

## **A case of preservation of the modern and regeneration of old downtown through civic participatory remodeling procedure: experimentation in Gwangju, Korea**

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### **Abstract**

The Gwangju Civic Center, the first facility of its kind in Gwangju was built in 1970. After 40 years from the completion, the necessity of reestablishment was raised due to the change of social function and the limitation of structural lifetime. In March 2010, Gwangju City decided the demolition of the Civic Center. However, a group of architectural professionals opposed the city government's decision and claimed the preservation of modern architecture. It was based on the reuse of cultural resource. In October 2010; a careful safety inspection for the warranty of structural problem was carried out. Consequently, the building showed the possibilities of prolonging its life with the minimum repair while total reconstruction or demolition of auditorium roof. For the remodeling of the Gwangju Civic Center, the discussions about the scope of preservation and the scheme of reuse have been held by public servants, professionals and civic organizations. In October 2011, seven expert judges and one hundred citizen judges decided the winning design among the five invited designers. It was a significant progress providing citizens with a chance to conserve the historical value. In this remodeling work, we can discuss about regeneration of historical value of modern architecture as a reuse of cultural resource. The design competition also raises a question about the foremost priority in preservation projects and new birth of cultural resource.

*Keywords: modern architecture, regeneration, citizen judges, reconstruction.*



## 1 Introduction

Gwangju Civic Center is a modern building built in the 1970s and the first modern cultural space for Gwangju citizens. Its architectural form was a public building that represents transformation of modern architecture in Gwangju region and the functional contents were a space that accommodates family culture and social events along with Gwangju Park. The building is deteriorating along with its 40 years of history and is undergoing a change in role with the advent of new cultural spaces. The reputation of the location of Gwangju Civic Center has degraded as an old downtown from once an activated center of the city, and while young residents of the surrounding area had moved out to the suburbs, there is no move in young people to this area. The civic center is on the verge of being demolished as part of downtown regeneration and reorganization of Gwangju Park. However, after discussions about reconsideration of the historical value of the old building and identity of the city between experts and public officers, the demolition has changed to remodeling. While implementing the project, several discussions were proposed for remodeling old public buildings in downtown. Firstly, which part of a physical architecture shall be preserved in reconstruction? Secondly, how to reflect the demand of the elderly local residents and boost the use of new young generation at the same time? Thirdly, how to implement participatory design determination methods that reflect demands of various residents in public buildings? In the project, the study sought to find an answer through brisk discussions on the three questions aforementioned.

## 2 Gwangju Civic Center as modern architecture

### 2.1 Gwangju Park and the Civic Center

As main facilities in Gwangju downtown for the last 40 years, Gwangju Park and Civic Center have been the place for culture and meeting of citizens. In the past, Gwangju had no cultural facilities except for some movie theaters. Citizens' commitment for cultural spaces and mayor's ambition for creating a space for cultural activities were the motive behind building a large cultural space. The building has a concert hall on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and a wedding hall on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor above the ground, where the concert hall is dedicated showing movies or performance and the wedding hall was used for holding western-style wedding events. Since the construction, Gwangju Civic Center was used for various purposes, such as wedding, essay writing contest for children, and animation showing location; in addition, the center was also used by the citizen militia that resisted to the martial law troops in the May 18 uprising in 1980.

Gwangju Park is No.1 Park of Gwangju City designated as a public park that used to area be called Mt. Seonggeo hill during the Japanese colonial era in April 1943. In the park, there are a variety of memorial facilities and treasures, such as West five storied pagoda, Children's charter monument, and a memorial monument, including a dove's habitat. Gwangju Park is a typical resting area,



along with Sajik Park for the citizens in the old downtown. However, much like other old parks in old downtown, Gwangju Park is now also a resting and hang-out place for the elderly, and the snack carts there are mainly used by the elderly citizens. On the east side of Gwangju Park is a Confucian shrine, and the west is adjacent to Yangdong, the south to Suhdong residential area, and the north to Gwangju River. Decrepit commercial facilities, such as Gukbap Street and Gudong sports center are transforming into Asian multicultural community park and Bitgoeul Citizen Culture Center in accordance with an annual implementation plan of Asia culture center space. A large-scale maintenance project for the reorganization around Gwangju Hyanggyo is under vigorous progress around Gwangju Park. National Asia Cultural Center, which is promoting a project in accordance with a fostering plan of cultural capital is located nearby, and is expected to play a main role in connecting the green network of the old downtown areas along with Sajik Park and Gwangju River upon the completion of the cultural center.



