

A STUDY ON THE REVITALIZATION OF PUBLIC DESIGN FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CITY IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT:

Since the turn of the 21st century, the notion of regionalization has been re-interpreted as an important part of globalization and the cultural values of various regions are emerging as a means of enhancing urban competitiveness. This has forced cities to actively seek to develop their image identity as a way of promoting consistent urban development. One way of drawing renewed attention is through public design, which helps to maximize the culture value of the public sphere as well as to improve urban brand values. This paper would like to point out the role and importance of public design as a means of establishing city identity, look into the problems and causes of public design in Korea today, and propose phased steps to improve these matters.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the 21st century, the notion of regionalization has been re-interpreted¹ as an important part of globalization and the cultural values of various regions are emerging as a means of enhancing urban competitiveness. This has forced cities to actively seek to develop their image identity as a way of promoting consistent urban development. One way of drawing renewed attention is through public design, which helps to maximize the culture value of the public sphere as well as to improve urban brand values.

We need to further recognize that excellent designs in the public sphere not only determine the identity of cities and countries but also upgrade our quality of living, revitalize the regional economy, and facilitate the development of the tourism industry.

In the case of Korea, meanwhile, private designs, including product designs, are considered to have accumulated world-class competitiveness, but public designs still remain at a floundering stage despite the investment of scores of trillions of won in taxpayers' money in this sector, mainly because of legal and institutional inadequacy. Public design policies of central and local governments have failed to keep up with the pace of overall design level and its changing speed. Such a dismal situation, when compared with cities in advanced countries, is regarded as the main culprit that weakens the cultural competitiveness of Korean cities. Looking squarely at this reality, it is emerging as the new urban task in the 21st century that cities work out ways to reinvigorate public design by taking culture, history, and environment into account to enhance the quality of public facilities and goods (which require massive governmental budgets), and thereby establish the city identity and enhance cultural capacity.

This paper would like to point out the role and importance of public design as a means of establishing city identity, look into the problems and causes of public design in Korea today, and propose phased steps to improve these matters.

¹ Regionalization can be the basic precondition for globalization, considering that globalization in the 21st century is not to standardize different places but to highlight specific regions' value in the world by reinterpreting and re-establishing their own unique culture.

2. CONCEPTS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CITY IDENTITY

The origin of the word 'identity' comes from the Latin words of 'identitas' and 'identicus', both of which are rooted in 'idem', meaning "the same." The concept of identity can largely be explained as similitude (sameness), individuality or oneness). If we look at identity from the viewpoint of city, the similitude is the element that makes a city worthy of its name, which can be divided into continuity despite changes and the notion of identification. In other words, the continuity means "there is something unchanged basically despite ostensible changes", while the identification occurs when one thinks "I, as one related with this city, am identical with it" or when one has a sense of belonging, thinking, "I, as one related with this city, get along well with other people and the environment." Furthermore, "individuality" is the concept in which "this city is different from and superior to other cities," and can be divided into peculiarity and superiority. Peculiarity signifies "that this city is different from other cities" and superiority means "that this city has something superior to other cities." Therefore, city identity is an element that makes a city worthy of its name and differentiates it from other cities. In other words, it can be said as the city's "sameness" from an internal point of view and as the "individuality" or "distinctiveness" from an external point of view.² City identity as such has a city's inner and outer images at its center and is comprised of the city's history, culture, and social and economic characteristics.

The reason why the importance of city identity comes to the forefront is that people live in characterless, uniform and unattractive cities by seeking only the cities' external, functional and physical growth without reflecting their own unique culture and characteristics.

Today, cities around the world are breaking away from the function-oriented urban development that has been enforced upon them in the course of modernization, and are striving to create images that incorporate their culture, characteristics and innate energy of the region, for the sake of establishing city identity.

² Page Nos. 3-4 in the "City identity and Urban Development," written by Kye Gi-suk and five others and published in the April 2001 issue of City Information Magazine under the sponsorship of the National Land and City Planning Academic Association.

