Ecological and Cultural Approach to Rural Village Planning in Korea

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Abstract

Rural area covers about 85 percent of Korean national land and exhibits diverse ecological and cultural resources. There are enormous opportunities of utilizing the ecological and cultural resources in rural village planning. The strategy of village planning has been changed from improving single elements of rural houses to making new villages. And the strategy is about to shift again to improving the existing old villages instead of making new villages. The new strategy intends to preserve the existing physical and social structures in the rural villages, to conserve ecological, cultural, and visual resources, and to increase income of rural residents.

The experience of rural village planning during the last 30 years in Korea seems to suggest making rural villages with traditional rural characteristics as well as urban amenities. The challenge to rural village planning in Korea in the new millenium is to develop specific strategies for the conservation and wise use of ecological and cultural resources in rural areas.

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I. Introduction

Rural villages in Korea have suffered from low living conditions and low income due to the economic development strategy of putting emphasis on the manufacturing industry and heavy and chemical industry during the 1960's and 1970's. Intensive measures to improve rural living conditions have been started since 1970's and the measures have been changed continuously to accommodate the newly emerging ideas of how to make better rural villages.

The development stages of rural village planning in Korea and the present and future rural village planning are to be discussed in this paper. The future directions of village planning are investigated through the case studies of recent three community development projects which the author has been involved in.

II. Development of Village Planning in Korea

Early attempts to improve physical and living conditions of rural villages in Korea has been started since 1950's when the Korean War ended. However, more active involvement has been initiated since 1970's when the New Village (Saimaeul) Movement began in Korea.

The development of village planning in Korea can be divided into four stages; stage of rural house improvement, stage of rural housing block development, stage of new village development, and stage of existing village improvement. The focus of village planning has been changed from the individual rural houses to the village as a whole.

1. Stage of Rural House Improvement (1970 ~ )

With the successful completion of the first and second 5-year national economic development plan (1962-1971), which intended to develop limited areas instead of balanced development, the economic and environmental gap between city and rural area has been widened and thus development projects for rural areas has been initiated by the Korean government (Suh,1995).

The rural development projects have been planned as a part of the New Village Movement. The New Village Movement aimed not only at the improvement of physical environment of the rural area but also at the innovation of the way of thinking of rural residents. The New Village Movement has successfully contributed to the improvement of rural living condition to some extent. The typical development projects included roof improvement, fence repair, and widening and paving of approach roads inside
Although the house improvement projects contributed to the living conditions of rural villages in some degree, most of those projects focused on individual houses and thus was not enough to improve the living conditions of a village as a whole.

2. Stage of Rural Housing Block Development (1976 –)

The Village Structure Improvement Project (聚落構造改善事業) sponsored by the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs represents this stage of rural development. This project encouraged each village to prepare a land use master plan, which included residential, road facility, common production facility, welfare facility, and green district (Suh, 1995). The focus of this project, however, was to develop a housing block of about 20 detached houses, a community meeting hall, and a mini sewage treatment plant. The size of a house was relatively small, which the floor area was usually about 1,000 square feet (approx. 30 坪) and most of the housing site was 4,300–5,400 square feet (approx. 120–150 坪) (Rural Development Administration, 1994).

Fig. 1. Site plan for Village Structure Improvement Project (Rural Development Administration, 1994:77)
The site plan resembles the typical traditional subdivision for urban residential site and thus is lacking in special considerations for rural context. This project aimed at providing new houses with relatively low cost instead of improving the existing houses. The group construction of 20 housing units with identical design could decrease the construction cost.

There were many deteriorated houses whose conditions were too low to improve. The new houses could improve the problems of traditional houses, i.e., heat loss, sanitary conditions, etc.

