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Residents' Participation and Common Activities in an Intentional Community: The Case of the *Mindlre* Community[†]

A new movement in forming community villages for better living standards is becoming popular. In order to sustain a proper community, it is essential to design proper community programs and facilities, which can encourage the proactive participation of residents. In this study, detailed aspects of the Mindlre (Dandelion) community (including formation process and management of the village) are investigated. The Mindlre community is a successful community village in Korea concerned with residents' participation and community activities. The community is located in Sancheong, Gyung-sangnam-do province in Korea. The study methods are references, field trips, and interviews with residents. Six areas were surveyed and investigated: the physical environment of the Mindlre community and eco-friendly elements, respondents' background and the motivation to join, residents composition, residents' participation in the formation process of the community, self-

management systems and common activities, and residents' life satisfaction. The Mindlre Community was founded on Christian religious faith. The primary idea of this village was building a new hope for rural areas without discrimination. The size of the village was expanded with housing for teachers and students who were linked with the Mindlre School (substitution school). When the community was founded, existing shapes of the village were preserved. The village was physically renovated based on the original environment, in addition nature friendly materials and methods were used. The residents were proactively involved in the community through regular meetings, self-regulation, and community worship. Although the survey results showed that most residents were highly satisfied with living standards, there seemed to be no clear division between community facilities and private houses. A systematic and detailed space planning technique was required. In addition, various community facilities are required due to the expansion of the community.

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A new movement of forming an intentional community for improving an individualistic residential environment or seeking after a better living standard is becoming popular in Korea. There has been a tendency that most construction companies have supplied houses in large quantities to keep pace with the rapid economic growth in Korea. However, diverse residential types reflecting various life styles are demanded. Residents do not

have to keep one-sided and passive attitudes in selecting houses, but need to request preferred residential types and environments. Residents can take more proactive and interactive attitudes through the participation in the formation process. In order to make up for the weak points in current type of housing system, sometimes residents independently form a residential community. They try to raise a sense of community with the intent to have privacy at the same time (The Korean Housing Association, 2000). Residents usually establish an intentional community with specific purposes and it is divided into three different categories based on individual characteristics: eco-village, co-housing, and a religious community (Jeon, 2007).

For sustainable maintenance of the intentional community, it is important to develop community activity programs and facilities that raise the sense of community to create intimate relationships among residents. However, few cases of residents' proactive participation in the formation process and management of intentional communities were reported in Korea, because it is still in the beginning stage. Thus the detailed aspects of the *Mindlle* (Dandelion) community (considered a successful case of an intentional community) were studied. The importance, problems, and goal of intentional community were also analyzed to show the starting point to make an intentional community. Finally, the basic information of common activities and residents' participation was given to revitalize the establishment and maintenance of the new village in Korea. Concrete examples of the communal living including the formation process, management of the community, and participation methods of residents were investigated. Results of this study provide fundamental information on the revitalization of Korean intentional communities.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Intentional Community

The intentional community (which is different from normal community made by the developer) is formed by the special group with the mindset of intention and design. The members of intentional

community have not only the common goal and ideology of life, they also live and work together. They have registered the land and house in the public domain.

There are several kinds of intentional communities like eco-villages, co-housing, and religious communities (Chun, 2007). Eco-villages have the intention of finding solutions to issues of industrial society that has problems of an exhaustion of natural resources, environmental disruptions and ecosystem crisis. In eco-villages, the buildings are consisted of eco-friendly materials and the inhabitants pursue the continuous eco-friendly life. Especially, the inhabitants also share the ecological agriculture methods in concert with the phenomena of returning to the rural areas in Korea. Co-housing was introduced to solve the egoism of industrial life. The members of co-housing have the similar mindsets and lifestyle targets as well they have the characteristics to work together on chores like cooking and day care of children.

There are co-housing, commune, *kollektivehus*, and co-operative housing in terms of intentional communities. Particularly co-housing has appeared in Europe for the aged and children who are belong to weak social classes. It recently has grown all over the world. The religious community is based on the same religion of members. Mostly they share property and work together. Even though all types of intentional community have the different pursuit values, they have a common feature of the cooperative living to solve the problems with the mindset of experience-sharing and non-violence (Kwak, 2008). Also, the constituents, who are organized intentionally, make the community into a physical entity, share the land and buildings.