3. MEANS OF ESTABLISHING CITY IDENTITY

In distinguishing city identity, people should first determine what they will retain as “the unchanging.” What will they select as something that never changes and in fact resists change despite drastic transformations of the times? There can be two approaches to selecting the unchanging. First, they can pick up among regional resources what the cities have possessed and accumulated from the past through the present. Second, they can accumulate and create new regional resources toward the future³. In the former case, they can list all regional resources, including natural resources, economic resources, human resources, cultural resources, life resources and historical resources, and seek out the “unchanging” ones that constitute the core in distinguishing city identity. In the latter case, which seeks to create new resources considered to be promising for cities with a futuristic perspective, they don’t have to rely on past or present regional sources but rather can create resources with a new vision and in future-oriented ways.

Meanwhile, Lim W.S.W. classified the means of establishing city identity into nine concepts.⁴ They are; localism, contextualism, historicism, urban spaces, environmental scale, urban scape, optional routes, symbolism and function, and social diversity. All these means should be used not independently but in mutually connected ways. In order to apply these means, planners, policymakers and citizens should maintain a close relationship with success being dependent on creative thinking, comprehensive and scientific approaches, policy wills, and citizen participation as its conditions.

4. PUBLIC DESIGN AS A MEANS OF ESTABLISHING CITY IDENTITY

There are more than nine means of establishing city identity as suggested by Lim W.S.W. By using public design that encompasses all the nine means, we can not only establish more dignified city identity but also create attractive cities good to live in by upgrading the quality of citizens’ living. It is noteworthy that public design is becoming the mainstay of city planning as a means of assuring city identity. Public design, after all, is to create values that formulate urban

³ Page Nos. 6-7 in the “City identity and Urban Development,” written by Kye Gi-suk and five others and published in the April 2001 issue of City Information Magazine under the sponsorship of the National Land and City Planning Academic Association.

⁴ Lim, W. S. W., “Environmental Identity and Urbanism”, Habitat Intl., Vol. 8, No. 3/4. 1984.

and national images. This is why we should regard budgets needed for public design not as cost but as investment.

4.1 CONCEPT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PUBLIC DESIGN

The word “public” is defined lexicologically as a “situation related to all members of a nation or society.”⁵ In other words, it means not specific individuals or groups but all members of society have access to something or share it.

The word “public” has a meaning by itself, but it is used as a word with diverse meanings with a nuance of not “individual” but “social,” as in the cases of public library, public expenditure, and public investment. Likewise, public design can be one such example.

Public design can be defined as the “design activity and its result to lift aesthetic, symbolic and functional values of public spheres related with all members of a nation or society.” That is, it is a design that takes all spheres used publicly, such as public space, public facility and product and public communication, as its subjects. In this way, it differs from private design, which is intermediated through markets mainly taking the individual consumer item as its medium. Public designs are either public goods by themselves or private properties with a “public nature” that can have psychological and physical effects on members of society. Particularly, exteriors of buildings and billboards, which have enormous effects on city street landscapes, are among the things directly and closely related with public design. Therefore, public design should be perceived as part of social infrastructure that collectively shows a society’s qualitative level and that can be materialized as an essential element of public work.⁶

4.2 SPHERES AND SUBJECTS OF PUBLIC DESIGN

As the subjects of public design are very diverse and comprehensive and the criterion of its applicable scope is ambiguous, defining its clear spheres and subjects is very difficult. One can

⁵ <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/>

⁶ Refer to page 8 in “What is public design” written by Choi Beom in the No. 7 issue of Hongik CD Newspaper in 2006.

approximately classify the subjects and spheres included in public design based on the criteria suggested by the Korean Society of Public Design as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Spheres and Subjects of Public Design

Classification		Detailed Contents
Public Space Design	Outdoor Public Space	Park, playground, cemetery, attached ground to public agency, plaza, play area for children, sidewalk, etc.
	Infrastructures Space	Road, parking lot, tunnel, railway, elevated road, bridge, irrigation/water supply facility, waterworks and sewage, sewage treatment plant, power plant, etc.
	Administrative Space	Public information office, town hall, police box, fire station, post office, telephone office, village office, military space, prison, central or local government offices building, government administrative office, foreign mission building, etc.
	Culture/Welfare Space	City hall, cultural property, gymnasium, athletic field, performing place, national or public welfare facility, national or public medical facility, daycare center, memorial, museum, art gallery, resting place, etc.
	Transportation Facilities Space	Automobile passenger terminal, cargo terminal, railway station, subway station, airport, port, resting space for highway motorists.
	Education/Research Space	National and public elementary, middle and high schools, university, kindergarten, educational institution, training institution, research institute, library, training center, etc.
Public Facility and Product Design)	Transportation Facilities	Pedestrian lights, fences, bollard, guardrail, escalator, stations, bicycle parking lot, overpass, underpass, walk guide facility, traffic lights, roadblocks, traffic calming facility, parking lot, parking fee collector, guiding block for blind people, etc.
	Convenience Facilities	Bench, chair, shelter, outdoor table, garbage bin, water fountain, ashtray, toilet, lavatory, store, unmanned kiosk, vending machine, newsstand, etc.
	Supply Facilities	Manhole, telegraph pole, pedestrian light, signal switch, electric culvert, power distribution panel, vent hole, postbox, fire hydrant, disaster prevention facility, crime prevention device, identity confirmation device, public phone booth, wind vane, clock, thermometer & hygrometer, information booth, tourist information facility, area information map, traffic information board, etc.

