

## REVIEW

**A Flexible Expansion of Space to Resolve Conflicting Borders: The Demilitarized Zone of the Korean Peninsula**

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A proposal for DMZ monumental park. *Space* 153-155 (1980).

Projects with architecture, art, and performance. *Space* 273 (1990).

Resurrection of the DMZ peace park. *Space* 555 (2014).

Architectural design employs concepts and programs to construct a building in a particular form, which in turn becomes a domain as it establishes a relationship with the ground. Architecture only becomes complete once it establishes a sense of 'place' within nature.

The purpose of architecture may be described as the creation of space, rather than the construction of objects that function as space. As 'space' has come to be recognized universally as the main objective of architecture, floors, ceilings and walls are none other than a means and method to establish 'space.' Rather than being a void, 'space' can more specifically be defined as a state of being empty. Such emptiness is coherent with opportunities for diverse acts to occur within. The architect must not only take into consideration how to complete the construction of a building; the consequent processes and actions that arise with the passing of time are also key to characterizing the space. As such, the making of a work of architecture is the creation of a 'space' mixed with 'time.'

*Space*, a South Korean architecture monthly, has spanned 34 years in its somewhat sporadic but nevertheless diverse coverage of the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ) of the Korean peninsula, since first featuring the topic in 1980. In domestic circles, the DMZ has long been a hotbed for discussion, with public consensus

divided between development and preservation. From an architectural perspective, the prevalent opinion has been to support the creation of a physical space, favorably in the form of a peace park. The public may misunderstand this as a threat to the natural ecology of the DMZ, as if it is the stance dominantly taken by avid real estate developers. Yet, in reality, the stance taken by architecture is more in line with recognizing how to form and modulate relationships with the surrounding nature. Therefore, the vacant state of the DMZ may combine with on-site events and the passing of time to yield greater significance. Finding such meaning is perhaps a more urgent task than designing any physical constructions as part of a peace park. The DMZ, both as a border and a place of collision between the mutually hostile parties of North and South Korea, can then undertake a more flexible role, potentially connecting different entities by functioning as a buffer zone. Architecture can facilitate the expedition of such a role. This review will serve as a chronological narrative of the discussions presented by *Space* about the DMZ through the ages, to suggest possible directions to be assumed by future generations.

## **SPACE AND SPACE AND THE DMZ**

The DMZ of the Korean peninsula spans regions pertaining to North and South Korea, yet the significance of its territory is not exclusively relevant to the nations it divides. As one of the few remaining countries to have been separated due to the Cold War, the Korea peninsula remains to this day as a potential war zone, and the land that lies between has been made inaccessible to civilians since 1953, essentially returning the land to nature's domain. The DMZ has purportedly become 'the center of worldwide attention,' as the territory gains recognition not only as a 'symbol,' but also as a potential 'passageway' of peace. Hence, a more urgent task than preserving the natural resources, or limiting the extent of development, may actually be to draw out a future path for the DMZ.

Despite this, difficulties persist in finding accumulated or continued studies about the DMZ of the Korea Peninsula from the past 60 years. This is because the DMZ itself is an area of conflict between the North and South, where political ideologies clash and the academic environment fluctuates according to political situations. *Space* has covered this issue sporadically, also without an accumulated or continued approach.

*Space* is recorded as the first civilian entity to suggest introducing the concept of a peace park at the DMZ, with the article, 'The DMZ Should Be Made into a Natural Peace Park' in March 1980 (Vol.153). After this initial stage, the second

phase continues in 1989 and 1990, as *Space* oversaw the development of a media campaign as a 'cultural movement.' Then, in the aftermath of the 1<sup>st</sup> Summit between North and South Korea in June 2000, as diplomatic relations on the peninsula thawed, the magazine revisited the issue in May 2001 by hosting an international academic symposium on the subject of the DMZ. This year, coinciding with the 34 year anniversary since *Space's* first introduction of the topic, the current Park Administration is actively promoting the construction of a peace park. In lieu of such plans, *Space* revisited the topic of the DMZ in February and again in May, with the theme of 'Resurrection of the DMZ.' This was followed up with a series of articles outlining different approaches taken by other theoretical fields in the August, October and November issues. By revisiting 34 years of contents touching upon the topic of the DMZ by *Space*, a concise but comprehensive understanding of the issue can be acquired, including different paradigms and approaches to the DMZ, as well as value judgment of what to do about the DMZ, and changes in the respective movements with the tide of time.

