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DMZ Cultural Center: The Role of Shared Space in the Korean Peninsula Crisis

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Centro Cultural DMZ: El rol del espacio compartido en la crisis de la península coreana

Centro Cultural DMZ: o papel do espaço compartilhado na crise da península coreana

Abstract

If we view urban space as a framework of events and memory, conflict infrastructure is inevitably understood as a memorial practice – it either solidifies the conflict or promotes positive associations. Using the mechanism of memorialization, this article examines the function of shared space, namely the built environment that occupies space between the highly conflicted borders of the Korean peninsula. In order to overcome the limitations of two recent inter-Korean projects that focused on economic cooperation, we analyze the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) Cultural Center's planning and design strategy, which is based on the role of shared space contributing to peace and reconciliation.

Keywords: Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), Korea, memorialization, reconciliation, shared space.

Resumen

Si vemos el espacio urbano como un marco de eventos y memoria, la infraestructura del conflicto es inevitablemente entendida como una práctica de memoria, la cual promueve la consolidación del conflicto o las asociaciones positivas. Usando el mecanismo de la memorización, este artículo examina la función del espacio compartido, es decir, del entorno construido que ocupa el espacio entre las fronteras altamente conflictivas de la península de Corea. Con el fin de superar las limitaciones de dos recientes proyectos inter-coreanos, los cuales se centraron en la cooperación económica, analizamos la planeación y diseño estratégico de la Zona Desmilitarizada (DMZ) del Centro Cultural, la cual se basa en el papel que juega el espacio compartido como contribución para la paz y la reconciliación.

Palabras claves: Zona desmilitarizada (DMZ), Corea, memorización, reconciliación, espacio compartido.

Resumo

Se virmos o espaço urbano como um âmbito de eventos e memória, a infraestrutura do conflito é inevitavelmente entendida como uma prática de memória, a qual promove a consolidação do conflito ou as associações positivas. Usando o mecanismo da memorização, este artigo examina a função do espaço compartilhado, ou seja, do ambiente construído que ocupa o espaço entre as fronteiras altamente conflitivas da península da Coreia. Com o objetivo de superar as limitações de dois recentes projetos intercoreanos, os quais se centraram na cooperação econômica, analisamos o planejamento e o desenho estratégico da Zona Desmilitarizada (DMZ, por sua sigla em inglês) do Centro Cultural, que se baseia no papel que tem o espaço compartilhado como contribuição para a paz e a reconciliação.

Palavras-chave: Zona desmilitarizada (DMZ), Coreia, memorização, reconciliação, espaço compartilhado.

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The built environment is a physical creation and embodiment of our culture; in return, it shapes how we live and think. Cities in conflict are clear examples of this reciprocal function, being both a manifestation of conflict and an instrument of addressing partisan identity. The Korean Peninsula is the most heavily armed region in the world and the only country still divided as a visible extension of the Cold War era. While the 1953 armistice agreement brought a temporary end to the Korean War, the conflict continues as the whole peninsula struggles both economically and politically. Continuing distrust and military clashes occurred until a major change came in 1998 with the implementation of the Sunshine Policy. This was an engagement policy initiated by former South Korean president Dae Jung Kim, for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000. Moon describes the Sunshine Policy as a proactive policy to induce incremental and voluntary changes in North Korea to create peace by way of reform through the patient pursuit of reconciliation, exchange and cooperation.[1] This policy is fundamentally based on the German *Ostpolitik*, which is represented by Egon Bahr's *Change through Rapprochement*.

However, without having a more productive framework for reconciliation, after only a decade, the Sunshine Policy slowly deteriorated. Giessmann points out that Ostpolitik deliberately left open the future status of Germany, while the Sunshine Policy focused on the goal of reunification.[2] East and West Germany admitted the existence of the other, and continuous exposure to each other positively changed East Germans' perceptions, especially among younger generations.[3] However, the South Korean administration could not achieve the same socio-cultural capital as their German counterparts and instead focused on top-down economic projects.

