An Ethnographic Examination of Urban Cultivation Practices in Seoul*
- An Emerging ‘Different Economy’ -

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서울 도시농업 실천의 민족지연구*
- ‘다른 경제’의 출현 -

이재열**

ABSTRACT: This article examines urban agriculture (UA) practices in Seoul from a ‘relational’ economic geography view, which is concerned with variegated economic practices. This article’s analysis is particularly built on the ‘different economies’ perspective, which recognizes the importance of non-capitalist economic practices such as UA. For the research, ethnographic data including participant observation records and in-depth interviews were collected at Nodeul Urban Agriculture Park in Seoul from March to September in 2014. A qualitative ‘content analysis’ was also conducted to understand the nature of urban agriculture practices, and this article presents three important findings. First, cultivation practices are found to generate a virtuous cycle of ‘affective agricultural production’ and ‘emotional accomplishments’, which include curiosity, affectionate feeling, eager for recognition, and community spirit. Second, the virtuous cycle is also productive of and associational with ‘practical achievements’ (appreciative capacity and self-sufficiency) and ‘socially conscious consumption practices’ (consumption changes and sharing). Third, emerging ethics including rural concerns and changing attitude towards urban development are also observed to interact with the production-emotion virtuous cycle. In essence, urban agriculture involves both individual and social accomplishments. These findings reaffirm the importance of production in urban agriculture policy, and also call for a more detailed ‘qualitative’ research about urban cultivation practices.

Key Words: urban agriculture, relational economic geography, different economies, ethnography, content analysis

요약: 이 논문은 ‘관계’ 경제지리학적 관점에서 서울 도시농업의 실천적 특성을 고찰한다. 관계경제지리학은 다양한 경제적 ‘실천’ 양태를 설득하는 분야이며, 이 논문에서는 특히 비자본주의적 경제활동의 중요성을 인식하는 ‘다른 경제론’의 유용성에 주목한다. 연구에 필요한 자료는 서울시 용산구에 위치한 노들도시농업공원에서 2014년 3월부터 9월까지 민족지조사를 통해 구하였고, 이는 참여관계 기록과 경작자 대상 심층인터뷰를 포함한다. 습득한 실적 자료를 바탕으로, 도시농업 실천을 이해하기 위한 ‘내용분석’이 이루어

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* This article is built on Jae-Youl Lee’s doctoral dissertation research (Lee, 2015a), and revisions are made to offer a more detailed methodological discussion (*이 논문은 이재열의 박사학위논문 (Lee, 2015a)의 일부를 발췌, 수정하여 작성하였습니다).** Lecturer, Department of Geography Education, Chungnam National University, Ewha Woman’s University, and Seoul National University (장남대/여화여대/서울대학교 지리교육과), Email: lee.jaeyoul@gmail.com, Tel: 02-880-7717
 Jeg, 부석결과 세 가지 도시농업의 중요한 실천적 결과를 발견하였다. 첫째, 도시농업 실천은 '정서적 생산'과 '강성적 성과' 간의 선순환 과정을 정출한 것으로 나타났다. 호기심, 예측, 인정에 대한 요구, 공동체 정신 등이 주요 강성적 성과로 보인다. 둘째, 상기 선순환 과정은 또한 자속적인 삶과 평가능력 함양을 포함한 '실용적 성취', 그리고 소비변화 및 공유가 바탕이 되는 '사회적으로 의식있는 소비'의 이유인 동시에 결과로 드러났다. 셋째, '새로운 융리의식' 또한 동장해 생산-강성 선순환과 훼손하는 것으로 나타났는데, 이 사례연구에서는 농촌에 대한 이해와 개발에 대한 대응 변화가 주목할 만하다. 요컨대, 도시농업의 실천적 결과는 개인적인 동시에 사회적이다. 이를 근거로, 이 논문은 도시농업 정책에서 생산의 중요성을 재확인하며, 도시농업 성과에 대한 좀 더 상세한 '결제' 정책연구를 요구한다.

주제어 : 도시농업, 관계경제지리학, 다른경제, 민족지리학, 내용분석

I. Introduction

Urban agriculture(UA) is composed of food production activities and associated 'spatial' practices such as indoor box gardening, rooftop gardening and beekeeping, vacant lot food production, school gardening, community gardening, and urban fringe farming. Highlighting such spatial and economic attributes, the Urban Agriculture Committee of Community Based Food & Farming defines UA as ‘the growing, processing, and distribution of food and other products through intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities’ (Tornaghi 2014, 1).

Among a variety of UA practice types, group cultivation, which is called 'community garden' in the United States and 'allotments' in the United Kingdom, is a highly celebrated urban phenomenon nowadays. Researchers, as well as activists and ordinary program participants, report an array of individual benefits including dietary habit change, physical health improvement, psychological restoration, and connection to nature(Alaimo et al., 2008; Kaplan, 1983; Lewis, 1996; Wakefield et al., 2007), and positive ecological and sociocultural and impacts such as fresh food access, biodiversity improvement, public space generation, educational benefits, inter-cultural exchange, and neighborhood and community empowerment(Corrigan, 2011; Hou et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2015; Schmelzkoft, 1995; Wang et al., 2014). For this reason, planners and architects increasingly see urban space for rural practice of produce cultivation as a means to promote sustainable development and improve public health(Brown and Jameton, 2000; Hou et al., 2009; Mendes et al., 2008; Viljoen, 2005).

