

Urban Regeneration in Korea

Hong-Soo Lee¹

(Received February 15, 2017 / Revised April 22, 2017 / Accepted April 27, 2017)

ABSTRACT

This short paper is about the background, progress, achievement as well as the direction of Urban Regeneration (UR) Policy since 2013 in Korea. The UR in Korea has been recognized and initiated late compared to UK, Japan as well as many other countries that have achieved economic growth earlier than Korea. In 2013, the Special Law on UR established and the UR project has begun in earnest. However, there are still a number of pending issues required to be resolved for the regeneration of declining cities. After reviewing the background of UR in Korea, we would go through the progress and achievement of UR and then we look at the follow-up measures required to be resolved in short period as well as longer term for successful UR.

Key words : urban regeneration policy, sustainable urban regeneration, communication, transparency, branding & marketing, mid-term master plan, comprehensive administrative system, professional urban administrator, place management, public engagement

1. Cause of Declining Cities

There are mainly three reasons for the declining cities in Korea. The first is a public-driven suburban development policy. Whilst the demand for new development has been reduced, the declining city centre has been intensified due to the inertial new-town development. In addition, indiscriminate new-town development at the periphery of existing cities without a clear mid and longer term master plan, based on too optimistic demanding forecasting of population and industry, caused the downturn of old downtown. Furthermore, the relocation of central administrative authorities such as City Hall, Courthouse, etc., to the outskirts of cities is also weakening the function of city center and accelerating the downturn further.

The second is the economic recession based on the changes in the industrial structure. Major cities that had been relied on industry in the past are stagnating due to the relocation of factories overseas. In addition, the concentration phenomenon to the metropolitan area has been deepened due to weakening of primary industry's competitiveness as well as the development of traffic facilities. As such, the economy of small and medium-sized cities has been stagnating in general.

The third is low growth, low fertility and aging trend. The

decline in economic growth rate, birth rate and decreased producible population are all expected to reduce the development demand for the cities.

2. Required Paradigm Shift for Urban Regeneration

Two-thirds of cities in Korea are currently declined with population decrease as well as industrial downturn. Major cities are deepening hollowing of the city centre with the population decrease by 40-70% compared to their prime period. For the medium and small sized cities, there are no distinctions between urban and suburban area as the whole of the cities are stagnating. Particularly, the decline of cities with a population of less than 500,000 is serious and lags behind in terms of economic strength as well as the settlement conditions.

Britain, Japan entered the low-growth society about 15-40 years earlier than ours and as such, their urban policy has been shifted to consider the declining cities earlier than us. Korea is also faced an era that policies for declining cities would have to be implemented based on the similar consideration.

Whilst the demand of the citizen's participation in urban policy is raised up to the level of developed counties, the local

1) Ministry of Land, Infrastructure & Transport, Korea(Main Author: tectonhong@gmail.com)

administration lacks experience and competence to lead or reflect the demand promptly. Therefore, local governments are also required to be part of the communities through this UR opportunity so as to actively improve their urban policy with the citizen.

On the other hand, although there are many ongoing projects for revitalization of the old downtown areas, the support for the project is limited as these are proceeding without a comprehensive big picture strategy. As such, the co-operation among the authorities for the integrated project for the regeneration is an essential approach that could maximize the impact of UR.

3. Process and Achievements of Urban Regeneration

After the establishment of Special Law on UR in 2013, the government initiated the Prime Minister's Special Committee for UR, comprised by Ministers as well as Expert Advisers to review and approve the national support for UR. The basic policy for UR was also established by the government in 2013 and the first 13 regeneration projects were selected for implementation in 2014. Then the National Housing and Urban Fund was able to support the regeneration project since 2015 and another 33 new UR projects were additionally designated for implementation in 2016.

To simply the ongoing 46 UR projects, there are three main types as follows:

The first is Economy-based UR promoting economic revitalization and job creation in the region through large scale mixed-use development;

The second is Downtown-based UR for the revitalization of declining city center.