## **THE FIRST APPROACH: BORDERS AS A PHYSICAL PARK AND A FRAGMENTED APPROACH**

The media campaign in 1980 started by *Space*, stemmed and illustrated the issue more on the level of curiosity or interest, as the area was entirely inaccessible. Thus the first media campaign provided a fragmented approach, that indirectly introduced the former academic studies coming from abroad, rather than a more direct approach.

*Space's* media campaign, that was first planned to run for a year by Kim Swoo Geun, was first presented to the public as 'A Proposal for DMZ Monumental Park' in March 1980 (Vol.153). Unfortunately, this was at a time when the Korean peninsula was under the international spotlight following the assassination of President Park Chung Hee on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, 1979. References to the planning of this project stem back to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1972, when the political situation suggested a more harmonious future for North and South Korea, due to the joint declaration by the two countries on; and again in the mid 1970's, when the pages of *Space* featured promising projects like the Kumgang Mountain Development Master Plan.

The March issue of 1980 sketched the vice-president of SPACE group at the time, the architect Kim Won-suk. However, in its entirety, this broadly sketched initiative lacked specificity, due to the ambiguous extent of its scope, in trying to represent the DMZ in its entirety, as 'the waist' of the Korean peninsula that

stretches from the West to East coast.

In the following month, Kang Yeongseon (director of the Korean Association for Conservation of Nature, and a professor of Seoul National University) contributed the article 'The DMZ is Full of Great Waves of Life,' which included vivid color photographs of the DMZ. At the time, all media outlets and publications in Korea were subject to censorship before being put to press, but the government authorized the feature on the grounds that it provided an academic approach to an otherwise politically charged region.

The foreign academic case studies introduced, due to limitations in researching the topic directly, are as follows. The article, contributed by François Bourliere (chairman, The Nature Conservancy), 'Sanctuaries Astride Frontiers' summarizes the many cases of peace parks in different conflict areas around the world. While the Tatra National Park between Poland and Slovakia, Vanoise National Park between France and Italy, and the Serengeti Maasai Mara National Reserve between Tanzania and Kenya can all be reached almost instantly in virtual reality, at the time, such materials were exceedingly rare. Sketches provided by Song Keeduck, the former chairman of the Korea Institute of Registered Architects, went a step further to actually designate specific sites and regions within the DMZ. The sketches include elaborate illustrations of tourist facilities including hotels and, youth hostels, and entertainment facilities including a monorail and a horse riding club. From the records, it is apparent that the idea of a peace park was regarded more as a sort of comprehensive leisure town at the time, rather than as a conceptual space.

Next in order, should naturally have been the introduction of more specific approaches and plans for each of these regions. Yet here, the series of the ambitiously planned *Space* DMZ media campaign were discontinued due to a sudden period of strict censoring by the authoritarian Korean government in response to the 5.18 Gwangju People's Uprising.

As the first campaign skidded to a halt, so did any architectural approaches analyzing the DMZ as a border. After 9 years, (at the time of Cho's article) the second campaign started, yet, this time, rather than building upon the content developed by the initial campaign, the campaign changed its course to be reborn as a 'cultural movement.' While *Space* maintained its place as the proponent of such discussions, the depth of these discussions have been somewhat compromised due to there being no way to guarantee the continuation of the editor or experts in charge. This situation persists to this day, revealed through the relative lack of quality in the discussions, compared to the sheer amount.

## THE SECOND APPROACH: CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS AS A NEW CULTURAL CAMPAIGN

If the first campaign in 1980 was mostly about overall master plans of a peace park or methods to approach the issue, enthusiastically joined by philosophers, journalists and architects alike, the second campaign from the late 1980s to 1990 was more similar in its form as a 'cultural movement' with active participation by artists. This was at a time when the Cold War had ended, with the US and the USSR participating in the Olympics together for the first time in the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. As the iron curtain was cast aside, West and East Germany reunited in 1990. The second media campaign that took place in 1989, was a time when the Roh Administration's diplomacy with North Korea was gaining stride.

