MASS STUDIES SEOUL COMMUNE 2026
RETHINKING "TOWERS IN THE PARK"

Seoul Commune 2026 investigates the viability of an alternative and sustainable community structure in the overpopulated metropolises of the near future. The imagined community is integrated within the ever-accelerating developments of the digital environment and ongoing rapid social change. Seoul Commune 2026 presents a concrete architectural and urban proposal that entirely reconfigures and consequently develops the existing "towers in the park" form. Seoul Commune 2026 unites towers and the park in a balanced way. It forms a complex network of private, semi-public, and public spaces.

Korean society continues to change rapidly in both technological and socio-cultural terms. An aging population, a declining birth rate, and rising divorce rate are changing the fabric of social relations. This increasingly "graying" and hyper-individualized society, mainly composed of one or two-person households, inevitably demands new forms of architecture and spatial structures. In addition, digital technologies such as the Internet and mobile communications have been adopted and adapted to Korean cultural norms very actively and extremely quickly. As a result, various online and offline communities have sprung up anarchically, without any support from architecture or urban space.

"Towers in the park," a relatively new Asian urban spatial structure, is swiftly gaining in popularity and replacing the slab apartment buildings reminiscent of the "Hilbersheimer block" that dominated the Korean urban landscape over the past 40 years. The towers in the park typology has been broadly applied in large cities across Asia, including Seoul, considered representative of superior quality open space while satisfying quantitative demands in these overpopulated areas. It consists of two very contrasting elements: the park represents a public space, while the rising towers are an accumulation of individual dwelling units and demarcated private space. Problematic in the engagement of these two static and seemingly opposing aspects is the lack of an intermediary space or structure that fosters the generation of spontaneous social interaction.

Seoul Commune 2026 solves this problem by connecting and balancing the two elements (towers and park). The creation of interjunctions between interior/exterior and public/ private space on a variety of scales accommodates various residential activities and facilitates spontaneous social interactions. This creates a spatial condition in which the towers become the park and the park becomes the towers, with the total emerging as a seamless whole.

Seoul Commune 2026 is located in Apgujongdong, a central area in the southern part of Seoul. It is located in a large-scale urban redevelopment zone that is possibly one of the most densely populated places on Earth. Covering 393,400 square meters of land and bound by the Han River on the northern side, 15 towers of varying height—from 16 to 53 floors—function like one giant house in this park-like setting. The concept is based on a mixture of purely private rooms, so called "cells", and communally used spaces. Ubiquitous digital technologies in the Seoul Commune enable the effective utilization and management of these complex spaces. These technologies are utilized to protect and maximize privacy in private dwelling units/cells, while also allowing individuals to monitor various public spaces in real-time and to select and reserve common public spaces depending on their preferred social contact or activity. This monitoring and decision-making is realized through the digital network system that also enables the dwellers to effectively communicate with various communities and thus helps to develop the diverse communal space. The members of this commune range from permanent residents to nomadic short-term lodgers.

Seoul Commune 2026 suggests a minimized private space consisting of a bedroom and a bathroom in several spatial variations. There are six variations of cells in size on the circular plan of a tower, ranging from 28 to 33 meters in diameter. Spaces where social interactions take place, such as living and dinning rooms, are situated outside the private units. The living cells operate as personalized hotel rooms and each basic residential unit satisfies private spatial needs, while the hotel's public space is shared and utilized by all, guests and non-guests alike. The private spaces in all towers are composed of individually unique beehive-like cells. A total number of 2,590 cells are spread throughout the 15 towers. These basic units can be horizontally and vertically connected and multiplied. A single household can consist of a few independent cells with additional functions. The unique honeycomb structure also improves natural light conditions.

The top floors of the towers have three distinctive spatial structures: the dome, the inverted dome, and the inverted cone, all serving as a sky lounge for the commune and include shared living and dining facilities. The dome type can be as large as 63 meters in diameter and 31.5 meters high, thus creating a huge atrium. The inverted dome and inverted cone type

OVERALL VIEW OF SEOUL COMMUNE 2026: RETHINKING "TOWERS IN THE PARK," CONCEIVED FOR A SURFACE AREA OF 393, 400 SQUARE METERS IN APGUJONGDONG, A CENTRAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF SEOUL

SEOUL COMMUNE 2026 UNITES TOWERS AND THE PARK IN A BALANCED FASHION. THE GREENING OF THE FAÇADES IS ONE THING THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THIS, MADE POSSIBLE BY THE USE OF GEOTEXTILES.