The third is Neighborhood-based UR engaging residents and local communities at town level.

Apart from this, there is another small scale project that goes along with Presidential Committee on Regional Development to improve Vulnerable Housing in the cities.



Fig. 1. Cheon-an City



Fig. 2. Young-joo City



Fig. 3. Busan City



Fig. 4. Vulnerable Housing Project in the Cities

4. Follow-up Measures for Urban Regeneration

Based on the feedback and trial-and-error from the first 13 regeneration projects, supposed to be completed by end of this year, there are summarized follow-up points as follows:

- 1) Reviewing the Progress of Selection for UR Project

Based on the opinion that the regions that are really

vulnerable are difficult to even prepare the regeneration project, the financial self-reliance of each local government would be reviewed carefully to support much declining cities;

2) Publicizing the Policy White Paper

The White Paper including the best practice case from the first regeneration projects would be shared to all of the local governments;

3) Establishment of Guideline for Gentrification

In order to prevent indiscriminate gentrification at residential as well as commercial areas, the guidelines for gentrification for local governments would be established;

4) Planning Phased Urban Shrinkage

On the other hand, the additional measures would be required for the areas where the trend of declining phenomenon is unstoppable especially at the edge of small and large cities;

5) Promoting Public-Private Partnership

To explore many different business models, including the use of National Housing and Urban Fund, as well as deregulation so as to induce more public partnership for UR project;

6) Considering Integrated Project for Efficiency

To find a mechanism which allows finding a way to integrate the government projects, scattered and supported independently, so as to increase the efficiency for UR;

7) Reestablishment of Mid / Longer-term Master Plan

To set up a strategic plan for regeneration taking in consideration more realistic-based population and industry trend in each local governments; and

8) Expansion of Customized Education Program

To continue to expand the customized education program for most of participants for UR project so that they could understand and achieve the project successfully.

5. Conclusions – Elements for Sustainable Urban Regeneration

1) Communication

This includes international communication for urban competitiveness. The information related to all cities should be familiar with English at least to communicate well abroad. The special Law for UR is just translated into English and all the regulation related to the UR is required to be familiar with foreigners;

2) Transparency

Recent global trend is opening information. It is also necessary to increase the transparency level for urban planning to domestic as well as foreign countries. When the transparency is ensuring along with the Communication, it should be a strong base for further stimulating the private investment for UR;

3) Branding & Marketing

Among the cities where the UR projects are ongoing, there are many areas including revitalization potential as well as competitiveness even at international level. As such, it is required to be developed through the strategic branding and marketing based on its own unique characters.

4) Mid / Longer Term Master Plan (Reiteration)

It should be clearly reflect the sequential planning including the UR at the declining region and its ripple effect taking into consideration the population as well as industry;

5) Comprehensive Administrative System

The old fashioned administrative organization from the development era should be reconstituted. In the near future, when the 4th Industry Revolution should be centralized and more flexible and integrated administrative organization would be required in urban planning as well to accommodate the new paradigm towards the compact city through the regeneration;

6) Cooperation among Local / Central Governments

The importance of collaboration could not be overstated. Between central governments, between central and local or between local collaboration is all an essential element in ensuring continuous and balanced growth by complementing strengths and weaknesses on the basis of each distinctive feature within the country, not competition between the cities;

7) Professional Urban Administrator

Experts in urban planning and administration in each region should be able to consistently plan and implement the planning insightfully based on the past and present trend;

8) Place Management

In order to create and keep the vibrant city, it is necessary to plan the appropriate programs that are enjoyable to both inhabitants and outside tourists 24/7; and

9) Public Engagement

The last one is public engagement. There are differences in the way of engagement by the type and scale of the

project however, the strong will for participation, understanding as well as public character for the UR project

(especially for Neighborhood UR) would be the key elements for the successful and sustainable UR.