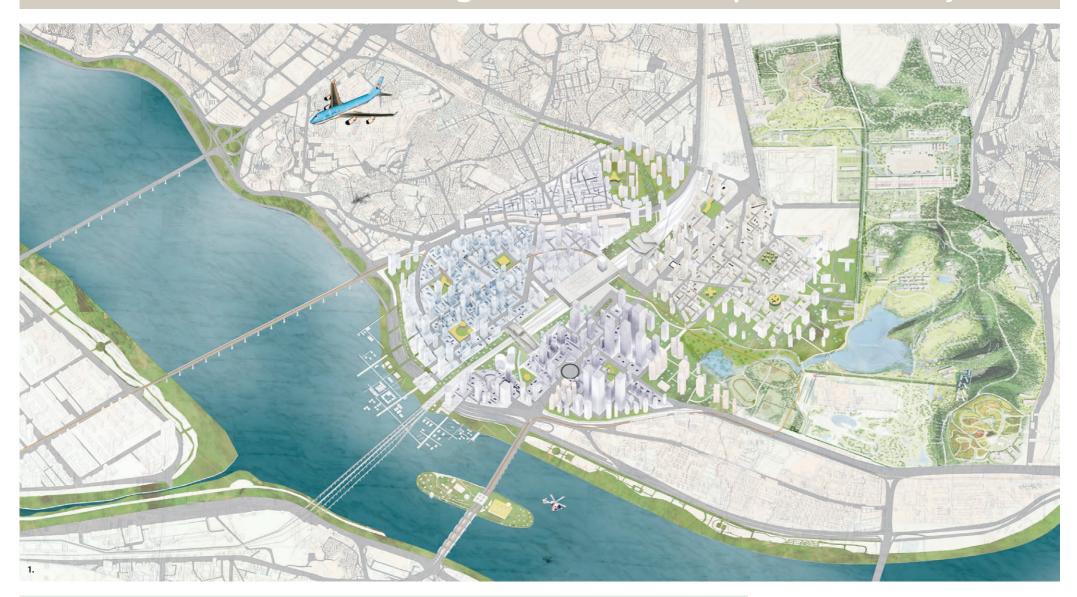# Vertical Cities Asia 2012, Yongsan, Seoul: The Open-Ended City

1.

Architecture is by its very nature a product of its broader socio-economic and political context. Spurred by what has been dubbed the Bilbao effect, developers and city planners have come to see iconic architecture as playing a central role in attracting such investment in the form of tourism and Big Money, resulting in the production of architecture that is in favour of visually consumable forms. Our aim is to propose a development that is able to retain the authenticity of the city while extending the dialogue between what exists and what is to come.

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THE ARCHITECTURE OR MASTER PLAN does not have to announce itself, or be sensationalised, but should focus primarily on creating the ideal backdrop for the flourish of activity. We sought to uncover and intensify what already exists, renewing the pattern of the city based on the city itself. Our master plan hinges on the premise that not just 'everyone ages' (as outlined in the competition brief) but rather, '*everything* ages'; we addressed the ageing issue in an holistic way, understanding the needs of elderly people in Korea and catering to this need by the provision of easy access to the programme and the creation of more opportunities for interaction, all within the broader framework of the fact that cities are constantly ageing and growing too.

A substantial amount of time was given to understanding the needs of Korean people, and the importance of strengthening community ties. We explored the idea of community through programmatic circles, as a means to organize programs in a meaningful way, which would provide for the needs of an ever-ageing population within a walkable radius of five minutes. The potential of these communities is that they disperse functions, as opposed to create agglomerations of one particular kind of activity.

At the heart of the communities are the hybrid centres that extend the functionality of a typical school to cater for elderly healthcare needs too, while the school yards (located amidst

a sea of tight-knit developments) were the only open plots and provided an opportunity for a new type of open public space. This was an interesting overlap, because it was not just an opportunity for a new form of mixed programme utilizing the existing open space, but also because of the high priority that Korean society places on education, with families moving to particular locations primarily because of certain attractive schools. Serving as a catalyst for urban regeneration and growth, these hybrid centres would attract more people to live in surrounding areas whilst serving the people and allowing the elderly to share their experience and knowledge with younger generations.

In addition to catering to communities, the leisure seekers form another important user group in the Yongsan area, as the newly formed park and surrounding museums and water-front districts are developed. This will liven up the whole area and create a buzz that most residential neighbourhoods lack. The event core comprises cultural and leisure programs that are situated between the communities, binding them together, but also creating a strong connection to the park and the water front from the Yongsan station, which is situated in the middle of the site.

By prioritizing the long term growth of Yongsan in the design process, the strategy primarily focuses on creating conditions and rules that will guide the growth of the city. By varying this set of rules – the permeability of the block, the height of buildings, setbacks and plot coverage according to the specificity of the site – we were able to define and differentiate four communities. This broad framework allows for the preservation of qualities that make cities interesting and at times unpredictable and unique places, whilst embracing the high densities required in the brief.

Fig. 1: Axonometric.
Fig. 2: Master plan superimposed on Yongsan.
Fig. 3: Hybrid Centre.

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