

# Urban Community as a Contested Practice: A Gap between Ordinary Practices and Civic Advocacy Discourse

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## 경합적 실천으로서 도시 공동체: 일상 실천과 시민사회 옹호 담론 간의 간극

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**Abstract :** This article problematizes and interrogates the idea of ‘community’ which is increasingly important in Korean urban policy-making. For the purpose, this article scrutinizes, and compares, how ordinary citizen participants and civil society activist organizations in a ‘community garden’ program of Seoul make sense of, utilize, and practice the policy concept. The neo-Foucauldian perspective of ‘governmentality’ is employed to understand the association between the community-focused policy program and neoliberalism, but Barnett’s(2005) call for ‘bottom-up governmentality’ is taken seriously in order to avoid any deterministic interpretation. On the basis of this eclectic perspective on governmentality, this article presents empirical findings that may suggest a contestation over community between ordinary citizens and civil society activists. More specifically, ordinary citizen participants prioritize place-based, on-the-ground community experiences that are built on common cultivation practices, whereas civil society activists tend to consider community garden as a teleological governmental technology generative of particular citizen subjects. Civic community garden advocacy as such aims to address social, economic, and spatial problems that neoliberalism has produced, but it also appears to be in a close association with neoliberal urban policy. Thus, the community activism’s meaningfulness lies in its active intervention to neoliberal urban policy, but a gap between ordinary practical achievements and civic activism can be a potential danger to urban community policy. On the basis of this discussion, this article asks more detailed investigations about the taken-for-granted positivity of urban community (re)vitalization programs, and also examinations on whether and how such projects generates emergent tensions between ordinary achievements and policy prescriptions.

**Key Words :** urban community, practices, neoliberalism, governmentality, citizen subjects

**요약 :** 본 논문은 한국 도시 정책에서 그 중요성이 확대되고 있는 ‘공동체’ 개념을 탐구 문제로 설정하여 심문한다. 이를 위해 서울의 한 ‘공동체 텃밭’ 프로그램 장소에서 일반 시민 참여자들과 시민사회 단체들이 공동체라는 개념을 어떻게 이해하고, 사용하며, 실천하는지를 조사하여 비교, 분석한다. 신푸코주의적 ‘통치성’ 관점을 통해 공동체 중심의 정책 프로그램과 신자유주의 사이의 담론-수행적 연관성을 분석하지만, 결정론적 해석을 지양하기 위해 ‘아래로부터의 통치성’ 또한 본 논문에서 중요하게 여겨진다. 이와 같은 통치성에 대한 ‘절충적’ 이해를 바탕으로, 본 논문은 일반 시민과 시민사회 활동가 사이의 공동체에 대한 경합적 간극을 암시할 법한 경합적 발견들을 기술한다. 구체적으로, 일반 시민 참여자들은 공동체를 장소 중심으로 새롭게 나타나는 공통적이고 구체적인 실천적 사항의 결과물로 이해하고 일상적으로 수행하지만, 시민사회 단체들의 목적론적 정책 담론 속에서 공동체는 특정 시민주체를 배양하기 위한 사회-공간적 통치 기술로 짜여 있는 것으로 보인다.

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이들이 주창하는 공동체는 신자유주의가 유발한 각종 사회, 경제, 공간적 문제의 해결책으로 그려지는 동시에, 신자유주의적 도시 정책과 적극적 연대 관계에 놓여있는 것으로도 보인다. 이것은 모순적 신자유주의적 도시 정책이 만들어낸 틈에 적극 개입하여 대안적 해결책을 찾는 유의미한 시도로 판단되지만, 일반인들의 일상적 실천 결실과 시민사회 운동 사이의 간극은 도시 공동체 정책의 잠재적 위협 요소가 될 수 있을 것으로도 여겨진다. 이 같은 논의를 바탕으로, 본 논문은 긍정적인 것으로 당연시되는 공동체 활성화 정책에 대한 면밀한 분석을 요구하고, 일상적 실천의 결실과 정책적 기대 사이에 생성되는 긴장 관계가 없는지 반추하는 것이 그 분석의 한 가지 방법이 될 수 있다는 점도 강조한다.

