

Seoul: Emerging city in global competition among cities

The Mori Memorial Foundation, Institute for Urban Strategies

Researcher: Norio Yamato



The former City Hall (foreground) and the present City Hall (background)

An executive director, dean and professor Hiroo Ichikawa, was invited by the Seoul Metropolitan Government to give lectures on “Seoul’s Urban Competitiveness and Policy Challenges” and “Tokyo’s Future Strategies” in a two day session on 11 and 12 August. After the lectures, an inspection tour was held by the government officials to see important places in Seoul, which is one of the most attractive cities in Asia. This report summarizes the lectures and the inspection tour.

1. Basic information on Seoul

The size of Seoul is approximately 605km², which is a little larger than the area of Tokyo’s 23 wards (622 km²)(Figure 1). On the other hand, the population of Seoul is about 10 million people, while that of Tokyo is approximately 9 million. This means a density of Seoul is higher than Tokyo. Figure 2 shows the population density of these two cities. It is clear that more densely occupied areas can be found around the CBD areas in Seoul.

(Figure 1) City Profile

■ Seoul

Population: 10,442 thousand (2012)

Area: 605 km²

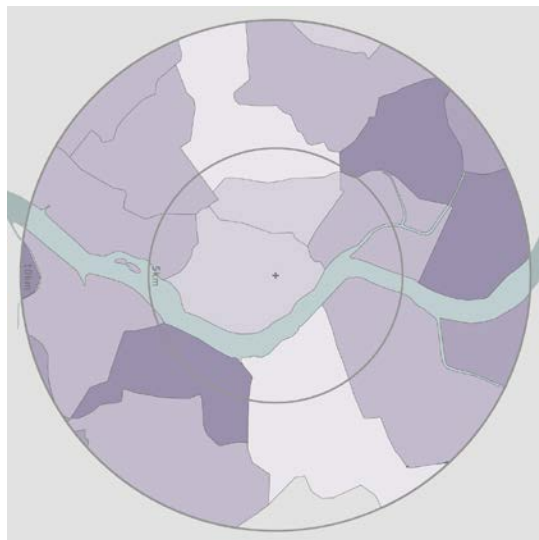
■ Tokyo's 23 wards

Population: 9,002 thousand (2013)

Area: 622 km²



(Figure 2) Population Density, GPIC (2010)



