

# Regional Planning and Area Studies in Korea

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**Abstract :** Spatial plans, widely encompassing national or regional plans, are designed for an appropriate management of 'region', which is a complex of social, cultural and economic functions. Designing a spatial plan, therefore, is based on the understanding of the structure, function, and some other characteristics of the region concerned. Area studies which have been conducted in the fields of geography, regional science and anthropology, have contributed a lot to establishing the whole range of the regional planning system. This is identified in three spheres: setting up planning units based on concrete area studies and appropriate regional divisions, dividing planning areas by the studies on goods and service purchase behavior, endowing specific functions to each planning area. Some suggestions have been made to intensify the connections between area studies and regional planning, which include consensus building, planning-oriented area studies by the standardized formatting and sharing of research products by commercialization.

**요약 :** 국토계획이나 지역계획과 같은 공간계획은 사회·문화·경제적인 기능이 복합적으로 존재하는 공간인 '지역'을 대상으로 한다. 따라서 공간계획을 수립하는 일은 해당 지역의 특성과 기능에 대한 이해를 기초로 한다. 본 논문에서는 계획의 대상이 되는 국내 지역에 대한 연구가 계획수립과 갖는 관계에 관하여 논의한다.

우리나라 국토계획과 지역계획을 수립하는 데 있어 지리학, 지역학, 민속학, 인류학 등의 분야에서 이루어진 지역연구는 큰 기여를 해왔다. 이것은 크게 세가지 영역에서 확인되는데 그것은 지역구분에 의한 계획단위의 확인, 생활권 조사에 기초한 계획권역의 설정, 그리고 각 지역특성의 조사에 의한 각 지역 기능의 부여라는 면에서이다.

과거 지역연구가 계획수립에 이처럼 큰 기여를 해왔지만 일부 부족한 점은 앞으로 보완될 수 있으리라 본다. 이것은 공간계획가와 지역연구학자 모두의 책임이다. 지역연구를 체계적으로 조직하여 계획에서 활용할 수 있는 형태로 축적하는 일이 필요하다. 이를 위해서는 순수 학문적인 지역연구 이외에 표준화된 형태의 계획 지향적인 지역연구가 필요할 것이다.

계획수립은 결국 사람에 의하여 이루어지는 것이므로 지역연구학자들이 계획수립과정에 다양하게 참여할 수 있는 방안이 마련되어야 할 것이다. 이를 위해서는 지역연구가 보다 활성화되어야 할 것이며 계획마인드를 갖춘 지역연구 인력의 양성도 필요하리라 본다.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Spatial planning is targeted to making good managements of space. Space, whether it be international, national or local level, is a complex of man, environment and man-made artifacts. A region, which is a more common word for space, has very

complicated structure. It contains the whole ranges of social, cultural, and economic functions. A region is believed to have an organic nature which changes sensitively responding to internal and external stimuli.

Because of this complex nature of a region, we cannot pursue appropriate regional planning without a good understanding of the structure, function, and

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some other characteristics of the region concerned. This is the connecting point of regional planning and area studies.

Foreign area studies, of course, have implications for making plans of domestic regions. We planners often refer to the samples of the similar foreign cases to draw some application points for the planning areas. In this paper, however, I am going to limit the discussion to the relationship between regional planning and area studies within a country.

In the next section, I start the discussion by briefly introducing the current regional planning system in Korea. Then, I want to review how deeply and efficiently area studies have contributed to the regional planning procedures in the past. After that, I will make some points to improve the working of those connections.

## **2. REGIONAL PLANNING SYSTEM IN KOREA**

The regional planning system in Korea has a hierarchical structure from national, provincial to county and city levels. The National Comprehensive Development Plan is a long-term, ten-year so far, physical plan for the whole country which covers spheres of spatial structure, land use, industrial location, etc. as well as infrastructure planning.

Following the national plan, several provincial plans are established, based on which subsequent county plans are formulated and, although by a separated system, city plans are made. This is the regular program of regional planning procedure.

There are also special programs of regional planning which have specific purposes. The Capital Region, which is composed of the city of Seoul and its surrounding areas, is given special care by the Capital Region Management Plan in order to manage its overconcentration problems.