Public Communication Design	Instructing/Guiding Media	Milepost, traffic signpost, area/tourism information map, bus service route, subway linemap, direction guiding sign, regulatory sign, number plate, various pictograms, etc.
	Advertising Media	Billboard, placard, poster, bulletin board, signboard, banner, flag, PR screen.
	Governmental Administrative Media	National symbol sign, administrative agency and local government symbol sign, stage agency symbol sign, various certificates, official document forms, various publication covers, public agency web pages, etc.
	Distribution Media	Currency note, passport, traffic card, bond, commemorative coin, postage stamp.
	Environment Appearance Upgrading Media	Mural painting, super graphic, media art, sound space, light space.
Public Design Policy	Administration and policy	
	Related laws and regulations	

5. PUBLIC DESIGN'S PROBLEMS IN THE ASPECT OF CITY IDENTITY

When we think of Korean cities, it is hard to find ones that have their own city identity and characteristics that can differentiate them from others. There are several reasons most frequently cited when pointing out public design problems in the aspect of city identity. First, they have fallen short of taking into account the appearance, or design, of the city amid the growth-first urban policy that has led industrialization and modernization. Second, there has been an institutional inadequacy for the systematic practicing of public design. Third, individual development projects have failed to be connected with one another on contextualistic dimension to create disparate images. Fourth, our cities have made insufficient efforts to develop their own images and materialize them in urban space.

If we concretely summarize the problems of public design in social-cultural, institutional-legal and policy aspects, respectively, this can come as follows.

Table 2 : Circumstances and Problems of Public Design

Classification	Detailed Contents
Socio-cultural Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problems in the course of city formation. - Lack of citizen's consciousness about public design. - Insufficiency of expert manpower in public design area.
Institutional and legal Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequacy of related laws and insufficient implementation. - Lack of continuity and expertise among responsible officials because of rotating assignment system.
Policy Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of objectives to be pursued by public design. - Lack of comprehensive planning for public design of entire city. - Problem in basic consciousness about urban planning. - Failure to allocate design-related expense in various public projects. - Lack of unity among departments responsible for building and managing different public facilities. - Shoddy construction and loose maintenance and management.

5.1 SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECT

• **Problems in the course of city formation** : Prior to the modernization of the nation, our cities had maintained peculiar, nature-friendly landscapes largely surrounded with nearby mountains. However, the cities' basic framework was almost completely destroyed as this country underwent Japanese colonization and the Korean War. As a result, poor, substandard houses cropped up recklessly after that. In addition, disorderly urban development and uniform expansion in an era of industrialization and economic growth have made the modern-day Korean cities dull towns with no distinctiveness or personality.

• **Lack of citizens' consciousness about public design** : Lack of interest in and consciousness about public design among citizens as its final beneficiaries have worked to produce general examples of crude signboards and unlawful advertising leaflets.

- **Insufficiency of expert manpower in public design** : The lack of specialized training institutes in public design has led to a failure to foster expert manpower that can deal with public design in various public projects.

5.2 INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS

- **Insufficiency of related laws and inadequate implementation** : The insufficient legal basis for systematically promoting and managing public design has resulted in a deficiency in comprehensive and systematic support. The few existing laws and ordinances related with city landscapes have failed to manage individual projects in a comprehensive manner, revealing their limitation in maintaining and managing city identity with consistency.

- **Insufficiency in job continuity and expertise among related officials because of rotating assignment system** : Under a rotating assignment system, officials who have done general administrative works would find it quite hard to digest such specialized areas as design and city landscape once they are assigned to posts responsible for public design. Moreover, by the time they have come to understand and adapt themselves to the new job, they usually move to other positions under the rotation system, resulting in the loss of job expertise and continuity.