Perhaps it was due to the atmosphere of the time that the issue turned towards becoming a 'cultural movement,' yet such a change was unfortunate for the overall discourse surrounding the DMZ. It became a discontinuation of the formerly established discourse on physical space and urban issues. Like a bird must fly from left to right, cultural movements must also be held simultaneously with established academic thought.

An article titled 'What to do about the DMZ' by So Heungyeol went beyond simply providing an ecological viewpoint, attempting to specifically observe space from the framework of the entire national territory in its entirety, from a historical and cultural viewpoint, overcoming the limitations of being confined to a simply ecological viewpoint. The cultural movement that was spawned thereafter can be defined as the second approach to the DMZ.

An attempt to view the issue of the DMZ as a 'cultural movement' was actively started by a handful of artists in 1987, 16 years after Lee Hyunggo had informed the world of the threat of losing an array of cultural artifacts across the civilian control line through the newspaper in 1971. Lee Bahn, at the time a professor at Duksung Women's University, headed this movement, and his works, both as an artist and as an academic, were introduced in the March issue of 1989 (Vol.259). 'Images drawn of the 88 Seoul Olympic Poster' were a reinterpretation of the 88 Seoul Olympics poster.

*Space*, which had changed its course towards becoming a comprehensive arts magazine starting from the late 1970s, was known for featuring a wide scope of art, in art theory, education and reviews.

However, in the November 1990 issue, *Space* made the error of allotting too many pages, 16 pages, to this single artist, for his one performance 'Intermarriage Ritual of Water and Soil, from Halla to Baekdu.' All texts and photographs were reproduced by the artist, inviting criticism that the feature did little more

than advertise the artist's work. Also, despite such efforts, the cultural campaign's influence remains small today. Art is intrinsically conceptual, and is thus limited to becoming a 'one-time' event as it cannot be represented or reproduced as a specific building, physical space or place. While it is true that the performance was immensely popular at the time, it is regretful that there was little to differentiate it from other art events that took place at the DMZ.

### **THE THIRD APPROACH: PARADIGM CHANGES IN DEFINING BORDERS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

Despite this frenzy of activity by cultural circles in the 1990s, the DMZ still remains as an uncharted object of mystery, and remains subject to development by many architecture, landscape and economic professionals. Until 1995, the DMZ and its surrounding border regions were viewed only as an ecological repository, hence yielding the prevalent opinion that the area should remain subject to preservation alone. Yet, after 1996, this concept of 'preservation' shifted towards a concept of 'development.' In place of unconditional preservation of the DMZ, two new issues of 'limited development' and 'sustainable development' in an environmentally friendly manner rose to the fore. The majority of prior proposals, such as creating an ecological park, hosting international non-profit organizations, constructing a peace city, or a North and South Korean distribution base, various remembrance halls and museums, tourist resorts, and a plaza for north and South Korea, etc. All stemmed from the desire of competitive and reckless real estate developers. The vast majority of the public was supportive of such development, as well as proposals for a tourist resort or a massive investment region. As these development strategies clashed with those wishing to preserve the natural ecology of the zone, concepts like 'limited development' and 'sustainable development' surfaced. These concepts first appeared in the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, and the concept of sustainability is defined in the Brundtland Report as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." By maximizing the efficiency of given natural resources, so that everybody can benefit, it is possible to view 'sustainable enhancement' as a more apt expression than 'sustainable development.' Thus, it can be evaluated that reckless investment, and the construction of mass scale privately funded social facilities would wreak havoc in the DMZ, without any plausible blueprint of the DMZ. It is also thought that whatever sort of development does happen, it should take place as slowly as possible.

## A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH: THE EXPANSION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF BORDERS

Amidst such discussions, *Space* revisited the topic of developing the DMZ in a new manner in January 2009 (Vol.494), again after almost 9 years. Yet, such perspectives were limited to the fact that they stemmed from the curiosity of those outside the Korean Peninsula, rather than from perceptions from within.