Both the success of the dissolution of East and West Germany and the failure of the Sunshine Policy in Korea revolved around the issues associated with shared space. In this paper we will review the instrumentality of shared space in a conflict and peace context, in the capital cities of Belfast, Northern Ireland; Nicosia, Cyprus; and Jerusalem, Israel. Furthermore, to promote peace and reconciliation throughout the Korean Peninsula we promote the planning strategy of mutually beneficial shared space in order to develop socio-cultural capital.

Space as an Outcome of Conflict

Contested cities generally produce evidence of social conflict in the form of walls, security gates, and checkpoints, but other buildings are also influenced with a subtle yet critical sense of defensiveness or aggressiveness. After the outbreak of the 1969 Northern Ireland conflicts and "The Troubles," Brand found that architecture in Belfast demonstrated principles of defensible design as an "unwritten convention of Northern Ireland."[4] The Peace Walls separating Irish nationalist and union/loyalist neighborhoods are

1   Moon, "The Sunshine Policy".

2   Giessmann, "German 'Ostpolitik'", 25-41.

3   *Ibid.*, 25-41.

4   Brand, "Written and Unwritten", 2669-2689.

Figure 1. Demilitarized Zone. Source: Green United Korea

obvious signs of conflict infrastructure. They were built as temporary barriers, but over the years they have become wider and higher. Research in 2012 reported that 78% of the general population believes that the segregation of communities is common, even in places where there are no Peace Walls, and it has been observed that the issue of both real and perceived segregation extends beyond the physicality of walls.[5] Ultimately, the conflict is manifested throughout citizen's everyday lives (69% of residents think that the Peace Walls are still necessary because of the potential for violence). This represents the reciprocal nature of the built environment as it shapes communities and individuals, providing effective memorials that shape their future, and exacerbate social, political, and economic conflict.

In Nicosia, the historic city center is divided by a buffer zone accessible only to United Nation peacekeepers. The Green Line constitutes about 20 streets running perpendicular to it containing hundreds of empty buildings. Bakshi emphasizes the critical function of image and memory in ur-

ban dynamics.[6] In interviews with Greek-Cypriots, they stated that the city's walled appearance deters them from spending time there: "It's not preserved as it should be, you walk around and you see windows hanging off, it makes it look scary"; "It looks empty, there is no life there".[7] Negative urban imagery as an outcome of conflict becomes one of the major forces to shape the spatial configuration.

In addition to separation barriers, urban planning of the Israeli settlement has also become a straightforward tool to address authority, identity, and power. Pullan's 'Frontier Urbanism' explains urban strategy, not just for separation but also for the purposes of the deployment of a confrontational identity to form institutional settings.[8] She observed that Frontier Urbanism happens even in the city center with security posts on rooftops and barricaded shacks.[9] Site planning, building heights, materiality, and façade design can all produce the message of confrontation and the sense of segregation.

5   Byrne, Gormley, and Robinson. "Attitudes to Peace Walls".

6   Bakshi, "Urban Form", 189-210.

7   *Ibid.*, 206-207.

8   Pullan, "Frontier Urbanism", 15-35.

9   *Ibid.*, 20-21.

The Korean DMZ is a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula; it is 250 km long and approximately 4 km wide. Within this massive physical division there is no shared space. Instead, the creation of the DMZ has resulted in an untouched nature reserve that has been protected by the military on both sides for more than 60 years. This complete disconnection through a void has resulted in the altered perception of North Koreans by South Koreans that is best characterized by one of two extremes: forgetting or fear.

Conflict infrastructure built to stop violence also ends up solidifying the state of conflict, as seen in the experience of physical barriers in everyday life (Belfast); the omnipresent imagery of the conflict (Nicosia); confrontational messaging through design (Jerusalem); and complete disconnection that creates a type of amnesia (Korean DMZ).