THE WEBBED STRUCTURE OF THE FAÇADE INSURES GOOD LIGHTING AND ABOLISHES THE SEPARATION BETWEEN FLOORS.

allow for large public spaces on the roof to be used as a roof garden or as an outdoor arena.

Between the top and the base of the tower, the trunk is composed of cells and open space areas for public activities. These areas consist of at least 12 floors and have six variations in the size of plan and section. With diameters ranging from 64 meters to 34 meters, these spaces serve as offices, medical facilities, public services, welfare facilities, and other supporting commercial spaces.

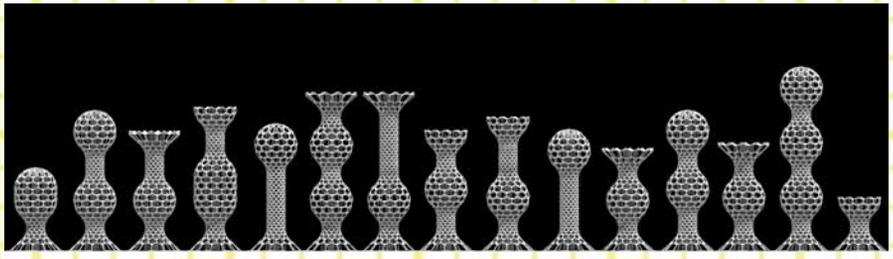
A circulating canal along the edge of the park turns the whole site into an island, and utilizing the adjacent Han River as cooling water for each towers' independent power plant. A 30,175-square-meter pond at the center of the site is designed for leisure activities.

The base of the 15 towers, where the park merges with the towers, creates the widest spaces of the site. Above, the first floor is 75 meters wide and extends up to the height of the first five stories. The ground floor space is reserved for pedestrians. Three walkways converge there and circulate around each tower's elevator core. Two out of three pedestrian walkways expand vertically and create the vertical connective tissue for the double helix stairs/terrace, thus expanding the park vertically. All vehicular circulation moves below the ground and is connected to underground parking spaces at each of the towers. A monorail loop on the second floor offers public transportation and people movers connect the neighboring towers.

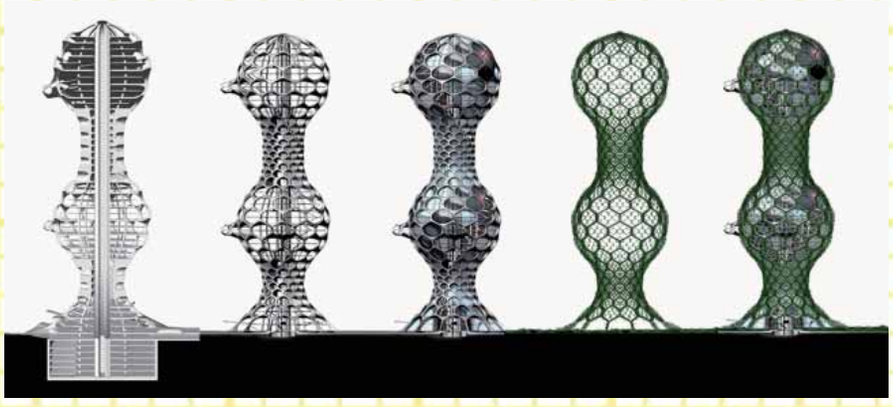
The bases of all 15 towers offer programs for sports and leisure, educational facilities, a convention hall, conference spaces, cultural facilities, and supporting commercial facilities.

Each tower is composed of a circular plan, ranging in diameter from 28 to 75 meters and has 15 gradual variations in size. In proportion to its varied plan, the floor heights also change from 4 to 12.6 meters. The circular plan is divided radially into 12 structural units. Six elevators and six shaft spaces are located at the center of each floor, creating the primary vertical circulation.

Two emergency stairs occupy two independent structural units among the 12 structural units in the circular plan. They are located at the periphery of the plan as exterior stairs, winding around the building, forming a double helix structure. More than merely an emergency exit, they also serve as a resting area and a garden in the multi-story residential buildings, thereby becoming the vertical connective tissue extending the horizontal plane of the parks space.

