



# Privatizing tendencies: fishing communities and tourism in Korea

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## Abstract

This paper examines development of tourism in Korean fishing communities, and illustrates the ways in which the responses of the state and the fishing village cooperative to tourism have advanced the privatization of commonly held local fishing grounds and of cooperative businesses. The financial assistance from the state and some privatization of common fishing grounds by the cooperative precipitated this trend. In addition, the development largely focused on the private goods characteristic of the tourist resources. In place, common assets are overlooked though tourism enterprises ultimately depend on common tourism assets.

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## 1. Introduction

With the increasing use of cars and leisure time, fishing communities in Korea are no longer considered remote and difficult to access. The technological advancement, rising discretionary income, mobility, education and labor laws all have contributed to the growing domestic tourism in Korea. In addition to the rise in the demand for tourism, the fisheries sector is embracing tourism because of its income generating capability in light of declining fish resources. As local common resources such as common fishing grounds and coop facilities become more accessible to nonlocals by leasing and for purposes other than commercial fishing, opportunities for coastal tourism development rise. For example, opening up the collectively run fishing ground to outsiders increases the access for others, and blurs the boundary between members and nonmembers of the fishing village cooperatives.

As private and public dimensions of property rights exist in tourist resources, fishing communities developing tourism can accelerate or decelerate the tendency to further privatization depending on which dimension (public or private) tourism interacts with fishing. This is based on the assumption that tourism is a two-faced

industry consisting of public and private spheres [1]. Tourist services such as accommodations and restaurants are managed by the private sector. Individuals or firms offer these services to obtain direct profit from tour operation. On the other hand, natural resources such as scenery, clean water, tranquility, ambience, and fish as well as cultural assets of the place are considered public resources. Furthermore, the infrastructure often-times provided by the government is essential to the smooth tourist operation.

In an attempt to unfold the ways in which fishing and tourism overlap resulting in privatization of commonly held resources, this paper examines the institutional responses of state and the fishing village cooperative. The first part delineates the pattern of tourist development in fishing communities. The second part examines institutional responses by state and fishing village cooperatives to tourism. The third part examines whether the pattern of tourist development leads to increased privatization of local common resources.

## 2. Tourism development pattern in Korean fishing communities

Tourism development pattern in Korean fishing communities, so far, is similar to other kinds of rural tourism. Typically, it is small scale, traditionally operated and relatively geographically isolated [2,3].

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The specifics of tourist development patterns in Korean fishing communities are discussed in terms of both the location and the types of tourist services.

Fishing communities tend to be located in front of the rice field or mountain or next to the rocky coastline. Fig. 1 illustrates a typical configuration. Because land space is scarce for most fishing communities, houses line up along the main road or are concentrated in one area usually behind the road or the coastline. Tourist development also tends to occur alongside the main road for easy access by the tourist and the local resident. Restaurants, fishing gear shops, and gift shops favor locations close to the major roadways; accommodation facilities are situated behind them in the residential areas. Parking lots oftentimes take up the space between the road and the residential area. In the center of the village is the docking area. Above in the right in Fig. 1 is the market place, and to the right and left of the docking area is the drying area for fishing nets. The road between the coast and the market place is where fishermen work, and is connected to the entrance road for the docking facility.

Since tourism in fishing communities is small-scale and relatively isolated, the ability of the villages to attract tourists depends on their proximity to other tourist destinations, to the major transportation point, like a ferry terminal or to major cities [4,5]. Fishing communities that have multiple draws such as fishing port, beach, and recreational fishing spot have a better chance of successful tour operation. The better locational advantages they have in terms of the nearness to major points of tourist draws, the higher income fishing communities can obtain from tourist activities. Indicative of this is the presence of a larger number of accommodations and restaurants in fishing communities

where locational advantages exist. A popular form of tourism is in the provision of tourist services such as accommodations and restaurants, and fishing communities rely on other leisure opportunities, particularly nearness to attractions to run tourism business. “Commercial viability requires that spending on site is maximized: for accommodation, the need is to maintain utilization rates and add value where possible through containing as much of the day-trip expenditure on site [6].”

The location of fishing communities affects the type of tourist services that they carry. For fishing communities with a beach located in front of or on one side of the village, accommodations and restaurants thrive. In instances where fishing communities do not have beaches nearby, recreational fishing is popular. Recreational fishing spots are usually located by a dike or use big rocks linked to the land. If a scenic view is the major draw, restaurants and accommodations develop along the coastal highway or road. Overall, the major tourist services consist of accommodations, seafood restaurants, and charter boats. Other tourism activities include local fish markets and the opening of seabed or aquaculture sites to allow educational experience.

According to a survey of fishing village cooperative leaders conducted by the KMI in 1997, the most popular type of tourism activities in fishing communities is beach swimming. It accounted for 49.4% of all tourism activities, followed by 12% eating and 11% recreational fishing (Fig. 2).

The accommodations in fishing communities are typically part of the fishermen’s home that has been converted into guest rooms. Fishermen sometimes renovate and add more rooms to the house, but overall the home stays (guest houses) follow the style of traditional fishermen’s homes. In the event that fishing communities are located near or within popular tourist destinations, near Seoul, or by a passenger ferry

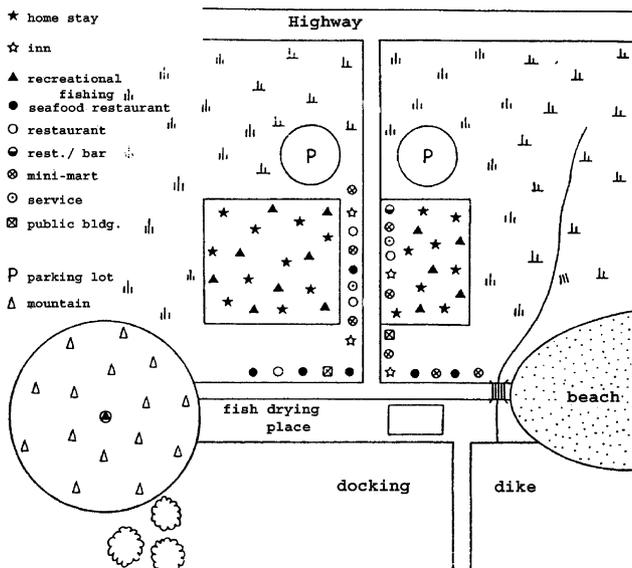


Fig. 1. Physical layout of the fishing village (Source: Lee, 1994 [9]).

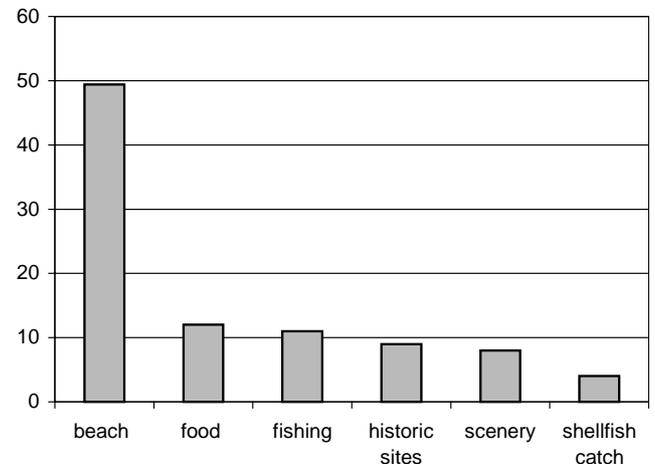


Fig. 2. Fishing village tourism activities (Unit: percentage), (Source: Kim et al., 1998).

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