Space as Instrument for Reconciliation

At the same time, in these same sites that contain conflict infrastructure, there are also cases of space being an instrument for positive sociocultural capital. In Belfast, Brand has argued for "unwritten building conventions",[10] taking as her main observation the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project (SRRP): a building including offices and retail space for both communities. The building maintains its identity as a part of the Peace Wall but presents two entries/exits on both sides with identical signage, and small businesses (such as supermarkets and cafés) are carefully presented to promote friendly encounters. Also, sectarian flags, graffiti, emblems, and ornaments are eliminated. These guidelines are very clear compared to the neutral Belfast City Center shopping mall, which exemplifies the general government policy strategy on Good Relations. Komarova claims that the policy is 'mired in confusion' since the meaning of "good relations" and "shared space" is not defined.[11] On the contrary,

the SRRP suggests the transformation of physical barriers by a specific program and the necessity of strategic principles for a 'socio-petal' design.

In Nicosia, Cyprus, an extreme form of 're-imaging' through shared space can be found at the 'Occupy Buffer Zone' movement on the Green Line. In October 2011, about 20 young Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot activists put up tents at the buffer zone for eight months until June of the following year. Antonsich has argued that the 'terrain of resistance' is "where the sovereign norm produced and enforced by the two States is suspended".[12] The resistance is based on the attribution of the space and the suspension of a juridical order.[13] For Antonsich and Featherstone, space is the embodiment of resistance, which should aim at appropriating and making new spaces.[14]

According to Pullan, Jerusalem's Damascus Gate, unlike the Israeli settlement, reveals a rich public space[15] that includes places for security checks by Israeli soldiers, Palestinian places of commercial activity, and religious places for Orthodox Jews, such as spaces for prayer at the Western Wall. An open framework for a rich, urban experience continuously produces a collective memory of the differences and similarities between the contested groups. Pullan quotes Paul Virilio's term *unwitting urbanist* with respect to the power of memory of the city dweller,[16] which suggests that memory is the key element of the instrumentality of space.

Memorialization and Shared Space

The performance of space as both a manifestation and resistance of contestation precisely aligns with the mechanism of memorialization practices across cultures and time. Alois Riegl defined the practice of memorialization as the building of a space or object for particular human deed and identity.[17] This space or object is powerful as

10   Brand, "Written and Unwritten", 2669-2689.

11   Komarova, "Shared Space in Belfast".

12   Antonsich, "'OccupyBufferZone'", 175.

13   Constantinou, "On the Cypriot States", 145-164.

14   Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities*.

15   Pullan, "Locating the Civic", 109-22.

16   Virilio, *City of Panic*, 7.

17   Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments", 83.

18   Nora, "Between Memory and History", 7-24.

it appeals to *memory* rather than history[18] and, as Bakshi points out, the nature of the bond between place and memory is especially evident in contested cities.[19] Viewing urban space as a framework of events and memory, conflict infrastructure is inevitably part of the memorial practice – it either solidifies the conflict or promotes positive associations. By engaging users in everyday life, shared space is a site-based event, as pat of which the spatial configuration is not a linear didacticism but is accumulated knowledge through time. Also, shared space leaves room for deviation from the expected course of action so that revision and re-creation strengthens remembrance.

However, the obvious danger is immanent in the nature of memory discourse. Baillie argues that Vukovar's outcome of conflict is war memorials that function as a 'symbolic border guard'.[20] Despite the cessation of physical violence, the

Figure 2. Location of DMZ and two inter-Korean Projects

wall memorial constructions in public space have served to strengthen the gap between Croats and Serbs. North Korean public spaces also show this obvious danger of memorialization. Integrated with memorials and monuments of their past leaders, these spaces create symbolic memories that are an inescapable part of everyday life and perpetuate a narrative of propaganda.

Therefore, in framing shared space as an important vehicle for reconciliation, we need to examine how the "unwritten testimony"[21] of a shared space can be effective as a form of memorialization, yet at the same time being devoid of any current authority's inclination/agenda. In this context, the limitations of the two ambitious inter-Korean projects should be reviewed.