Anna Grichting who had worked in the Aga Khan foundation of Geneva as an architect and urban planner, contributed the article 'The Korea DMZ, a Ready Made Paradise Park or a Laboratory of Ecological Planning?' She discussed how the DMZ is no longer a fixed and physical, limited border, but proposes that it be viewed from a macroscopic point of view, as an expanding and fluid entity. Such a perspective could not be founded on domestic discussions, both in architectural and academic circles, as their discussions were limited to choosing between development or preservation, or unnecessary emphasis on creating a 'cultural campaign.' Nevertheless, this perspective is valuable, as relevant academic studies are generally hindered for domestic scholars due to changing political situations and are thus limited in the scope of their research.

It is thought that with the DMZ taking on new significance and expanding, it can move beyond being a physical and political space, assuming the possibility of taking on a pivotal role in reconciliation between North and South Korea. This can be seen as a sort of 'expansion of the role and spatial significance of the DMZ,' making the peace park an ecological space of cooperation, rewriting the topographic map of the bordering regions, and becoming a buffering zone to prevent future conflict. Hence, the DMZ is not simply seen as a piece of land spanning 248 km, but through its regional aspects such as the new order that involves the diverse paths, the complexities, and the uncertainties of the present day North East Asian region. Only then may realistic and sustainable strategies be established. With the surfacing of unprecedented new geopolitical discussions and ecological aspects, efforts have also been seen to understand the DMZ as a 'North East Asia Eco-Zone,' from a more macro perspective. The region's geographical accessibility, the changing weather patterns with the passing of seasons, migration of birds and animals are all taken into consideration to change a local issue into an issue transcending its borders. Also, to understand external viewpoints towards the DMZ, a variety of international workshops, academic events, and international competitions have since been held. This has provided a more wide-sighted view as to how we may view the linear characteristics of a space defined as a border. All of these facets go beyond suggesting a physical construction for a peace park; using the concept of a border to define metaphysical future roles for the DMZ.

At this stage, international workshops have also vibrantly popped up, relating to the DMZ. In 2009, the Harvard Graduate School of Design opened a workshop related to the DMZ. This initiative was held to gather the fields of landscape, urbanism and architecture, to study the DMZ, and design new knowledge and visions. In the earlier stages, the politics, culture, history and geographical background of North and South Korea were studied in lieu with the DMZ's physical existence as a linear buffering zone, providing a base for future design. As such, relative approaches to the DMZ were complemented with a variety of different models. Also in 2008, Seo Yehre started her project 'parallel utopias.' By making the rare decision to determine an actual site, she gathered resources, and designed various political, social and economic scenarios that could work in accordance with changes in the human ecological system and nature. Started in 2008, the project expanded in 2011 into an optional studio of Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, and through visits to the surrounding border regions and joint studies with the Gyeonggi Research Institute, a specific plan was drawn up. This study was first presented in the DMZ Forum hosted in the United States in 2011, and in the World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2012, and will be further developed with the Seoul National University Graduate School of Environmental Studies from the latter half of 2014.

As the conceptual meaning of the DMZ border is changing, it expands accordingly, and with research now expanding into many different countries, its width and depth are intensifying. Borders are formed not through lines, but the space that lies between, and as this 'in between space' expands, the space becomes a multifaceted existence with many different meanings. In other words, viewing borders as an 'in between space' rather than as a line separating the interior and exterior, the border is no longer a simple closing mechanism, but a veritable existence that can be used to form a relationship. It is a universal fact that space is a three dimensional existence, in which volume has been added to a two dimensional plane. Moreover, in architecture, which is basically a human intervention, a temporal aspect can be added to this three dimensional space to yield a four dimensional space. Deconstructing the specific form of the three dimensional space will unbundle the space, transforming it into a multidimensional being. Borders as separating lines can thus be abolished if the cortex of the three dimensional space is treated as a comprehensive self-completing mechanism, rather than being determined as a means of national defense.