Seoul



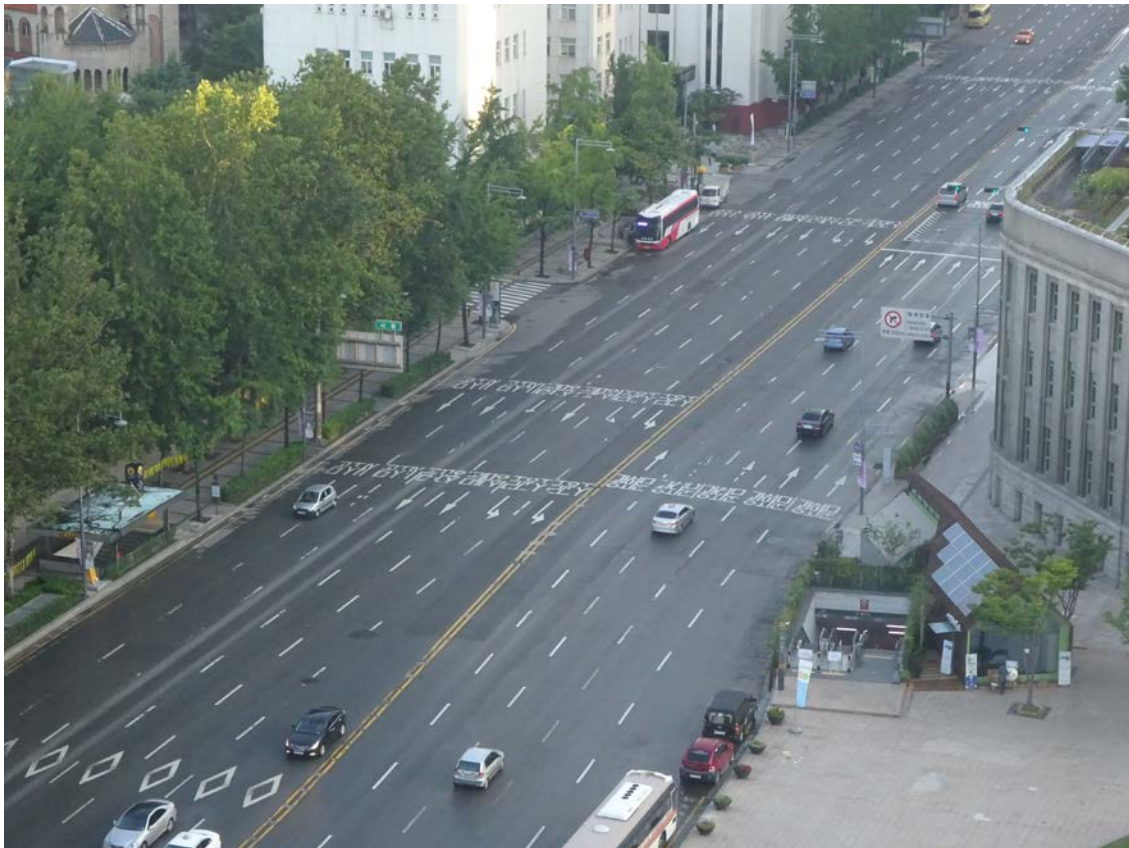
Tokyo

2. Accessibility from the airport to the city centre

It took two and a half hours from the Tokyo International Airport (Haneda) to the Gimpo International Airport. The number of foreign visitors to Seoul is approximately 38 million people annually, which exceeds that of Tokyo whose number is 33 million. It was about 45 minutes from the airport to the city center by car which was almost the same amount of time from Haneda to Tokyo station by airport limousine bus under congestion-free conditions. A big difference between the two cities is that the width of roads in Seoul is much wider than that in Tokyo, where a lot of buses and taxis are running continuously. It shows that Seoul is more of an American-style motorized society.

It can be said that scenery composed of a river, bridges, and buildings is one of the

most attractive urban landscapes. Seen from inside the car, there are skyscrapers in the Yeouido area and groups of apartments on the other side of a large river Han-gang. The scenery is different from that of New York City that is a symbol of a capitalist economy, and London and Paris that have solemn buildings built by bourgeoisies or men of power at that time, while that of Seoul seems to be a juxtaposition of elements of capitalism, developed and developing countries, and Western and Asian countries.



Wide roads representing a motorized society in Seoul

3. Lectures

On the first day, Professor Ichikawa gave a lecture on “Seoul’s Urban Competitiveness and Policy Challenges” followed by discussions with government officials from a wide range of specialties such as policy planning, investment, transportation, employment, economic policy, housing and so on. Seoul’s strengths and weaknesses were examined from the perspective of the Global Power City Index (GPCI), which led to the suggestions of policy challenges. Lively discussions followed among participants regarding not only GPCI but also issues of relocation and redeployment of capital functions, ageing societies, special incentive zones and deregulation, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and so on.



Conference hall where the lecture was given on the first day

The next day, another lecture titled “Tokyo’s Future Strategies” was given to about twenty-five researchers at the Seoul Institute, a group which has been doing research on Seoul from a wide variety of perspectives. In the lecture, shifts in core areas in Tokyo was explained first, then the conversations moved on to topics about the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, effects of a maglev train on economic blocs in Japan, and a discussion of “Tokyo Future Scenario 2035” published by the Mori Memorial Foundation in 2011. Lively discussions regarding policies after the collapse of a bubble economy in the early 90’s and balanced development policies were held after the lecture.



The entrance of the Seoul Institute that is located in a quiet setting

4. Inspection tour

After the lecture on the first day, an inspection tour was hosted by the Seoul government, which included visits to the current and the former city halls and the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP). Although most public facilities are closed on Mondays, they were kindly opened for the tour.

The former city hall was built in 1926 when Japan occupied Korea, and used to be the city hall of Keijō. It then became the city hall of Seoul after the war. The new one was completed in 2012 in which the “biggest vertical green wall” registered in the Guinness World Records since 2013, can be found welcoming visitors warmly.

DDP, located where baseball fields and a soccer stadium were located, opened March 2014 after a four year and eight month construction period. The total amount of investment was approximately KWN400 trillion (about JPY40 trillion). DDP and it's neighbouring park, Dongdaemun History and Culture Park, is one of the most popular “art & design” tourist sites in Seoul. The designer of DDP is an Iraqi-British architect, Zaha Hadid who is also a designer of 2020 Tokyo Olympics main stadium. The exterior of DDP is extremely unique. It is mostly composed of curved surfaces as opposed to ordinary architecture that uses vertical - horizontal surfaces.