Limitation of Two Inter-Korean Projects in the Korean Peninsula

Gaeseong Industrial Complex (GIC) is one of the most significant inter-Korean projects that was initiated under the Sunshine Policy. The site is located south of Gaeseong in North Korea and north of the DMZ, about 38 miles north of Seoul. Aiming to combine the South's capital and technology with the North's land and labor, GIC, now in its eleventh year, is home to 125 companies that employ 53,000 North Koreans and about 800 South Koreans.[22] For more than a decade, since 2004, it has aimed to bring economic benefits to the two Koreas and contribute to peace in Northeast Asia.

Doucette and Lee speculate that the key element of this project is experimental territoriality.[23] As Ong has suggested, this territoriality works as a message, "These zones are places where notions of an eventual national reunification can be practically broached and tested [...] suggesting a way to the eventual reunification of the two Koreas".[24] Many South Koreans who have worked for years with North Koreans say that the most notable change over the past ten years is the change in

19   Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses", 189-210.

20   Baillie, "Vukovar's Divided Memory".

21   Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

22   Data from Gaeseong Industrial District Foundation.

23   Doucette and Lee, "Experimental territoriality", 53-63.

24   Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 117-118.

the way citizens from both countries perceive one another. Initially, they were on their guard and interacted with suspicion; now, however, they feel mutual respect and kinship.

Despite this, the territoriality of the GIC project was not able to accelerate the pace of potential reconciliation due to the lack of shared space that could provide a multiplying platform for the positive change of perception. Policy makers assumed that increased collaboration would automatically contribute to reconciliation. Socio-cultural programs were missing and the space as well as the content (program) was blindly focused on economic productivity. Along with North Korea's nuclear tests in 2009 and 2013, and other political tensions that have negatively affected the operation of the GIC, there has been no clear consensus of support in South Korea, which makes the future of the GIC uncertain.

Mt. Geumgang Resort is another significant project created as a special destination in North Korea for South Koreans to visit as tourists. Located in North Korea, about 31 miles from the South Korean city of Sokcho on the east coast, Mt. Geumgang is a mountain known by all Koreans. Initiated by Hyundai Asan in 1998, the South Korean company invested US$1.52 billion to develop the site, which has attracted a total of 1,930,000 South Korean visitors.[25]

The potentially positive effect of shared space is evident in this project. 71% of the tourists admitted that the tour positively changed their opinion regarding reunification.[26] They were most impressed by the scenery of the mountain, and then by meeting the North Korean tour guides, followed by watching the North Korean circus performance. Keonsik Cho, CEO of Hyundai Asan, emphasized the *changes behind the scene*: tourists are touched by the kindness and good service of the North Korean people, and, thus, the level of understanding between North and South has improved.[27]

Studies have confirmed a relationship between tourism and peace-building. Tourism increases interactions and brings people together from different cultures.[28] Even before the Sunshine era, Kim and Crompton argued that contact between citizens and tourists to the Korean Peninsula would assist the reunification process.[29] However, Cho used the Mt. Geumgang Peace Index (MGPI),[30] which is based on Azar's COPDAB,[31] and concluded that Mt. Geumgang tourism has only weakly and slowly contributed to peace. This is indicated by low MGPI. For example, Cho gave a weighted scale of +27 for the initiation of the project and -16 for the display of hostility in interaction. What might the weighted value of these interactions and their collective remembrance be if there was an open, shared space where people could freely meet and talk? Mt. Geumgang tourism has been closely managed by the North Korean regime, and meaningful contact on the tour was prevented. In 2008 there was a sudden shutdown.

Shared Space for Socio-Cultural Interaction in the Post-Sunshine Era

Without space and place making, memory discourse is superficial and everyday life becomes disassociated from the motivation for peace and reconciliation. This is the main reason that the two inter-Korean projects mentioned were easily compromised by unstable political changes. Therefore, the DMZ Cultural Center, as a new inter-Korean reconciliation project, is based on 'shared space' and 'place making to create national memory'. It takes into consideration the following strategies:
1. Manifestation of a future image: Shared space as reference to a shared future through the architectural representation of communication and reciprocal respect rather than the physical representation of a selected idea or figure.
2. Increased interaction: Participatory communication rather than linear didacticism in the

25 Data from Ministry of Unification, South Korea.

26 Kim and Lee. "Change of Perception", 67-96.

27 Cho, "Inter-Korea Tourism Achievements".

28 Anson, "Planning for Peace"; Webster and Ivanov, "Tourism as a Force"; Butler and Suntikul, *Tourism and War*.

29 Kim and Crompton, "Role of Tourism", 353-366.

30 Cho, "A re-examination of Tourism", 556-569.

31 Azar, "The conflict and Peace", 143-152.

space. Diverse cultural programs and events with flexible spatial planning is desired.

