

CASE STUDY

# Regeneration Without Demolition: Remaking Sewoon



The area around Sewoon Sangga as seen from above. Source: Seoul Museum of History, <http://www.museum.seoul.kr/>

CONTENT BY  
**The Seoul Institute**

Seoul's bold efforts in transforming highways and main roads into public spaces for people and its creative rejuvenation of modern heritage were two reasons why it clinched the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize 2018. The city's Makercity Sewoon project showcases how top-down and bottom-up approaches helped rehabilitation seven commercial superblocs into a vibrant space for the people.

### **The rise and fall of a commercial hub**

First built in 1966 as a large-scale remodelling project, Sewoon Sangga (or Sewoon Shopping Mall) connects Jongmyo Shrine and the Nam Mountain. The name commonly refers to the stretch of eight buildings—Hyundai Arcade (currently removed), Sewoon Arcade, Cheonggye Arcade, Dalim Arcade, Sampoong Arcade, Poongjeon Hotel, Shinseong Arcade, and Jinyang Arcade—which are each 8-17 floors high, and together, stretch 1 km from south to north along the street.

When first completed, Sewoon Sangga introduced many ground-breaking concepts, including being the country's first multi-purpose building. Pedestrians and cars were separated on the ground level, and there was a



Green Belt Park on the former Hyundai Arcade. Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government (2015), Seoul 2014/2015 Urban Form and Landscape, p. 119

pedestrian deck of continuous shopping malls, and an atrium. It was planned to induce shared growth in a part of the city that had stagnated and was deteriorating. The arcade formed a central commercial hub in Seoul and was known to offer the most luxurious apartments in the city. Sewoon Sangga was also a Mecca for electronic products and sound systems. This changed from the early 1970s as the development of Gangnam saw commerce shift to the Myeongdong area. In 1977, the electric and electronic businesses were also designated to be moved, eventually ending up in Yongsan Electronics Market in 1987. By the early 1990s, Sewoon's commercial supremacy had collapsed.

However, the area remained an excellent location for manufacturing-based businesses, and was home to industries such as printing & publishing, jewellery, medical and fashion. As it connects Jongmyo Shrine and Nam Mountain, Sewoon Sangga had the potential to expand the vitality of the city to the peripheries too. As the buildings in the area also had huge historic and cultural potential, attracting interest even from foreigners, it was attractive to preserve the existing structure.

### **Between Preservation and Demolition**

Discussions on redeveloping Sewoon started as early as 1979 with the relocation of the electric and electronics businesses. The Seoul Metropolitan Government considered "full-scale redevelopment after demolition" as part of a South-North Green Zone development plan to connect Jongmyo Shrine and Nam Mountain. However, residents felt that such a development would increase their financial burden and there were conflicts between the Sewoon Sangga group and residents of the nearby areas. Discussions dragged on for years, and with the depressed real estate market in the late 1990s, none of the plans were realised. In 2003, the Cheonggye Stream Restoration Project revived discussions on reorganising the spatial structure of the city, resulting

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in strong support for the South-North Green Zone development project again. As a result, the Hyundai Arcade was removed in 2008 to develop the Sewoon Green Belt Park as part of the Urban Environment Maintenance Project. However, the original plan of developing the South-North Green Zone from Jongmyo Shrine to Nam Mountain did not proceed as planned.

In the fifth and sixth elections for the Mayor of Seoul, the future of Sewoon became a hot topic. There was support for preservation rather than removal, echoing similar controversies that continued for decades over the New Town Development Project in Seoul and the Seoul Station Overpass Project. Many of the discussions were about maintaining Sewoon Sangga’s ecosystem of urban industries, respecting the historic and cultural centre of the Fortress Wall of Seoul, reducing the excessive burden of redevelopment on residents and creating a more pedestrian-friendly city. This resulted in the Seoul Metropolitan Government officially announcing its Sewoon Sangga Regeneration Project in February 2015.