A sense of dignified atmosphere in the former city hall



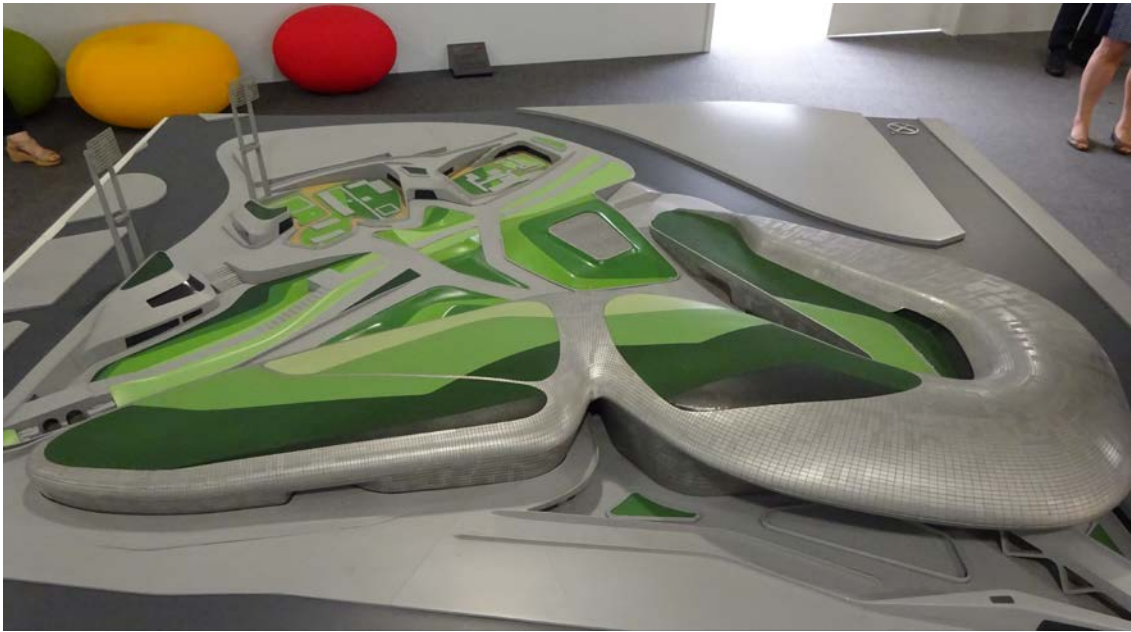
The entrance of the new city hall characterized by curved glass surfaces.



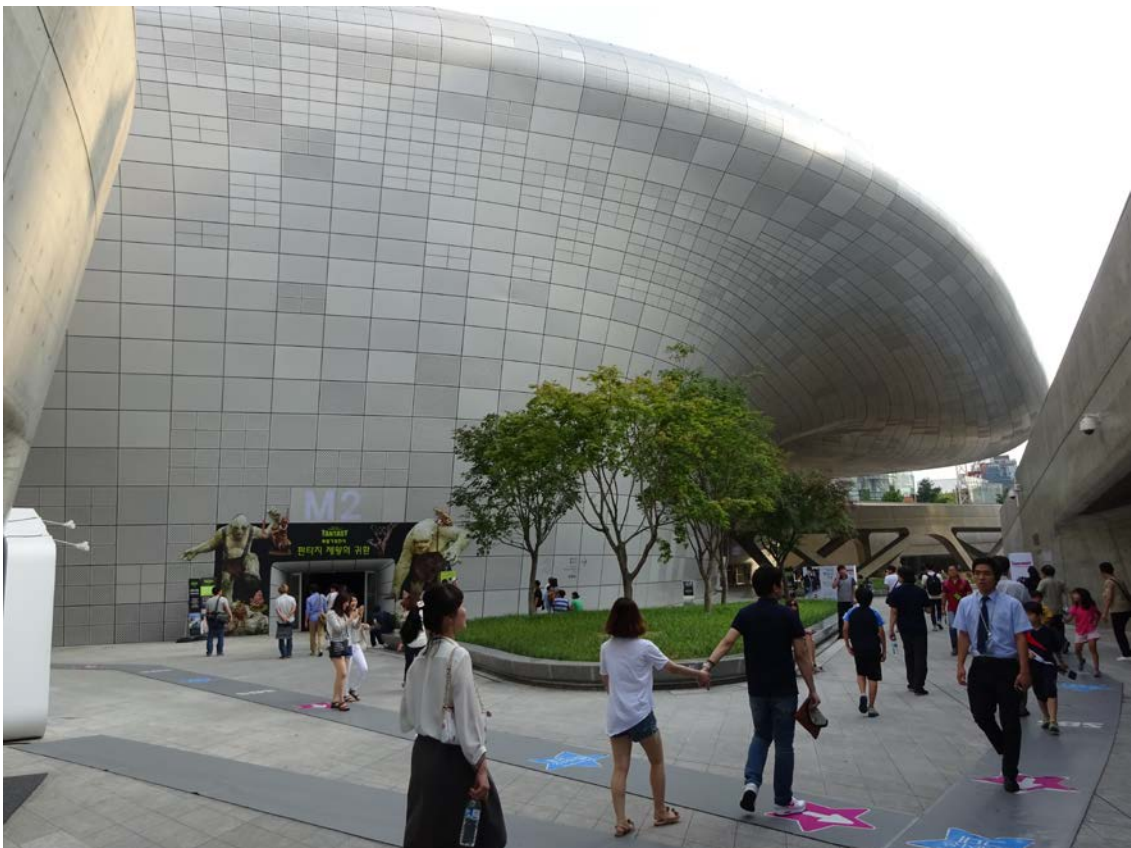
The former city hall looks as if it is being swallowed by the new city hall



