

Mullae Creation Community in South Korea

Intae Choi

Department of Public Administration
Yonsei University
Yonsei-ro, Seoul
South Korea

ABSTRACT

In South Korea, 'Cultureonomics' is utilized as a logic tool in urban regeneration plan. Lagged cities highlight their cultural capital to generate economic effects. This plan can make the lagged city have creative and cultural image. Therefore, it can be meaningful and important to exploring concrete case of the urban regeneration in South Korea. Mullae Creation Community can be the typical example of the plan. Artists in the community metamorphosed this lagged place into creative and artistic place to seek coexistence with residents and steel industry workers. In this way, Mullae creative community has been formed naturally and voluntarily without external actors like governmental organizations. However, as the governmental actors started to support this creative community by providing subsidies therefore, the question of sustainability in the community has been raised. Accordingly, this research raises the need for sustainable development of Mullae creation community.

Keywords: Mullae creation community, sustainable development, artists, Seoul municipal government.

Introduction

Once being the center of a booming steel industry in South Korea, Mullae creation community is now going through a huge change as factories leave and a wave of artists come in. The identity of the community is undergoing a dramatic transformation (Kim, H.J., 2011). In places where the steel industry once prospered now stand apartments and shopping malls. Although the surrounding environment has changed, remnants of the steel industry still exist. As artists replace the empty space left behind by the steel companies, Mullae has become a region where the steel industry and arts community coexist (Reigh, Y.B. & Choi, S.B., 2012). The artists in the community are leading the change in the region, giving a creative quality to it. Also, steel industry workers are trying to coexist with the artists in a harmonious way (Kim, H.J., 2011).

As a result, Mullae creation community came into being breathing a new life into Mullae community. Besides, the Seoul municipal government recognized the potential benefits of the community and began to provide subsidies. For instance, some of the art studios receive funding from the government. Besides, the media and academia started to

pay attention to the community. What caught their attention was that the creation community was formed naturally without any external stimuli (Kim, H.J., 2011; Kim, I.S., Kim, Y.S., Seo, J.H., Choi, W.D., 2010; Reigh, Y.B. & Choi, S.B., 2012). The purpose of this research is to analyze how Mullae creation community has adapted to its surrounding environment and evaluate its sustainability. In addition, it is supposed to find out sustainable path for Mullae creation community. This study places a bigger emphasis on how Mullae Creation Community came to form a creative organizational community naturally, interact with its external environment, and how it deals with its internal problems.

Features of Mullae Creation Community

Mullae Creation Community is located in Mullae-dong, Yeongdeungpo-gu, Seoul, Korea. The community was first developed as a site for textile factories and a residential area for their workers during the Japanese colonial era (Jung, N.R. & Kang, J.S., 2014). After Korea's independence, the structures used by the textile industry were transformed into steel mill factories (Kim, H.J., 2011; Reigh, Y.B. & Choi, S.B., 2012). In the 1960s, as part of the Korean government's economic development plan, Mullae community was designated as a steel industrial park to supply the industrial center with necessary materials. As a result, a large number of factories were established in the town to meet this objective. Such wave of factories moving into Mullae community intensified in the 1970s as the Seoul municipal government decided to move steel mill factories out of Wangsimni and into Mullae community as part of its urban development plan. As the density of factories continuously increased, a residential area formed naturally (Kim, H.J., 2011; Reigh, Y.B. & Choi, S.B., 2012).

However, starting in the 1980s, as a policy decision was made to move the industrial parks like the one in Mullae town out of Seoul to Gyeonggi province, the town began to face rapid changes. The decline of the steel industry in Mullae town was further accelerated by such incidents as the Asian Financial Crisis in the 1990s. As the era of a booming steel industry came to a close, Mullae town saw the emptied spots left behind by the factories being filled with apartments and shopping malls (Lee, S.H., Kim, H.C. & Ahn, K.H., 2013). Beginning in the early 2000s, another novel phenomenon emerged in Mullae town that would put it on a unique trajectory of development. Groups of artists began to build their work studios in the town heralding the coexistence of the declining steel industry and newly blooming arts industry (Hong, Y. S., 2012; Kim, H.J., 2011; Reigh, Y.B. & Choi, S.B., 2012).

