

Chapter 4. Challenges of providing and managing public space in a transitional context

In response to the first research question, this chapter considers the cases of Teheran-ro in Seoul and Mediaspree area in Berlin in terms of the challenges faced by the public sector in providing and managing public space in a transitional context. This chapter is informed by a document analysis.

4.1. Teheran-ro, Seoul

The Korean War (1950–1953) severely damaged Seoul, South Korea's capital. As a result, the role of urban planning was to restore the city and to cater to a rapidly growing population (Kim et al., 2001; City of Seoul, n.d.). The post-war period, and in particular between the early 1960s and the mid-1970s, deserves to be called the most dynamic period in Korean urban history since the urban population growth rate was very high. Seoul was no exception: the city experienced rapid urbanisation followed by industrialisation. Within 15 years, the population almost tripled from 2.3 million in 1960 to 6.8 million in 1975; it reached 10 million in 1988 (PopulationStat, 2020). As the concentration of population in Seoul continued to accelerate, the city's area expanded from 268 to 605 square kilometres in 1963 (Youn & Jung, 2009).

In the process, Gangnam¹ was incorporated into Seoul (Kang, 2015). Gangnam, which had been farmland until the 1960s, was developed as the very first new town project following Korean independence. The urban structure in

1 Gangnam literally means the area on the south side of Han River in Seoul. Its administrative border has been changed several times during its development. Here, the analysis refers to the present-day Gangnam and Seocho districts.

Gangnam was formed through a series of steps that started with the first proposal in 1962 (Youn & Jung, 2009). Superblock concepts, a ring-radial roadway circulation system, grid-pattern streets and riverside roads were discussed and partly adopted. In addition, apartment complexes started to be built in the late 1970s to remedy the shortage of housing and improve the efficiency of land use (Kang et al., 1999). Gangnam thus transformed into one of the most affluent areas within Seoul and in South Korea as a whole. Below, the case of Teheran-ro will be analysed to discover the effects of urbanisation on public space provision and management.

Teheran-ro is one of the main roads in Gangnam. In its development, Heo (2011) distinguishes four major periods: foundation, preparation, promotion, and expansion. During the foundation period, the character of Teheran-ro was determined as a main road forming superblocks through a land readjustment project. In the next phase, an urban design was established to provide the basis for the development of large buildings along Teheran-ro. During this period, a subway line opened along Teheran-ro ahead of the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The actual development of the road started between 1987 and 1997, accompanied by full-scale developments of office buildings. In the last phase, other types of buildings were built on the remaining land, and the development of the area was almost complete. Within just 20 years, Teheran-ro had become one of the most densely populated areas for office buildings in Seoul.

In Teheran-ro, the rapid development of high-rise buildings meant that the quality of the urban environment worsened (Kang et al., 2009). In fact, no emphasis was placed on the quality of the urban environment, although it is directly linked to urban life (Kim & Kim, 2011). Pedestrians lacked space to walk or rest along Teheran-ro. To prevent reckless development, it became necessary to manage individual buildings by providing development guidelines for the use and location of buildings, exterior spaces and parking lots, to name a few. Gangnam and Teheran-ro also faced the challenge of rapidly increasing land value due to the high development pressure. In fact, the official land value for not only residential but also commercial areas in Gangnam district is the highest in Seoul (The Seoul Research Data Service, n.d.), and land value in Teheran-ro is especially high. Hence, it is too costly for the public sector to acquire land or to provide and maintain public space in the area without external support. In other words, public sector is incapable of providing and managing public space alone.

4.2. Mediaspree area, Berlin

Germany's capital city has a complicated history, not least due to its Cold War division. Berlin underwent radical change after the fall of socialism and the subsequent reunification in 1989. The political and economic restructuring after 1989 changed all facets of society, including the established structures of planning. In the following section, Mediaspree area will be examined to identify which challenges transformation has brought about in the provision and management of public space.

Mediaspree is one of the largest property investment projects in Berlin. The project area is situated in the southeast of Berlin, along both sides of the river Spree (3.7 kilometres in length), and covers a section of 180 hectares (Ahlfeldt, 2010). For the most part, the site is located within the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. The area had already been an important industrial area before the Second World War; during the Cold War, the riverfront was divided into border zones (with the border drawn in the middle of the river itself). Accessibility to both sides of the river continued to be limited, as the East side was used for railway and harbour facilities and the West side mainly for trade and industry (Hofmann, 2018). The area went through a radical transformation in the post-unification period. The once unattractive industrial area has since become a world-renowned hotspot for alternative music culture as numerous industrial facilities along the river fell into disuse and opened up to new uses (Ahlfeldt, 2010).

