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Gamcheon Culture Village's City Rejuvenation Project

Award Scheme

Guangzhou Award

Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

The Gamcheon Culture Village Project is an urban regeneration initiative designed to reinvigorate a hillside community at risk of becoming decrepit. Residents, artists, and government cooperated to develop a system of democratic governance by means of the arts and culture.

Background and Objective

The project resulted in improving the poor living conditions in the community, thus boosting the local economy and generating jobs. Around 8,000 residents saw their living conditions improve, while some 200 found jobs after the project which preserved the village townscape and reenergized the district. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION** The Gamcheon Culture Village Project was inspired by the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities. The 5th-term Saha-gu District Office Head, elected by popular vote, joined hands with residents and artists to undertake the project as part of a local agenda aimed at reinvigorating a community on the verge of degrading into slum. As the City of Busan passed city regeneration ordinances and the central government enacted special act, the project gained momentum for implementation. **ORIGINS** Gamcheon, home to Gamcheon Culture Village, was a shanty town formed when refugees flocked to Busan during the Korean War, and even today bears traces of the tumultuous war time history of Korea. Most of the houses were small at less than 33m² wide. Residents still share public restrooms built in those days. As the town kept sprawling outward in the absence of city planning or a sewer system, odors began to pervade the entire town. Without adequate water supply facilities, residents had to depend upon public wells, which can still be seen around the town. Its population, once reaching around 30,000 in the 1980s, stopped growing, while surrounding villages continued to develop by attracting new residents. The population continued to dwindle, dropping to as little as 8,000 by 2010. As younger generations left the village and the number of residents moving in dropped, the rate of senior citizens rose to 26%. Empty houses were left unattended and the declining district slowly began to turn into a ghetto. As a result, the population in the area was increasingly composed of the socially vulnerable poor and marginalized classes. In the complex deficiency indicator survey, which looked into residents' housing, income, education, safety, and living conditions, Gamcheon's deficiency score was the second highest out of a total of 205 villages examined in Busan. The project was undertaken jointly between residents, artists, and the City of Busan in order to reinvigorate the village and improve living conditions. Inspired by the UN's SDGs, the Gamcheon Culture Village Project was initiated to create a sustainable city and organize a community for residents. To that end, sub-goals were also set, for example, i) sanitary living environment, ii) sustainable consumption and production, iii) decent jobs and economic development, and iv) quality education. To begin, environmental improvement policies were carried out in order to improve basic public infrastructure; installment of public septic tanks, separate sewers, and the maintenance of old retaining walls and alleys. Also built were a public bathing house, public washing facilities, a village management office, and residential convenience facilities, in addition to free shuttle services. The village turned itself into a tourism destination by hosting a variety of cultural events, such as a village environmental design competition, gallery exhibition, and alley festival, as well as installation art. New jobs were created as souvenir shops opened. Cafés, restaurants, interactive activities, tour programs and tour guide service led to the reinvigoration of the local economy through sustainable consumption and production. A village school, urban regeneration academy, and cultural programs were developed to boost community activities. Quality educational programs ensure residents are capable of sustaining independent development in the community. Education led to the voluntary participation and enhanced capabilities on the part of residents in the project. The participation was educational in itself and the village served as the learning environment. What led to this project's success lies in its governance system engaging residents, artists, and the city government, unlike top-down, government-led practices. The village community consists of 120 residents living in the Gamcheon Culture Village, making and executing project proposals. Saha-gu formed a creative city task force team to lead the Gamcheon Culture Village Project. The TFT is comprised of 17 officials responsible for handling administrative affairs. Some 40 local artists, village activity planners, and professors support the project by contributing their expertise. The groups who benefited most from this project are residents, local artists, public agencies, and the tourism industry. Residents have benefitted the most as their living conditions improved and new jobs were created. They have access to a wide array of local facilities and cultural education programs. About 20 resident artists receive support for their artistic work through various cultural and art projects held in the village. The project has set an urban regeneration model for not just Saha-gu, but also Busan, the Korean government, and other public agencies, adding momentum to the national initiative of balanced regional growth. As a tourist attraction drawing more than 2 million visitors every year, the Gamcheon Culture Village has benefitted from the tourism industry as well. From 2009, when the project was first initiated to 2017, the total budget of USD 9,400,000, or an annual average of USD 975,000, had been injected into the project. USD 6,580,000 was allocated for extensive construction undertakings, i.e. construction of a sewage system, natural gas pipelines, and communal septic tanks. USD 2,350,000 was spent to construct convenience amenities, including a community bathhouse, and a village laundromat. The rest of the budget worth USD 470,000 was spent for public art projects.



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Budgets were secured by means of support from the central government, participation in many competitions hosted by metropolitan governments, as well as from the budget of Saha-gu, and a community fund. Four renowned architects and seventeen local artists contributed their skills to take the artistic landscape of the village to the next level. By cooperating with welfare centers, senior clubs, police stations, fire stations, and other relevant institutions in the district, both human and technical resources were obtained. As a local autonomous government struggling to secure the budget necessary to implement the project, Saha-gu concentrated on hosting competitions organized by Busan Metropolitan City and the central government. Local artists donated their talents to the community in return for access to free spaces for exhibitions and creative work. Revenue generated from commercial projects in the community was reinvested into the village, creating a virtuous cycle for the development of the community and welfare for residents.

