Proposal for the
13th Docomomo International Conference
Workshop: Sewoon Arcade

SEOUL, KOREA
19TH - 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2014

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BACKGROUND:

The early half of the twentieth century was a time of darkness and crisis for Korea as it was colonized by Japan. Though Korea would be liberated after the defeat of the Japanese Empire in 1945, it would bear the scars of the colonial period for many decades. The story of the Sewoon Arcade begins with this legacy.

Unlike Europe, the urban fabric of most Asian cities are composed of wooden structures and were higly susceptible to the ravages of fire. After seeing the complete destruction of their timber cities from Allied bombings, the Japanese forces in Seoul created a fire-containment gap by removing a 50m wide corridor, several kilometers long, within the fabric of the city. This was to prevent any fires from jumping from district to district. However, after the war, this urban cut became a magnet for the thousands of war refugees, orphans and the homeless, creating a dense and problematic informal settlement for a city aspiring for a rebirth.

President Park ordered the development of this gap and ordered the design and construction of the Sewoon Arcade. Designed and planned by Kim Swoo-Geun--founder of the Space Group--and built by different construction companies, the design was a bold initiative, comprised of four mega-structure blocks along a 1 kilometer corridor between the historic Jongno and Toegyero streets. The design embodied the most contemporary notions of urban mixed-use programming by building a 3 story high commercial-retail arcade base with 4 stories of residential on top. The construction was completed in 1967.
NOW:

From 1967 to 1977, the Sewoon Arcade was a social and commercial success. It held the luxuries and services that catered to the new emerging working and middle class. The 13 story multi-purpose residential and commercial blocks were one of Seoul's first high-rise developments, featuring some of the city's first elevators. However, the rapid economic and technological growth of Korea catalyzed a growth in Seoul's urban fabric, sprouting new and more sophisticated districts of commerce and living across the city. Sewoon Arcade quickly became archaic and would begin a rapid decline in its use and relevance.

After repeated attempts to revitalize this mega-structure (including re-zoning it for highrises), the government has decided to demolish the Sewoon Arcade and create a green corridor in its footprint. The proposal will replace the arcade with a green corridor that would connect Jongmyo Shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage site, with Namsan Mountain, the physical and symbolic heart of the city. The first phase of the project was completed in 2008, with the rest schedule to be finished by 2015.
WORKSHOP THEME:

The theme of the workshop is revitalization and re-use of a project that promised a contemporary and modern life based on an idea of multiplicity and simultaneity: both architecture and urban design, residential and commercial, infrastructural and landscape, divisive on East-West axis / connective in the North-South axis.

Given the enormous ambition and complexity of the project, the recent government studies suggest either a complete tabula rasa for the site or a complete re-embracing of the original aspirations and desires of the project. The current decision to replace the Arcade with a linear connective green park reflects the recent “green” zeitgeist within the government.

The purpose of the workshop is to evaluate the history of the Sewoon Arcade development, dissect and extract key issues and opportunities to propose a strategy of symbiosis. With an emphasis on conservation efforts through intelligent re-development and community awareness, the workshop asks if redemption is the blueprint for the future. The Sewoon Arcade represents an important precedent for how Seoul can negotiate with the legacy of urban conservation in the future.
SCHEDULE:

30 June: Application Deadline for Foreign Students
30 July: Application Deadline for Domestic Students

19-20 Sept: Opening Event / Pre-Workshop Lectures & First Night at Temple Stay
20-24 Sept: Workshop

Workshop Personnel:
Students: 100 (50 Foreign + 50 Domestic)
Tutors: 10 (5 Korean, 5 International)
Directors: 2 (one Korean, one International)

Fees:
Foreign: 200 EUR (includes 5 nights of lodging & food)
Domestic: 100 EUR (includes food)