The new houses have modern western closed floor plans in general and thus consist of a living room, 2~3 bed rooms, a western-style kitchen, and a restroom with septic tank. The closed floor plan, which has begun to be widely adopted in urban areas during 1970's, may be good for the urban residents but was not suitable for the rural residents. The floor plan did not reflect the way of rural life and the traditional rural house layout. It was hard to find out cultural and ecological considerations in the site plan nor in the floor plan.


The Cultural Village (文化新村) Project which aims at developing new villages has been introduced to rural central village under the rural settlement development project sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The project intends to reinforce the central village in each rural settlement area. The project can be called an advancement of the village planning in Korea from the housing block development to the village level development.

The new village development project, which is called “Cultural Village Project,” is to construct common facilities as well as 50 to 100 housing units. The common facilities include community meeting hall, senior residents’ hall, welfare center (health improvement center), children’s playground, village park, common storage for grains and agricultural machines, etc.

The floor area of each housing unit is about the same as the one in the previous ‘housing block development,’ but the area of each site is smaller than the one in the previous one. The percentage of total housing site in land use plan is usually less than 50% in ‘cultural village’, while the ratio in the previous one is approximately 70~80%. More area is allocated for common facilities in the ‘cultural village’ than in the ‘housing block development.’ The floor area of each house is usually 1,000 square feet (approx. 30 坪) and the area of each housing site is approximately 3,600 square feet (approx. 100 坪) (Rural Development Administration, 1994).

The floor plan of the house represents the closed one, which is similar to the previous ‘housing block development.’ Although the closed plan does not reflect the traditional rural house plan, rural residents seem to be satisfied with the closed plan. They seem to prefer urban-like atmosphere and housing
4. Stage of Village Improvement (整備：1995～)

The new (Cultural) village (新村型) project introduced diverse community facilities to rural villages and contributed to enhancing the living conditions of rural residents. In spite of the positive aspects of the ‘Cultural Village,’ it revealed several problems.

Physically, the area of each housing site (approx. 3,600 square feet) is too small for a rural house to accommodate such diverse daily outdoor activities as storage, vegetable garden, parking, etc. Socially, the residents in the new village do not feel the sense of belonging to the existing adjacent villages. The new village is a socially heterogeneous tissue in the rural settlement. Culturally, the new villages do not provide spaces for the traditional events for rural villagers nor represent the spatial characteristics of the 'Cultural Village.'
traditional rural villages.

Ecologically, the compact site plan does not allow the conservation of existing trees or natural streams. Economically, comparing to the house improvement or reconstruction on existing site, the residents of the new village need to pay extra money for the site acquisition.

The improvement project (整備型) for the existing village has been introduced as an alternative to the new village project. Although the improvement project is still called Cultural Village Project, the concept of the project is completely different. The improvement project aims at preservation of the existing physical, social, and cultural structure of the rural village, improvement of the living conditions, and development of income sources for rural residents.

The project is focusing on improving the infrastructure of the existing villages including approach road and sewage treatment plant. The project also encourages the remodeling or reconstruction of the rural houses through the subsidy program.

The ‘Package Project’ sponsored by the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs is another alternative to the new village construction. The ‘package’ project is an advanced form of the previous ‘Village Structure Improvement Project (整備構造改善事業)’. The Package Project combines several partial projects, which are sponsored by diverse government organizations, and concentrates on one village. The partial projects are road construction project, water supply project, sewage treatment plant project, house improvement project, etc. The concept of the Package Project is similar to the concept of the village improvement project mentioned above. But the Package Project puts more emphasis on the development of income sources than the previous village improvement project. The Package Project can be called another form of village improvement project. The improvement of existing villages instead of constructing new villages seems to be the future direction of village planning in Korea.

III. Ecological and Cultural Approach to Village Planning: a pilot study of village improvement project at Kail-2-ri

After 30 years of village planning practice in Korea, there seems to be consensus about the future direction of rural village planning in Korea. The village planning should identify, conserve, and utilize the ecological, visual, cultural, and economic resources in each village.