The area was soon recognised as an essential development area due to its central location and fertile cultural environment, as well as the boom in waterfront development projects in other metropolises (Dohnke, 2014). In light of the city's difficult financial situation as well as the social imperative for deregulation and market liberalisation, this development was expected to come from the private sector. As a result, Berlin used marketing and incentive strategies to draw investment; initial plans were made as early as the mid-1990s, the aim of which was to bring positive economic impetus to the area by establishing media and creative industries and implementing an urban renewal of the surrounding area (Ahlfeldt, 2010). A dozen high-rise buildings, an arena for large events, other event locations, and several hundred thousand square metres of offices, hotels and luxury apartments were planned. To realise this mega-project, the vast majority of land that belonged to the city of Berlin or to public enterprises, especially in the former East Berlin,

was privatised by means of selling it to the highest bidder, with subsequent development by private actors (Dohnke, 2014).

The vision of the development project stood in sharp contrast to the reality of life in the adjacent neighbourhoods, which were generally inhabited by people with low incomes (Dohnke, 2014). Among them, there was increasing concern over the eventual adverse effects of the project in the neighbourhoods, including gentrification. Alarmed by the coming changes, a citizens' protest initiative called *Mediaspree Versenken!* (Sink Mediaspree) was formed in 2007 around three core demands: (a) no new buildings on a 50-metre-wide strip on both sides of the river Spree; (b) no new buildings between Stadtbahn and Köpenicker/Schlesische Straße; and (c) a new pedestrian and cyclist bridge over the river instead of another road bridge (Bezirksamt FHKR von Berlin, 2009a). The movement initiated a referendum, *Spreeufer für Alle* (Spree riverbank for all), in 2008; with a turnout of 18.6%, almost 86% of voters approved the initiative (Bezirksamt FHKR von Berlin, 2009a). Although the result of the referendum was not legally binding, it was taken seriously by the district office due to the public pressure (Hofmann, 2018). A special committee was established in the district parliament; yet, it did not have any great success. An amendment of the plans was made on state-owned properties only.

The Mediaspree area has been a construction site for many years (Hofmann, 2018). In the mid-to-late 1990s, the office towers Trias (1996), the Twin-tower (1997), the Jannowitz-Centre (1997), the Treptowers (1998) and the IBIS Hotel (2000) were completed. In the 2000s, Osthafen witnessed the inflow of corporations, mainly from the media and creative industries. In 2002, for example, Universal Music moved its headquarters from Hamburg to the converted Eierkühlhaus in Mediaspree area; this was followed by new developments for MTV Deutschland (2007), Fernsehwerft (2009), Labels 2 (2009) and nhow Design Hotel (2010). In 2013, the Coca-Cola Deutschland headquarters was moved to the area. A residential building The White was also built, and there has been a development boost in the area around the Mercedes-Benz Arena as well, with office, commercial and residential buildings as well as a hotel planned.

The transformative influx of foreign investment, along with the rapid privatisation of state-owned properties (especially in the former East Berlin), resulted in enormous changes to public space in Mediaspree area. Given that a considerable amount of the riverside was to remain privately owned, securing public access to the riverside became a matter of concern, as public access could be denied by private landowners seeking to discourage undesirable

visitors and disruptive forms of use. More generally, the provision of public space in this rapidly changing context was an issue due to the amount of new development planned in the neighbourhood. However, the public sector was unwilling to (re)purchase properties in response to public demand (Dohnke, 2014). Even though the Senate Department for Urban Development and Environment and the district office² played a central role, austerity measures meant they were unable to contribute to a larger extent (Hofmann, 2018). Private investors and developers came to the forefront with their resources, while civil society had their own visions; ultimately, it was collaborative efforts between the public sector and relevant economic and civil society actors that proved essential to addressing the challenges of public space provision and management.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter attempted to answer the first research question, identifying the challenges faced by the public sector in providing and managing public space in a transitional context in both Teheran-ro in Seoul and Mediaspree area in Berlin. The findings suggest that public space provision and management are profoundly affected when cities undergo radical transformation. The document analysis revealed that although the drivers of transformation in each case are different, they arrive at the same outcome, whereby the public sector is incapable of providing and managing public space alone, especially in times of change.

The challenges observed in Teheran-ro and Mediaspree area are remarkable due to the pace and intensity of change in both areas. The rapid development of Teheran-ro as part of urban expansion and population growth meant that the quality of the urban environment worsened. Although public spaces were necessary to provide adequate walking space and resting areas and to prevent reckless development, the surge in land value meant it became too costly to buy land for public space. Mediaspree area, meanwhile,

2 Berlin has a two-level government system: the Senate and Districts. District offices in Berlin are a relevant decentralised part of the administration of Berlin (Bezirksämter). They have considerable powers. They also have a district mayor, who is the head of the administration, elected by a council. There are 12 district mayors; they also form a council together with the mayor of Berlin.

witnessed radical changes in the aftermath of German reunification: securing open space along the riverside and providing public space within the neighbourhood were significant issues, yet the public sector was neither willing to nor capable of (re)purchasing private land. In conclusion, both Teheran-ro and Mediaspree area demonstrate that common issues around public space arise when cities undergo radical transformation and face intense development pressure.