5.3 POLICY ASPECT

- **Absence of objectives to be pursued by public design** : So far, our cities have had no clear objectives to be pursued by public design and have remained at a level of either simply imitating excellent examples of foreign countries or successful cases of neighboring cities, or accepting illustrative manuals provided by the central government with no alteration at all. This has led to a failure by our cities to create images of their own.

- **Lack of comprehensive planning for public design of entire city** : There are insufficient across-the-board plans to manage and coordinate public design comprehensively. Almost all plans are for short-term, localized ones, making it impossible to realize consistent public design.

- **Problem of basic consciousness about city planning** : So far, the city planning based on growth-first policy has put priority on the city's industrial production and other functional aspects, sacrificing living convenience at the expense of the cities' cultural aspects and human values.

• **Failure to allocate design-related budgets in various public projects** : Various projects currently conducted by central and local governments are lacking in design-conscious approaches, thus they fail to set aside design-related provisions and expenses. This is because they regard design not as an essential qualitative element but as an additional and optional matter. Such being the case, most public projects do not go beyond levels of simple facility construction and civil engineering works, falling short of upgrading the quality of the public environment.⁷

• **Lack of unity among departments responsible for building and managing different public facilities** : Public facilities built on the streets have their individual functions, but when they fail to harmonize with surrounding things on a contextualistic dimension, they hurt street landscapes by emerging as enormous stumbling blocks to establishing city identity. Despite this, departments responsible for public facilities in our cities are organized separately only for the sake of administrative convenience, resulting in a situation in which the establishment and management of facilities are being done with no unity in public design-related administration. This has in turn led to disharmony and disorder throughout the entire city landscape.

Establishment and Management of Public Facilities		
Streetlamps	→	Lighting Section in Civil Department
Roadside trees	→	Park and Green Zone Department
Kiosks	→	Construction Management Department
Newsstands	→	Traffic Support Department
Public phone booths	→	Telephone Company
Pavement reparation	→	Civil Department

Figure 1: Establishment and Management of Street Facilities in Seoul

• **Poor construction and loose maintenance and management** : However excellent a design is, inaccurate construction can turn it into an unattractive structure. Most public facilities in our cities have not been built by systematic planning beforehand but established upon needs by rough estimation after the roads and buildings are built, resulting in disharmony and disorder. With

⁷ Refer to page 9 in “What is public design” written by Choi Beom in the No. 7 issue of Hongik CD Newspaper in 2006

construction itself so shoddy, the facilities are easily broken, but officials cannot make swift responses due to insufficient budgets for their maintenance and management.

These problems may go unnoticed when cities are in phases of rapid growth, but those which have entered into stable phases with slower population increases should begin to make efforts for creating and improving urban images to seek city identity. Urban image will be determined by a city's historicity and tradition internally, while city landscape and public design will constitute the most important element externally.

6. Strategy to Revitalize Public Design for Establishing City Identity

6.1 PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING CITY IDENTITY

The establishment of city identity does not simply remain on the dimension of image but has so comprehensive an aspect that it can be called the strategy itself to revitalize urban culture. For each city to establish an image differentiated from others, it should invest heavily into developing creative policies and strategies. Creative policy is due not to simple differentiation but to differentiation stemming from the region's culture, tradition and characteristics. Simple imitation of neighboring cities' models can never succeed. In the following, I would like to propose some principles that should be kept in establishing city identity, based on problems suggested in the preceding chapter and exemplary cases of advanced cities.

First, it should be based on the city's history, culture, tradition and inherent characteristics. Second, it should reflect on citizens' consensus. Third, it is necessary to examine whether these keep up with the current trends of the times. Fourth, central and local governments should promote related policies, systems and projects with consistency and continuity. Fifth, it is necessary to provide clear shapes to citizens' indefinite values and images and elevate them to unified symbol and vision. This of course requires citizens' response to such a vision that is as favorable and friendly as its precondition.

6.2 PHASED STEPS TO REVITALIZE PUBLIC DESIGN

This study proposes measures to reinvigorate public design as a means of establishing city identity in phases as follows.