Residents' Participation

Residents' participation means that to be residents of an intentional community, participants must have positive mindsets from the initial planning stage to final construction. They participate in all processes of building a community by themselves and have the responsibilities in final decisions. Voluntary activities are needed to develop the intentional community (Kathryn & Charles, 2003). Through this partici-

pation processes, the members of community should find the problems and demands to solve them by discussion procedures. Residents' participation, throughout all processes, gives a feeling of satisfaction to members when finished. The connection among neighbors could be more closely related to each other. Community spirit can be preferentially and naturally molded by self-participation to common motives. After moving into new house, the community spirit is based on the fundamentals of relationships and common activities.

Common Activities

Common activities mean that the residents of intentional community are in charge of self-governing, culture life planning, and community life. Those are made up of all activities from dressing up and managing the village to share in the life experience of each member. They include concerts, athletic meetings, all kinds of feasts, and group meetings. Especially, meeting could progress with the items of common meals, cooperative kitchen work, purchasing products, and with the number of participating members. Common activities are realized with the idea of living together and solidified with taking care and concerning of each member. The generosity, love, and cooperation give the positive stability to the community and the activities of sharing the properties reduce the amount of living expenditures. They also have the characteristics of effective education, labor, and communication among all members (Kwak, 2008). Common activities have the effect of increasing the interaction and cohesive power with neighbors, and expand a sense of unity in advance.

RESEARCH METHODS

Selection of Research Subject & Study Methods

In order to select subject of the study, preliminary research was conducted through a literature review (Jeon, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2000; The Korean Housing Association, 2000, 2004) about intentional communities in Korea. For the second step, a fundamental database regarding each community

was collected from internet resources. Based on these results, seven intentional communities were selected, which are well known as the role model of a community through the press, articles, and internet. Researchers contacted representatives of communities for arranging field trips and interviews. The *Mindre* community (a religious community) is one of the seven communities. The reasons to investigate the *Mindre* community were that it had longer history among the seven communities, that the residents had an active mindset to management issues and that it showed the prototype of community villages (Cho *et al.*, 2008).

The interview was used as primary research method. Five residents including the community representative were selected as interviewees, and an in-depth interview was conducted with a prepared questionnaire. Interviews were conducted on February 18th 2008.

Contents of the Research

A structured questionnaire was designed with reference of previous studies (Han, 2005; Hong, 2005; Jeon, 2007; Kwak *et al.*, 2007; Oh, 2002). Detail contents of the questionnaire are as follows: ① Physical environment of the *Mindre* community and eco-friendly elements, ② respondents' background and the motivations to move in, ③ composition of residents, ④ methods of residents' participation in the formation process of the community, ⑤ self-management system and common activities, and ⑥ residents' life satisfaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Physical Environment of the Mindre Community and the Eco-friendly Elements

The *Mindre* community is located in Galjeon-ri 42, Sancheong-gun, Gyeongsangnamdo province in Korea. It is an intentional community, which was based on the Christian principles. The primary idea of the community is building a new hope for rural areas without any discrimination of residents. The residents had started communal life in Jinju city since 1990, and moved to the current place and

TABLE 1. THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF *MINDLRE* COMMUNITY

Building	Numbers	Size	Usage	Possessions	Condition
Individual Dwelling Unit	2	198 m ²	Dwelling	Owned	-
Individual Dwelling Unit	1	98 m ²	Dwelling	Rental	Renovated Building
Common House 1	1	198 m ² (2 storied)	Common Kitchen + Dining Room + Dwellings (1F) Community Hall (2F)	Owned	New Building (1996)
Common House 2	1	66 m ²	Library + Workshop	Owned	Renovated Building
Substitution School	3	198 m ²	Class room + Teacher's room. Dormitories for Boys and Girls	Owned	New Building (2007)

FIGURE 1. VIEW OF *MINDLRE* COMMUNITY

formed a village in 1996. The total area of the village is 792 m². The village is divided by residential areas (396 m²), community facilities (198 m²), and a substitution school (198 m²). All the buildings have been developed after the purchase or rental of existing buildings in the village. The original shapes of the village were preserved, and it was physically renovated based on the existing environment.

There are seven individual houses. Of those, six houses are shared and one house is rented. Two individual dwelling units cover 198 m², other two dwelling units cover 98 m². Each family does not occupy an individual dwelling unit, but some families share the building according to financial ability. The community facility is a two storied building (198 m²). The common kitchen, common space for meetings or worship, and residential space for two families are located inside this building. This common houses were newly built when the community was founded, and about 600,000 Korean Won/m² was spent in 1996. In addition, there is a single story common house (66 m²), and it is used as a common library and workshop.

FIGURE 2. THE *MINDLRE* SCHOOL

The *Mindlre* School, which is a substitution school in the village, was established in 2007. School buildings were constructed with eco-friendly techniques and natural materials such as straw bales. The school consists of three buildings, a staff room and classrooms, dormitories for boys and girls. All residents share ownership of the middle school, which has 24 students, several buildings, and community facilities.