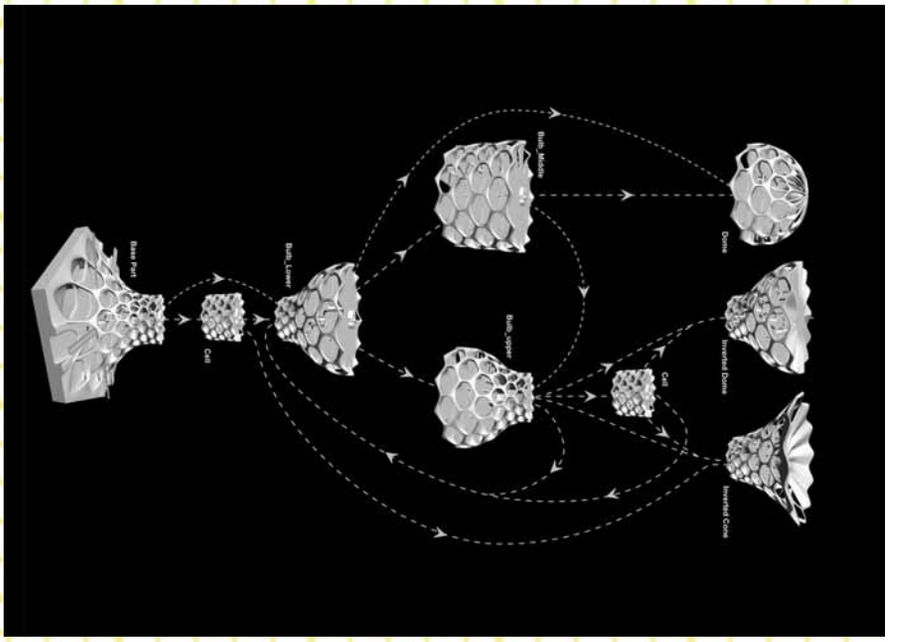


VARIATIONS OF TOWERS OF SEOUL COMMUNE 2026

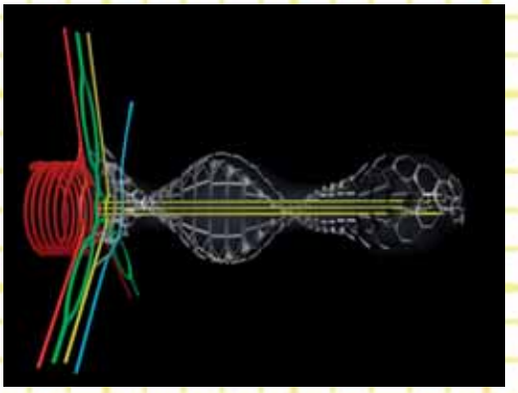


BUILDING STRUCTURE AND ACCESS TO TOWERS

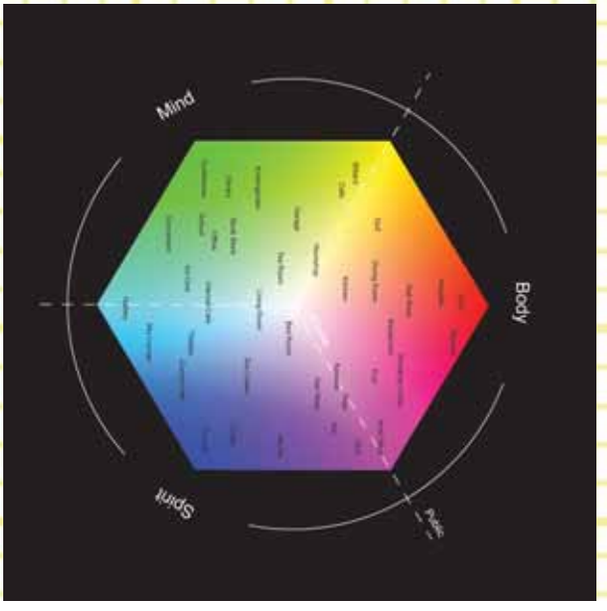
COMBINATIONS OF BUILDING COMPONENTS



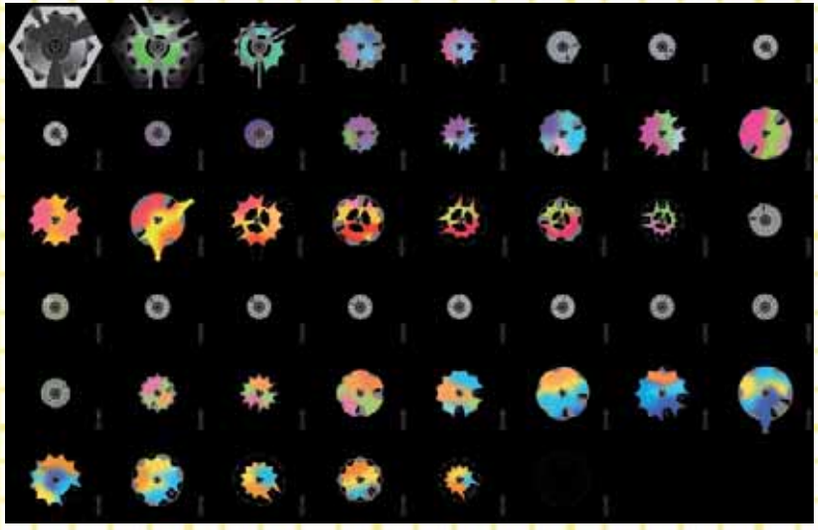
CIRCULATION WITHIN TOWERS



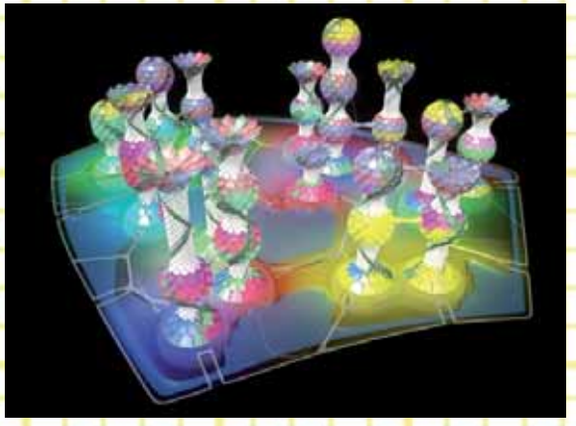
FROM COMPLETE PRIVACY TO PUBLIC AREAS, SEOUL COMMUNE 2026 OFFERS NUMEROUS POSSIBILITIES OF USE AND THE APPROPRIATE SPACES, AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE DIAGRAM.



The exterior skin of the towers consists of hexagonal lattice structures that derive from the unique spatial structure and create the unique appearance of the towers. The hexagonal openings are filled with various types of glass. Photovoltaic glass panels are placed in sunny areas for energy efficiency. Some exterior glass windows are recessed to create shaded balconies. The outer surface covering the lattice structure is made of a geotextile that creates an environment where vines can grow during the summer months to shade the openings. These integrated green structures have an internal watering system and a fog machine with automatic temperature and humidity sensors to optimize the environmental conditions of the plants. The water distribution system also carries up to 30 percent of the cooling load during the summer and cleans the glass windows of the building in the heavily polluted city of Seoul.



LAYOUTS OF THE 46 FLOORS OF A TOWER OF THE SEOUL COMMUNE 2026



THE VARIOUS COLORS OF THE TOWERS EMBLEMATIZE THE VARIOUS USES OF THE SEGMENTS. BRIGHT SEGMENTS ARE RESERVED FOR PRIVATE USE, WHILE THE DARKER SECTIONS ARE THE PUBLIC AREAS.

Mass Studies
Seoul Commune 2026: Rethinking "Towers in the Park"

Team
