

# auri research brief

No. 72

---

Sim, Kyungmi  
Research Fellow

## Introduction and Status of the City Architect System in Architecture and Urban Planning in South Korea

### Background and establishment of the city architect system

In 2007, the city architect system in architecture and urban planning(hereafter, city architect system) has been established for the architects and urban designers to participate in design competitions and urban development projects through the enactment of the ‘Framework Act on Building,’ along with their qualification criteria, roles and responsibilities, and remuneration prescribed in its enforcement decree (Article 21, Enforcement Decree of the Framework Act on Building).

The city architect system is a ‘cooperative management system for design’ in which external experts support the administration (of local governments) for the effective operation and management of various public projects. Even though various divisions in a local government are related in public projects, it is not always easy for them to carry out those projects while linking, coordinating, and cooperating with each other. In addition, although the initial planning stage of such a project is very important, the local governments are not aware of the importance, not to mention of the lack of the expertise in the planning itself. As a result, similar projects may be double-planned, or an

excessive design can be applied that does not meet the local condition, or frequent changes on the design may happen in the design and construction stages. All of these result in a waste of budget and poor design quality for public projects.

The city architect system has been introduced to solve above structural problems of public projects and their administration. In other words, the architects and urban designers participate in public projects of the local governments to strengthen the planning stage, to improve the process in ordering, to secure quality in the design and construction stages, and to adapt the operating system to the local conditions so that various divisions in the local government can cooperate.

**Purpose of this study**

This study aims to derive emerging problems and improvements on the city architect system for local governments. To this end, the concept and terms related to the city architect system were reviewed to derive their related issues. Also, the operation status of local governments was reviewed to find the characteristics and implications.

**Classification of the city architects**

‘The civilian expert’ is a legal term that the ‘Framework Act on Building’ refers to collectively, however, the term referring to civilian experts in related manuals and municipal ordinances varies, for example, in regional master planner, project master planner, field expert, and master architect and public architect.

[Table 1] Classification and definition of the city architects in South Korea

Term	Definition
Civilian expert	An expert in architecture or its related fields appointed by the head of a public institution through designation of a master architect or a master planner.
Master architect and Master planner	A city architect who performs duties related to improving the competitiveness of architecture and urban design, such as supervision on the spatial policies and the strategies for the administrative districts and the project zones, or general administration and coordination of the planning, design, and implementation of major projects.
Public architect	A civilian expert who manages individual construction projects to maintain consistency of the plan throughout the entire process from planning to design, construction, maintenance, and management.

Source: Guidelines for operating the city architect system in accordance with the ‘Framework Act on Building’ and the ‘Scope of duties for architectural design of the public sector.’ (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, July 2019.)

In July 2019, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport organized the related terms into ‘Master Architect and Master Planner’ and ‘Public Architect’ through the ‘Guidelines for operating the city architect system.’

### Status of the city architect system

Since the establishment of the city architect system in 2007, Yeongju-City (2009) and Seoul Metropolitan City (2012) led in introducing the system and have since operated the system. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport has also promoted the system since 2013. As the achievements of Yeongju and Seoul regarding the city architect system have been known, more local governments have introduced the city architect system. Five local governments started operating the city architect system in 2018, and the number of the local governments operating the system increased by 24 and 16 in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

[Table2] Civilian experts appointed by local governments in Korea (June 30, 2021)

Category	Total number of local governments <sup>1)</sup>	Number of local governments operating the city architect system	Master architects	Public architects	Total
Provinces and Metropolitan Areas	17	<b>6</b> (about 35%)	6	623	629
City/Country/District	226	<b>47</b> (about 21%)	33	393	426
Total	-	<b>53</b>	39	1,016	1,055

As of June 30, 2021, a total of 53 local governments are operating the city architect system with about 1,055 architects and urban designers working under this system. Of these, 23 local governments have both master architects and public architects, 10 local governments have only master architects, and 20 local governments have only public architects.

1) Administrative Districts and Population of Local Governments, p.4, (Ministry of Public Administration and Security, 2019) References

## **Status of the city architect system in operation and implications**

### ***Procedure for appointing the city architect***

In South Korea (hereafter, Korea), a master architect is usually appointed by the head of a local government rather than by competition, while public architects are usually commissioned through competition and examination by an examining committee. Requirements for qualification are added based on municipal ordinances in addition to laws and regulations. There is also a problem that the procedure to appoint a master architect is not objective, while opinions supporting the procedure as a master architect acts as a policy partner to the head of a local government.

