

Hwangchon Heritage Circle: A Virtuous Cycle of Heritage and Everyday Life

Executive Summary

Gyeongju is a World Heritage city whose identity has long been shaped by the legacy of the ancient Silla Kingdom. Yet Hwangchon, a historic neighborhood adjacent to the UNESCO-listed Gyeongju Historic Areas, had suffered long-term decline caused by aging housing, population loss, weak local commerce, poor walkability, and strict preservation regulations that limited renewal. While heritage remained protected, the quality of everyday life in the historic center continued to deteriorate.

In response, Gyeongju City launched the **Hwangchon Village Urban Regeneration Project (2021–2024)** to restore habitability by treating the historic center not just as a preserved enclave, but as a living urban neighborhood. Rather than isolated improvements, the city introduced the “*Hwangchon Heritage Circle*”, an integrated regeneration model linking housing, mobility, public space, economy, governance, and community life into one mutually reinforcing system.

The project requalified the habitat through housing renovation, upgraded living infrastructure, and new community facilities. It transformed mobility by redesigning narrow alleys into safer pedestrian-oriented streets through CPTED principles and landscaping. It regenerated the urban environment by converting underused spaces into active places for gathering, culture, and neighborhood exchange, significantly improving safety, accessibility, and residential attractiveness.

At the same time, the project mobilized heritage as an active economic resource. Through the Village Hotel (Alley Hotel) model, vacant homes and underused buildings were adaptively reused as accommodations, cafés, and neighborhood businesses. This created a stay-oriented local economy in which tourism revenues benefited residents directly and supported surrounding commercial streets.

A defining strength of the project was participatory governance. Residents were positioned not as passive beneficiaries, but as leading actors through residents’ councils and the Happy Hwangchon Cooperative. They participated in planning, management, and operation, while locally generated revenues were reinvested into community facilities and resident programs, creating a lasting virtuous cycle.

The project also demonstrates clear and verifiable outcomes. Housing conditions improved, walkability satisfaction increased, local businesses were revitalized, community participation expanded, and 98.7% of residents expressed willingness to continue living in the area. Hwangchon has been transformed from a declining historic district into a vibrant living heritage neighborhood.

As an integrated, people-centered, and transferable model, Hwangchon shows how heritage cities can regenerate historic centers, create lasting urban dynamics, and place inhabitants at the heart of urban transformation.