

Creative Communities at the Seoul Biennale

Case Study 1: The Walking Drawing

Practical tips for anyone who commissions or runs programmes which get people involved in the design of buildings and cities



서울
THE 5TH
SEOUL BIENNALE
OF ARCHITECTURE
AND URBANISM
2025

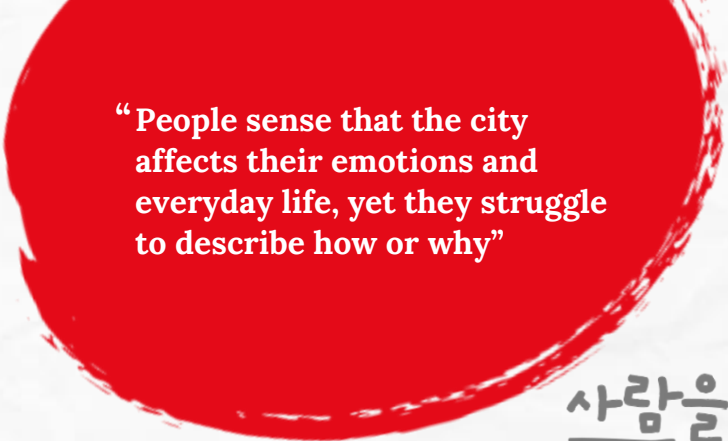
1. What's the project about?

Creative Communities

This project formed part of a 'Creative Communities programme' which ran during the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism 2025. It brought the voice of citizens directly into the Biennale and enabled communities to explore how the buildings in Seoul make them feel and how they could be made more joyful and engaging.

The aim was to generate original creative content and turn the Biennale into a city-wide conversation that belonged to everyone, not just the professionals. It began with an open call that generated 83 applications, submitted by 148 creators and 1,214 community members. Of these, 10 were selected and 9 projects delivered, directly involving over 1000 people over the next 7 months.

Each of the projects delivered 2D artwork (8.25m × 4.8m) that was showcased on the Humanise Wall in a park in the centre of Seoul and contributed to an exhibition beside the Hall of Urbanism and Architecture, as well as being presented at a global conference in Seoul City Hall.



“People sense that the city affects their emotions and everyday life, yet they struggle to describe how or why”

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Recognising the problem

In many cities, people experience urban space intensely but rarely articulate what they feel. Familiar environments fade into the background for long-term residents, while newcomers and visitors, overwhelmed by unfamiliar information, tend to absorb the city as fragmented images rather than as a space where people live.

For almost everyone, a gap emerges: people sense that the city affects their emotions and everyday life, yet they struggle to describe how or why, or even to clearly identify what they are feeling. This gap between feeling and expression makes the urban experience difficult to capture within existing design and policy processes.

The Walking Drawing began as an experiment to work within this gap, exploring how everyday sensory experience might be made visible, shareable, and usable as a starting point for discussion about how a city can evolve.

The project did not begin with surveys or predefined questions but by raising a more basic issue: how can people become more aware of how the city makes them feel in the first place?

Surfacing our emotions

Walking is the slowest and most direct way to encounter a city. Drawing is the act of stopping during that walk and translating your sensations into a personal language. By combining these two simple actions, *The Walking Drawing* project created the conditions in which sensory awareness could surface before being formalised into specific opinions or explanations.

Rather than asking participants what they thought about the city, the sessions were designed to help people notice how specific places felt as they moved through them.

This did not take place in isolation. Walking, stopping, and drawing took place collectively, allowing individual impressions to be shared, compared, and discussed in real time. As the drawings accumulated, sensory experiences that would normally remain private or fleeting were externalised in a visible, physical format.

Participants were encouraged to think about how enclosed or open a place felt, how strongly surrounding buildings asserted their presence, and which moments instinctively stood out as distinctive or memorable. These observations were not framed as evaluations, but as immediate responses to specific places.

By combining shared experience with collective recording, the sessions generated material that captures the kind of urban experience that is often flattened or lost in surveys – hesitation, comfort, discomfort, attraction, and subtle emotional shifts tied to particular spatial conditions. In this way, *The Walking Drawing* made it possible to communicate not only what people say about the city, but how urban experience is collectively felt, discussed, and remembered.