As was explained above, Mullae creation community was formed as artists moved into factory structures no longer in use. Since 2007, when local festivals such as 'Unlimited art' and 'Mullae art festival' were launched by these artists, the community saw a further influx of artists from Daehak-ro attracted by the artistic aspect of Mullae community. Currently, about 30 artists' associations and 200 artists are in the community. Their artistic genres range from visual arts such as painting, sculpture, photography, movie and performing arts like dance and street performance. The artists

work individually, but they occasionally collaborate with each other to do group projects as well. Such examples of collaboration include such festivals as 'Public art project', 'Rooftop art program', 'Alternative area project', 'Art shower workshop' and a community magazine to interact with the residents of Mullae. And they also participate in environmental and educational activities including 'Mullae flea market', 'Fair Trade Activity', 'Mullae Climbing Club' and 'Regional Farmer Project'. They even take part in academic organizations like the 'Institute of Art and Society' to research how Mullae community has changed. Besides, municipal government of Seoul established 'Mullae Factory of Art' to support the voluntary activities of artists and residents. It is intended to make Mullae community as a cultural center of city of Seoul by officially supporting their art projects (Kim, H.J., 2011; Kim, H.J. & Park, S.H., 2012).

From these above states, the features of Mullae creative community can be summarized like followings. First, as artists immigrated voluntarily, the community has formed naturally without any external influence. Second, it contributed to the establishment of other many cultural facilities with creating synergy effect with cultural policy of the municipal government and these facilities made the community famous as an artistic district. Third, the low rental fee in lagged facilities supposed to be redeveloped attracts many artists who can't ensure stable earnings and seek private ateliers. Fourth, various cultures such as steel industry, apartments, shopping malls, educational institutes coexists in one area by relieving conflict among them and cooperating each other. Fifth, recently the community faced the question of sustainability as the subsidies from the government and other external actors were flowed in the community (Kim, H.J. & Park, S.H., 2012).

Discussion

It is interesting that many successful creation communities also have similar characteristics with Mullae creation community. One example is SOHO. Around 1860, the population of SOHO drastically decreased. Then residential buildings had changed into industrial facilities. But in 1960s those metal structures were no more used as factories, and started to be occupied by poor artists (Kim, H.J., 2011; Kim, H.J. & Park, S.H., 2012). Like Mullae case, artists also integrated environment with their artistic living place. However, the relationship between artists and the government is quite different in SOHO. After many artists moved into SOHO, they started to demand a reorganization of SOHO and also had a need to have well-developed policies on SOHO area. To fulfill these needs, city management department, non-profit corporation and local citizens gathered together and reached a consensus on SOHO policies and reorganization plans. However, when it comes to Mullae creation community, Seoul city and artists are having conflicts due to the coercive attitude of government, who has abundant resources. In conclusion, Mullae creation community has potential of further improvement, but it would not be accomplished without a consensus and participation of artists, workers and local people.

Conclusion

Mullae Creation Community is not salient because previous studies on this community are small in number. Therefore, future research should be needed to highlight this community to find ways how to maintain artistic value of this community. Specifically, quantitative studies about infusion rate of artists are necessary to identify which factors can attract artists to move in Mullae Creation Community. The cultural power of the community reflects the value of Mullae community. The core value which consists of the community is artistic value. However, creative activities are not such a thing that is made by a forced government policy, because it is made naturally whining the environment. If the activities of the artists shrink in Mullae community, the sustainability of the community cannot be ensured.

As seen in the successful cases like SOHO in the city of New York, two ways to ensure sustainability in the community is to preserve regional characteristic and to maintain the coexistence between steel industry and ateliers. Besides, encouraging the reciprocally interactions among people in the community such as artists, steel industry workers and local residents is important. Therefore, the consensus among each party is positively necessary. Specifically, for the sustainability, there should come under various stakeholders like artists, factory workers, landlords, government and local residents. Consequently, the cooperation and active communication among them are the most important in prolonging the community. Also, the government should collect the opinions of the community members actively and formulate the policy systematically to preserve the traits and the value of the Mullae creation community. The community should not be a tool for the governmental policy.

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