**주요어** : 도시 공동체, 실천, 통치성, 신자유주의, 시민주체

## 1. Introduction

Community is becoming an increasingly popular, if not hegemonic, urban policy concept in Korea. Most conspicuously, ‘community regeneration’ has recently been a key area of policy support and promotion, and an increasing number of provincial governors, city/metropolitan mayors, and district heads in the country have expressed their willingness to devise community-focused projects. For instance, a simple Google search on January 6, 2016 generated a list of 50 local government chiefs who mentioned ‘community’ in their ‘new year speech’ for the year. They include not only high-profile politicians such as Seoul Mayor Won-Soon Park and Gyeonggi Province Governor Gyeong-Pil Nam, but also County Heads of remote localities such as Bonghwa, Youngwol, Okcheon, Boeun, Haenam, and Gangjin. As such, community is becoming a buzz word for local development throughout the country like competitiveness in the 1990s and creativity in the 2000s, but the real processes and consequences of community-centered urban policy appear to receive little critical scrutiny partly because of positive connotations the idea provokes in the country. For example, community is seen as a solution to disintegrated urban neighborhood in community regeneration programs of Seoul Metropolitan Government(SMG, 2013), and it is also thought to be a way of recovering and

reconstructing traditional cultural values impinged upon place-based close social interactions and networks.

In this context, this article problematizes the idea of community in urban policy, and examines how it is actually understood and practiced. For the purpose, it presents a ‘critical discourse analysis’(Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 2001) of ethnographic and interview data that I gleaned from an urban ‘community’ garden in Seoul, as well as some important policy advocacy documents related to the policy program. Nodeul Urban Agriculture Park(NUAP) where 600 individual/family members and 19 civic organizations are participating in a city-led project of urban cultivation-focused community regeneration is the particular site of interest in this article.<sup>1)</sup> At NUAP, according to its head manager, individual/family tenants are called ‘cultivators’, and participant civic urban agriculture organizations are differentiated from them with a category of ‘community member’. The former group of lay participants needs to pass through highly competitive procedures to hold a plot of 6.6m<sup>2</sup> there at yearly rent of 20,000 Won. Since its opening in 2012, NAUP has maintained a low acceptance rate of tenant applications (1 to 5.8 in 2013, 1 to 3 in 2014, and 1 to 4 in 2015), and only 30% of cultivators are able to renew their annual lease on the basis of biannual plot evaluations. In contrast, community members composed primarily of leading urban agriculture activists groups are allowed to maintain much larger plots with little external

intervention, and some activists take part in the monitoring of individual/family cultivators. This article's analysis is centered on how these two groups of NUAP makers make sense of and also practice community building, and this examination is built on Lynn Staeheli's (2008, 18) call for the problematization of community:

[Community] is the terrain that is negotiated particular constructions of citizenship are put forward, contested and changed through time. Citizenship and community, therefore, are always unsettled. In that sense, they are always a problem. They are problems to be engaged and worked with, rather than to be dismissed, ignored or condemned. They are part of the agonism of democracy and citizenship, as riven with problems as these may be.

For the problematization, I also employ the Foucauldian idea of 'governmentality', which is concerned with the extension of state power to ordinary social practices and subject formations, albeit with a critical reflection (Elden, 2007; Foucault, 1991; Huxley, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2006). In this analytical framework, as Larner (2003, 511) emphasizes, it is important to understand 'techniques of neoliberalism, [and] mundane practices through which neoliberal spaces, states and subjects are being constituted in particular forms' with respect to neoliberal state policy-making and circulation. Governmentality has helped urban geographers critically reexamine the idea and the practice of community gardening. From the perspective, for example, Pudup (2008) characterizes community gardens as neoliberal spaces of governmentality, highlighting its association with social engineering of new consumer-citizen subjects, with a partial acknowledgement of their aim to challenge hegemonic ideologies such as corporate capitalism and racism. Similarly, Ghose and Pettygrove (2014) have recently found community garden activism's attendance to neoliberal tenets such as welfare retrenchment, neigh-

borhood beautification, the temporary use of future real estate development site, the devolution of state responsibility to the community level, and conditional citizenship with subtle exclusive elements. As I will show, these critiques help understand the relationship between urban agriculture activism and neoliberalism, especially how civil society actors make sense of and practice urban agriculture in Seoul.