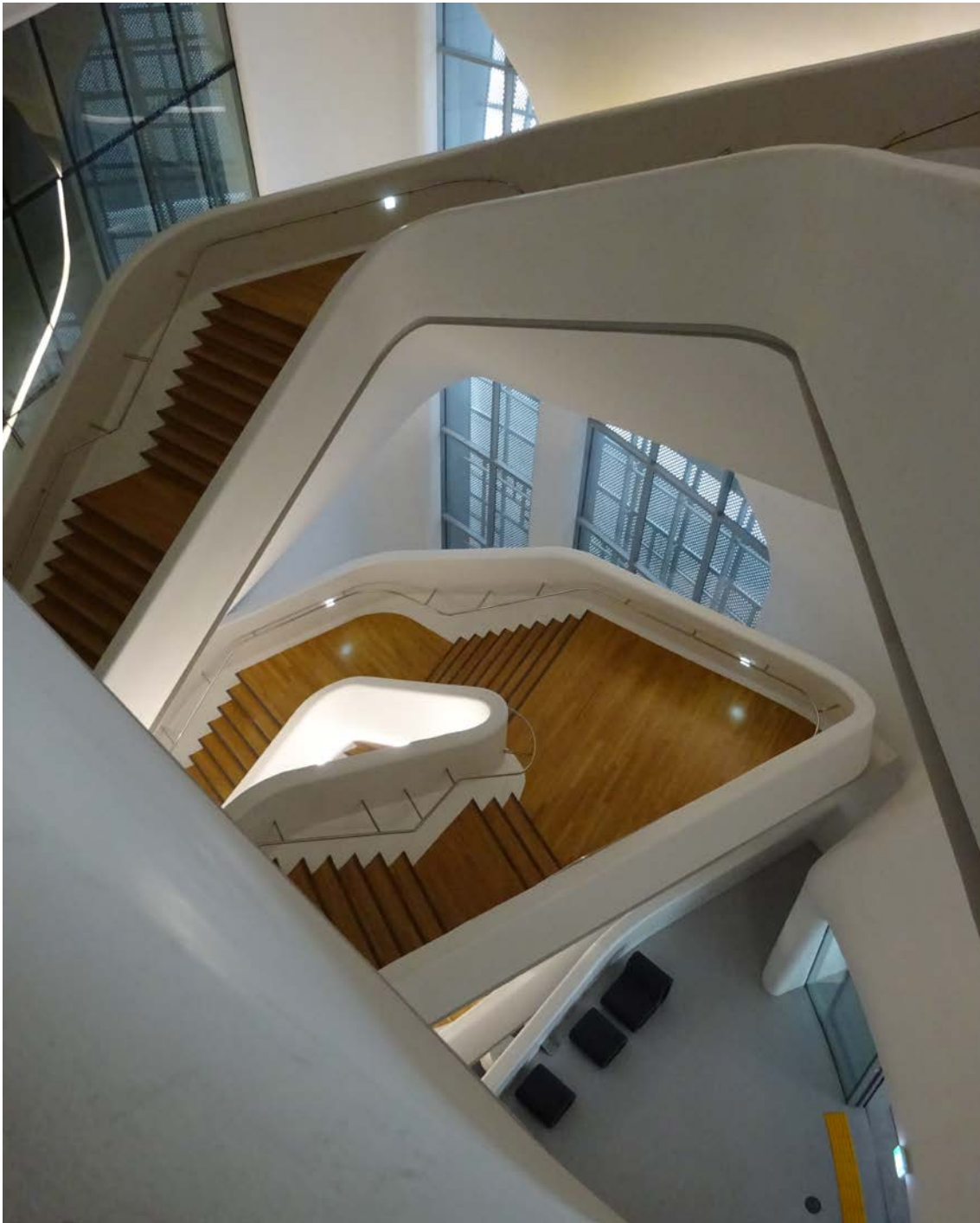
This green wall is registered in the Guinness World Records as the “biggest vertical green wall”



A architectural model which is quite obviously a very unique shape



The exterior of DDP is composed of curved surfaces



Stairs inside DDP are also unique

It might be difficult for some foreigners to work with each other due to cultural differences, which could lead to misunderstandings or psychological stress. Yet, everything went well this time. It mainly due to the fact that our counterparts did a good job. It is good opportunity to learn a wide range of new things from people who have different culutures and characteristics.