Such multi-functional benefits of UA have recently been acknowledged in Korean literature (Heo and Kim, 2012; Heo and Kown 2014) in the context of UA’s emergence as a popular civil society movement in the mid-2000s, and then as a government policy program from the early 2010s(Ahn et al., 2013). Seoul has played a leading role since the city government’s declaration of The First Year of Urban Agriculture
in May 2012. Aforementioned benefits are broadly employed to legitimize policy promotion for UA in Seoul, but enhancing urban-rural exchange is seen to be a distinctive policy goal in the city in comparison to other cities outside the country (Lee, 2015a). In addition to the multi-functionality of UA, Korean researchers employing multi-disciplinary perspectives including landscape architecture, planning, and sociology are also interested in analyzing the spatial distribution of UA sites (Lee, 2012), the nature of UA participants and their activities (Civil Urban Agriculture Association, 2013; Heo and Kwon, 2014), and the ways to improve planning and governance (Oh and Kim, 2014; Park et al., 2012), just to name a few for the sake of brevity.

In the meantime, little is known about UA’s roles as an economic sector with a rare exception of Heo and Kwon (2014), who estimate the economic value of urban agriculture in Seoul to be 82.2 billion Won. For urban cultivation tends to be framed as a ‘non-economy’ in the capitalist society (Drake and Lawson, 2014; Moore, 2006), with a categorization of unproductive hobby and leisure, despite its relation to production, consumption, and distribution (Tornaghi, 2014). Against this background, this article aims to explore the inner logics and dynamics of UA as an ‘economic’ sector, with a case study of Nodeul Urban Agriculture Park (NUAP) where 600 ordinary families and 19 civic UA organizations are participating in UA. To do so, a ‘relational’ economic geography perspective on ‘different economies’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006a) is utilized.

This article therefore consists of five sections including these introductory comments. The second section outlines the concept of ‘different economies,’ with a brief introduction about economic geography for those readers who may not be familiar with the discipline. The section also characterizes Seoul’s urban agriculture as a ‘non-capitalist’ different economy, in reference to available statistical evidence. Then, the third section introduces a qualitative methodology that combines ‘ethnography’ and ‘content analysis’ as an appropriate analytical framework. In the fourth section, key empirical findings are presented in order to highlight the individual and social accomplishments of urban agricultural economic practices from an on-the-ground perspective, with detailed accounts of identified analytical and descriptive codes. The final, and the fifth, section offers a discussion of the article’s policy implications, as well as research summary.

II. Urban Agriculture as a Different Economy: A Relational Economic Geography Perspective in Transition

Economic geography is a sub-discipline of social science and human geography, and concerned primarily with the relationship between economic activities and places. Spatial catego-
ries such as location and region were once the key explanatory category in traditional approaches (Bathelt, 2006), such that locational advantages (e.g., natural endowments and transportation cost) and regional institutions were deemed to define economic performance and behaviors. However, economic geographers’ analytical attention is increasingly shifting away from the traditional approaches, and towards the nature of actual ‘economic practices’ on the ground (Jones, 2014; Jones and Murphy, 2011). This disciplinary transition is called as ‘relational turn’ or ‘practice shift’ as it emphasizes actors, their networks, and practices as its analytical foci (Boggs and Rantisi, 2003; Yeung 2005). In accordance with Jones and Murphy (2011, 366), practices can be defined as “stabilized, routinized, or improvised social actions that constitute and reproduce economic space, and through and within which socio-economic actors and communities embed knowledge, organize production activities, and interpret and devise meaning from the world.”

There are four primary research themes in the relational economic geography (Jones and Murphy 2011). First, some economic geographers examine economic practices in the context of globalization with attention to ‘global production networks’ (Coe, 2011; Yeung and Coe, 2014), ‘transnational innovation networks’ (Coe and Bunnel, 2003), cross-border ‘communities of practices’ (Amin and Robert, 2008), ‘global pipelines’ (Bathelt et al., 2004) of learning. Second, institutionalist economic geographers are attentive to the institutional ‘embeddedness’ of economic actions at multiple geographical scales, and of varied types (Hess, 2004; Jones, 2008). Third, others explore the relationship between ‘mundane’ practices and neoliberalism, with emphasis on governmentality, power relations, and subject formations (Larner, 2002; Larner and Laurie 2010).

In contrast to these three research themes invariably associated with the growing role of non-local and non-territorial dynamics in the formation and reshaping of local economic life in places (i.e., global and transnational interdependencies in economic life), the remaining fourth is concerned with the nature of diverse economic livelihoods and ordinary economies that exist and emerge beyond the realm of capitalist rendition (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Leyshon et al., 2003). In this literature, research is focused on the ways in which diverse economies and associated practices are driven by non-capitalist motivations (e.g., caring and social responsibility) and processes (e.g., unwaged labor and bartering). Examining such forms of the economy is challenging not only because our economic life is mostly (if not all) embedded in the hegemonic capitalist economic system, but also because we Korean researchers including myself are nurtured to idealize capitalism as the only economic system possible as I reflect on somewhere else (Lee, 2015a). In other words, our economic and intellectual life intertwined
with the hegemonic capitalist ideal may act as a hindrance to the understanding of non-capitalist diverse economies.