Whilst the governmentality approach resists resting on a simple advocacy standing point and also offers opportunities and challenges to community development's progressive potentials, its economic and statistic rendition of governmentality comes short of examining the role of non-state and non-corporate actors (Allen, 2004; Barnett, 2005). To address the blindspot, this article is also attentive to Barnett's (2005) call for 'bottom-up governmentality', which highlights open-ended power relations instead of any structurally deterministic interpretation of power and governmentality, in consideration of a primary group of research subjects, civil activists in this article. In this view based on another Foucauldian interpretation of power as an immanent force (Allen 2004), power relations are not seen as domination by supposedly powerful institutions and people, but as an 'effect' that is shaped through diverse relations and techniques acting on and through people, who are not only experience but also transform power relation through specific site-based engagements. From this perspective, Barnett (2005, 10) also argues that "there is no such thing as [hegemonic] neoliberalism", indicating "the proactive role of socio-cultural processes in provoking changes in modes of governance, policy, and regulation". To him, more specifically, 'populist ethos' such as consumer expectations, bottom-up movements, and polyvalent democracy is also a key driver of social and political change. As such, an enhanced role of human actors and their networks is emphasized in the idea of bottom-up governmentality.

With these concerns about governmentality in mind, this article pays close attention to ordinary community

gardeners and civil society activist organizations to avoid any deterministic rendition of community practices. This article therefore consists of five sections including these introduction comments. The second section offers a review of critical scholarly works on community garden as an important intellectual context for this research. In the third section, ordinary experiences of community building among individual/family tenants at NUAP are examined. Then, their experiences are compared to several noticeable efforts to idealize community in civil society urban agriculture activism in the fourth section. Finally, community is considered as a ‘contested practice’ in the fifth section, in which this finding’s policy implications are also discussed.

## 2. Community as a Problematic Concept: The Case of Community Gardens

‘Allotment’ and ‘community garden’ are most widely used spatial categories and metaphors for urban cultivation, but they are provincial practices in the Europe and North America, respectively. Because the terms are embedded in specific geographical and institutional settings, they have specific connotations. For example, government responsibilities including site provisioning and land tenure protection are assumed in allotment cultivation, and decentralized neighborhood level grassroots initiative is implied in community gardening. Therefore, in the United Kingdom where community garden is increasingly popular, “there is a notable difference between allotment gardening, where each member has a plot of land, and community gardens, which are a public garden in terms of ownership, access and their degree of democratic control”(Firth *et al.*, 2011, 556). For this reason, both terms are hardly applicable to other geographical settings such as Korea, where the national government

has recently started to encourage, rather than require, local authorities to open urban cultivation sites with little legal protection for land tenure(Lee, 2015a). Similarly, the correct meaning of Japanese “shimin noen” is lost when it is referred to as either allotment or community garden in literature written in English(e.g., Azuma and Wiltshire, 2000; Mok *et al.*, 2014).<sup>2)</sup>

At the same time, there is a growing suspicion about the relevance of community as the most valued spatio-sociality of urban cultivation. Community is under critical scrutiny in many studies because community-building tends to be seen as an unproblematic character of urban cultivation(Bouvier-Daclon and Senecal, 2001; Ernwein, 2014; Firth *et al.*, 2011; Kurtz, 2001; Pudup, 2008; Staeheli, 2008). There are five types of critical assessment about the presupposed causality between community and urban cultivation.

First, community means different things in different societies, and thus defining the relationship in any single term is almost impossible. In this regard, for example, Ernwein(2014, 79) indicates that community is “negatively associated with the fragmentation of society and the risk of ‘communitarianism’ where each culture lives on its own and endangers national harmony” in francophone Switzerland to explain why urban gardening is framed as an affair of inter-city networks in one of her case studies. As such, she suggests that the ‘imagined community’(Anderson, 1991) of the nation can be prioritized in some societies. In addition, territoriality is a key defining element of community, which can be defined as “a group of people who share common culture, values, and/or interest, based on social identity and/or territory”(Martin, 2009, 103), and the commonality is also seen to help lay foundation for mutual support and responsibility among the idea’s advocates. However, Martin(2009) suggests that the popular deployment of community in current public policy is influenced by a neighborhood level fixation of the Chicago School sociologists, who adopted and adapted German sociologist

Tonnies' pre-industrial rural community concept for their explorations of urban neighborhoods in a different socioeconomic setting of industrialization.

In this line, second, much of urban cultivation policy pursues the goal of neighborhood community development and regeneration, but the association is founded to be weak or ambiguous in some empirical studies. One reason is that community is unable to capture all the gardening motivations. In an analysis of social interactions and relationships in Montreal community gardens, Bouvier-Daclon and Senecal(2001, 507) find that gardeners are mainly interested in their own cultivation and "the only community element of these gardens is their name". Similarly, as a former community garden coordinator in San Francisco, Pudup(2008, 1231) characterizes the garden's internal society as "communities of self interest in which gardeners are bound together by a fierce determination to obtain and hang on to a plot of cultivable urban space". These findings in existing literature suggest that community might be neither a major motivation for urban cultivation nor a significant achievement.