For the regional economic centers in the areas other than the Capital Region, Enlarged Economic Area

Development Plans are to be established for some designated areas. This program is intended to give impetus to the regional economic bases. For underdeveloped areas, Development Promotion District Plans are to be formulated for the designated areas. These areas include abandoned mining areas and those areas which have been experiencing everlasting underdevelopment.

Despite this highly hierarchical structure, there have not been any big conflicts in implementing several levels of plans. This has been mainly due to the strong role and dominance of the central government in the high rate growth period. Lower level plans have been designed faithfully in conformity to higher level ones.

The expansion of local autonomy, however, is changing this picture. Many local authorities are making their own long-term plans, not seriously considering the higher level plans. The role of the national level plan as coordinating rules and standards is becoming more important.

## **3. CONTRIBUTIONS OF AREA STUDIES**

To activating the whole range of this regional planning system, it is evaluated that studies of area with diverse scales have contributed a lot. These studies have been conducted in the fields of geography, regional science, anthropology, folklore, etc. Regional planning has been much indebted to geography in this sense.

Contributions of area studies are found in the following three aspects.

First, a precise regional division based on concrete area studies provides basic ideas on setting up planning units. A regional plan is designed for the entire area itself in the first-tier process and for its rationally divided areas in the second-tier process.

For a rationally determined regional division, we use diverse methods, such quantitative techniques as

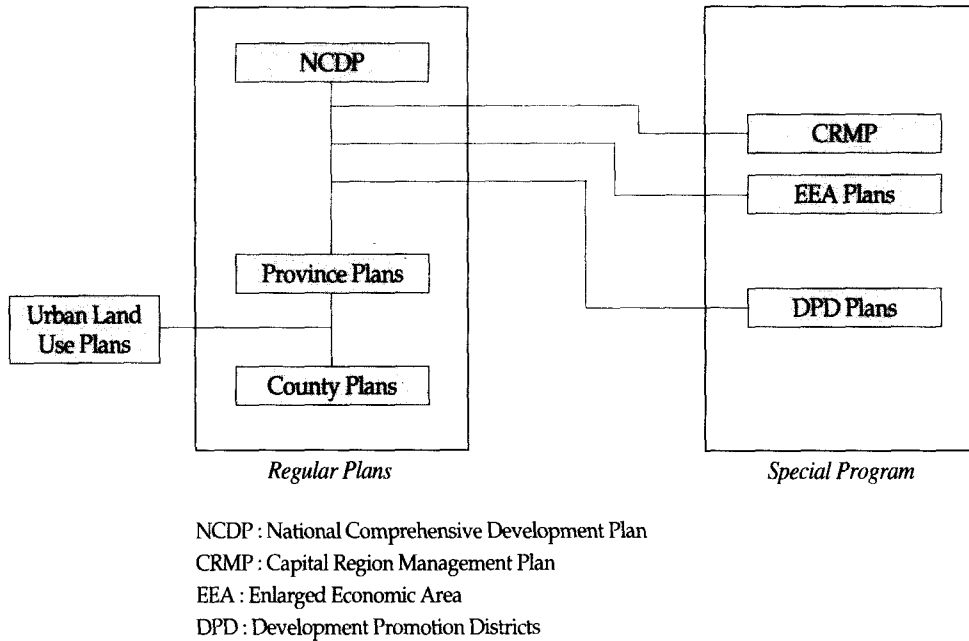


Figure 1. Korean System of Spatial Planning

factorial analysis and GIS, or some qualitative ones. In many cases, regional divisions are made on the basis of administrative boundaries or some geomorphological indices, which have great relationship with each other.

Second, area studies provide some basics to be considered in the planning process. Most of regional plans begin with a survey to residents of the region which asks about their goods and service purchase behavior, commuting, and some other spatial elements of life. This type of survey, which is conducted as a part of area studies, informs the planners of the needs and orientations of the plan.

Researches on the sphere of living or sphere of influence based on purchase behavior or commuting does sometimes make a core part of a plan. In the Second National Development Plan, which was for the period 1982 to 1991, sphere of living was adopted as a basic concept for the planning. The contents of the plan were centered on the 28 spheres of living, which were divisions of the whole country.

Third, giving specialized functions to each of the regional divisions has its basis on the detailed investigation of their characteristics. A region can be easily specified by manufacturing industry when it has advantages in the locational factors, such as accessibility to resources and market, labor characteristics, physical environments, etc.

Designing a regional plan is a process of giving functions to each region. This process is determined by the study of the region-about its physical conditions, economic base, cultural heritage, demographic structure, mobility of the people, its potentiality, and so on. The more detailed and precise the study of the area is, the more possible and feasible it is to make a better plan.

There are also other contributions that area studies have made to designing better regional plans. These contributions are to be more encouraged and promoted and we need to look for some methods to make this possible.

#### 4. IMPROVING THE CONNECTIONS

Although area studies have contributed to regional planning in many respects, there are also something to be desired and complemented. Some ideas to improve the connections between this two important elements can be summarized by the following three points.

First, it is estimated that there have not been enough consensus between regional planners and geographers, a representative of area study academics, about the need to connect area studies and planning process. Or, in more correct words, even if there being interests, regional planners have not been active in utilizing area studies and geographers have not been given chances to provide their accumulated knowledge. Therefore, a starting point to improve the connections is to increase the consensus of both party, planners and geographers, to exchange their knowledge and needs.

Second, area studies in the field of geography need to be more planning-oriented. I hear that there have been a revival of area studies in geography in recent years. I think this trend is very desirable because even systematic approaches in geography need to be comprehended in the area studies so as to be used in the real world.

Area studies so far, however, have tended to be studies themselves and remained unused in the planning process. I think this is mainly because area studies have been carried out without a well-designed framework. While there are plenty of topical studies, focusing on culture, industry or migration, with specific areas as samples, we find very few studies with systematic analyses of the areas concerned.

In the planning process, we referred very often to the series of Korean Geography(*Hankuk Jiji*), written by the geographers of the Korean Geographical Society from the early to middle of 1980s. It is generally evaluated that this was a masterpiece of Korean geographic information, covering all over the country. But it is almost twenty years that the project launched. There were so many dramatic changes during the period. Geographic information of the past

supplies very few implications for the future planning.

I argue for planning-oriented area studies which are to be revised and updated regularly to be ready for use. Some practical ideas can be suggested as follows.

First of all, the framework for area studies needs to be standardized. The standardization of the items to be analyzed and described enables us to easily compare areas and draw appropriate strategies for each area.

Area studies are sources of geographic information. In this respect, it is also possible to digitalize items of area studies with a formatted database framework. Database accumulation makes it much easier to update the contents of the information.

For the area study databases, we can adopt the commercialization concept. To be used by planners, policy makers, company managers, or even ordinary people, information based on area studies should be disseminated. This can be feasible by private companies. Final output to be purchased can be either hard copies or digitalized forms, such as CD-ROMs.

The third point that I want to mention to improve the connections between area studies and regional planning is that there needs to be more active exchanges of manpower between area study and planning sides. Area study academics, especially geographers, have been involved in the regional planning process in diverse forms. The level of involvement, however, has been very limited.

I suggest that we develop exchange programs by which regional planners are informed of regional issues and some analytic results, and geographers take some parts in the planning process with their practical knowledge. A participation in the planning process continuing in the real world will give many practical ideas in designing researches on regional geography.

I would ask geographers to show many interests in the practices of regional planning. The pool of manpower needs to be extended in its numbers. Also in qualitative sense, the manpower needs to be planning-mined enough to conduct planning-oriented area studies.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We can make good plans when we know the planning objects well. Regional planning is a planning for diverse levels of regions. Therefore, good regional planning is possible when a steady accumulation of correct information or knowledge of the region is prepared.

The field of regional planning can be called as a consumer for area studies. Area studies as a resource supplier should try to understand the needs of the

consumers. Regional planning as a consumer, on the other hand, should establish the atmosphere in which the supplier are correctly informed and feedbacked by the customers.

It is certain that regional planning and area studies should cooperate each other. The problem is how well and how deeply the cooperation is accomplished. The success of regional planning depends on how well and sensibly this cooperation is shaped in the real world.