The idea of future village planning can be summarized as follows:

1) To improve and upgrade existing villages instead of making new villages
2) To maintain existing spatial and social structure.
3) To conserve ecological, visual, cultural, and economic resources.
4) To develop income sources.
5) To encourage participation of villagers in the planning process.
6) To continue modification of the plan after construction.

The idea of future village planning has been applied to the planning of Kail-2-ri Seolak-myun Kapyung-gun Kyunggi-do and the planning process will be discussed as a case study.

1. Planning process

The village planning process can be divided into nine steps, i.e.,

1) formulation of goals and objectives,
2) analysis of existing conditions,
3) defining opportunities and constraints,
4) presentation of development strategy,
5) master plan,
6) public hearing,
7) implementation,
8) post-occupancy evaluation,
9) modification (fig. 3).

1) Formulation of goals and objectives

Major goals of village planning is to upgrade the level of living conditions and to provide spaces for income generation.

2) Analysis of existing conditions

Four types of data concerning existing conditions need to be collected. Those are physical and ecological data, visual and aesthetic data, social and behavioral data, and economic data. It is important to collect residents' ideas and preferences on the village improvement. They used to have many ideas on the development of their own village and it is preferable to accommodate as many those ideas and preferences as possible.

3) Defining opportunities and constraints

Opportunities and constraints for village planning is to be investigated.

4) Presentation of development strategy

Development and improvement strategy is to be decided based on the opportunities and constraints.

5) Master plan

Master plan consists of sub-plans, i.e., land use, traffic, facility, planting, and utility plan.

6) Public hearing

The residents of the village need to be a part of decision-making process. If necessary, modifications need to be made to accommodate residents' demand.

7) Implementation

Successful execution of the plan requires timely funding and monitoring by residents.

8) Post-occupancy evaluation
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Fig. 3. Ecological & cultural planning process for village improvement
After completion of the project, periodical post-occupancy evaluation needs to be made to make sure whether the plan works well. Suggestions for modification is to be made based on the evaluation.

9) Modification

Continuous modification will ensure the full satisfaction of residents. It can be called fine tuning approach.

2. Planning strategy for Kail-2-ri

For the derivation of best planning strategy, residents’ preferences on the village development and site potential were considered (Rural Development Administration, 1996).

1) Resident’s preferences

- Most residents (70%) prefer their village to be a rural resort village with lodgings and tourist farms.
- Items which residents want to be improved are tap water and sewage disposal facilities (66.7%), farm house (53.3%), road (33.3%), extension of parking lot at the trail entrance (30%), and shops (26.7%).

2) Site potential

- The village is located in front of the famous trail entrance and there are many visitors especially

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Fig. 4. Master plan of Kail-2-ri (Rural Development Administration, 1996: 79)
during the summer.

○ There exist some small lodgings and restaurants.
○ There is a shiitake mushroom farm, which can be developed as a tourist farm.
○ The stream flowing along the center of the village can accommodate water related recreation.

3) Derivation of development strategy
○ To develop a resort village with lodgings and tourist farms for the increase of residents’ income and convenience of visitors.
○ To improve rural houses and infra structure for the upgrade of living conditions.
○ To conserve the eco-system in the village and surroundings as much as possible.
○ To maintain existing social and spatial structure as much as possible.

IV. Ecological and Cultural Approach to the Improvement Planning of Rural Stream

The improvement project of rural stream is another effort to upgrade rural living conditions. The ecological and cultural approach has been applied to the planning of rural stream at Seo-ri Idong-myun Yongin-si Kyunggi-do.

1. Existing situation

Seo-ri is located in a valley close to several cities and thus can be called a suburban rural village. Seo-ri consists of 267 residents and 87 households. The main approach road is located along the stream runs through center of the valley. Houses and three factorjes are clustered along the main road. The stream is used for places for bathing, washing, and picnic but there is no facility for those activities at all and accessibility to the stream is very low.