## **A FUTURE ROADMAP FOR THE YET TO BE COMPLETED DMZ PEACE PARK**

The third attempt by *Space* to deal with the issue of the DMZ took place over two issues in February and May of 2014, in the 'Resurrection of the DMZ' (Vol.555) and 'Future Roadmap of the DMZ,' (Vol.558), as fresh initiatives to channel new discussions about the DMZ. Yet, at the special feature of May, the part of 'Limits of Architecture and the Role of Architects in the Metaphysical DMZ' and the urban proposal for the border area of the DMZ only concentrated on Gyeonggi-do, and is thus not critical enough to be seen as an architectural proposal.

While *Space* has dedicated its pages to the DMZ for the past 34 years, there are definitely limits too. All of its discussions appear to be fragmented in a sporadic manner, as if to list information, rather than being a continuation of its own. The first media campaign that started in 1980 fizzled to a stop, as its ambitious plans were stopped by external pressure. Discussions on the DMZ after the 1990s overtly focused on the perspective of art and culture, clearly favoring certain artists over others. The special features and series carried out by *Space* in 2014 is living proof of both expert opinion from inside and outside architectural circles, and of the difficulties in bringing new perspectives into the discussion.

In the same manner that experts criticize the qualitative rather than quantitative aspects of the discussions surrounding the DMZ, domestic discussions often remain as repetition of what has been brought to the table before. The quality of these discussions regrettably falls short of the minimal requirements to certify them as valid, making the accumulation of such discussions even more infeasible. Thus, reinterpreting these discussions by comprehensively combining these trends and discussions may actually imply discussions valuable to the DMZ. Repeated discussions are as such to emphasize their importance, more so because the issue has conquered the tests of time, reappearing time and again in the discussions of others. Hence there is a true need to establish and develop the values and roles of how to define a peace park in its most fundamental sense, by putting such faded discussions aside.

## **NEED FOR ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTION TO PROMOTE INTERACTION AT A HOSTILE BORDER**

In the introduction, 'space' was defined and introduced as the main objective of architecture, in which actions to take place must be placed within it; rather than being defined as a state of emptiness or a state of being confined within physical

walls. The future architecture that is to be designed for the DMZ must focus on the potential for it to function as an agent for environmental design, based on the mechanism of the environmental, social, and political ecosystems of those regions, in times of political or military negotiation over tension-arising borders. In other words, rather than suggesting a simple program through a stationary physical space that provides for superficial and predictable actions, more specific methods are needed to create flexible borders to actively counter the diverse environmental changes that will take over the DMZ.

Under the premise that a peace park will be built at the DMZ, it is more important to consider the actions that could take place, rather than the form of the future park. For example, even for the simple act of observing, it is needless to say that little can come from a superficial observation platform that only provides a place to stand and view the park from far away. Merely hosting cultural activities or events at the platform may also be insufficient. Combining the aspect of time with the act and object of observation can potentially create a space in which people from North and South Korea can visit and face each other in the single site, yet ironically not touch or meet (for example, a bridge with a wall or a observation platform divided in the middle). It is also possible to use the platform to consider the state of loss. Rather than utilizing the site as a simple meeting place in which the families torn apart by the war can reunite, or performance halls or receptions, and meeting rooms, it is important to dwell upon the meaning of loss. One method could be to gather, preserve, commemorate and exhibit objects that symbolize loss to people from both North and South Korea. People can also consider the act of 'dwelling.' Creating a park in the relatively small space of 1km width, designing a new landscape and adding benches, simply so that people can walk to and fro may not be significant. As the DMZ is a temporary construct, it may be more effective to envision ever changing forms and programs such as temporary pavilions, as they will eventually have to be packed up and taken down.

Eventually, in the final stage of political negotiations, the space should be established as an agent to encourage its visitors to actively do something, rather than a passive park composed of simple symbolic acts. Amidst the complex tangle of multilateral interest groups for national security and politics, architects will play a pivotal role in the future of the DMZ. Architecture will inevitably be the means that will define the fate of the DMZ, and thus should shoulder the responsibility to suggest future direction for how humans and nature can coexist. Only then can new relationships form between nature and space, allowing the space to expand into the nature, and abolishing the borders that once separated each side. The key to good architecture lies in opening up such space.