Third, dedicated urban cultivators, 'non-representational' ethnographic studies suggest, are more attentive to personal 'performative' experiences and achievements(Crouch, 2003a: 2003b; Lorimer, 2005). In Couch's(2003a) account of British allotments, in situ community-building activities such as 'close contact with others' is found to comprise an aspect of plot-holders mundane practices. However, generative, emergent socio-spatialities out of their 'unremarkable' terrestrial activities are much more than that. Embodied practices of doing and feeling cultivation are conducive to self-identification through (re)negotiation with multiple contexts of the practices, including society and nature. In relation to society, for example, their self-identification, sense of becoming rather than being is associated with such performative achievements as sensual feelings of love and care, perception of non-commodity values, and proud of giving(also see Lee, 2016). With these observa-

tions of inter-subjective self-identification process from his 'lay geography' of allotments, Crouch (2003a: 2003b) also challenges a conservative performativity notion grounded on prefigured, coded, and ritualized practices, such as Butler(1997), and calls for a more generative performativity concept(e.g., Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). In this way, he implies, over-coded representations such as community ideal can be contested, dislodged, and/or refigured through cultivation site 'dwelling'.

However, fourth, in case that community-building is evident, the nature of community varies from one place to another. In a study of community gardens in Nottingham, the United Kingdom, Firth *et al.*(2011) identify two distinguishable community types: 'place-based', or territorially embedded local community, and 'interest-based' community whose members are not always confined to a specific neighborhood. Similarly, Kurtz(2001) finds variations in community formation in her comparative analysis of three community gardens in Minneapolis, the United States. In the study, site's size, cultivator's place of residence(i.e., nearby vs. faraway), accessibility, and openness(i.e., fenced or not) are found to influence the degrees of community-building and diversity, and the perception of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. More specifically, Kurtz(2001) suggests, smaller community gardens and neighborhood membership are conducive to building a stronger sense of cohesion, and enclosure vis-à-vis openness incurs a different sense and experience of community among gardeners.

Fifth, most importantly, community is not a politically innocent idea and policy practice. Critical researchers highlight its association with neoliberal governance strategies of, for example, capital accumulation, welfare provision, and neighborhood policing(Martin, 2009; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Staeheli, 2008). As Staeheli's (2008) meticulous analysis of the neoliberal 'moral' politics of community responsibility and care reveals, exclusion, as well as inclusion, is intrinsic to in community-building because morality involves a division of agreement and

disagreement about certain values. For this reason, she also argues, some individuals and groups are possibly deprived of their citizenship if communities participate in the normalization of certain values, which run counter to theirs, and the politics of community activism needs detailed interrogations in terms of its internal operation, external relations, its relationship with citizenship, and associated conflicts, contradictions, and negotiations.

Despite these conceptual and political problems, community garden is the most widely used term in academic research, as well as advocate policy organizations, in a manner of “producing social representation in which everything is part of the same complex and therefore ultimately means the same thing”(Gibson-Graham, 1996, ix cited in Blomley, 2004, 643). Even researchers critical of the idea of community still tend to employ the term, except for a few notable case studies such as Moore(2006) on subsistence gardens and Pudup’s(2008) organized gardening projects. This is an understandable trend given international knowledge exchange is important in academia as well. However, it is also equally true that unproblematic employment single dominant term based on a particular geography might evaporate all the practical differences in place, and that one might be considered to be an ‘ideal type’.

### 3. A Place-Based Community in Practice: Individual/ Family Cultivators’ View

I have found in a previous research that urban cultivation activities at NUAP generated a set of ‘economic’ activities, whose values were realized and recognized outside the capitalist market economy, and offered detailed explication of them somewhere else(Lee, 2016). To recapitulate some important empirical observations, agricultural produces were produced with unpaid labor for self-

sustenance household consumption, but much of them was also distributed by non-capitalist modes of transaction such as sharing and donation without pecuniary gain. It was also found in the study that emotional accomplishments, such as enjoyment of satisfying curiosity, pleasure of caring for plots, produce, and family, pride of giving, and earning recognition from peer cultivators and neighbors facilitated such non-capitalist economic activities. With regard to this paper’s main analytical concern, this emergent mode of agricultural economy is seen to have three broader social effects, which took place beyond the cultivation site and also strengthen communities of various forms, as well as forming a what Firth *et al.*(2011) call ‘place-based’ community of urban agricultural practices.