2. Planning process

The planning process is basically same as the previous one for the village improvement at Kail-2-ri. However, there were intensive survey on the activities at the stream. The survey included field observation, recording and photographing physical traces, and questionnaire to residents.

3. Planning strategy

○ Preservation of the existing natural shoreline, vegetation, and water quality.
○ Support and encouragement of residents’ water-related activities.
Fig. 5. Conception for the improvement of rural stream at Seo-ri (Rural Development Administration, 1999: 118).

- Preservation of the existing cluster of protected old trees, connection of the cluster to the stream, and provision of picnic space around the connected place.
- Provision of a wading pool and a pavilion at the place close to the village central plaza.
- Provision of stone panels for the traditional way of laundry beside the stream (introduction of traditional way of living and education of young generation).
- Screen planting in front of the factory nearby.
- Provision of a pedestrian and bicycle path along the stream.

V. Ecological and Cultural Approach to the Design of Rural Pocket Park

The rural pocket park project, which is sponsored by The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is one of the efforts to improve rural living conditions. The ecological and cultural approach has been applied to the design of rural pocket park at Duchang-5-ri Wonsam-myun Yongin-si Kyunggi-do.

1. Existing situation
Duchang-5-ri is one of the typical rural villages in Korea, which is a spontaneously generated village and consists of about 50 households. The park site is in the middle of the village and covers about 5,400 square feet (150坪). There are a spring, an abandoned pond, and three big trees (zelkova) in the site.
2. Design process
The design process is basically same as the previous village improvement planning process at Kail-2-ri. However, the process can be characterized by the frequent and close cooperation among the design team, residents, and the rural guidance officer.

3. Design strategy
- Preservation of the existing big shade trees (zelkova).
- Introduction of water-permeable paving and natural material.
- Utilization of the overflowing water from the spring well and maximum provision of residents' opportunity to contact water.
- Provision of diverse spaces for playing, meeting, and resting.
- Placement of a pavilion in the place where one can have the best view.
- Introduction of the traditional pond shape, which consists of circle and rectangle. The circle and

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Fig. 6. The plan of the rural pocket park at Duchang-5-ri (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 1996b:70)
rectangle symbolize the heaven and earth respectively.

**VI. Summary and Conclusion**

The efforts to improve rural living conditions have been initiated since the end of the Korean War. At the early stage of development each single element of rural house has been focused on. The development focus, however, has been moved to the rural village as a whole. The construction of a new village adjacent to a existing old village has revealed many problems. Those problems include new residents’ low sense of belonging to the existing rural community, sharp contrast in physical condition between the new and existing old village, compact development without rural characteristics and enough green space, residents’ high economic burden due to purchasing land and building a house, and little consideration of the existing ecological and cultural resources.

Considering the drawbacks of the new village construction, the village improvement is considered to be an alternative to the new village practice. The village improvement is expected to achieve various goals, that is, 1) maintaining existing spatial and social structure, 2) conserving ecological, visual, cultural, and economic resources, 3) developing income sources, 4) encouraging participation of villagers in planning process, and 5) continuing modification of the plan after construction.

In addition to the development of rural village planning, ecological and cultural approach to the design of public spaces in rural villages has been attempted. The rural stream improvement project has demonstrated the conservation of natural stream environment, the expansion of residents’ opportunities of contacting water, and the introduction of traditional activity.

The rural pocket park project has also demonstrated the preservation of existing trees and spring well, the provision of spaces for diverse activities, and the introduction of traditional symbolic expression in the pond shape.

Rural environment contains diverse ecological and cultural resources comparing to the urban environment. The challenge to the future rural village planning in Korea is to conserve and utilize those resources and to derive strategies for making a village with traditional rural characteristics on top of all the urban amenities. Rural village planning in Korea seems to demonstrate a right sense of direction but needs to develop specific and applicable strategies for the better living conditions of the future rural residents.
References