3. Resistance to contestation: Clear linkage to shared memory rather than mere artistic expression. (Spatial configuration to frame the reunification)

The DMZ is essentially a site with two faces. One is that of a physical barrier that creates a complete disconnection; the other is a transboundary reserve, a ready-made bio-diverse natural reserve[32] that is protected by military forces. These opposing perceptions provide the perfect conditions for a new memorialization site. First, the new project will represent the irrefutable evidence of war; any memorial should serve as a reminder of the importance of peace. The natural area between the Korean borders provides an opportunity for people to witness the direct result of the conflict. Second, the project will provide a symbolic resistance to the historic division of the past by allowing people to freely participate in joint activities.

The proposed cultural center site would utilize the reconnection of the Kyung-Ui line, which was re-opened in 2007 with a hopeful vision of connecting the Korean Peninsula to Eurasia by railways (fig. 3).[33] Despite its limited usage, the reconnected railway could be a meaningful infrastructure to transport North and South Koreans to the DMZ Cultural Center in order to transform the neutral space of the DMZ into a place where there is a meaningful exchange between people in the two Koreas. The suggested special district for the DMZ Cultural Center is at the center of this grand connection (fig. 4); it also serves to encourage global attendance, considering that the Korean War involved 67 countries.[34] For example, Colombia is one of many countries that sent soldiers under UN command. On April 2015, South Korean president Park visited Colombia and had a round table meeting with Korean War Veterans. In this meeting, Jesus Maria Novoa Martinez traveled 961km to deliver a letter to President Park, and in the letter he said, "I want to see Korea again before I die." Park promised to invite him to Korea this year (fig. 5); it is estimated that about 1000 Korean War Veterans are still alive in Colombia today.

Place making for peace-building requires the specific arrangement of programs. The most important program for shared space should be housing for the separated families. Significant numbers of people who lost family members in
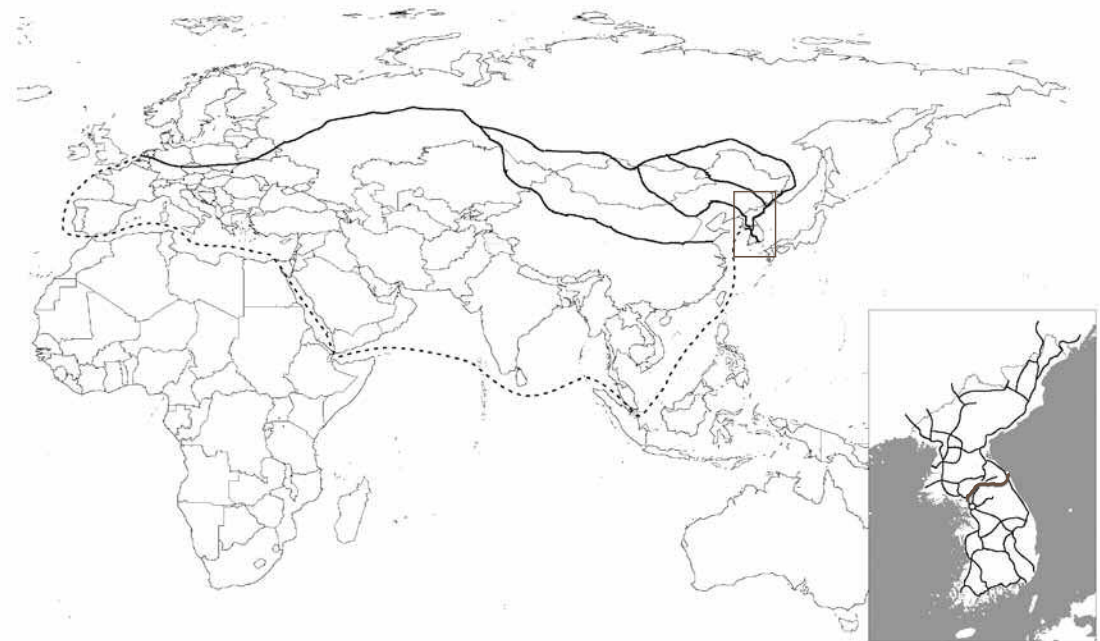