Mass Studies: Minsuk Cho (principal), Kisu Park (partner) and Joungwon Lee (associate), Jinyoung Ha (associate), Kiwoong Ko, Jongseo Kim, Soonpyo Lee, Bumhyun Chun, Daewoong Kim, Jieun Lee, Joonhee Lee
Structural Engineer: Byoungsoon Park
Mechanical Engineer: Sangrak Jang

Mass Studies was founded in Seoul, Korea in 2003. The group seeks to investigate architecture in the market-oriented context of mass production and intensely over-populated urban conditions. Mass Studies explores a broad range of building materials, spatial matrices, and building typologies in order to develop a vision that specifically meets the needs of each project. The recent completion of a six-storey mixed-use building with 34 units (11,200 square meters) and the current construction of a mixed-use, 27-storey building with 172 units (54,500 square meters) mark the realization of this new architectural vision.

Minsuk Cho (principal) was born in Seoul in 1966. After studying architecture at Yonsei University (Seoul, Korea), he received a master's of architecture from Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture. He has had professional experience in various locations in America, Europe, and Asia prior to opening his own practice. In 1998, he established Cho Slade Architecture with business partner James Slade in New York City. Their work has been honored with numerous awards, including two Progressive Architecture Awards (Citations) and the Architectural League of New York's Young Architects Award in 2000. He returned to Seoul in 2003 and established Mass Studies.
Kisu Park (partner) was born in Iksan in 1969. After studying architecture at Chonnam University in Gwangju, Korea, he worked in a number of Korean firms prior to joining Mass Studies in 2003.

www.massstudies.com