Figure 1: Gwangju Park site area. Number 1 is Gwangju Civic Center, number 2 is Confucian shrine, number 3 is Bitgoeul Citizen Culture Center, and number 4 shows Gwangju River.

## 2.2 Architectural status of the Gwangju Civic Center

Gwangju Civic Center was designed by Yim Yong-bae, who was a professor of the Department of Architectural Engineering at Chonnam National University. According to Chon [2], Yim was a disciple of the first generation architect who

studied in Japan and worked in Gwangju, and some of his major works are the master plan and main building of the Chonnam National University. The civic center building basically has a circular motive. The mass was designed in a natural circular arc in order to induce a visual continuity at the time of access. The projecting circular windows at the entry corridor located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor concert hall were used as additional ornament to emphasize the formativeness of the building. The configuration of the continuity that connects the arc at the center, the circular mass on the right and the square mass on the left demonstrate the gradual expansion method as if a circle is laid out straightforward. The vertical louver conjures up strings of instruments as if granted with meaning of decorative elements and its outer shape emphasizes the place is a concert hall.



Figure 2: 3D modelling of Gwangju Civic Center.

Since the modernization, Korea had no momentum to develop proprietary construction techniques and esthetics, and in most cases, the formation of the buildings imitated or transformed the western building imported from Japan. Consequentially, the formation of the buildings in Gwangju had showed the imitations of the style of building that is 20–30 years behind western countries and about 10 years behind Seoul City of Korea. The architectural form of architect Yim can be referred to as ‘transformation of post-modern architecture at Gwangju, which underwent the adoption time of the modern architectural form that used to be argued in the West then. Based on the understanding of the modern architecture, Yim engaged in his architectural philosophy through key words, such as the history of post-modern architecture, meaning, and symbol that were discussed in the West. The first outcome was Gwangju Civic Center and

the circular motive or the projecting circular windows on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the center were patterns of symbolic sign not appeared in the modern architecture. The form was used continuously in other works, such as the modernistic borrowing of Greece order or arch.

Above all, what determines the quality of buildings is economic power and followed by cultural levels. This region is economically vulnerable and while importing and imitating the Western style, the result was token, not able to reveal the essence of the true architectural form. Nevertheless, Gwangju Civic Center can be a piece of work that represents Gwangju in the 1980s as it exposed regional characteristics while accommodating the global current during the reality of Gwangju.

### 2.3 Programs for reconstruction

With the promotion of an environmental maintenance project for ecological forest restoration and expansion of urban neighborhood parks through reorganization of old urban areas around Gwangju Park, organization of 'youth square' is designed by demolishing the old civic center. During the process of demolition, a group of architectural professionals opposed the city government's decision and claimed the preservation of modern architecture. They insisted that the civic center within Gwangju Park needs to be preserved because it holds historicity as the first large-scale cultural space. Gwangju City held a public contest for collecting ideas of the citizens. The concept of the prize-winning piece was reflected to an execution drawing in which to revitalize the deteriorated Gwangju Park's function. It had been decided re-organize of the civic center into a youth cultural plaza for both the elderly and youth through a review and feasibility study. If the center is to be utilized as a resting place for youth, the new feature might be induced users of various age groups into Gwangju Park. And it could be expected renewal of the existing image as a community space only for a specific age group. For reinvigoration and strengthening of Gwangju Park's function, some of the suggestions were to build ecological green network as well as amenities to organize the center as a space of urban relaxation and culture for various generations to enjoy together.

The new program is not to restrict activity programs and facilities to be introduced into the park, besides the area of the civic center, where the designer can suggest plans freely of activity programs and facilities consistent with the concept. Basically, the roof part of the concert hall will be torn down for safety, even the walls, which will be transformed into an opened stage and seats; it will enable a space that allows the conventional activities, such as music, films, and play. However, the concert hall should be designed to accommodate from small street performance to large events. Space programs, including planting, garden composition, and water space are optional in the opened space; however, the space needs to be designed to meet multiple purposes, not only for landscape appreciation. In addition, programs that continue, routine use of the park, and transient event programs are to be distinguished in suggestion. Green and space within the park that were disconnected due to buildings and geographical features are to be connected and build a space in order to induce participation of



citizens of a variety of generations. The plan of space programs and service programs should have to be enjoyed by a variety of generations through space utilization programs and remodeling of the civic center.