Figure 3. Potential Railway Connection from the Korean Peninsula to Europe

32 Kim, "Preserving Biodiversity", 242.

33 Na, "State of Works".

34 Data from Korean War Memorial Foundation and the World Peace Freedom Unite

1. New Train Station with mixed use development
2. Performance Center, Museum, Restaurants and Shopping
3. Housing for Separated Families
4. New Bike path extended from the cross-country cycling road
5. New trail utilizing existing military guard post walkways
6. JSA (Joint Security Area)
7. GIC (Gaeseong Industrial Complex)
8. Panmun Station of Kyungui line (southernmost station of North Korea)
9. Dorasan Station of Kyungui line (northernmost station of South Korea)
10. Munsan (South Korea)
11. Gaeseong (South Korea)
12. Han river and Seoul

Figure 4. Suggested Location of the Shared Spaces between Two Koreas

Figure 5. President Park in Colombia meeting Korean War veterans. Photo from the Korean Culture and Information Service

the Korean War are still looking for them. Temporary meeting events have been only a cosmetic cure (fig. 6). In the special DMZ cultural center district, separated families from both sides could come to the housing area and stay as long as they want. Their separation is evidence of conflict, but their reunion can serve as clear linkage to a shared future. Within this public space and housing development, public interaction will be framed as the act of witnessing, remembering, and memorializing the Korean conflict.

Another key feature of the DMZ Cultural Center, which would enhance the reconciliation effort, is a planned performance center. Those who visited Mt. Geumgang and worked for the GIC cited that meeting other Koreans was desirable. Over decades, the cultures of South and North Korea have grown apart; contemporary music and art in the South varies considerably from the traditional North Korean performance and circus 'Arirang' mass games. Cultural sharing fosters mutual understanding and is akin to making deposits into a collective memory, which then becomes the memorial, promoting participatory communications rather than didacticism in space. Images and sensations are the core architectural elements that establish a true memorial, informing the mechanism of memorialization. The architecture should

Figure 6. It took 60 years for Myung-bok Kim from South Korea to meet with his sister Myung-ja Kim from North Korea at the meeting events of February 2014. On the last day of the meeting event, they returned to their own sides without any assurance of ever meeting again. 2. 22. 2014, Photo from the Voice of the People Korea

Figure 7. DMZ Cultural Center Performance Hall Rendering

capture the experience at the DMZ Cultural Center by the specific interaction between people in shared spaces. As an example, figure 7 shows the glass performance hall that provides a unique experience, emphasizing the DMZ and enhancing the views and perceptions of those it serves.

Third, food culture is one of the shared identities associated with the space, which the Centre will explore in the form of restaurants. Even in South Korea, there are restaurant chains that originated in the North Korean cities of Pyongyang and Hamhung. While arguably a superficial reminder of shared cultural identity, the restaurants at the DMZ Cultural Center will produce positive encounters, increased interactions, and memories.

