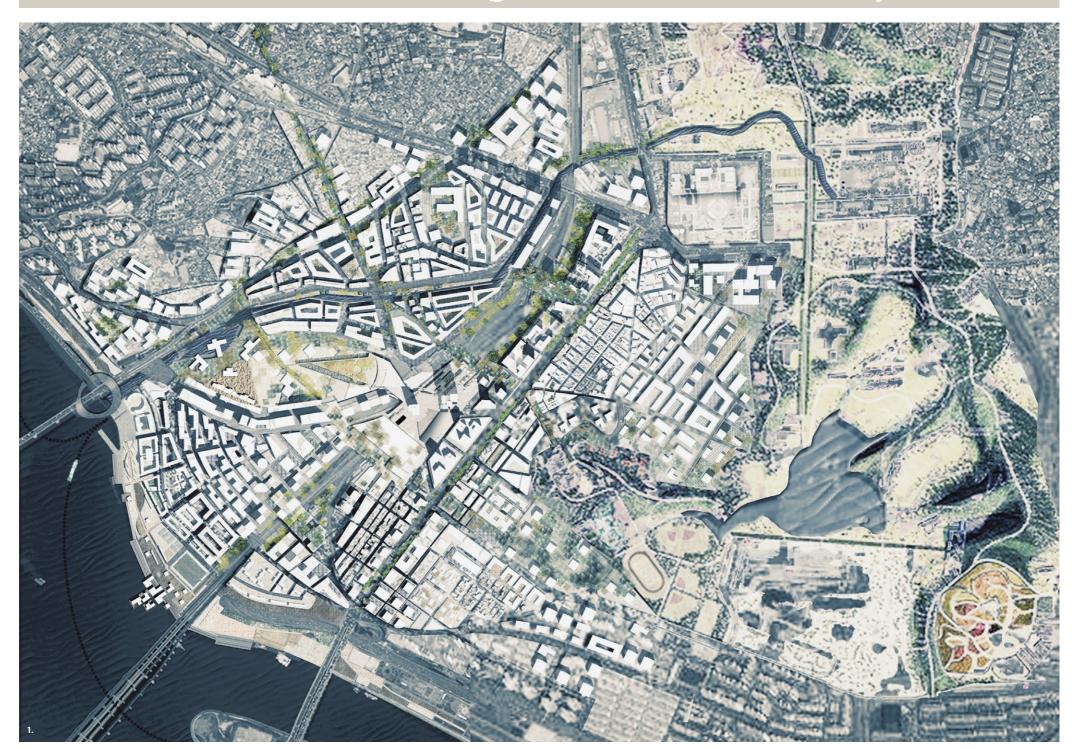# Vertical Cities Asia 2012, Yongsan, Seoul: Lifetime City

1.

Walking through the city of Seoul is a vibrant experience. People eat, drink, walk through shops or sit in a park. They live and grow old in a city that lives and grows old with them. Not just everyone ages, but everything ages. Activities, buildings, emptiness, centralities, high density, all together create different atmospheres in different places. As part of the Vertical Cities Asia 2012 competition, we worked on identifying the inherent characteristics of Seoul's Yongsan district and used them as a starting point for the new design of the site. Existing urban life and a new way of understanding the role of streets merge in our proposal.

Laura Dinkla, Katerina Salonikidi, Maria Stamati, Johnny Tascon Valencia, Qiu Ye

6.

KOREA HAS FLOURISHED in the twentieth century. Its economy grew, so did its population. From 1963 until the mid-1980s, Seoul's population rose by more than 10 million. However, this demographic growth did not see an expansion of the city borders. Therefore, the city has densified within its borders. At the same time, the elderly population has increased dramatically. Estimates say that by 2050 more than 50 percent will be 55 years or older. How should a city be designed in this ageing context?