Therefore, as a thoughtful comment from an anonymous reviewer suggests, this article may “appear to be lacking economic consideration.” However, what is lacking in this paper is capitalist economic reasoning and analysis because it is written from a different economy perspective in an effort to overcome what Gibson-Graham (2006a) call “capitalocentrism”, which refers to the hegemonic discourse that reduces all economic activities to the operation of capitalism. By this, I do not mean that any capitalist economic thought is irrelevant for urban agriculture. Nor do I imply that urban agriculture should be necessarily anti-capitalist. UA has been founded to make an important contribution to capitalist development in the Global South by playing a role in food distribution and generating jobs for economically disadvantaged urbanites (McGee and Yeung, 1977;

Table 1. Different Economies(Gibson-Graham 2011: 13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capitalist Economy</th>
<th>Alternative Practices</th>
<th>Non-Capitalist Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Alternative Capitalist State-owned Environmentally sound Socially responsible Non-profit</td>
<td>Non-Capitalist Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waged labor</td>
<td>Alternative Paid Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare</td>
<td>Unpaid Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Alternative Private Hybrid ownership State-managed assets Customary(clan) land Community land trust Indigenous knowledge</td>
<td>Open Access Atmosphere International Waters Open source IP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Alternative Market Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter</td>
<td>Non-Market Household sharing Gift giving Gleaning Hunting and fishing Theft, piracy, poaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Market</td>
<td>Alternative Market Cooperative banks Credit unions Community-based finance Micro-finance</td>
<td>Non-Market Sweat equity Family lending Donations Interest-free loans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mougeot, 2010), and Gibson-Graham (2006a) argued in their proposal of post-capitalist politics that diverse economies could generate transformative potential in relation to capitalist market mechanism. Leaving such aspects for other analysts (e.g., Heo and Kown, 2014), this article’s empirical exploration is focused on UA’s economic values that are realized beyond the realm of hegemonic capitalist system.

There are two justifications for the analytical foci. First, commercial, namely capitalist, agriculture is in a long-term decline in Seoul. An annual report of farming households in the Korean government’s Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery Survey offers a useful guide to the trend (Statistics Korea, 2014). According to the Survey of 2014, the number of commercial farming households experienced a marked decline in Seoul from 10,572 in 1970 to 2,751 in 2013. Commercial agriculture is also becoming an unreliable source of income. In 2013, only 980 full-time farming households were reported in Seoul, and agriculture was a part-time job to the remaining 1,771 families.

The second justification is associated with the nature of Seoul’s urban agriculture on the rise. In contrast to the commercial UA’s sustained decline, the recent growth of urban agriculture is attributable to non-commercial cultivation practices (Lee, 2012). The number of UA participants in Seoul grew from 287,000 in 2012 (Civil Economy Division, 2014) to 449,332 in 2014 (MOAFRA, 2015), such that 4.6% of 9.6 million Seoul people cultivate produce. Regarding the use of produce, only 0.8% of agricultural products from community gardens in Seoul were traded for pecuniary gains, and the remaining is consumed exclusively at home (19.5%) or given to the grower’s acquaintances including siblings, relatives, and neighbors (78.5%) according to Agro City Seoul (2013).

Taken together, the current UA economy in Seoul can be seen as a ‘different’ economy in that it is considerably differentiated from the capitalist mode of for-profit production and distribution. More specifically, non-capitalist economic practices such as self-reliant subsistence cropping and sharing undergird the recent development of UA in Seoul. Therefore, it can be framed as a locally specific manifestation of different economies, which are also called as ‘diverse economies’, ‘community economies’, ‘beyond-capitalist’ economies, and ‘alternative economies’ (Leyshon et al., 2003; Wright 2010).

This research agenda is built on ‘post-structuralist’ and ‘feminist’ geographers Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b), who argue that capitalism should be thought as a particular, rather than universal, form of the economy. According to them, the capitalist economy is a specific economic assemblage which consists of capitalist enterprises, waged labor relations, private property ownership, market-based transactions of goods, and mainstream market financing.
Beyond the capitalist economy, there are diverse ‘actual’ economic manifestations, configurations, and constitutions with respect to labor relations and compensation, enterprise forms, and transaction loci, property relations, and finance mechanisms (Table 1). Built on this different economy framework, economic geographers examine the working of such ‘alternative’ economic spaces as local exchange trading system, alternative retail spaces, and cooperatives (Leyshon et al., 2003).

The different economy perspective offers important insights to the understanding of UA sites as well despite the presence of critiques that question UA’s association with neoliberalism among economic geographers (McClintock, 2014; Pudup, 2008; Rosol, 2012; Walker, 2015). Specifically, it helps some researchers rethink and reposition UA as a longstanding (but, marginalized) urban economy (Drake and Lawson, 2014; Moore, 2006), and others recognize diverse forms of labor, markets, enterprises, property, and finance in actual practices of UA and their progressive and transformative potentials (Cameron and Wright, 2014; Dixon, 2011).

III. Methodology

To examine the nature of urban cultivation in Seoul from the outlined different economies perspective, ethnographic data including participant observations and in-depth interviews were collected at NUAP from March to September in 2014.

Extensive statistical generalizations in existing studies such as Lee (2012) help know that non-commercial practices are crucial to the nature of urban agriculture in Seoul as discussed earlier, but they say little of how such a form of non-capitalist agricultural production, distribution, and consumption operates on the ground. Thus, informed by Baxter (2010: 81), it is believed in this article that an ‘intensive’ case study allows researchers to “explore in-depth nuances of the phenomenon and the contextual influences on and explanations of that phenomenon”. In this line, this article regards NUAP as a vehicle which to examine the phenomenon of different economies.

