demolish the existing structure. Thus, unlike the High Line, it was not specifically an abandoned area but was used extensively for automobile traffic. Unlike the High Line, Seoullo7017 is located not on an urban periphery but in a city center that is predominantly a commercial and business district. Seoullo7017 connects important urban nodes and tourist destinations, including the Seoul train station, N Seoul Tower, and Namdaemun Market, which is the second largest open door market in Seoul. Evidently, Seoullo7017 is surrounded by major tourist destinations for it to become another attraction. Seoullo7017 attracts tourists as well, but the ratio of tourists to residents is not high. Although Maas proposed to build an urban arboretum, it is not clear

that all of the plant species that can grow in Seoul can be planted and sustained there. Thus, the aspiration of policymakers to make Seoullo7017 a spectacular landscape may not be fulfilled, though this may be beneficial to local residents, given the gentrification and changing spatial activities of such projects as the High Line.

Similar to the majority of the cases of newly constructed urban landmarks, the effectiveness of Seoullo7017 cannot be judged easily. Despite being open to everyone and promoting the re-use of old structures, Seoullo7017 has been the focus of concerns on the process of regeneration. Compared with Sevit Island and DDP, Seoullo7017 is more accessible and better connected to other parts of the city. Unlike DDP, this area is an outdoor space. Hence, visitors do not have to make any commitments or subscribe to any programs. In this sense, Seoullo7017 exhibits characteristics similar to sidewalks. Survey and interviews with users revealed stories of positive experiences. Some visitors expressed satisfaction over the fact that it is a car-free environment with a garden-like ambience in the middle of a forest of high-rise buildings. Others appreciated that it is a car-free place where families can bring their children without having to pay an entrance fee. One female user in her 30s responded that Seoullo was a good place to read books because it provides a place to sit while looking out the cityscape. Contrary to the policy documents that expected Seoullo7017 to become a tourist destination, most visitors (37.8%) responded that they came across it unintentionally. Unlike the High Line, which has become a high profile global destination, Seoullo7017 was perceived as a destination and a passage, with many people coming from Seoul (62.1%) and using the place to get to their work/home or to pass by. This situation illustrated that Seoullo was used as an everyday space for local residents more than for tourists' visits.

In interviews held between May and July 2018, a few interviewees noted a sense of satisfaction as the spaces of Seoullo provided "a quiet corner to read books" in the form of planter benches. Others, including shop owners in nearby Namdaemun Market, repeated positive sentiment toward the project, as it became a resting place for the business owners and employees. Contrary to the idea of the arboretum, most users cared more for the greenery's shading capacity, noting that more shade would be better. Despite giving a general positive feedback, a few expressed that regulation was too strict, as drinking beer on the bench was not permitted. Given that drinking alcohol on the sidewalk is not prohibited in South Korea, this prohibition was considered abnormal for a few individuals. This researcher also encountered a form of surveillance when conducting interviews and survey, as one of the security guards prevented me from conducting the survey. Surveys could be done only after the researcher sent an official letter asking for permission. Thus, Seoullo7017's spatial type is in the grey area, as it can be considered both an open sidewalk and a closed facility which needs to be carefully surveilled.

4. Conclusion

This study has discussed recently completed landmark structures in Seoul in the recent two decades. Although scales and types differ, the landmarks discussed in this

research share the common feature of having been constructed primarily to promote an image of Seoul as a post-industrial and design-oriented city. Sevit Island, DDP, and Seoull07017 are all projects carried out by the Seoul City government as attempts of urban branding. As such, they were the focus of heated discussions and criticism because many residents questioned the public utility of these landmarks. A few criticized the landmarks as a waste of money or a “political showpiece,” whereas others responded more positively, arguing that they help create a positive image of the city. Urban branding can sometimes be successful, but constructing a single narrative about Seoul is a difficult task, as the city already contains many stories. Current attempts to build brandscapes in Seoul lack consistency, as some, including Sevit Island and DDP, seek an outlandish and unique design, whereas Seoull07017 emphasizes an experiential aspect by emphasizing walkable environments.

Whether these cases of new landmarks in Seoul will become new symbols of cultural modernity or examples of failed aspirations is still an open question. Although it is too early to evaluate their long-term effects, the first two case studies seem to confirm the suspicion that free-form landmarks tend to reflect, or contribute to, a neoliberal logic due to their particular aesthetics. Conventions and exhibitions are held in the interior spaces of these buildings, but these are primarily special events rather than everyday activities, making them special-purpose halls only. In this sense, they become spaces of exception rather than of the everyday. The first two case studies analyzed confirm that urban branding results in the encouragement of a neoliberal urban redevelopment agenda. However, urban projects following the example of another project in a different setting have produced different results, although their forms may be similar. Although Seoull07017 followed the example of New York's High Line, its impact was different, as the relative status of the tourism industry and the local site context much differed. The low rates of global tourism in South Korea, and the central location occupied by Seoull07017, have contributed to the local use of the space rather than remaking it as an international tourism destination. Although successful urban regeneration projects tend to result in gentrification and possibly other negative externalities, less successful projects that do not fulfill their aspirations can also create positive effects. Not all urban landmarks that mimic or invoke other structures are mere copies that repeat the mistakes and effects of the original. A considerably nuanced approach to analyzing urban branding through the use of landmarks is necessary to understand the fast-growing metropolises of Asian countries.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the 2016 Hongik University Research Fund.

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