Why this matters

The Walking Drawing demonstrates that how citizens feel about a city can be meaningfully collected and shared.

For community organisations, it shows how everyday actions – walking, stopping, drawing, talking – can be structured into programmes that generate insight without requiring large budgets or complex infrastructure.

For city authorities, it provides a template for commissioning projects that will reveal citizens' sensory understanding of a place, and insights about emotion and experience that should influence the development of urban policy and civic programmes from the start.



2. Who took part?

Structure

Rather than relying on large numbers of people or a complex organisational setup, *The Walking Drawing* operated through five clearly defined roles, and connected with existing communities and professional groups. This made it possible for the project to be implemented relatively quickly and stably, without the need for large-scale promotion or extensive preliminary training. It demonstrates what a *minimum operational unit* for a citizen-participation programme can look like, regardless of the scale of the city or institution.

① Planning and framing

The first role coordinated the project end to end. It structured the lens through which the city was observed, and required someone with experience in architectural practice, education, and workshop delivery. It also provided a point of contact for city authorities to suggest priority areas, emerging issues, or sites undergoing transition, without pre-determining the outcomes. This allowed institutional knowledge to support, rather than constrain, what citizens observed and discussed.

② Route curation

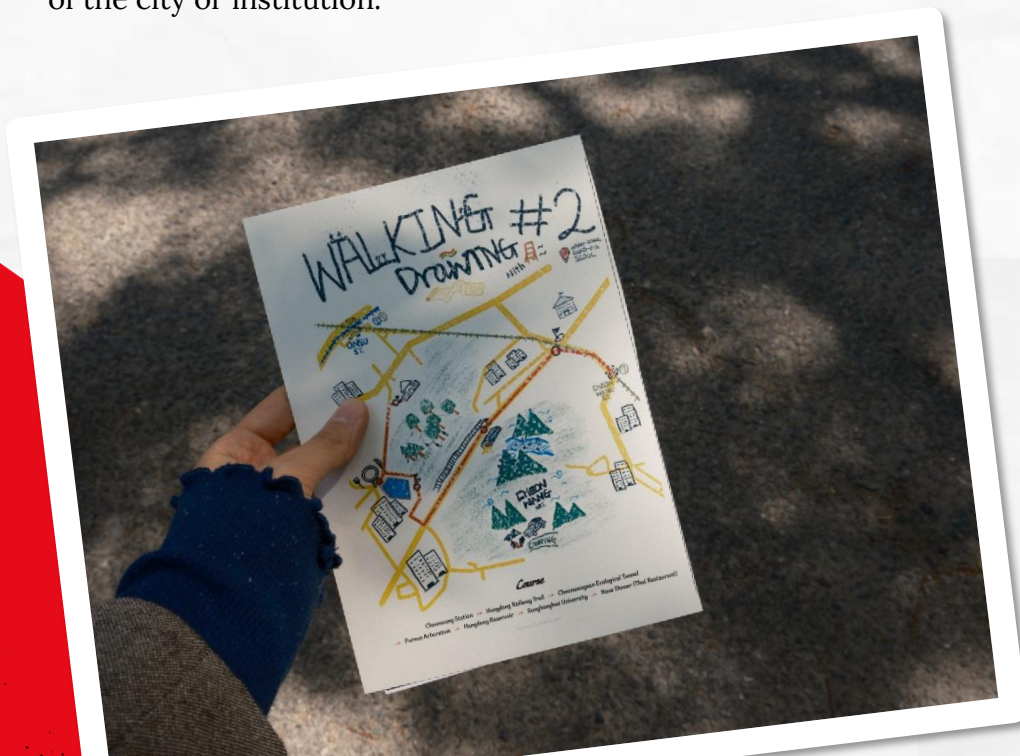
The second role designed the walking routes and acted as a guide, explaining the context and characteristics of each place. It provided participants with cues that supported their own reading of each urban space. In future, it could also be used to share information from city authorities – such as areas of particular relevance to current policy – and shape the routes around specific questions rather than neutral exploration.