Outcomes and Impacts

Six project units of 129 member residents have been formed to carry out village development. The units generate a sales volume of USD 1.4 million, creating jobs for 30 residents. The declining village has now turned into one of the most loved tourist destinations, attracting 2.05 million visitors every year. The local economy has been revitalized by the booming tourism, laying the groundwork for residents to gain economic independence, with about 280 jobs created as a result. The poor village infrastructure has been renovated to give residents access to a cleaner and safer living environment. Residents have more chances to enjoy cultural activities and benefit from the education through a variety of cultural and educational programs. The project has turned the languishing village into a vibrant community with quality living conditions. The outcomes delivered through the project are making contributions to not just boosting the nation's tourism industry, but also promoting a balanced regional growth initiative in Busan and beyond. Officials from both home and abroad visit the village to benchmark the project. With the hope that the outcomes of the project will last, Busan has laid the institutional foundation for its survival by setting up the Gamcheon Culture Village Special Zone and establishing district-level planning. Busan will continue to implement new policies to improve the village, sharing and disseminating the outcomes of the project with the rest of the world. The project was initiated in order to reinvigorate the village and create a sustainable city as the population decrease was accelerating with the declining environment. A university-run specialized agency assessed the status of change in different categories including: number of residents; reduction of empty houses; village community; number of active residents; number of jobs created; floating population (number of visitors); residents' satisfaction with the project; and revitalization of regional businesses (sales volume from village shops). The outcomes of the assessment serve as standards to measure the project's effectiveness, sustainability, and improvement tasks. The university uses the indicators as academic data for urban regeneration. Government agencies address the shortcomings of the project and come up with new policies based on the assessment results. As explained above, the Gamcheon Culture Village Project is an urban regeneration project which sought a paradigm shift from redevelopment and reconstruction to 'preservation and revitalization' to ensure the effectiveness of the project. For the purpose of maximizing the chances of success, the governance system was created involving residents, artists, and the government, departing from previous government-led systems. A wide variety of participation-based projects were also carried out including public art project and village school. The income generated by the project was reinvested into village development businesses, ensuring the sustainable development of the community. The Gamcheon Culture Village has become one of the most famous cultural brands in Busan and beyond, setting a new standard for urban regeneration initiatives. Delegations from home and abroad continue to visit the village to benchmark the success of the city redevelopment project. The GCV has also hosted the UNESCO International Work Camp, sharing the outcomes of the project with delegations from different countries at the World Cities Summit, UNESCO Workshop, and International Association of Educating Cities. Global media outlets such as CNN, NBC, Le Monde and the BBC highlighted this project as a model of urban regeneration. The GCV has been recognized across the world as it won awards and recognition, including the ROK President's Award at Korea Space Award Grand Prize at Asian Townscape Awards, Excellent City Award at International Association of Educating Cities, UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Certification of Official Project, Dubai International Role Model Award, Stevie Awards Asia Pacific, and more.

Innovative Initiative

The Gamcheon Culture Village Project is an eco-friendly project. Most existing urban regeneration projects designed to build a new town would completely reshape a village's physical environment, thus getting rid of historical and environmental continuity. They also lead to low rate of resident resettlement. Not just that, such previous projects disproportionately tilt toward improving the physical environment, failing to bring about development in both economic and social terms. As a result, they fall short of delivering lasting effects the community. Taking lessons from previous projects, the Gamcheon Culture Village Project was undertaken as an urban regeneration initiative which would preserve the village's environment and social history, but at the same time enhance economic and public infrastructure. Existing government-led urban regeneration projects would center around redevelopment and reconstruction, leaving little chance for residents' request and opinions to be reflected in policies. However, the Gamcheon Culture Village Project made up for these shortcomings by engaging residents from the beginning, ensuring satisfaction, effectiveness, and sustainability. The Gamcheon Culture Village Project is replicable in urban regeneration policies anywhere in the world. It can also be applied as a business model for job creation and local economic reinvigoration. The GCV has set a benchmark for urban regeneration projects, which leaves a village's beautiful landscape intact, while turning them into tourism resources. Its governance implementation, built on cooperation and engagement, can be replicated for other governance management projects. What's more, this project's virtuous cycle, where the local economy is revitalized, jobs are created, and revenue is reinvested into the community can define a new sustainable model. Gamcheon, where the project was initiated, was an impoverished neighborhood. Most



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residents were from the low income, socially vulnerable class. It was natural that they were indifferent or skeptic about the project at first because they had little means to spend on sustaining their livelihood. As a measure to ensure residents' participation, various programs were implemented, for example, participation-based public art projects, communal commercial businesses for job creation, a village regeneration project, urban school regeneration, village school, and more. Other amenities in the village contributed to garnering residents' support for the project, including installation of a sewer system, urban gas pipeline, maintenance of decrepit walls, public bath house, remodeling of old housings, and free blanket laundry service. To address old ordinances and regulations standing in the way of implementing the project, the City of Busan cooperated with the central government and the National Assembly, revising rules and enacting new ordinances.

Conclusion

Gamcheon was one of many declining neighborhoods in Busan. However, the Gamcheon Culture Village Project took the unique elements of the town and turned them to valuable tourism assets. Gamcheon eventually was transformed into a vibrant village that attracts tourists all year round. The living environment has been improved for residents and jobs were created. As the local economy has been reinvigorated, the village has now become a livable neighborhood. The whole process engaged residents, which in turn led to the natural formation of a true residents' community. Residents played a major role in reviving the town in a voluntary and independent manner. Cities around the world can identify with the methodology of carrying out urban regeneration project customized for the unique conditions in their cities by benchmarking the GCV Project. In order to facilitate their benchmarking efforts, we provide presentation sessions in foreign languages to visiting delegations. We hope to disseminate this project to other cities around the world by applying for the prestigious Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation.

RELEVANCE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable Target 1: Access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums Target 3: Participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns