

## Social Museum Seoul: Review

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*“The Social Museum is a democratic space of civil society that envisions a neutral zone of values. We begin a chapter jointly to sympathise with our shared time, space, values, heritage, and the sense of indebtedness to the society.” (Translated from the Exhibition Text)*

Social Museum is an annual conference that takes the museum as its conceptual parameters to capture and re-evaluate the urgencies in our society. The project is funded by Seoul City Hall and is part of the research program for the governmental plan of building Seoul Innovation Park in the centre of Seoul. In partnership with Seoul City Hall (Seoul Metropolitan Government), the development of the overall idea and the materialization of the event were led by the art director of Takeout Drawing & Museum, an alternative cafe-museum space located in Seoul. Working as part of the planning team, I was able to witness the entire production process of the very first Social Museum from its preparatory sketches to its actualization in early December last year.

Social Museum is situated in the future site of Seoul Innovation Park, a massive 60,800 square meter area formerly occupied by the Korea Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, where the vast platform of buildings has been left inoperative since 2004. The renovation plan of Seoul Innovation Park promises to reactivate this immense deserted space by creating networks of international conference halls and creative hubs to facilitate the discussion of social issues and social incubation activities.

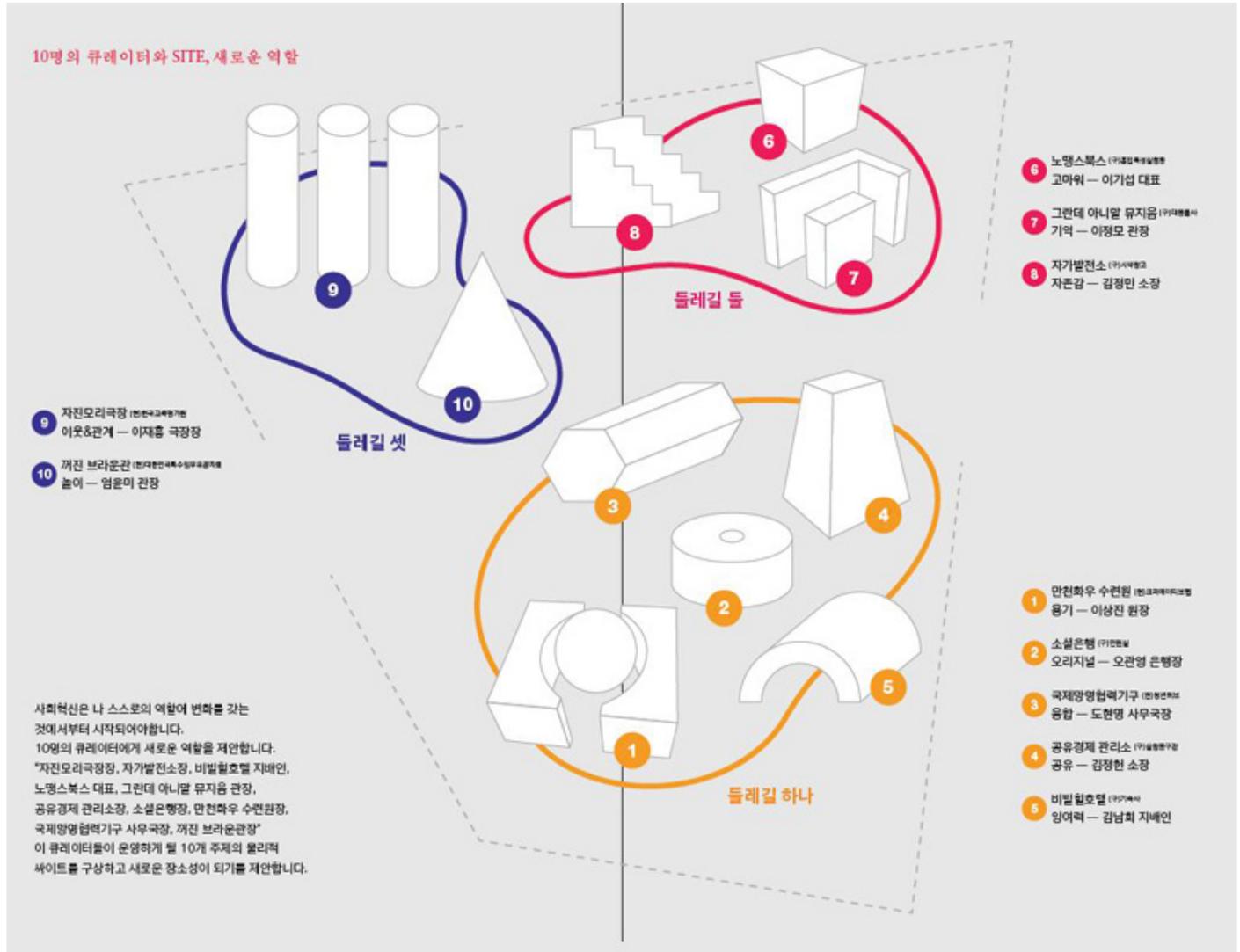


Master plan image of Seoul Innovation Park proposed in 2013. Image courtesy: Junglim Architecture.