A various requirements and ideas were put together through an operation committee, and designed making of a space that holds various and autonomous performances as an urban stage of a civic center. Programs require differentiation from that of events held in Bitgoeul Citizen Culture Center located near Gwangju Park; considering the relationship between various performance facilities and event organizers of Gwangju City, the demand of underground or indie band performers for places, practice rooms, or incubator facilities is significant. A program has been confirmed that provides practice rooms for such performance of underground bands, including youth practice rooms, small performance hall, and multipurpose practice rooms. 'Cultural waterside' was suggested as a place where citizens can enjoy and be creative in order to make various cultures as an ecosystem, which is built and improved by citizens themselves.

### 3 Reconstruction of the Civic Center

#### 3.1 External preservation and the space program

In remodeling of the civic center, the plan was intended to be a reconstruction method to respond to social and structural deterioration. The spatial program is suggested to provide a new space to take the role of the center for performance culture as to be the entities that various generations produce and consume the cultures. One of the conditions was that new programs must be able to create a new value in establishment of relations with the structure, park, and city. A plan was requested its original status restored with the planning of Gwangju Park through the regeneration plan of surrounding region. The reconstruction scope was required to provide a master plan for the center and the park.

In reorganizing the civic center, the curved façade of the concert hall building and the structure of the wedding hall building were requested to be preserved.

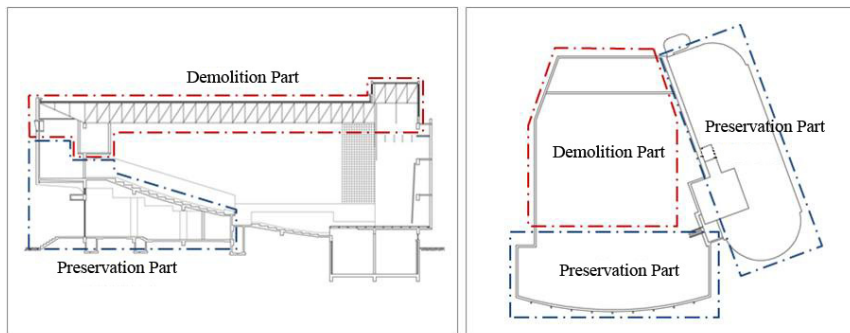


Figure 3: Demolition part and preservation part.

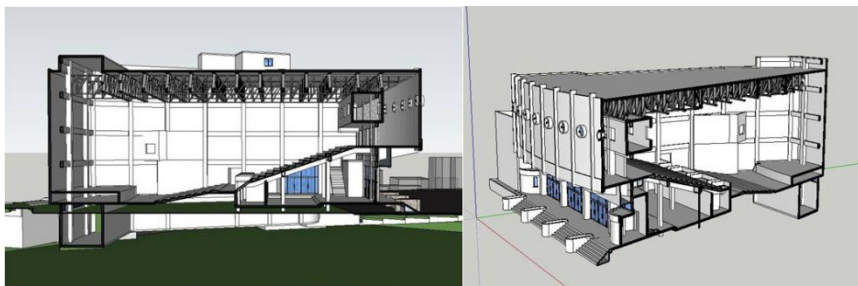


Figure 4: Roof structure and curved façade.

The demolition range of the remaining parts should be decided based on precise safety inspection result. The rooms required in the new building should include rental spaces for a management office, small concert hall, practice room, seminar room, coffee shop, souvenir shop, etc. It was required to establish outside restrooms and elevators. The space programs have a device that records and informs the history of Gwangju Park and the Civic Center. It should be on the main access line to ensure easy approach for user. Considering the geographic features that allow good view of the Gwangju downtown, the program should be reflected in the plaza or the concert hall plan.

### 3.2 Proposals of five invited architects and a prize winner

The architect selection committee invited five teams and received proposals. The selection criteria for invited architects are as follows: Firstly, the invited architects shall be in the age between 30–40 who is professor and received an architect award. Secondly, they are an expert with experience of similar projects according to the project characteristic. Thirdly, they have to propose as a team who carry out architecture and landscaping work together. Fourthly, they are recommended architects come from various regions. A manpower pool was prepared based on the criteria and the teams that confirmed their participation are as follows: a. Chung Wookjoo (Landscaping) and Suh Hyun (Architect) team, b. Yang Sungu (Architect) and Kim Changguk (Landscaping) team, c. Cho Minseok (Architect) and Hah Sunghan (Landscaping) team, d. Kim Ahyeon (Landscaping) and Kim Gwangsoo team, e. Cho Sungho (Architect) and Choi Sinhyun (Landscaping) team.