First, NUAP cultivators invariably told me in personal interviews, cultivation strengthened family tie, as food production and consumption became a collaborative project of family members. Especially, married couples talked about their experience of improvement in conjugal relation. A important mechanism was husband’s growing interest in wife’s works, as a female interviewee of Yong-san District in mid-50s(AAA) said that her photographs and excited explanations of produce growing attracted her husband’s attention and led him to come to NUAP every weekend.<sup>3)</sup> This was an important change from a man’s perspective, given Mr. BBB’s(male East Ichon resident) apt description of Korean male white-collar workers’ life pattern: “over-working in weekdays and meeting friends in the weekends”. NUAP tenants also brought their extended families to show their plot, share produce, and enjoy family reunion in an unconventional way as Mr. CCC(male cultivator from West Ichon in early 50s) told to me:

At home, there is nothing to say to kids except for ‘eat!’ and ‘study!’ This place is different. We can teach something in this nature. Let say, ‘this is chilly’, ‘this is lettuce’... Family reunion is also different. At

restaurants, it takes only one hour to finish eating. What can we say? Deep conversation is impossible... But, here conversation begins with this plant and that plant. Then, we glide into some serious talks like family history, very naturally... One, two hours pass really fast. And, the same is true with even others.(personal interview)

As this person suggested in the end of the quote, the second social effect of cultivation was a new way of interacting with strangers and forming a community. Mr. CCC said, “we say hello to strangers here”, and similar descriptions of NUAP’s cordial atmosphere were also told in other interviews. Nobody was able to explicate the reason other than a ‘natural mood’, but what the people consistently emphasized were this place’s differences from other social sites. The ‘absence of backbites’ was a key narrated difference from oversocialized sites. This West Ichon resident mentioned it to make a distinction from workplace colleague gatherings, and aforementioned Yongsan District woman Ms. AAA compared Nodeulseom’s socializing environment with her neighborhood gossips. To another ardent female cultivator(DDD, East Ichon resident in 50s), Nodeulseom is a ‘demilitarized zone’ because she was able to enjoy a “culture of cultivation... and communication... regardless of others’ age, education, and job”. An atmosphere of ‘easy communication’ also made Mr. BBB happy at NUAP. According to him, “Aged people [like me] are not easy to make friends because people become stubborn as getting older. But, I can broaden communication by exchanging greetings and playing [Korean] chess here”. In this circumstance of easy communication, cultivators learned each other, and knowledge transfer took place ‘naturally’ between experienced and inexperienced farmers, in an old lady’s account(EEE, female cultivator from East Ichon in late 60s). She spent about 200,000 Korean Won annually for the management of her plot when she was a novice, but only 50,000 to

60,000 Korean Won was necessary in 2014 owing to colleague tenants’ advice.

Despite the easily communicative atmosphere generative of a community of agricultural practices, NUAP was not a conflict free community. For example, according to an on-site manager at NUAP Office, two section groups of tenants argued over the size of plots in early 2014 cultivation season, and two groups looked unfriendly even after reconciliation. I was also able to feel such an awkward atmosphere when some tenants talked of complaints over others. For example, some cultivators’ smoking, bringing dogs, produce overgrowth to others’ plot, and plot size difference were the narrated sources of complaint. These internal disagreements were not seen to be an adversarial internal division, and tenants appeared to more or less respect their differences. I recognized this social atmosphere while snowballing the size of my acquaintances and informants at Nodeulseom. For example, an informant introduced me to many people, and the networking was not limited to tenants of the person’s favorite. After an interview, another person encouraged me to meet the other tenant because s/he would be able to give another perspective, saying “[s/he] is different from us”. This loosely socialized environment for communication was told as an important base of NUAP’s ‘community spirit’ in an interview with Mr. CCC.

As such, third, community was experienced and perceived as a loosely tied social site among the dominant group of Nodeulseom users, individual/family tenants. In their perception, a variety of agricultural practices, including land fertilization, cultivation, and produce consumption and distribution, were seen to generate a new community, through which tenants, their acquaintances, and strangers created and reshaped diverse inter-personal and social relations. In this place-based community formation, some relations were congealed and relatively stable, and they were found within groups of close tenants. In such groups, involved tenants made consistent interactions, and exchanged their personal cares and af-

fections.