### ***Status of the master architects***

The status of a master architect is recommended to be that of the vice-head of a local government, which is not specified in the ordinance of any local government. The term of office is two years, with the possibility of being reappointed one or two times. Most of the positions are on a part-time basis, working 1-2 times a week. Suwon-City is the only city that has a full-time position for the master architect. The status of a master architect needs to be clearly defined for an efficient performance of duties. There has been an opinion that the two-year term is short considering the scope of their duties to reorganize the master plan and to maintain consistency in the plan.

### ***Operation of dedicated personnel or division***

The duties assigned to the division in charge of the city architect system has been increasing. There has been a need to expand personnel or to create a new division dedicated to the system, which cannot be realized easily. Seoul is the only local government that operates a dedicated division to support the city architects, while only a few among the local governments have one or two dedicated personnel. On the other hand, personnel in charge of support find difficulties in supporting the architects and urban designers due to frequent change of personnel in charge. For this reason, the need of a dedicated (term-base) professional has become obvious. In the case of Chungcheongnam-do(province) and Suwon-City, these duties are assigned to professionals. They have a higher understanding of the system than personnel in other regions, which results in good cooperation with related divisions and professional operation of the system.

### ***Roles and responsibilities of the city architect***

Responsibilities of master architects include supervision on major public projects, improvement of order placement, establishment of an operating system for public architects, and education for public architects and public officials. They also participate in ensuring consistency between master plans when the plans are in progress during their term of office. In small and medium-size cities, the roles are more focused on discovery of new projects based on open competition, advising on planning, and integration between projects. The primary role of public architects is to provide advice for public projects requested by individual divisions in a local government. Recently, public architects also participate in architectural planning or consulting. In some regions, public architects are involved in the design. Especially, the city architects and urban designers were satisfied with their roles when they could share their activities with a master architect and other public architects on a regular basis and when they participate in the planning stage of policy-driven projects on specific areas. In some areas, on the other hand, public architects had difficulties in carrying out their task due to a lack of understanding of architectural planning.

Depending on the size and the hierarchy of the local governments that operate the city architect system, the scope in operating the system varies much. The roles and responsibilities of a master architect should be different according to the size of city. One example is the wide-area units of local government such as Dos(provinces) and Metropolitan Cities. Another example is cities with a population of more than 1 million such as Suwon-City, Yongin-City, and Seongnam-City. Cities with a population of less than fifty thousand like Yeongju-City, Uiseong-Country and Buyeo-Country are yet another example. Therefore, it is necessary to provide guidelines for these different situations at the national level.

### **Conclusions**

The status and trends of the city architect system operated by the local governments in Korea were reviewed. The city architect system operated for the architecture and urban planning in Korea is in an early stage, in which the first master architects and public architects are in their terms. In order for the city architect system to be operated as intended, the following needs to be improved. First, it is essential for the officials in the local governments and local architects to understand the system so that the master architects and public architects can play their roles and responsibilities smoothly. Above all, as the role of the heads of the local governments is important, it is also important for master architects and public architects to understand how the system works. To this end, it is necessary to provide relevant education for public officials, public architects and local architects, the heads of the local governments and

the local council members at the initial stage of the system introduction. At the national level, it is necessary to continuously provide related education and information. Second, it is most urgent to define the status of the master architects for improving their working environments and increasing the efficiency. Since their terms at office and remuneration are not irrelevant to their status, they need to be revised. Third, measures should be prepared so that the personnel in charge of the city architect system can focus on their tasks without discontinuity. Given the rotational position system of public officials in Korea, it is important to hire termed public officials responsible for the city architect system and to establish a dedicated division. Fourth, it is necessary to seek a cooperative operating system so that public architects can play various roles together with the master architects depending on the local conditions, rather than simply limiting them to the advisory role of individual projects. To this end, it is necessary to secure a budget for planning that the master architect can use, and to prepare the remuneration standards for public architects for each type of their activities. Fifth, it is necessary to revise and supplement the existing 'Guidelines for operating the city architect system' so as to improve understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the master architects and the public architects. In this guideline, it is recommended to define the roles and responsibilities of the master architect by the city size, and to add contents related to the responsibilities directly covered by the public architects and the relationships between the city architects and the related organizations such as the public building deliberation committee.

**Keywords :** City architect, Master Architects, Master Planner, Public Architects, Design Management System, Public Architecture