The ‘team d’ was selected as the first prize winner. They proposed two carpets that include everyday life and festivals, urban activities, and power of nature under the theme of the carpet of the city and green concert. The first carpet is a Gwangju wooden bench, a flexible venue that captures various events and everyday life by flowing into the civic center. The second carpet is a Gwangju carpet, the carpet of memory replaces with nature; it suggests a botanic garden by utilizing memories of the place used by the citizen militia as an education venue during the May 18 movement where history, everyday life, and plants become one and all.





Figure 5: Proposal of the first prize winner.

The 'team a' suggests Gwangju children's library. In order to reorganize the space, the plan emphasizes the possibility of continuation of the road that reaches to the patriots' memorial from the Gwangju Bridge, and preserves the seat in the civic center occupied by the citizen. Children's' books will be provided in the existing seats and a library filled with general books in the surrounding balcony. The cement bricks removed will be recycled put in wire sacks to make outer walls to be used.

The 'team b' suggests that the civic center structure preserved at Gwangju Park is not a snapshot of the moment, but is a process of history. The 'team b' set the design direction according to the awareness of the history as a process, rather than a complete restoration to its original appearance and preservation. The civic center that has the infrastructure and structure concept will be connected to the roof of the entire park, stairs, and lamp supplemented to the auditorium space and be a part of the urban network that link to the whole area of Gwangju City.

The 'team c' proposed a plan that amplifies openness of the park and building under the title of Bitgoeul open culture platform. The proposal accommodates concepts, such as multi-use culture space, multi-directional accessibility, multi-level public space, and reclaiming landscape in the plan.

The 'team e' suggested a design strategy that invites memories and nature vanished from Gwangju City in the place in accordance with the development theory under the name of invitation in 40 years. Yim Yongbae left some part of the old structure to transform into a structure museum of a modern architecture, thereby making a garden inside the building space. The roof was opened in order to let in sunshine, suggesting new scenery using the rooftop.



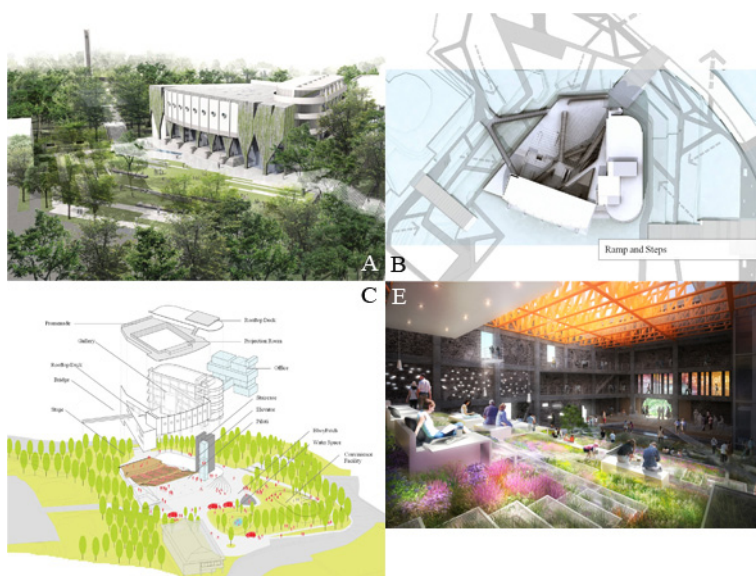


Figure 6: Proposals of the invited teams.

### 3.3 Citizen participation in selection

A professional panel of judges and citizen panel of judges are organized to select the prize winning piece among the works of the five invited teams. The Review will be conducted together with seven professional and 100 citizen panels of judges and a vote of citizen panel of judges was deemed the same as one vote of the professional panel of judges. The pre-election was implemented on the date of review after the presentation of teams to select two candidate teams to go a final election. At the final election, if there is same number of votes as seven professional and one citizen panel of judges, the process is to give additional points to the citizen panel of judges. The professional panels of judges are experts and professions in architecture and landscaping from Seoul and Gwangju areas. The 275 citizens applied for panel through open call and of them, 100 people were selected according to the gender and age ratio. Except for 20s, there was a high interest among the senior level since a higher number of applicants are seen from 30s and higher age. The citizen panel was selected in a similar ratio among 40s, 50s, and 60s, and many people from 20s were selected as there were an overwhelming number of applicants in the age group.