#### **Transforming Sewoon into a Home for Creatives**

To draw up detailed regeneration proposal for Sewoon Sangga, the Seoul Metropolitan Government consulted the public extensively on its plan to focus on the “creative culture industry”. The government held 270 interviews, gathered artists together on 18 occasions, sought advice from culture and art planners 15 times and made 17 presentations to residents to hear their opinions. This gathering of feedback from residents continues up till today. In addition, the government organised a five-day BBP Conference, 29 Sewoon Forums and 25 expert advisory committee meetings to hear from different fields. Various experimental programmes, such as “Sewoon Arcade is a University”, “Imagination Factory”, “Steve J & Yoni P Fashion Show”, and “Uljiro Light Way”, were organised to increase interest in the area and to gather opinions from various fields and classes.

Amidst these discussions, the Seoul Metropolitan Government also held an international design competition for Sewoon Sangga in February 2015. The winning “Modern Vernacular” concept design by Environmental Scape Architects (E-Scape) was finalised in December 2015 with the input of an expert design advisory group and after a presentation given to the residents. The design was to be built in two sections, with the first stage slated to be completed in May 2017.



Aerial view of E-Scape's winning design concept to regenerate Sewoon Sangga.

Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government (2015), <http://mediahub.seoul.go.kr/archives/880067>

### **The Making of “Sewoon Again”**

The regeneration plan sought to maintain Sewoon Sangga and induce progressive and customised maintenance that respects the existing community. Other key goals included maintaining the existing urban industries, discovering new growth engines and activating the peripheral area by cultivating an industry linked with culture and tourism. This develops a foundation to revitalise urban life in the area with cultural events, residences and the development of a start-up incubation centre. There are also plans to develop Sewoon Sangga into an urban creative and innovative centre through connecting with its industrial heritage.

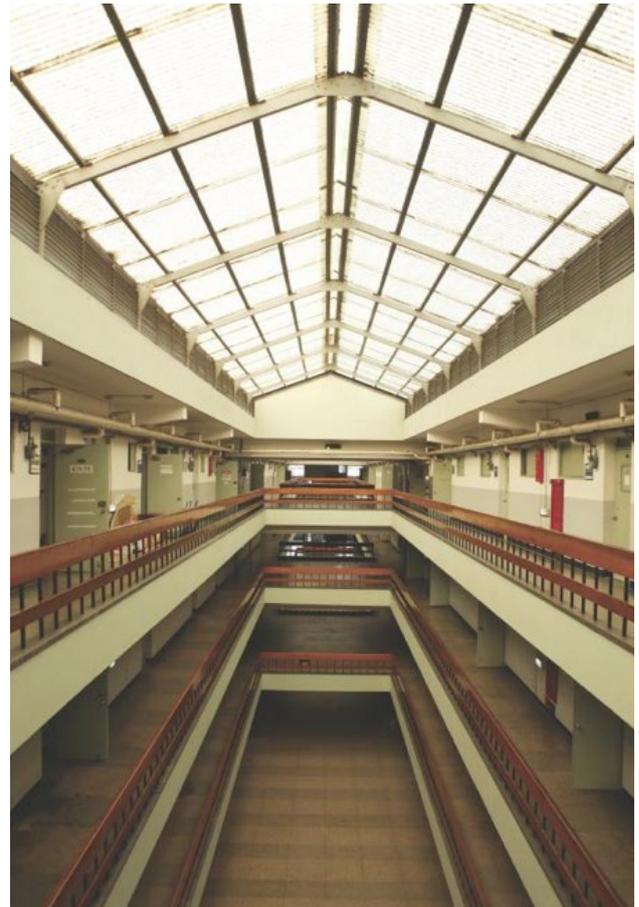
In addition, a pedestrian network will connect various commercial buildings in Sewoon Sangga, and Cheonggye Arcade will be developed to connect the pedestrian streets in the city. This will add significant vitality to the city by enabling the population in Jongmyo Shrine / Jongno / Cheonggye Stream / Euljiro and Toegye-ro / Nam Mountain to use Sewoon Sangga to easily move from south to north and east to west.

The sloped square (Dasi Sewoon Square) will be modified to directly connect the existing Sewoon Green Belt Park (constructed in 2009) with the mid-air pedestrian road in the building group. A double-width crosswalk will also be installed between the Square and Jongmyo Shrine to continue the pedestrian network that connects Jongmyo Shrine, Jongno and Dasi Sewoon Square.