Eco-friendly elements and resources were widely applied as diverse forms such as construction materials, insulation materials, solar energy, wind power, fermentation type toilets, and unpaved roads in the *Mindlre* community. In addition, original shapes of forests, hill areas, and green fields are preserved through minimizing the transformation of geographical features.

During interviews, the residents said as follows,

Eco-friendly materials such as mud or wood are used for the construction. Straw bales are used for most buildings, which are being constructed. We

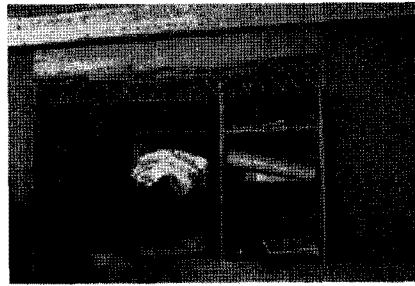
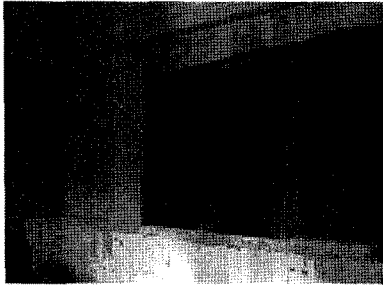


FIGURE 3, 4. THE WALL OF *MINDRE* SCHOOL MADE OF STRAW BALES



FIGURE 5. THE WAREHOUSE MADE OF YELLOW SOIL



FIGURE 6. FERMENTATION TYPE TOILETS

used same materials for the newly constructed buildings in the village. For example, we maximized the usage of eco- friendly methods for the construction of school buildings. In order to enlarge a green area, we designed roofs of the buildings or surfaces of walls with trees and plants.

We have not thought of applying eco-friendly elements to our living from the beginning stage of the Mindre community. However, we have started to use alternative energy resources such as renewable energy, wind power, human energy, solar energy, and biogas. Although these do not produce large amount of energy, we are about to promote and extend the use of these energies.

Fermentation type toilets will replace the flush toilets in the village. We also try to control the use of shampoo or synthetic detergents. Natural composts are produced through fermentation process of the food garbage.

In order to maximize the water permeability of the road, gravels, sand, wood, bricks were used as pavement materials in our village.

Respondents' Background and Motivation to Move in

Three males and two females were interviewed. The range of the ages of respondents was between their late 30's and mid 40's. Concerning the education of respondents, most respondents had university or graduate school degrees. All housewives had a high school education. There was one family that had three generations living together, and most families had at least one child and some up to four children.

About the motivation to move this community, a community representative said that,

When I studied at the university, there was a student group called 'Hak-sa (it means bachelor)'. We tried to make a plan to form a Christian religious community.

We had a strong objective to generate a new hope for the rural area. Like churches in the bible,

TABLE 2. RESPONDENTS' BACKGROUND

Respondents		Age	Education	Occupation	Family
Community Representative	Interviewee (M)	39	Bachelor's degree	Farmer & Chief of the Center for Alternative Energy	4 Children
	Spouse	37	High school diploma	Housewife	
Resident 1	Interviewee (F)	47	Master's degree	Freelancer	1 Parent & 2 Children
	Spouse	48	Master's degree	Manager	
Resident 2	Interviewee (M)	37	Master's degree	Etc.	2 Children
	Spouse	40	Bachelor's degree	Etc.	
Resident 3	Interviewee (M)	40	Bachelor's degree	Technician	1 Child
	Spouse	33	High school diploma	Housewife	
Resident 4	Interviewee (F)	37	High school diploma	Housewife	4 Children
	Spouse	39	Master's degree	Technician	

we wanted to build an ideal community with philosophies of equality and non-possession.

We decided to settle down here to live together with people who believe same values, to enjoy common activities with neighbors, and to live in the nature.

Based on the results of the interview, researchers found that respondents had a common motivation to move into the *Mindlre* community for realizing the non-possessive philosophy through living inside a religious community. Respondents also wanted to live in the *Mindlre* community to seek an eco-friendly life style and to live together with neighbors who are like-minded.

Composition of Residents

Researchers surveyed about the composition of residents through interview with members of the community. Interviewees said as follows:

Concerning the composition of residents, we started to form the community with close friends even though there were company colleagues and people who joined through the public propaganda in the early period.