An additional 'place making' possibility at the DMZ Cultural Center could be the establishment of a leisure-oriented culture. Biking is now a national trend in South Korea. The cross-country cycling road (Riverside Bike Trails) was completed in 2014 as part of the Green New Deal policy by the South Korean government; it connects most of the major rivers in South Korea from Seoul to

Busan, and it has a total length of 1757 km (1090 miles). Even though this national route does not reach the DMZ, recent events in Kangwon Province, specifically the 2015 Tour de DMZ, have shown great potential. Under the 'Peace Parade' motto, more than 2000 people have participated in cycling from Yeonchon to Chulwon along the DMZ on the east coast. The DMZ Cultural Center could integrate the bike infrastructure originating in Seoul along the Kyungui line toward Paju, Dorasan, to the DMZ Cultural Center, GIC, and even Gaeseong in North Korea (figs. 4 and 8).

The planning and design strategy of the DMZ Cultural center suggests that spaces can be seen as an event, not merely as a physical place. Unexpected encounters, cultural events, and entertainment could take place along the conflict infrastructure. The use of public space to enhance interactions and create opportunities for the reciprocal respect of plural cultures is an important prerequisite for the reconciliation process. Therefore, the Korean crisis is a great opportunity to address the role of architecture and planning in developing socio-cultural capital. Tragic history
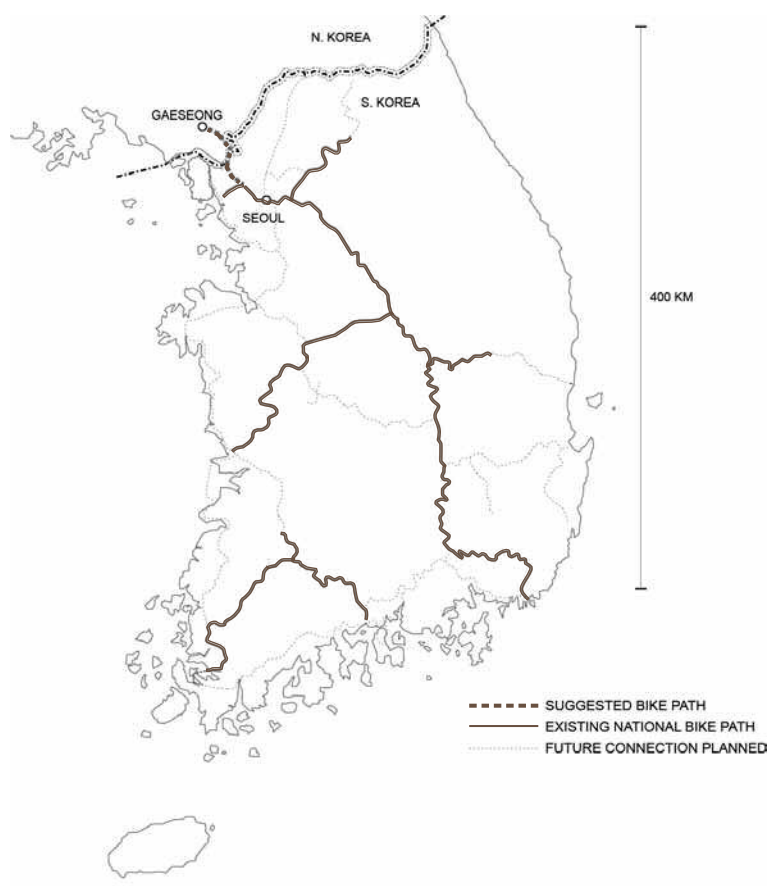

Figure 8. Extending the Bike Infrastructure to DMZ and North Korea

and the agony shared by both South and North Koreans can be transformed into a unique asset that shapes a peaceful, shared future.

Further research is necessary to advance this vision, especially regarding the following aspects: the legal aspect of the land; the process of developing the DMZ with the contracting parties of the armistice agreement; economic modeling of the programs and examination of financial feasibility; understanding public opinion through surveys and connection to global tourism; administrative challenges to assign this area as a special district between two countries with entry from both Seoul and Pyongyang; military concerns from both sides; and balancing the DMZ design strategy with protection and utilization. Research and planning in these areas is imperative for the long-term success of this plan. Nevertheless, this article advocates the start of a new inter-Korean project for a post-Sunshine Policy era: a unique approach to a building consensus that has untold potential for establishing peace and achieving reconciliation throughout the Korean Peninsula.

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