Resident participation in urban renewal: Focused on Sewoon Renewal Promotion Project and Kwun Tong Town Centre Project

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Abstract
This study aimed to identify problems related to resident participation by analyzing urban renewal projects. It attempted to draw specific measures to promote participation of residents that can be applied immediately and suggested practical ways to make use of resident participation at each stage of a project.

The study, by closely examining the cases of Seoul and Hong Kong, is expected to help diversify ways to encourage residents participate in urban renewal projects and stimulate their active engagement. In light of its contribution to building up a constructive communication platform among administrations, experts, project managers, and residents, this study can serve as the basis material for carrying out projects effectively.

In this study, resident participation methods were classified according to the frequency of application in four items, namely, administration-led, expert-led, resident-led, and complex-entity-led participation.

Improvement measures were suggested regarding resident participation based on leading entities. The measures suggested in this work will contribute to the realization of “urban renewal projects for residents and communities and by residents,” where residents actively engage in the overall project processes and, as the proponents of urban renewal, gradually be familiar with it; express their opinions regarding the project; and fully enjoy the benefits from the project.

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1. Introduction

In line with the changes taking place in the age of governance, urban policies have been transitioning from those pursuing indiscriminate redevelopment and reconstruction to those focused on community improvement and recovery and from those mostly led by the administration and experts to those based on resident participation and partnership.

Local residents are the most important and capable group that can actively participate in policy-making processes, as well as propose and lead urban renewal projects, to improve the current environment and create livable communities. If urban planning and urban renewal project implementation can secure rationality and democracy by engaging residents in their processes, then they can not only heighten the sense of community among residents but also contribute in revitalizing local autonomy (Woong-Kyoo, 2002).

This study aimed to identify the problems related to resident participation by analyzing the current operating system of urban renewal projects and related laws and regulations, as well as examining case studies. It attempted to draw specific measures to promote the participation of residents that can be applied immediately, and suggested practical ways to make use of resident participation at each stage of project.

Moreover, the study, by closely examining the cases of Seoul and Hong Kong, is expected to help diversify ways in encouraging resident participation in urban renewal projects and stimulate their active engagement. In light of its contribution in building up a constructive communication platform among administrations, experts, project managers, and residents, thereby resolving existing conflicts of interests and problems, this study can serve as the basis material for carrying out projects effectively.

With an aim to present specific ways to promote participation in urban renewal projects, this study first made a comparison review of the cases of Seoul and Hong Kong that have geographic, historical, and cultural similarities.

In Korea, urban renewal has mostly taken the form of full-scale demolition. To address subsequent problems, such as huge economic loss, damages to historical and cultural properties, and violations of housing rights of local residents, Seoul has been making efforts to transition its renewal projects to centre around creating communities and villages that guarantee “the right to live as decent human beings.”

Seoul is currently re-examining its urban renewal project implementation system based on field survey reports by experts and public opinions gathered from residents. At the same time, relevant legislations, such as the “Special Act on the Promotion of Urban Renewal” and the “Act on the Maintenance and Improvement of Urban Areas,” were amended and began taking effect in August 2012. A key part of the amendment concerns the promotion of resident right to know and strengthening project transparency.

The Urban Renewal Authority (URA, Hong Kong) oversees entire projects as an independent urban renewal institution and is also responsible for the related education and promotional activities. Projects were divided into four categories under the holistic 4R strategy (Figure 1).

The common challenge faced by Seoul and Hong Kong in their urban renewal projects is that they have to address complex issues, such as raising the living standards of residents in old urban districts; resolving the problem of aging of those downtown areas; and meeting the demands of people in terms of financial support, compensation, settlement, and formation of communities, especially with metropolitan areas with high population density and high land prices. Hong Kong, having realized that the best way to resolve conflicts and problems is to communicate with residents and to encourage them to participate actively in projects, is concentrating its efforts on inducing resident engagement. This observation is similar with the “resident participation-based urban renewal projects” objective of Seoul (Yan, 2013a, 2013b).

Table 1 shows a list of preliminary studies in Hong Kong that were conducted after the URA was launched as the official agency of the region for urban renewal. Most of the studies stressed that the projects are focused on “urban renewal for residents,” in which the active participation of residents is encouraged and guaranteed.

This work includes the descriptions of the project operating systems of Seoul and Hong Kong, analysis of related laws and institutions, and forms of resident participation shown in the two cases.

The method of research involved a literature review, empirical analysis of business cases, interview, and content analysis method.

The study mainly dealt with the projects of Sewoon Renewal Promotion (Korea) and Kwun Tong Town Centre (Hong Kong), both of which aimed to improve old and deteriorated residential and living environments. In the 1990s, these districts were designated as prospective renewal areas, but no progress was seen due to several reasons. Later, when efforts to redevelop urban areas began in earnest, these districts started garnering a lot of attention and the projects officially began in 2009 (Table 2).

Sewoon Renewal Promotion Project is the first urban redevelopment project with a public corporation designated as and playing the role of a project manager and is the most representative redevelopment project carried out by Seoul. Kwun Tong Town Centre Project is the largest in scale among all the redevelopment projects currently pursued by Hong Kong and is the first case of “urban renewal by residents,” which has aggressively induced resident participation with the amendment of strategies. Sewoon Renewal Promotion Project is currently at the stage of establishing the District #4 promotion plan, and Kwun Tong Town Centre Project is at the first stage of project implementation. Therefore, this work examined resident participation from the project preparation stage to the implementation stage to a certain extent and presents project maintenance and management as future research projects.

The steps involved in Sewoon and Kwun Tong projects from preparations to future implementation can be summarized as follows (Figure 2).

2. Methods of resident participation in urban renewal

2.1. Overview of resident participation

Resident participation is any act of engaging in project proposal, establishment of project plans, and implementation processes by residents as persons who have a direct or
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