In the Mindlre community, two families are regular members. And four families are irregular members. There are 13 adults including an

unmarried person, an elderly person, a university student, and a farmer. There are also 12 children in the community. Four families as regular members used to live in the community. However two families are now in Cambodia to build a school.

Besides, there are many collaborative families outside the community. The Mindlre School has 24 students and 3 teachers now.

It shows that the composition of residents in the *Mindlre* community is diverse. The family structure is diverse as well: there are single person households, nuclear families, and extended families. Although the *Mindlre* community is a Christian religious community, it is open to outsiders. Any person who is interested in community living can either experience the community life, or live together as a member in the *Mindlre* community. Compared with other intentional communities, residents of the *Mindlre* community seldom leave the community because of the religious background and strong solidarity.

Residents' Participation in the Formation Process of the Community

Researchers examined the residents' participation in the formation process of the community. Interviewee said as follows.

Concerning the housing design and a renovation, we tried to preserve original shape of the existing houses. Some houses and the community facilities were planned and designed through discussions and the agreement by residents themselves.

When we planned to form the community, we had a plenary session every week and discussed our concerns. Entire process of the community formation was conducted on the initiative of residents.

Although there were some difficulties in constitution of residential infrastructure and community facilities in the village, the conditions were gradually improved. When residents planned to design the shapes of new houses, the original forms were respected and maintained. Furthermore, the *Mindlre* community residents minimized the conflicts with existing inhabitants in the village. They also tried to eliminate all negative stereotypes of the religious community.

Self-management System and Common Activities

The interviewee said as below about self-management system and common activities.

Residents proactively participate in the community events or activities. We hold a tea or dining meeting almost every day. We try to live with carrying the percept of love which is considered a fundamental principle of Christianity through our religious sessions.

There are various common activities here in the community. We have artistic activities (ocarina, piano, needlework, and etc.), Sunday football club, community festivals (anniversaries, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, school festival, and etc.), educational sessions, volunteer service sessions, and co-producing activities.

Most residents proactively participate in group works. We sometimes give the absentee a good scolding, and it is enough.

A residents meeting is held almost every day. The



FIGURE 7. THE COMMON HOUSE

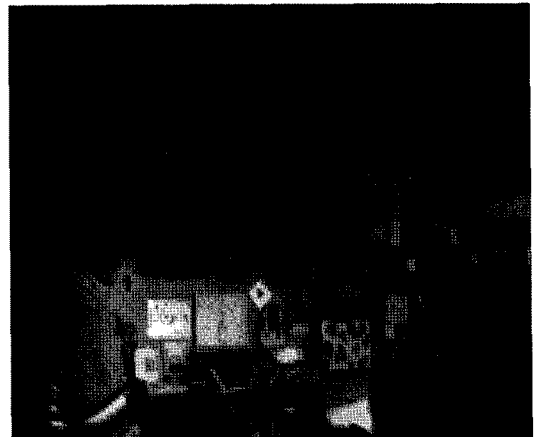


FIGURE 8. THE WORKSHOP

community representative usually brings up the financial issues about the community, and discusses a direction in community management. Conflicts between residents are also settled in this meeting. The meeting is never finished until all issues are passed by a unanimous vote. The community living is controlled by self-regulations in the *Mindlre* community, and these regulations cover all necessary matters such as community management or shared ownership issues.

Residents' Life Satisfaction

Researchers also asked about residents' life satisfaction

We are very much satisfied with our current life. So, we never want to leave the Mindlre



FIGURE 9. THE WORKSHOPS (EXTERIOR)

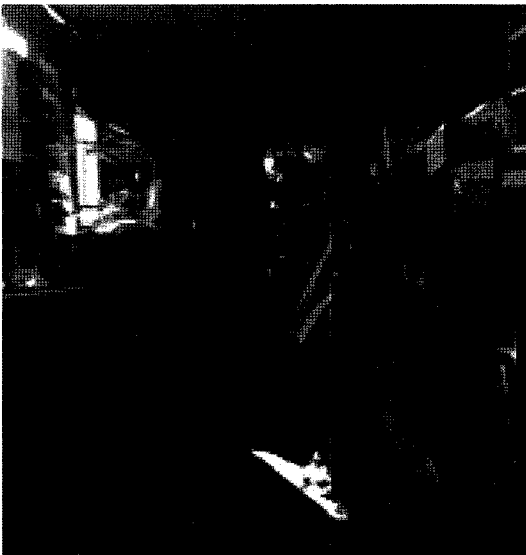


FIGURE 10. THE WORKSHOP (INTERIOR)

community and move out to other place.

However, there are many things to be improved regarding the individual dwelling units.