③ Visual documentation

The third role documented the project, capturing moments created through the walking and drawing process. As the work progressed, the importance of documentation became increasingly clear.

④ Community Facilitation

The fourth role recruited participants from diverse backgrounds and managed the group's atmosphere and rhythm. Conversations among participants were actively facilitated.



⑤ Map production and archiving

The fifth role produced maps for the route of each session that could function both as information for participants and tools for communicating the programme to other people.

Composition

Participants were drawn from two existing groups: an international community that already spent time walking together around Seoul, and a university-based architecture photography group who were used to recording urban scenes through drawing and photography.

There were six walking sessions, each involving 15-20 participants. They were people of different nationalities, ages, and professions, participating side by side. Some joined all six sessions, while others participated only once.

Together, they combined the curiosity of a community accustomed to walking and experiencing the city, the expressive capacity of a creative group skilled in visual recording, and the planning and coordination of the organising team.

This naturally produced a cycle of walking – observing – drawing – sharing. And through this structure, participants expanded the way they perceived the city. The boundaries between visitor, resident, and expert became less rigid, revealing more clearly the conditions under which people in different positions can collectively become active agents in interpreting and shaping how a place makes people feel.

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3. How did it work?

The Walking Drawing ran initially for six weeks in Seoul during April-May 2025. There were six walking-drawing sessions, and the project was designed with a repeatable structure that could be easily applied in different cities. It has five stages:

① Goal-setting and role-setting → ② Site selection and route design → ③ Developing participation tools → ④ Operation and facilitation → ⑤ Recording, reviewing, and expanding.

Goal-setting and role-setting

At the start, the team focused on clearly defining the goals of each session, the mode of participation, and their roles. The central objective was set as “awakening the senses of the city.” The team prepared open-ended questions for each session, such as “At which points do your senses stop or react?” and “Which scenes make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?” They also looked at schedules, safety guidelines, and participant information.

Site selection and route design

The operating team surveyed locations across Seoul with different urban conditions, including downtown areas, residential neighbourhoods, parks, waterfronts, and places in transition. Routes were then composed so that different spatial conditions would appear sequentially within a single walk.

Each route was designed to be walkable within approximately four hours. Maps were produced for each session and functioned not only as wayfinding tools but also as records and souvenirs.



Developing participation tools

Recognising that walking alone might not be enough to trigger deeper engagement, the team also developed tools that would enable citizens to directly record and express what they saw and felt. The most important of these was a mobile drawing device, called the *Seoul Jige*. This functions as a moving easel, carried by participants on their back. It allows people to draw on a vertical

scroll that rolls upward automatically and can be used continuously throughout the session.

Pens, maps, and question cards were carried together with the easel, so that recording could take place immediately whenever the group stopped. The question cards prompted participants to translate sensory impressions into words, using prompts such as “What is the first sound you notice on this street?” or “If this building had a facial expression, how would you describe it in one word?”



At the beginning of each session, pairing cards were handed out so that participants with the same pattern could form pairs, helping people who had never met before to start conversations and observe the city together.

On-site facilitation

On site, the sessions followed a consistent rhythm. After a short orientation, each session was structured around a repeated cycle of 30 minutes walking / 10 minutes stopping.

During the 30-minute walking phase, participants accumulated sensory impressions through walking, photography, and note-taking. During the 10-minute stop, the group paused to draw on the easel and have question-card conversations.

This rhythm strikes a balance between immersion and reflection. And at the end of each session, participants compared where their senses had reacted most strongly and put into words the differences in how they each perceived the city.

Archiving and feedback loop

After each session, participants gathered at a nearby place for some food. They laid out the drawings accumulated on the mobile easel and their own photos, and discussed what they had seen and felt, which parts of the route were difficult, and what should be adjusted for the next session.

This feedback acted as a learning loop and informed adjustments to the route and questions for each subsequent session. After each session, all the drawings were scanned and compiled into a digital archive, while photographs and video were sorted by date, location, and theme.