In recent decades Seoul, as well as many other Asian cities, has seen an increase in urban density, which has meant the removal of hundreds of traditional neighbourhoods. Developers demand space for modern, luxury apartment complexes. These complexes are often serialized high-rise apartments that do not represent the identity of the city, but merely market requirements. These complexes are located throughout the city, generating high-density areas towards its borders, as well as increasing the use of automobiles and increasing commuting time.

The answer, while also addressing the above-mentioned issues, was to be found in the traditional neighbourhoods. In these places the people and the city evolved together. As a result, the urban shape, its vitality and its atmosphere, spontaneously reflect people's needs. This fact can be perceived in the accessibility to basic urban services. From the analysis of successful residential areas, it is clear that people have, within convenient walking distances, basic destinations such as grocery shops, hair salons, churches, community centres, public transport stations, parks, friends' houses, and so on. According to the International Longevity Centre, this condition is one central characteristic of what they call Lifetime Neighbourhoods: "Lifetime neighbourhoods are those which arrange their services, built environment and public spaces in such a way so as to facilitate access by those with reduced physical abilities" (ILC, 2007). One basic design premise for the present work is that if the city works for an elderly person, it works for everyone.

A high-density proposal in Yongsan does not need to result from the wiping out of the urban life that has evolved over the years in the form of neighbourhoods, replacing them with high-rise serialized apartments and office complexes. Densification can be a process within neighbourhoods where urban life evolves over the years. By using densification instead of replacement, the urban life in neighbourhoods can be protected and enhanced. In order to face the social challenges of ageing in Seoul, we propose Yongsan to be a city of neighbourhoods; a city where everyone, whatever their age, can find a place to settle, to live, and to be part of an on-going local process. A process that did not begin with this project, but that this project will reinforce.

The proposal
We focused on existing elements in the site and the context, such as streets, green areas, and water. After researching neighbourhoods in different cities around the world (and in Yongsan as well), we identified a specific neighbourhood structure and a hierarchy between the streets. We came to the conclusion that the most important part of the neighbourhood is its streets, starting from the neighbourhood's backbone that contains all kinds of local functions such as grocery, bakery, hairdresser, and so on. Some secondary streets provide functions at a larger

scale and link the local backbones to the primary roads, which in turn connect the neighbourhood to the city. Our most important strategy was to identify the existing neighbourhoods, with its street pattern, and densify the site by adding further neighbourhoods and using the above-mentioned street structure.

The site, Yongsan, is a strategic part of the city in which to implement this strategy. It used to be the southern border of Seoul in the 1940s, but with expansion south of the Han River, Yongsan rapidly fund itself located in the geographic centre of the metropolis. Nowadays it is a vibrant mixed-use area surrounded by residential neighbourhoods and Seoul's three Central Business Districts (CBDs). A highway to the south of the site provides direct connection to the rest of the region by car, as well as to Incheon International Airport. Yongsan Station provides urban transportation by train, metro, and bus. This infrastructural linkage constitutes the reason why commercial attractions, such as the electronic market or the recently built I'Park shopping mall in Yongsan Station, are located here. Proximity to the United States Army Base Yongsan Garrison is another characteristic of the area surrounding our site. These facts have had consequences for the structure of the neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods to the west of the site have turned into commercial dependencies of the electronic market since it arrived here in the 1990s; neighbourhoods to the east spontaneously mix local people and immigrants, particularly those related to the military base.

After researching these and other functions, we based our new program for the different districts on a mix of existing and proposed functions. In this way each district can have its own character. After all, our master plan is proposed as part of the evolution process of the structures and communities identified in Yongsan. This way, neighbour-hoods become supporters of the daily life that underpins our proposal. Our design will make sure that this is still possible in the future when even more people live in the city and grow old. People will be able to live in Yongsan for a lifetime. It can become a Lifetime City.

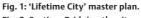Fig. 1: 'Lifetime City' master plan.
Fig. 2: Section. Bridging the site.
Fig. 3: The atmosphere of the city.
Fig. 4: Increasing density on the site.
Fig. 5: Revealing the water stream.
Fig. 6: New electronic market as seen from the park.
Fig. 7: New Yongsan Station.