I believe that the Mindlre community does not exist for the individual resident's self-happiness. The spontaneous affection towards our neighbors is the fundamental philosophy here. Therefore, the overall solidarity of our community is stronger than that of any other types of community.

I have lived here for 9 years since the Mindlre community has been formed, and I am very much satisfied with my life here. Of course, there are many things to be improved and each resident should make an effort to develop our community.

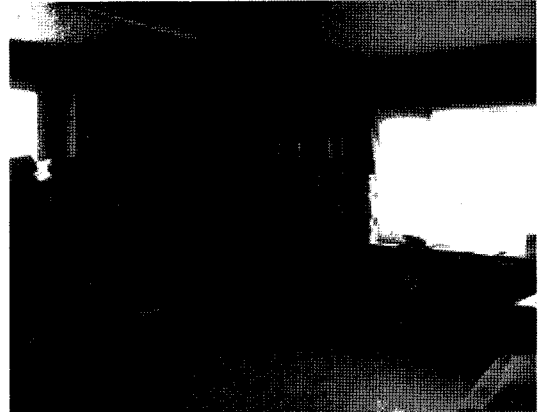


FIGURE 11. THE COMMON LIBRARY

We are making efforts now.

Proper communication and understanding are the most important in the community life. Sometimes residents misunderstand each other due to the lack of proper communication. I think this kind of communication problem naturally occurs under conditions of community life. I think the most important thing is how to tackle the conflicts.

In order to encourage residents' participation in common activities and to raise the sustainability of the community, we need to sacrifice ourselves and try to respect other residents' opinions.

In general, residents of the Mindlre community showed a high satisfaction with the community life. Most respondents did not consider leaving the Mindlre community. However, satisfaction with physical features of the individual dwelling units was low. Researchers found that residents had some difficulties and complaints regarding the quality and size of residential spaces.

CONCLUSION

Based on results of this research, following characteristics were found concerning the residents' participation and common activities in the Mindlre community.

First, the *Mindlre* community was formed by residents based on the Christian principles. Residents showed very high adaptability and satisfaction with the community life. The constitution of the community was planned and processed through the education and discussion among the residents themselves.

Second, concerning the physical features of the community, there was lack of professionalism in space composition even though the idea of residents' participation in the decision making process was excellent. There was no clear zoning between the community facilities for common activities and individual dwelling units that should protect the residential privacy. Moreover, there was no structured connection between the community facilities and individual dwelling units. Respondents showed low satisfaction with individual dwelling units, and there was lack of diverse infrastructure and related facilities that would make a easy connection between the community and the *Mindlre* School. It is necessary to make up for the weak points in quality and scale of entire community buildings. Researchers believe that the *Mindlre* community needs to ask architects and specialists to complement the weak aspects of the current space composition.

Third, one of the significant characteristics of the *Mindlre* community is that residents established a substitution school after they formed the community. Establishing the school seems to be a very effective solution to prevent residents from leaving the community for children's education. The residents have tried to make up the proper educational environment for rearing children. It is also very helpful to revitalize the local society.

Fourth, the *Mindlre* community has internal solidarity, but also has an open operating system which outsiders can access the community life without any barrier. The system consists of three phases; regular membership, irregular membership, and collaborative family. From the religious aspect, devotional regular members build a strong solidarity through a spirit of volunteering and sacrifices. Whoever wants to live in the community can obtain a position as an irregular member or collaborative

family. This system shows the characteristics of openness in the *Mindlre* community.

Fifth, the residents meeting has been successfully managed in the *Mindlre* community. It was not caused by outstanding leadership of a specific individual, but also it is due to the perseverance of the community representatives to supervise meetings and draw conclusions by unanimous votes.

Sixth, the community facilities and various common activity programs are operated by a self-management system in the *Mindlre* community. They are supposed to be good tools to create and intimate atmosphere among residents and to emphasize the value of community life.

In Korea, the number of people that want to have a community and live together is increasing with the phenomena of returning to the rural areas. But, there is little professional knowledge of planning to revitalize villages, also they do not have experience with the community life. Consequently, they made many mistakes from the initial planning stage to manage the village. From the survey of the *Mindlre* community, it was found that the positive participation of residents was based on the intentional community, and the mindset to united and open activities was needed. Those could make the rational relationship among neighbors, give the high satisfaction, and give the motivation for developing a village. The *Mindlre* community is closely related with the school activities, so it enlarged the scope of the community. Even though it lacks in a physical environment and facilities, the community tries to be eco-friendly. The religious background was found as a key factor of the intentional community in the case of *Mindlre* community, more research is needed to realize a desirable neighbor and community living in the case of a non-religious community

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