NUAP is one of only two public urban agriculture sites under the direct jurisdiction of Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) as of 2014 (Lee, 2015a). At the local government-led public UA site, 600 families are allowed to lease a farming plot (6.6m²) at yearly rent of 20,000 Korean Won. NUAP cultivators tend to live close to the farming site. Among 549 family members who disclosed their address to NUAP Office in 2014, 346 (58%) live in the Districts of Dongjik (210, 35%) and Yongsan (136, 23%). In terms of age, people in their 30s (22%), 40s (33%), and 50s (21%) account for 76% of 591 NUAP cultivators who shared their date of birth to NUAP Office in 2014. The remaining is composed of 5% of 20s and 19% of 60 or older (Lee, 2015a). Alongside the family
members, there are 19 ‘community’ members (composed of leading civic UA organizations in Seoul and South Korea) at NUAP, but these organizational participants are excluded in this article’s analysis focused on lay cultivators, leaving them for other studies such as Lee(2015b), in which differentiated perceptions on the island between individual/family cultivators and community members are discussed.

In the above-noted methodological grounding of the case study, the next section’s ethnographic examination should not be relegated to a simple idiosyncratic description, which cannot make any broader contribution to our knowledge formation. A statistical generalization may be impossible with a single case study, but ‘analytical’ or ‘theoretical’ generalization is possible if a case study works with a particular theory. As Baxter(2010) convincingly argues, the success of a case study is dependent upon its ‘transferability’ to the theory in question, rather than statistical generalizability that applies to all cases. This means that NUAP may not be a representative case of the urban agriculture in Seoul, but a “carefully selected case”(Baxter 2010: 94) for a specific research question about different economies.

I designed and conducted an ethnographic research at NUAP in two steps, built on qualitative geographic research guides(Limb and Dwyer, 2001; Hay, 2010) and also ethnographic traditions in human geography(Jackson, 1999; Ley, 1974; Lees, 2003). Thus, the first step was to “move beyond reliance on formalized interactions such as those occurring in interviews⋯ to develop understanding through being part of the spontaneity of everyday interactions”(Kearns, 2010: 245), and to build up rapport with NAUP people including on-site managers, civil society activists, ordinary cultivators through close engagements with them. This was done through participations in on-site public events, socializing gatherings, and casual conversations, rather than my own experiences of urban cultivation. Therefore, an ‘observer-as-participant’, rather than ‘participant-as-observer’, is a relevant descriptor for my research positioning(Kearns, 2010).

Then, second, semi-structured, but open-ended, interviews were conducted with eight ‘dedicated’ NUAP cultivators who made frequent appearance at the research site. For the purpose, a ‘criterion' sampling technique was employed to balance the age and gender distribution among interviewees, who are thus composed of five men and three women in terms of gender, and one in 30s, another in 40s, four in 50s, and two in 60s with respect to age composition. In the sampling, the place of residence was not considered, but interestingly seven of eight interviewees turned out to be residents of nearby Districts(i.e., Dongjak and Yongsan) except for one residing in Gangdong. This unintended spatial bias in the sample may suggest that participants living closer to NUAP are more dedicated cultivators than those resid-
ing relatively far away. Following interviewee selection, detailed ‘interview schedule’ (Dunn, 2010) for each informant was developed as well, with primary question themes of cultivation experiences, community activities, changes in life, and place perception.

As a result, the ethnographic research at NUAP generated two volumes of field notes that recorded conversations and observations, and eight full transcriptions of the aforementioned semi-structured interviews. To protect confidentiality of my interviewees, they are presented with an interviewee code in order of appearance in the next section IV (Table 2).

A ‘content analysis’ of the gleaned qualitative data was conducted for a mapping of urban agriculture practices, in reference to Cope(2010), Jackson(2001), and Strauss and Corbin(1990). At the heart of the qualitative analysis technique is ‘coding’, which can be defined as a process of data reduction by identifying ‘descriptive codes’ and ‘analytical codes’. Descriptive codes, or ‘manifest messages’, are “themes and patterns that are obvious on the surface or are stated directly by research subjects” (Cope, 2010: 283). In contrast, analytical codes(a.k.a., ‘latent message’) are those that the researcher identifies in relation to research interest, concepts, and theory, or develops through abstraction of descriptive codes.

Table 2. Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Yongsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Yongsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Yongsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Yongsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Yongsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Gangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IG</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Yongan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IH</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Dongjak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Content Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Codes</th>
<th>Code Type</th>
<th>Relation to Non-Capitalist Economy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land tending</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Affective production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwaged labor</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Production resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Emotional achievement(production resource)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Emotional achievement(production resource)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative capability</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Practical achievement(knowledge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption change</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Socially conscious consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural concerns</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Ethical/emotional achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-sufficiency</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Practical achievement(consumption)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition for recognition</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Production resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Socially conscious consumption/distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Production resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing attitude</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Ethical/emotional achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this article, for example, ‘curiosity’ was identified as a key descriptive code as informants repetitively referred to it as a main reason for their dedication. I also developed ‘unwaged labor’ as an analytical code on the basis of informants’ consistent remarks on labor use and in reference to the diverse economies perspective. Table 3 lists all the analytical/descriptive codes, which are found to substantiate non-capitalist economic practices. Property ownership, labor relations, and transactions are particularly important.