Junglim Architecture was commissioned for the spatial remodelling of the site, and in 2013, uploaded their master plan image on the website (<http://www.junglim.co.kr/>). In the rendered conceptual image of Seoul Innovation Park, the pre-existing structures of old laboratories and warehouses are noticeable under the newly-constructed buildings, while the new glass-windowed building represents the international conference hotel, the core business that the government proposed for the space. However, their so-called 'master plan' is not without problems. Questions like whether such spatial business is appropriate to the local economy and disputes over the cost of the project and the absence of permanent staff in the new dwelling still persist unresolved.

Social Museum 2014 presents a different vision projected onto the site in their fictive tour guide map shown on the brochure distributed during the day of the conference. In the map, 10 museum buildings stand as sculptural maquettes, each represented with a new name, new use, and new 'curators', who are the 10 keynote speakers in the conference. The new ideas for each space were conceived through a series of interviews undertaken by the art director of Social Museum with each keynote speakers, who are experts of various different academic and professional fields in society. Involved with artistic translations and visual tools, a parallel script for the Social Museum and its compartments could be brainstormed, and through the work of the graphic designer, a

complete image of what Social Museum is could be visualized onto the site.



Social Museum tour guide map designed by Mingoo Yoon. Image courtesy: Takeout Drawing & Museum

Like the Social Museum depicted on the brochure, the actual cluster of ten building sites transformed into the imagined museum with architectural-scale banners hung for the day of the conference. Outside the conference room, each of their symbols and the colour markings continued to be repeated throughout the walkway as emblems for Social Museum. In addition to the visual execution of the museums was the performative tour walk around the Social Museum,

which was led by the museum staff and accompanied by the 'curators' and the observers from Seoul Metro Government, bringing together the real and the imagined script of the site together in both discussions and activities.

The permanent collections that Social Museum Seoul 2014 has exhibited were 10 keywords of social ideals: 'Play', 'Appreciation', 'Courage', 'Surplus', 'Share', 'Remembrance', 'Original', 'Hybrid', 'Neighbor', and 'Collectivity'. This temporary gathering of experts, institutions, artists, and activists aimed to excavate new possibilities for creation of support structures for the common interest of general society.



: Site tour lead by the Social Museum staff, accompanied by the curator of each fictive museums and observers from Seoul City Hall. Image courtesy: Takeout Drawing & Museum.

As its antithesis stands A'Social Museum, which is found to extract the 'artistic' and perhaps 'antisocial' clues from each ideals depicted in keywords of the Social Museum. The tool in drawing out those clues was parodying an artwork, *10 Ways to Fail in Life* by Korean artist Ahn Kyu-chul, on the 10-step to feel like a failure in life. The participants and keynote speakers were asked to write out the 10 steps to fail in making their keywords possible in society. Then, this interview

made tour back to the original artist for him to present the "10 Ways to Fail Social Museum", which became the centerpiece and mandate for the Social Museum conference.

*"The creation of a new use is possible only by deactivating an old use, rendering it inoperative"*

Social Museum takes this quote from Giorgio Agamben in the essay "In Praise of Profanation" in their exhibition text. The physicality of the museum was manifested through the production of brochures and banners and the collection of artworks. Then, the speakers, designers, artists, museum director and museum staffs were who operated the imagined museum drawn upon this particular site, which began in the morning and was taken down by the evening. In the spirit of 'play', the temporary establishment of Social Museum staged what it proclaimed in its vision statement, drawing a neutral zone of values by overturning the use and actively ascribing its new ideas onto the memories of the place.

While Social Museum 2014 might come off as a one-time attempt for an artistic experiment, Takeout Drawing & Museum, which stood at the centre of the event, has a rich history of working with artists, designers, and recently with human rights activists in their café-museum space. With its ambitious expansion of the museum practice to the scale of 'What is social?' gathered an active and diverse network of people, and has shown a mode of working together through the day's gathering in the fictive museum.