A moment at an evening gathering of four experienced tenants and two NUAP Office employees on July 18 is illustrative. In their meeting, participants kept expressing their worry of Mr. CCC's recent lacking appearance at NUAP, and the person was trying to divert the topic in the beginning. Later, when he drank rice wine a little bit, he started to talk about his father's illness in relation to his recent absence and burst into tears while disclosing family conflict over the family issue. In a silence, a Buddhist female cultivator took off her bracelet of 21 beads and put it on his wrist, saying "everything will go well". A similar story was heard in an interview with Ms. EEE who lived alone:

My mother passed away on April 4. I was just crying at home and couldn't eat anything for three days. I got a phone call from a worried cultivator, and said what happened to me... She came over my home with something to eat, and she comforted me... I thought, this great place builds up great relations. I won't be able to forget her kindness.(personal interview)

Unlike these close relations, others were temporary but socially meaningful. These experiences were heard mostly in relationship to tenants' involvement in collaborative altruistic projects and public event volunteering. However, still others were confrontational. One type of these relations was internal conflicts, as the case of plot size disagreement illustrates. In this context, a male cultivator was discussed in the above-noted evening gathering. NUAP employees did not make any intervention, and two present tenants resentfully talked about what they call 'bastard CEO XXX', who seemed to own a business. However, the furious backbite was soon resolved when Mr. BBB in charge of plot evaluation talked about a par excellence plot management of the 'bastard CEO'.

The other type of confrontational relations was rather quiet in comparison to the inter-tenant conflicts, but

potentially adversarial. It happened between individual/family tenants(i.e., cultivators) and civic organization 'community' members, and the primary source of confrontation was differentiated perception and expectation about community formation. Unlike the individual/family tenants' perception of community centered on real-life social interactions at NUAP, some influential civic organizations saw community as something that only they could design, create, and manage. Put another way, in view of these community designers, the idea of community was not a suitable descriptor for individual/family cultivators. For the idealization, the community designers not only delimited community to their activities, but also employed a discursive practice of stigmatizing the tenants as "selfish" participants lacking community spirit, as an influential civic activist told me "individualized cultivation is one of our problems. People keep indicating this problem... selfish cultivation... We need change the direction to public interest".

In the opposite side, individual/family cultivators paid little attention to the organizations' discursive practice, but expressed their complaints of the civic organizations' practice at NUAP from another perspective. A dual standard and unfairness was at the center of their contention. In other words, individual/family tenants complained of the absence of any regulation for community member plots and the unconditional renewal of their land tenure(see above). Indeed, civic organization participants of the NUAP program were highly active in urban agriculture policy governance at SMG, but they were rarely diligent of NUAP plot management as an organization leader admitted, "we do not utilize [NUAP] for a specific purpose". Other organization leaders gave me similar comments about their use. For this reason, individual/family tenant leaders saw the participant organizations as a hindrance to cultivation plot availability at NUAP. Indicating the community members' negligent plot management, some individual/family tenant leaders referred to the organizations' cultivation plots as "communist



collective farms”, while hoping NUAP to be a place and community of only individual/family plots.

#### 4. Views from Civil Society: Community, a Technique of Neoliberal Governmentality?

While problematizing, and othering, self-interested cultivation practices, civil society activists have recently begun to advocate North American ‘community garden’ an alternative model to replace the current public urban gardening program format centered on annual leases to individual families such as NUAP. In so doing, they tend to criticize individual/family participants’ overindulgence in cultivation on the one hand, and idealize the North American model as a ‘powerful community solution’(Agro City Seoul 2013) to such practices. The policy tour that influential community garden advocates in Seoul made to annual meetings of the American Community Garden Association in 2013(Seattle) and 2014(Chicago) illustrates the American model’s rise in Seoul. Indeed, the community garden model is increasingly understood as an alternative to ‘weekend farm’ programs, which have been rendered to be a primary cause of urban farmers’ selfish behaviors among civil society activists.

However, there is no agreement about what community garden means among leading community garden advocates, who are involved in the place-making of NUAP(Lee, 2015b) and the policy-making of Agro City Seoul more broadly(Lee, 2015a). Such informants of mine indicated North America as the concept’s geographical origin, but different people explicated it in different ways. To illustrate, three noticeably differentiated perceptions and expectations are introduced here.