Exhibition and workshops

The drawings, photographs, and conversations were all shared again at a public exhibition. The materials were composed into a two-dimensional image that visualised how citizens' sensory experiences were translated into visual expression. The mobile recording device itself was installed in the exhibition space, allowing visitors to see exactly how the project worked.

During the Biennale itself, the same structure was used for a public workshop. This process confirmed that the methodology could accommodate people of different ages and backgrounds, and demonstrated its potential for scalability and application in other contexts.



4. What were the outcomes?

Sensory-based urban experience data

The Walking Drawing became a rare case in which citizens' sensory experiences of the city were collected in a structured way. Across six sessions, drawings, photos, notes, and recorded conversations were accumulated as qualitative material that made it possible to identify sensory hotspots - moments and locations where participants' attention and emotional responses became particularly focused or heightened.

Rather than breaking sensory experience into predefined categories, the collected material preserves participants' immediate reactions to places they encounter along the walking routes. Drawings, notes, and recorded conversations highlight moments where participants paused, reacted, or engaged in discussion, anchoring sensory experience to specific locations in the city.

As a result, the project produced a form of experiential data that can inform early-stage urban planning and policy discussions, offering insight into where people pause, how certain places are experienced as comfortable or uncomfortable, and how urban space is perceived through everyday movement.



“In the end, this project was more about people than about the city.”

Expanding how we perceive the city

In post-session interviews, participants commonly mentioned changes such as:

- “I started to look again at places I usually passed without thinking.”
- “It was my first time describing the city’s ‘expression’ in words.”
- “Seeing other people’s observations and drawings gave me new perspectives.”

Some participants were so engaged that they joined all six sessions. They described how not only their visual perception but also sounds, smells, wind, and tactile sensations around them became increasingly vivid. This shows that combining walking, drawing, and conversation can shift the city from a space that is simply “seen” to an environment that is understood sensorially.

Several participants also said, “In the end, this project was more about people than about the city.” The act of walking together, looking at the same scenes, talking, and sharing each other’s observations enriched the urban experience. This revealed that,

beyond architecture, human interaction is a key component of how we all perceive the city.

These changes suggest that *The Walking Drawing* functioned not only as a creative activity but as a programme that brings about real shifts in how citizens feel and interpret their city.

Public participation

The mobile drawing device (the easel) acted like a magnet for passers-by. People often approached the team to talk or draw and briefly joined the sessions. This showed that the programme operated not as a closed workshop but as an open platform. The ease with which people engaged suggested that recording was no longer perceived as an expert activity but as something accessible to everyone in our everyday movement around a neighbourhood.

During the Biennale, participation by children and families was particularly noticeable in the workshops. This confirmed that the method can be applied across ages and backgrounds, and that sensory-based participation can emerge without formal recruitment or instruction.

Importantly, these moments were not planned outcomes of the sessions but emerged precisely because participation was not demanded or staged, allowing engagement to occur on people's own terms.

Cross-community interaction

The project was designed so that different types of people could interact within a single structure. It was a rare case of professionals, students, general participants, and visitors collectively interpreting the city together.

It combined the questions and responses of participants accustomed to experiencing the city together with the visual interpretations of a group skilled in recording and expressing space, to form a continuous flow in which observation and expression were linked, not separate.

Through this process, interpretation shifts from something held by individuals to something produced collectively, as different viewpoints intersect and reshape how places are understood.

Public resources

Materials generated through the walking sessions were reorganised and shared through exhibition and archiving. Drawings, photographs, and recorded conversations were recomposed into 2D image works and installations, while the mobile recording device (the easel itself) was exhibited so that visitors could easily understand how the project worked.

These outputs are significant because they were transformed into public resources. In particular, the roll drawings and photographic records serve as visual references showing how citizens' sensory experiences are translated into architectural expression, and can be used as supporting material in future discussions about design and urban policy.

Feasibility and scalability

Despite operating with relatively limited budget and personnel, *The Walking Drawing* generated high levels of participation, rich records, and clear shifts in participants' perception of the city. This demonstrates that the project is not limited to a specific city or context, but could be reproduced as a lightweight citizen-participation model applicable in other urban settings.