As such, I rely on the different economy perspective for the interpretation of gleaned data, but a brief description of ‘reflexive’ research process may (hopefully) address a worry of theoretical reification, selective quoting, or ‘cherry picking.’ A reviewer of this article expressed such a concern, indicating a danger of “intentional filtering.” By the same token, another reviewer asked me to “justify the relevance of analyzing specific terms”, which I refer to as ‘codes’ throughout this paper. To respond, and also emphasize my endeavors to avoid such pitfalls of qualitative research, I want to introduce an anecdote from my own ethnographic engagements at NUAP, and the story started from a cordial meeting with an on-site manager who “had previously worked for a well-known fashion company with no prior experience of cultivation” (Lee, 2015a: 73-74):

Our conversation continued until around the midnight over rice wine, and he kept saying “nature” and “reflection” in relationship to life style changes and improved family relationship, which the new agricultural job at NUAP brought to his early 50s. In his description, he was an “extravagant person” who enjoyed multiple rounds of drinking almost every night, but family became his priority owing to the new job. Then, he recommended me to grow produce someday. Later, many NUAP cultivators told me in a similar pattern. They enjoyed talking about personal life [changes] as well as cultivation experiences … After saying great things and changes, they also usually urged me to grow produce.

My intention of introducing this story here is to underscore that my explanation here is not designed for a functionalist reification of scholarly knowledge in question. Quite contrary, I ‘learned’ various achievements from lay cultivators through close engagements with them in the first place by identifying repetitively ‘emerging’ similar remarks, and then decided to utilize Gibson-Graham’s idea of different economies for a rather organized description with observed and derived categories, or codes. In other words, the theory in question was identified afterwards, not before hands, in association with empirical findings.

This research practice may appear to be subjective to some analysts, but I would argue that it is a ‘situated’ knowledge production, which
is informed by a recent development in relational economic geography and a qualitative analytical procedure called coding. I also argue that quantitative research is a situated knowledge production as much as qualitative one because of the influences of particular disciplinary tradition and analysis techniques, and thus such a mode of interrogation is only partial at best.

With respect to quantitative survey research on urban agriculture, Kurtz (2001) finds for instance in her literature review of American community garden that: “neighborhood reclamation ranks highest among reasons to garden in one survey, lowest in another and does not figure at all in a third.” The same thing has happened with regard to existing research on urban agriculture in Seoul. For example, Lee (2012) found in a telephone survey that media including the Internet as the highest-ranked motivation of beginning urban cultivation in the city with the recommendation from acquaintances being the second, but the order reversed in another questionnaire survey of Civil Urban Agriculture Association (2013). This difference may suggest that different research methods could generate different outcomes and knowledge, and also that a triangulation of diverse studies employing varied perspectives and methodologies may offer us a more fine-grained understanding of urban agriculture.

In this line, I believe, this article built on ethnography and qualitative research techniques may offer useful insights that existing survey-based quantitative research can overlook. The possibility can be substantiated with an important difference in coding between questionnaire surveys and ethnographic interviews. In the former, analytical codes are usually determined prior to on-site research and reflected in survey questions in a top-down manner. In contrast, the relative open-endedness and flexibility of ethnographic interview questions allow researchers to discover unexpected utterance and happenings, as well as responses to pre-determined questions. I believe thus that coding after open-ended interviews can help observe more diverse aspects of urban cultivation practices than pre-coded survey questions allow.

In addition, coding-based content analysis also helps identify the relationship between codes and thus develop a ‘coding structure’ (Cope, 2010). In this way, the content analysis allow researchers overcome an apparent limit of questionnaire surveys, which rarely offer an explanation about the relationship between pre-determined codes despite their benefits of ranking the relative importance of discrete factors and outcomes. With regard to urban agriculture in Seoul, both Lee (2012) and Civil Urban Agriculture Association (2013) provide an important understanding about participation goals and motivations, production and consumption behaviors, and achievements, but neither examines their relations. It is thus unknown, for example, how particular achievements are related to concrete production and consumption practices.
For such a relational understanding, identified codes are also structured with attention to their similarities, substantive relationships, and conceptual links. In so doing, in accordance to a guide offered by Cope(2010), I tried to capture connections among codes and organize their relationships. In their ‘ground theory’, Strauss and Corbin(1990) also recommend researchers to pay close attention to four types of themes including conditions, interactions among actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences. This is to seek to an understanding of how and why certain actions and interactions lead to a particular event in specific contexts. With this in mind, a coding structure was drawn to delineate the relationship between identified codes in the end of this research’s content analysis(Figure 1), and the next section presents and explicates the analysis results.

IV. Practicing a Different Economy: An Ethnographic Examination of Nodeul Urban Agriculture Park

NAUP cultivators were found to have engaged with agricultural practices and made achievements beyond the realm of capitalist economy. As twelve codes above show, such experiences were narrated in relation to plot holding and production, consumption and distribution, incentives of competition and cooperation, and changing lifestyle and attitude.

A further analysis of the codes revealed three important findings, which were associated with both individual and social impacts of urban agriculture practices. First, as Figure 1 illustrates, cultivation practices generated a virtuous cycle of ‘affective agricultural production’ and ‘emotional accomplishments’, including curiosity, affectionate feeling, eager for recognition,
community spirit. Second, the virtuous cycle was also productive of, and also associational with, ‘practical achievements’ (appreciative capacity and self-sufficiency) and ‘socially conscious consumption practices’ (consumption changes and sharing). Third, ‘emerging ethics’ including rural concerns and changing attitude towards urban development were found to interact with the production-emotion virtuous cycle. The remaining of this section outlines the findings with detailed explications of aforementioned codes and their relations.