To begin with, an urban agriculture-based social enterprise CEO, who is also a landscaping expert teaching a

college near Seoul and utilizing NUAP as a site for his social enterprise experiment explained community garden to me in comparison with ‘kitchen gardens’, employing English language:

In foreign countries, kitchen gardens and community gardens are different... Strictly speaking, that place [Nodeulseom] is not a community garden. It is filled with kitchen gardens. People plant flowers and put some beautiful decorations in community gardens [outside Korea]. This is the difference. They grow something only to eat [at NUAP].(personal interview)

In contrast to this businessperson who emphasized the necessity to go beyond individual food production, Dr. Chang-Woo Lee, a leading urban agriculture policy researcher at The Seoul Institute emphasized the needs of connecting urban agriculture with broader social policy such as welfare program and also requiring individual tenants’ social responsibilities. Right after benchmarking North American models at the 2013 American Community Garden Association Conference in Seattle, Dr. Lee(2013, 449) wrote in a research report:

Our community gardens [on city-owned properties] are lacking community spirit. As the cases of Vancouver and Seattle demonstrate, community garden must be founded upon community spirit... To nurture community spirit, an institutional improvement is necessary to require plots for donation and tenants’ obligatory volunteering. We should develop programs that can link community gardens to multicultural families, and to food banks.

Like Dr. Lee, Kang-Oh Lee(2012, 465) at Seoul Green Trust, a leading urban agriculture advocate organization in Seoul, considers social responsibility as the defining feature of community garden, but he also differentiates it from ‘food production type’(e.g., post-Soviet era Cuba

and crisis era relief gardens in the United States) and ‘leisure type’(e.g., English ‘allotments’, German ‘kleingärten’, Japanese ‘shimin noen’, and conventional Korean practices at ‘weekend farms’). He offers this typology to emphasize ‘lessons that can be drawn from North American community garden movement’(Lee, 2013, 466), and make a call for changes in current practices focused on food production and leisure in Seoul. At the same time, government-nonprofit partnership is what he advocates. While introducing Seattle’s P-Patch as a model, Mr. Lee highlights the presence of ‘middle organizations’ between city government and individual cultivators as an important lesson(Lee, 2012; 2013). Regarding Nodeulseom, he has recently proposed to benchmark Eden Trust in the United Kingdom and Friends of Highline in New York for a nonprofit-led governance model for the island’s future project(Lee, 2014). In an interview with me, he also revealed his ‘dream of Korean-style Eden project’ at Nodeulseom.

Despite the varied renditions of community garden, there are two important commonalities in the civil society community garden advocacy. First, the concept community is employed as a means of disciplining and othering self-interested urban cultivators as above-noted characterizations among civic advocates demonstrate, and also engineering socially responsible cultivator subjects. In other words, particular behavioral expectations and community ethics are presupposed in the advocacy of community garden. In varying degrees, civil society activists problematize self-interested behaviors in public urban cultivation sites such as NUAP, and refer to ‘community spirit’ as a solution to ‘our problems’ such as overindulgence in cultivation, individualism, and selfishness. In this discursive practices, the community spirit is assumed to enhance ‘public interest’ of city-owned group cultivation sites, and then group cultivation’s public interest is projected to achieve by making an attractive place as I discussed in another paper(Lee, 2015b) and also fulfilling the city government’s policy agendas such

as community regeneration and welfare provisioning. In this context, leading urban agriculture nonprofits endeavor to serve as ‘middle organizations’ between the government and individual cultivators because, they believe, they are capable of designing communities and nurturing socially responsible behaviors.

The second commonly held view among activists is that community garden can help revive Korean agriculture, which is “on the verge of collapse” because of free trade agreements (FTAs) according to a leading civil society activist, who was frequently referred to as the father of urban agriculture in Korea:

FTA will collapse commercial agriculture. How can it survive in price competition? Cheap produce from the United States, China, and South America inundates in domestic market. Vegetable market is also on the verge of collapse. It takes only two hours to import Chinese vegetables. Only grains were imported previously because long distance shipment was possible, and vegetable trade was impossible... But, Korea-China FTA will take a toll on domestic vegetables... This is ironical, but a chance for... communitarian cultivation.(personal interview)

In such ways, many activists believe that the ‘communitarian cultivation’ can reshape consumer needs and generate a new form of demand in the city. In turn, they also expect, the new demand would nullify the advantage of imported cheap produce and create a new market for rural farmers. In this line, an eco-feminist also claimed in an interview, “only direct experiences will let urbanites realize the value of Korean agriculture and understand the importance of food security... This is the way how the rural area can survive... urban agriculture is a great learning opportunity to understand how agriculture can enriches our life and places of living”. In this way or another, activists perceive community garden as a tool of engineering new ‘consumer subjects’(Purdup, 2008) able

to make a contribution to the survival of countryside and rural agriculture.