	Establishment of legal, institutional and physical basis to systematically promote and manage public design
Phase #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fixing main administrative agencies responsible for public design and coordinating work among related agencies. - Establishing institutional and practical system to secure items and expenses related to design implementation.



	Establishment of creative and differentiated public design policy and comprehensive plan that envisions city's future values and reflects region's culture and characteristics to build up city identity
Phase #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing agencies exclusively responsible for public design. - Working out guidelines on public design. - Finding out and fostering firms specializing in public design. - Enhancing expertise of related officials.



	Establishment of basic infrastructure and system to implement policy
Phase #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operating public design management and coordination committee - Establishing flexible cooperation system between related departments and industry-academics-research group. - Inducing active resident participation. - Promoting research and development to advance public design and fostering expert manpower.



	Provision of measures to ensure thorough construction and post - construction management
Phase #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing monitoring system. - Applying value-oriented appraisal system. - Encouraging civil consciousness.

Figure 2 : Phased measures to revitalize public design

1) Phase #1

During Phase #1, cities need to establish a legal basis for systematic promotion and management of public design. They should work out institutional and substantive devices that help to secure related provisions and expenses to clarify key departments and thus prevent overlapping and excessive investments as well as to allow central and local governments to implement public design when conducting various public projects based on these laws. This comprises reasonable procedures and manuals in implementing design and rules on budget. It is necessary to positively consider introducing a system, like the Capital Improvement Program in the United States, which obligates these agencies to allocate a certain percentage of public project budgets to design works.

2) Phase #2

Most of our cities look so similar in appearance as a result of the fact that they don't have differentiated policies and alternatives to seek city identity. In Phase #2, they should establish a creative and differentiated public design policy and comprehensive plan that envisions the city's future values and reflects the region's culture and characteristics for the systematic establishment of city identity. As the peculiar nature and conditions of one city differ from another's, public design policy should naturally be established differently by individual cities.

Specifically, policies should be made to set up agencies exclusively responsible for public design for their effective implementation, work out design guidelines, find out and foster excellent firms specializing in public design as actual developers of designs and secure expertise of officials responsible for public projects concerned⁸.

3) Phase #3

In Phase #3, they should establish a basic infrastructure and method to systematically implement the public design policies already made. Foreign cities that apply advanced public design, including NRW (Nordheinwestfalen) in Germany and Paris in France, are operating public design

⁸ The current rotating assignment system is seriously hurting job continuity and expertise of related officials. Among the best ways to enhance expertise of officials in their duty is the "Specialized government employee system," which selects expert civil servants by job classification and have them exclusively responsible for their duty, as well as the "Open employment system."

management and coordination committees, which look at and fine-tune entire cities (civil engineering, construction, facilities, space and color) from an integrated point of view. This committee is the highest agency that deliberates, decides, and coordinates issues on public design chaired by mayors. The public design management and coordination committee is essential for consistent and continued public design management. In addition, they ought to establish systems to ensure cooperation among industry, academics, research and government, and to induce residents' participation as well as build up basic infrastructure and systems, such as promoting research and development and fostering expert manpower, all for the advancement of public design.

4) Phase #4

In Phase #4, measures should be implemented that can ensure thorough construction and post-construction management. However wonderful a design is, shoddy construction and loose management would deprive its reason for existence. As such, cities should conduct strict and detailed supervision on their construction and management according to public design guidelines, and establish systems to continuously monitor and improve difficulties and inconveniences for users after the construction of facilities. Besides, a system that puts appraisals based on urban values ahead of evaluations based on subjective preferences of individuals or groups is also needed.

Furthermore, diverse programs that can encourage civil consciousness are required so that the citizens can recognize the need for managing public design as its end beneficiaries and manage and handle public facilities with care.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper, by its nature, is a primary study to help cities that have entered into the stable growth phase seek measures to establish their peculiar images and identities through public design, starting from the examination of concepts of public design and city identity and proceeding toward the study of problems of public design from the aspect of city identity as well as taking into account their causes and ending with proposals of the phased steps to improve them.

From now on, public design should be considered not as a special area monopolized by experts nor an inconvenient mechanism that restricts individual property rights but as the new engine of urban growth; which helps to create cities' peculiar images by reflecting their historic and cultural contexts on city space; instills deep impressions in visitors through developed urban economy, strengthened international competitiveness and enhanced cultural capacity; and improves the quality of citizens' lifestyles and elevates their consciousness about community and sense of settlement.

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