First, individual/family tenants were not simply public property occupants, but ‘land tenders’ according to IA, an experienced female cultivator in early 50s. By this, she meant the necessity of regenerating barren Nodeulseom into a fertile ground of produce cultivation. Nodeulseom was used as a tennis court, and because transported soils were just dumped on it, Nodeulseom farmers had to improve the soils in the beginning. The inaugural participant of NUAP program recalled her first year: “Cultivation was impossible on the soil. It was very sticky, and became hardened after raining. So, I had to dig up frequently. I also learned black soils are better, and so brought them and fallen leaves under the trees over there to here. Then, I put organic ingredients like composts.”

In male West Ichon resident IB’s plot preparation, ‘knowledge transfer’ from a more experienced farmer played a more important role as he remembered his first day of Nodeulseom: “I came here later than other people. I did not know what to do. I just assumed, planting seeds would be enough. I was wrong. All of sudden, Mr. Lee came here to my plot with a shovel, and dug it out. Then, he told me, ‘put some fertilizer and plant seeds a week later.’ I started learning like that.”

In either way, second, ‘unwaged’ labors were used to transform otherwise unproductive city-owned property into a productive place of rich soils. These actions of land quality improvement were certainly intended to maximize individual plot yield, but they were also altruistic behaviors at the same time. For the soil enrichment was done on a public land piece without ownership, the tenants’ exclusive use was guaranteed for only one year, and its benefits were supposed to yield to next cultivators.

Such benefits were not limited to enhanced plots’ productivity, and they also included the third element of non-capitalist economy. It was what NUAP cultivators frequently called ‘affection’ for the plots they took ‘care’ of. The expression of affection was slightly different between men and women. Men tended to place more weight on their plots. For example, IB associated his Nodeulseom affection primarily with his physical efforts to generate a fertile plot. In contrast, women offered more detailed explications of year-around cultivation experiences including both site preparation and produce growing. A ‘gender division of labor’ at NUAP appeared to be an important reason as
a NUAP Operation Committee member IC said: “We [men] are necessary only when physical labor is needed like putting support poles, moving harvests, and watering. The remaining, say seeding, planting, weed removal... is my wife’s work. I am just an assistant. I am doing only 10%... In general, women usually take a lead role here.”

Fourth, ‘curiosity’ was invariably mentioned as a key incentive to the evocation of affectionate feeling for plots among cultivators. Plants’ slow growth made them inquisitive of their produce, and this eagerness to know urged them to make frequent visits to NUAP. Nearby post office employee IA talked about her ‘impatience’ around five o’clock in the every afternoon, and unmarried retiree ID in her 60s came to Nodeulseom every morning around 10 o’clock to take care of her produce like a ‘cute kid for the ‘last three happiest years’ of her life because new sprouts made her ‘smile naturally.’ Daily visits were necessary for ID because ‘vegetables recognize [her] foot steps” in her feeling. First-year cultivator IE was worried of weekly attendance requirement (once a week) when she heard of NUAP rules in the beginning of 2014 season, but she came at least three times to check ‘mysterious happenings.’

In addition, they emphasized produce cultivation was a way of experiencing, knowing, and understanding the nature, and their affection for Nodeulseom was told to get stronger in that process.

In that regard, IA’s story is illustrative. As a native Seoulite, she had no prior experience of agriculture before joining NUAP as its inaugurating year tenant in May 2012, but she became one of the most ardent and knowledgeable participants. To take good care of her plot, she studied every aspect of cultivation including soil management, produce growing, seed gathering, and diverse plants ‘like a student preparing for the bar exam’, and then utilized the learning for her own experiments, whose success always made her ‘more passionate about cultivation.’ I was able to see and feel her excitement about such a success when she brought native Choseon cucumbers and narrated a long experiment story at NUAP kitchen while I was about to have an early evening gathering with a group of male cultivators in July 2, 2014. Such experiences at Noudulseom led her to “indulge in a life style adherent to the nature... [and] feel an indescribable basic cultivation instinct.”

In short, plot management was not simply the use of a land piece to enthusiastic cultivators, but also an act of physically and emotionally associating their bodies with the nature, more specifically soils, land, and plants. This affective experience was frequently expressed as ‘caring’, rather than growing or managing, among enthusiastic NUAP tenants. Experiencing this relational process of human-nature, as well as produce yielding, was referred to as a major reward to them because it developed interest and curi-
osity, made them feel enjoyment and happiness, and in turn evoked an affectionate feeling for their produce and plot. These bodily engagements and associated emotional achievements made NUAP cultivators passionate about a new life style closer to the nature, and reshaped themselves.

At the same time, fifth, the affective production also helped cultivators acquire various practical knowledge including a capability of appreciating agricultural production site. IB was able to fathom the amount of efforts a quick glance of its surface appearance. Two-year experiences helped ‘deepen’ his insight of produce growing. Previously, IB just recognized the presence, and absence, of plants, but he was able to say, for example, ‘this chilly plot is well tended.’ To IE, plot appearance was an indicator of one’s personality based on her experience of hasty excessive fertilization and water supply, which turned her plot into a land of dead plants. From this experience, she learned that ‘affection and waiting’ were crucial and hastiness was destined to a dead plot.

Sixth, such an accomplished appreciative capability was also enunciated in relationship to consumption sites including grocery and home. At grocery stores, ‘fresh vegetables’ looked different to IE, who learned that humans were not able to avoid “sharing produce with insects” with any pesticide-free cultivation. Thus, freshness at grocery now means excessive fertilization and pesticide to her. Similarly, IC claimed, “so-called organic produce at grocery is not completely pesticide-free.”