## 5. Summary and Policy Implications

To summarize, civil society activists advocate community garden as a spatial technology to nurture socially responsible citizens and politico-economically conscious consumers. These coded practices are drawn to generate new social relations and socio-economic subjects in neo-liberal capitalism at different geographical scales. At the nexus of national market and global capitalism, urban cultivators are projected to become conscious consumers who can help the adaptation of rural areas to increasing agriculture market liberalization. At the city level, community garden advocacy also has an effect of diverting the state's responsibility of social food provisioning to the community. As such, in a nutshell, community garden advocacy in the civil society activism is centered on nurturing community subjects able to attend to and resist neoliberalism at the same time. More specifically, such subjects are expected to resist consuming commercial/imported agricultural products and in so doing generate a new economic condition for changes in rural agriculture production on the one hand, and participate in the devolution of the state's welfare responsibility to the community level on the other.

However, those prefigured community expectations are only partly performed at NUAP because individual participants make sense of community in a different way. As discussed above, NUAP cultivators tend to value emergent place-based, but also spatially extensive, community experiences closely related to self-reliant production higher than the imposition of particular community ideals. In my observations, the presence of activist organizations is occasionally referred to as a hindrance to community formation of their interest. Therefore, I

suspect, overemphasis on any imposed community ideal limiting individual freedom may generate a fissure between activists and lay cultivators, and become a source of conflict.

Finally, it is possible to draw three policy implications on the basis of the primary finding on community as a contested discourse-cum-practice. Firstly, it makes a call for detailed investigation and interrogation about the taken-for-granted positivity of the community ideal. Community building and regeneration are increasingly popular policy goals in Seoul and somewhere else in Korea, but it is still largely unknown whether and how the ideal has any exclusionary component(s) and dimension(s). In the case of community garden movement, it is found to run counter to individual freedom and self-reliant life style. Thus, secondly, the finding also encourages civil society activists to reflect on the actual consequences of their community activism. Their closer policy-making partnership, or 'critical collaboration' in a female activist's apt description, with government entities is certainly an important indicator that demonstrates a substantial progress in the governance of urban policy, but this article's case study reveals ambiguity in the role of civil society nonprofit organizations regarding whether such governance partnership prioritize on-the-ground citizenry needs, nonprofit's organizational interests, or the state's requests. Thirdly, by the same token, it is necessary to scrutinize and reassess whether the partnership governance reproduce a hierarchical relationship between ordinary policy beneficiaries, nonprofit organizations, and the state, or generate new progressive potentials. For only such a critical self-reflection is believed to actualize the promise of partnership governance and deliberative democracy, which the current city administration of Seoul Mayor Park ardently pursues and other localities in Korea are endeavoring to duplicate.

## Endnotes

- 1) Nodeulseom is an artificial island located in the middle of Han River, and some conspicuous development plans including an opera house in 2005 have been proposed since its construction in late 1960s. This place is currently used as a temporary community gardening site at this time, and its final use is still in the process of deliberation among city government officials and civic organizations. For a detailed information about the history of development aspirations in this place, please consult Lee(2015a; 2015b). Lee(2016) also offers an analysis of urban cultivation activities.
- 2) It is necessary to note that urban cultivation has different origin in different places and its sociocultural and practical meaning also changes overtime. In the United Kingdom, for example, allotment was an institutional response to declining food security for socially disadvantaged urbanites in the nineteenth century, but became a leisure activity in the late 1960s and then a conscious social action among young people questioning established ideals such as capitalism and developmentalism in the 1970s. In Korea, urban cultivation started as a civil society movement in the early 2000s, and then it has recently been adopted as an urban greening strategy among some noticeable urban activists. Please see Lee(2015a) for a more detailed explication about global geographies of urban cultivation and their differentiated long-term development paths.
- 3) In this paper, informants are presented and quoted with anonymous codes AAA, BBB, CCC, and so on in order of their appearance for the purpose of protecting their confidentiality.

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