5. How much did it cost?

The project was one of nine funded through the Creative Communities programme of the Seoul Biennale. Each project received KRW 20,000,000 (USD 13,000) of public funding.

Rather than being consumed by a single event or production outcome, the budget was distributed across preparation, on-site facilitation, documentation, and follow-up processes. This reflects an understanding of public funding not as short-term event support but as an investment in the conditions that allow citizen participation, dialogue, and learning to unfold over time.

In practice, this budget structure made it possible to sustain multiple sessions, support on-site facilitation, and produce records that extended beyond the moment of participation. Seen in this light, the scale and structure of support provided through the Creative Communities programme functioned as a policy choice that prioritised process, continuity, and public value over one-off outputs.

As a result, the project simultaneously produced:

- 1) a repeatable structure for citizen participation
- 2) sensory-based urban experience data, and
- 3) outcomes that could be extended through exhibition and archiving.

This demonstrates that a lightweight participation model, focused on people and process rather than large-scale facilities or one-off events, can function very effectively within the public sector.



6. What did we learn?

The Walking Drawing project shows how to understand and expand the way citizens' experience and interpret a city. It offers six lessons:

1. **Citizen participation can come from a simple, well-designed experience, not from large or complex mechanisms.**

Tools like the *Seoul Jige* (the easel), question cards, and curated routes were modest in themselves but how they were combined and used shaped the quality of participation. These small-scale devices lowered the threshold for participation and encouraged citizens to observe and express themselves voluntarily. This suggests that even without large budgets or complex infrastructure, urban policy could be based on the feelings and emotions of citizens.

2. **Walking and observation can function as a practical method for collecting sensory urban data.**

By going on a well-curated walk, participants gradually became able to articulate where they felt discomfort, attraction, or interest. These responses accumulated as qualitative data showing what kinds of emotional and sensory reactions particular places trigger. This can be used at an earlier stage than quantitative surveys or

post-hoc feedback, and could help build a credible dataset revealing people's urban experience.

3. **When citizens with different backgrounds walk together, we start to understand how a place is really perceived.**

Experts, students, long-term residents, and foreigners showed very different reactions to the same places. These differences are a crucial form of diversity data. *The Walking Drawing* demonstrates that participation structures allowing multiple viewpoints to intersect can broaden how a place is perceived, rather than limiting interpretation to a single group's perspective.



4. **Public participation should be designed around continuity and iteration, not one-off events.**

Adjusting stopping points, pacing, and question cards in response to participant feedback after each session played a key role in gradually improving the programme. Repetition and small feedback loops were key to improving programme quality. This suggests that citizen-participation policies should be designed around continuity and iteration, rather than one-off public hearings or isolated events.

5. **Systematic archiving becomes a foundation for future policy and experimentation.**

The Walking Drawing shows that records generated through participation are not just outputs: the materials can be accumulated as data for the next experiment or policy development. Scanned drawings, notes on sensory reactions, photographs, and place-based pattern analysis can all be reinterpreted as data and used to inform policy debate and public programming.

6. **The moment when citizens become active agents of the city begins with small, everyday actions.**

Through walking, stopping, recording, and talking, citizens were positioned not as passive recipients of expert explanations, but as participants interpreting and sharing space based on their own sensory observations. *The Walking Drawing* demonstrates that citizen participation does not arise only through formal systems or procedures, but can emerge naturally when the way people experience the city itself is transformed. This suggests that the goal of urban policy should

move from simply collecting more opinions to designing the conditions in which the way citizens see and understand the city can surface and be heard.



Watch a video about The Walking Drawing project [here](#).



Creative Communities was a key project of the Thematic Exhibition of the 5th Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism, hosted by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. Conceived as a participatory programme, it brought citizens and creative practitioners together to explore urbanism and architecture and to experiment with new ideas.

This case study was produced to document the development and implementation of Creative Communities, the experiences of its participants, and its key outcomes, and to share these with audiences in Korea and internationally. The research and writing were undertaken by Heatherwick Studio and Hyelim Jang, in collaboration with the participating project teams.



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