Seventh, this re-appreciation of grocery produce seemed to encourage NUAP cultivators to reflect the condition of agriculture in Korea. To IC, for example, grocery shopping was also a practice of realizing the underestimated value of agricultural labor, such that “900 Won cabbage… doesn’t make any sense at all.” In a similar way, NUAP cultivation was an opportunity for IA to think of the current state of Korean agricultural regions as an affair of her own. She had “no interest in agriculture policy at all, but became interested in free trade agreement agreements’… [impacts on] rural hardship.”

Ironically, eighth, this attitude change was attributable to a sufficient amount of produce that substantially reduced their consumption of rural produce in the summer. ‘Self-sufficiency' was what all individual/tenant interviewees mentioned about family vegetable supply. A relatively small family size was one reason, as IC said that yields from a small NUAP plot were appropriate for ‘a family of four’ like his. In case that kids were younger than two college student sons of IC, four family members generated surplus vegetables. IE’s family was such a case. She was a mother of one middle school and one high-school son, but the small plot cultivation produced more than enough, and shared her vegetables with her sister and neighbors. Cultivator’s occupation and lifestyle
were also important. IA had two children in their early 20s, but her produces were rarely consumed at home because “she does not have time to cook, and cultivation is only for hobby.” The majority of her produce was given to others including her mother, siblings, and neighbors. Like IA, ID who lived alone rarely cook at home, and outputs were mostly given to church friends.

Ninth, the production exceeding family consumption was also owing to competition among tenants. Annual tenure extension was certainly one reason, as a gentleman expressed his positive feeling about renewal, indicating several poorly managed plots. In a different manner, IE told me her anxiousness about plot evaluation because she was relatively inexperienced. However, there were other competition incentives as well. Earning recognition from other people acted as a catalyst for competition. IA, whose passionate cultivation led her to represent NUAP tenants at an urban agriculture conference in 2013, attributed her excited and indulged hobby cultivation to “encouraging compliments from people passing [her] plot.”

Tenth, recognition was also important in relation to outsiders, and sharing produce was an important vehicle because gratitude and compliment followed as most interviewees told me. Most illustratively, IB said, “competition results in sharing… [I give] surplus weekly harvests to neighbors or a corner shop aunt”, after differentiating Nodeulseom competition from “workplace competition for interest.” Such recognition, in turn, became a motivation for joining NUAP as IE’s case illustrates. She received a box of ‘tasty sweet potatoes’ from a colleague swimming club friend, and then decided to submit an application to NUAP in February 2014.

Eleventh, in addition to competition, cooperation was also an important means of production at NUAP. More specifically, NUAP’s rice field and nearby potato farm were maintained through on-site volunteering, which is named ‘ulyuk’ to regenerate a traditional rural practice according to head of on-site managers at NUAP Office, and their harvests were used mainly for donation. In addition, tenants were also asked to donate cabbage in the fall, and the donations were used to make kimchi to be given to social facilities such as nursing home. According to IB, these experiences of collective production generated ‘community spirit’ among NUAP cultivators.

Whereas the vast majority of family tenants expressed the idea of community with respect to collaborations and cooperations among individual tenants and their contributions to a wider society, some participants, especially those with an organizational affiliation, utilized NUAP as a place to strengthen a community that had been formed somewhere else. IF took a part in the NUAP program with five alumni of a collegiate environment awareness club UNEP Angel, and asked NUAP Office to locate their plots together in an effort for continuing
their collegiate community after graduation. Similarly, IG founded a new base for his neighborhood activism at NUAP with like-minded Yongsan residents after several years of experience in small-scale collaborative vacant lot cultivation for social causes in Wonhyoro area.

Finally, and twelfth, changing attitudes towards development was also apparent among NUAP cultivators, and it was expressed in relation to the cancelled Nodeul Art Island Project. A male cultivator IH, who identified himself as a former state-owned bank employee, was an advocate of the Nodeul Art Island because he thought it to increase the property value of his apartment in Dongjak, but he preferred Nodeulseom as it was after three years’ cultivation. When the reasons for his changed mind were asked, all the aforementioned non-capitalist elements of urban agriculture were mentioned. More specifically, IF said, “the curiosity of how 13 vegetables grow” urged him to “come almost everyday,” indicating the pleasure of “sharing produces with friends and neighborhoods” and “self-sufficient vegetable supply” as well. According to him, the practice of sharing produce not only “helped build a closer relationship with neighbors,” but it was also a “source of family pride” in his neighborhood. To emphasize the significance of sharing in his UA involvement, this former banker also said, “it’s really hard to find a paper or plastic bag at home.”

A more serious pro-development IC’s attitude change is also noteworthy. As a former construction company employee, he “agreed naturally” with the previous opera house construction project “before doing this [produce cultivation]” because “this expensive land’s productivity is ridiculous.” His cultivation experiences for two years led him to realize “economically incalculable values,” and so IC was in a “dilemma” between construction employee’s job ethos and UA practitioner’s realizations. Because of these two conflicting subjectivities, his opinion about keeping NUAP is “reserved, even though the majority of [NUAP] people are against development.” He appeared to be in a state of ‘hesitancy’, which Thrift (2003, 2012) once explained as an important political moment saying “it wants expand the existing pool of alternatives and corresponding forms of dissent.”

These two male plotolders’ utterance of their attitude change demonstrates that they were becoming someone else concerning real estate development. The degree of change was different, but economistic reckoning was no longer the only way of making sense of the place to them. Instead, they also recognized the island’s “economically incalculable values.” This change took place not because of their aloof realization of Nodeulseom’s intrinsic value, but owing to their materially mediated bodily practices such as cultivation and produce sharing, and performative achievements such as pleasure of self-sufficiency and proud of giving. Their
differentiated place appreciations suggest that bodily engagement with Nodeulseom generates a ‘suspensive force’ (Woodward et al., 2012) to subjectivity and reshape it in varying ways and different degrees.