At the result of the pre-election, the proposal of 'team c' 3 by Cho and Hah and the proposal of 'team d' by Kim and Kim were advanced to the finals. At the final election, the proposal of 'team d' was selected as the first prize winner.

In Gwangju, there was no previous case such as public building competition which citizens could participate as judges. With the increase interest of general citizens about large cultural public project design, such participation is expected

Table 1: The configuration of the citizen panel of judges.

Age groups	Sum		Male group		Female group		Ratio
	A	S	A	S	A	S	Applicants (Selections)
sum	275	100	123	50	152	50	
20s	155	37	55	15	100	22	53% (37%)
30s	20	10	13	6	7	4	07% (10%)
40s	26	17	16	11	10	6	09% (17%)
50s	34	18	10	6	24	12	12% (18%)
More than 60s	40	18	29	12	11	6	15% (18%)

Table 2: The result of the pre-election.

		a	b	c	d	e
		Chung and Suh	Yang and Kim	Cho and Hah	Kim and Kim	Cho and Choi
Citizens panel of judges	votes	26	3	47	71	53
	Ratio (%)	13	1.5	23.5	35.5	26.5
	selection	.	.	.	1	1
Professional panel of judges	votes	0	2	5	7	0
	Ratio (%)	0	14.3	35.7	50	0
	selection	.	.	5	7	.
Final result	votes	0	2	5	8	1
	Ratio (%)	0	12.5	31.25	50	6.25
	selection	.	.	A	B	.

Table 3: The result of final election.

		A	B
		Cho and Hah	Kim and Kim
Citizens panel of judges	votes	46	54
	Ratio (%)	46	54
	selection	.	1
Professional panel of judges	votes	2	5
	Ratio (%)	28.6	71.4
	selection	2	5
Final result	votes	2	6
	Ratio (%)	25	75
	selection		prize winner

to surge henceforth. Asia Culture Complex to be established in the former provincial government building and the site, the Gwangju Folly Project in the old downtown were some of the projects that gained high interest of citizens. Asia Culture Complex was under controversy about the prize-winning piece selected through international design competition. A debate was on the necessity of formal landmark, as the proposal plan shows a low presence of the building form that is exposed outside by arranging large scale building under the ground by the concept. The Gwangju Folly project is a part of the design biennale carried out every two years in Gwangju. They are 12 structures built at street of the main old downtown areas. Gwangju City government contributed a lot of budget in the project that raised the interest on the city and the public space of Gwangju citizens. This project also increased participation of the citizens as it also includes work pieces of young domestic artists and projects by famous international artists. Gwangju Folly is in the process of the second project.

## 4 Conclusion

This study discussed about several matters to be considered in preservation and reconstruction of old buildings through the remodeling project of Gwangju Civic Center.

Firstly, determine which part to remain in the preservation of old buildings is an issue. There are three methods to preserve a building. 1) Preserve a building the way it is, 2) Preserve a part of the building, 3) Preserve a part of the building but newly supplement the part. Through discussions, Gwangju Civic Center chose to preserve a part of the building, and the part was the circular façade and attachment building.

Secondly, problems in reconstruction are a functional solution that induces new users while accommodating requests of the existing main users. As with other old downtown areas, Gwangju Civic Center is used as a space for the elderly. A space functional solution is required in order to provide the space occupied by the elderly to many users. This project accommodated an incubator function, which is a culture that adopts cultural youth to make a space dedicated for younger generation and set the elderly as an audience that passively observe the performance.

Thirdly, it is a decision making methods through participation of general citizens, not only experts, in the regeneration of public buildings. The trend of recent construction is that architecture of a public building that reflects demands and opinions of building users. It is related with the decision of plan and the progress speed of projects that how much accommodate the opinion of general citizens in decision making. While there are fundamental questions about desirable decision making methods, the project was affected by experts and general citizens in 7:1 ratio, and intended to give importance on citizen opinions through additional points.



## Acknowledgement

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