The pedestrian bridge between Sewoon–Dalim Arcade that was disconnected during the Cheonggye Stream Restoration Project in 2005 will be reconnected to support the natural flow of the population between the stream and arcade. The Dalim Arcade and the Uljiro Underground Arcade will also be connected with escalators and elevators.



The exterior pedestrian deck at Sewoon Sangga.  
Source: Seoul Museum of History, <http://www.museum.seoul.kr/>



Pedestrian deck and atrium on the 3rd floor inside Sewoon Sangga. Source: Seoul Museum of History, <http://www.museum.seoul.kr/>

A mid-air pedestrian deck at Sewoon Sangga will also be constructed on the second floor, while between the second and third floors, about 30 container boxes will serve as exhibition halls. The pedestrian deck on the third floor will be repaired to improve safety, and it will be filled with attractions.

### **The Impact of Sewoon's Transformation**

The development of the Sewoon Sangga Pedestrian Network will connect Jongmyo Shrine, Jongno, Cheonggye Stream, Uljiro and Nam Mountain with a large pedestrian street. This will greatly increase economic activity and is expected to be an unprecedented case of pedestrian regeneration in Seoul.

Through the Cheonggye Stream Pedestrian Street and continuous improvement of the pedestrian environment in the city, it is expected that the Myeongdong area in the west and the Dongdaemun Shopping district in the east will be connected centrally to the Sewoon Sangga Pedestrian Network. This will greatly improve dynamism in the city.

Transforming Sewoon Sangga into a creative manufacturing hub will bring it new life and crowds as in the 1970s and 1980s. It is expected to become a sustainable model of business and one of the city's main attractions.



Aerial view of the third-floor deck at Sewoon Sangga. Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government, <http://mediahub.seoul.go.kr/archives/955872>



Aerial view of Sewoon-Cheonggye mid-air pedestrian bridge. Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government, <http://mediahub.seoul.go.kr/archives/955872>



Aerial view of Dasi Sewoon Square. Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government, <http://mediahub.seoul.go.kr/archives/955872>



Mid-air view of the second- and third-floor decks at Sewoon Sangga.

Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government (2016), [http://spp.seoul.go.kr/main/news/news\\_report.jsp?search\\_boardId=26236&act=VIEW&boardId=26236](http://spp.seoul.go.kr/main/news/news_report.jsp?search_boardId=26236&act=VIEW&boardId=26236)

### **Regeneration Without Demolition**

After over 35 years of discussion, the plan for the Sewoon Sangga has changed from “redevelopment after demolition” to “regeneration on the premise of preservation”. This was finally initiated in 2016 as the Sewoon Again Regeneration Project.

This shift was enabled by the determination of the Mayor and the Seoul Metropolitan Government to create a more pedestrian-friendly city. The government also made a continuous effort to promote the benefits of the project to local residents, merchants and organisations, as well as to listen closely to the opinions of different experts and the general public. Thus, a consensus was formed with the people.

Once this project is completed, the entire city will have more attractions and the connection of pedestrian streets will greatly increase its dynamism. Alongside the High-line Park development project on the Seoul Station Overpass, the Sewoon Again Regeneration Project will be long remembered as an example of urban regeneration that made the city more pedestrian-friendly.



### About the Seoul Institute

The Seoul Institute analyses major challenges that face the city. As a think-tank for the Seoul Metropolitan Government, it plans for the city's future through studies of various current policies along with establishing mid- and long-term visions for Seoul. Funded by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, the Seoul Institute was established as a comprehensive policy institute in 1992. It has systematically studied problems in various disciplines such as urban planning and design, housing, transportation, environment, safety and control, industrial economy, administration and finance, social policy, welfare, health, cultural tourism, gender and family, and education.

Since these areas influence the lives of the city's residents, viable policy alternatives are critical. While Seoul, as the capital of Korea, has been an icon of compressed growth in modern times, it now needs to become a city of social responsibility with a clean environment and a unique culture. We propose policy alternatives to improve life in qualitative terms, instead of simply quantitative indicators of urban growth. The Seoul Institute also conducts research on urban infrastructure for citizens of Seoul.



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The Centre for Liveable Cities was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, based on a strategic blueprint developed by Singapore's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. Guided by its mission to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, the Centre's work spans four main areas - Research, Capability Development, Knowledge Platforms and Advisory. For more information, please visit us at <http://www.clc.gov.sg>