V. Conclusion: Summary and Discussion

To summarize, NUAP cultivation appears to generate a set of economic practices, whose values are realized and recognized outside the capitalist market economy. With respect to production, vegetables, as well as an agricultural landscape, are produced with unpaid labor for self-sufficient family consumption, but much of the production outputs are also distributed by non-capitalist modes of transaction, such as sharing, yielding, and donation, with no pecuniary gain. These practices of production, consumption, and distribution generate a set of emotional accomplishments including enjoyment of satisfying curiosity, pleasure of caring for produce and cultivation plot, pride of giving, earning peer recognition, and feel of community spirit. These emotional achievements in turn become key incentives for dedicated cultivation.

In a nutshell, NUAP program generates a virtuous cycle between cultivation practices and emotional accomplishments. In this regard, an important finding is that the virtuous cycle is an effect of bodily engagements in production, consumption, and distribution practices, rather than a cause. NUAP cultivators also tend to experience it unexpectedly by surprise through materially mediated practices. This pattern is also true with respect to emerging ethics such as participant’s growing concerns of the rural and changing attitude towards urban development.

These findings are consistent with a recent geographical study of Moore et al. (2015), who observe urban cultivation’s progressive potentials in relation to neoliberalism. Some studies have identified a close association between urban cultivation programs and neoliberalism (Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014; McClintock, 2014; Purdup, 2008), but Moore et al. (2015) finds the emergence of experimental socio-ecological politics that contests neoliberal policy. Similarly, this article’s primary findings imply that bodily experiences of non-capitalist agricultural economy may help to make citizens more conscious of the havoc of neoliberalism, such as rural hardship driven by domestic market liberalization and problems associated with entrepreneurial city policy. In other words, non-capitalist different economies such urban agriculture may address the problematic issues that the mainstream capitalist economy has caused.

Finally, three important policy implications can be drawn from this research. Firstly, empirical findings in this article reaffirm the importance of productive activities in urban agriculture. The generation of a virtuous cycle between affective production and emotional achievements is found to be driven by culti-
vators’ direct and hands-on experiences of plot tendering and produce growing in the first place. This fact calls for policy-makers’ closer attentiveness to productive practices.

For this reason, secondly, it is necessary for policy-makers to prioritize and develop production-based policy measures that can promote bodily engagements with urban agriculture. In other words, policy measures lacking concern about material practices may be hard to actualize urban agriculture’s potentials. An important precondition for actualizing such potentials would be an increase of cultivation sites, but it is not sufficient. Given an observed pattern of dedication level corresponding to physical proximity, policy-makers are also in need of locational considerations. Most noticeably, Lee (2012) has recently reported a pattern of unevenness in the spatial distribution of UA sites in Seoul, and this unequal accessibility should be addressed with adequate policy actions to broaden the population of beneficiary citizens able to realize UA’s progressive potentials.

To that end, thirdly, urban agriculture policy assessment needs to pay more attention to the qualitative aspects of urban agriculture. As Schmelzkoepf (2002) convincingly indicates, the values of urban agriculture are largely ‘incommensurable’ with any numeric representation, and statistical generalization thus suppresses the qualitative properties of urban agriculture practices. Given this nature of urban agriculture, quantification-based policy analysis is certainly destined to lose sight of what are actually happening on the ground. It means that policy-makers as well as researchers take qualitative research techniques (such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, observant participation, and ethnography) more seriously to reveal the voices of ordinary cultivators, instead of simply resting on questionnaire surveys. Hopefully, this article fills the obvious methodology gap in the policy analysis in Seoul.

Despite the lessons that can be drawn from this research report, it is also necessary for me to acknowledge at least three limits of this case study, and they are related to research method, my positionality, and theoretical grounding. Regarding the research method, I have to admit that my access to lay cultivators’ experiences is far from prefect, but limited because my ethnographic exploration was based on verbal testimonials from research subjects rather than my own direct participation in urban cultivation. Thus, I was able to know, for example, curiosity drove delightful urban cultivation experiences among NUAP tenants, but detailed feelings of such an emotional achievement were beyond my understanding. My gender positionality also influenced my research. Male cultivators were more approachable to me throughout the period of my field research, such that some female cultivators declined my interview request and interactions with male cultivators (usually over rice wine) tended to be much more cordial and natural than those with female interviewees.
Therefore, experiences, opinions, and knowledge of male cultivators might be more represented in this article even though, as I noted above, female cultivators tended to be more ardent than their male counterparts. Finally, this article’s theoretical grounding, in other words the different economy perspective might also act as an hindrance to a fuller understanding of urban agriculture at Nodeulseom and in Seoul in more general. This approach sheds important lights on the economy because it opens up a window to a nuanced, bottom-up understanding of creative solutions and innovative alternatives to the hegemonic capitalist economy and transformative and progressive potentials of such economic practices. For this reason, however, empirical studies employing the theoretical optic tend to overvalue non-capitalist practices and undervalue their pitfalls, and this article offers little critical scrutiny of urban agriculture.

Therefore, participatory ‘action’ research based on researcher’s embodied experiences, feminist analysis, and more critical interrogation should provide us with important insights that this article overlooks. And, I hope, such knowledge gaps would be addressed in future research.

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