

Reforming Planning and Building Regulations for Enhancing Neighborhoods : Future Directions

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The quality of the built environment of the General Residential Zone is yet to be discussed in depth despite being the area where everyday lives of residents are most affected by. This in part is due to the housing shortages during the process of rapid urbanization in Korea by which building regulations were successively eased to accommodate for speedy urbanization, which in turn meant that regulations were alleviated even in areas with inadequate infrastructure. This caused the deterioration of living standards in single housing areas quickly turning it into dense multi-family housing areas of today. This study focuses on the General Residential Zone as it is the most common form of residential area in Korea, and identifies the problems and limitations of the current planning and building regulations to propose a general direction and improvement regarding these regulations.

In chapter two planning and building regulations were discussed as a determinant of shaping neighborhood environments based on the literature review and analysis of overseas case studies such as the zoning ordinance of New York, street-oriented district-unit plans of Japan, and form-based codes of city of Peoria. It was found that the physical boundaries of planning and building regulations were increasingly becoming focused on smaller areas to effectively respond to local

characteristics, and contents of regulation were differentiated and specific to the concerned areas. Both in cases of US and Japan, existing mixed land use and physical conditions of streetscapes were some of the factors taken into account for area adapted regulations. It was also worthy to note that for both standard regulations and area specific regulations, the compliance areas were divided to a finer degree. Such sophistication of application directly reflected the nature of regulation, in which regulation was utilized as a means of not just preventing public nuisance but was positively used in forming the future vision of the urban environment. Hence, case studies revealed that regulations were flexibly adapted to reflect and enhance existing area's character.

In chapter three the problems and limitations of the planning and building regulations were discussed by analyzing areas adjacent to local streets within Songpa-gu Bangi-dong's General Residential Zone, which revealed the relationship between the current physical conditions and its regulatory means. As a result, it was found that due to the continuous easing of building regulations relating to the provision of housing, areas adjacent to minor streets were occupied by multi-housing units built on pilotis-space invented by modernist for parking. This caused the loss of vitality of the mixed-use streets and the shortage of neighborhood facilities, and these sites were found to be dominated by residential use only. Furthermore, since current planning and building regulations are negligent towards public spaces, the problems of pedestrian environment were worsening, and many cases of breach of rules were identified where standardized regulation failed to be relevant to site-specific conditions and constraints. All of these issues demonstrate the failings of the current planning and building regulations in becoming instrumental towards creating and managing desirable neighborhood environments. According to the current system, the act of building within the General Residential Zone which is immune to the district unit planning is subjected to the

Act on Planning and Use of National Territory of its land use, building-to-land ratio and floor area ratio and the Building Act of its building size and arrangement. However, these rules and their widespread application illustrate a disconnect between the original rationale for their existence and their actual effect on the natural and human environment. Such universal regulation decreases predictability of outcomes due to the predominantly quantitative standards on a plot basis, and fails to effectively manage public spaces.

Chapter four discussed the possibilities and limitations of area-based regulations such as special districts, district-unit planning and landscape agreements on the effective formation and management of a healthy neighborhood environment. Insofar, there is very little effort in forming and managing neighborhoods through the areas adjacent to local streets within the General Residential Zone. This is partly due to the problems of limitations in controlling and appropriating regulations to reflect local characteristics, and concerns against the effectiveness of agreements. Additionally, area-based regulations have been utilized in the past primarily to meet the needs of development and high density land-use through increasing floor area ratios, maximizing building measurements along arterial roads, and improving street aesthetics. However, responding to the shift in the urban planning paradigm, area-based regulations are starting to bear meaning as a tool of enhancing existing built areas, despite that further sophistication of regulations and inducement of such process is in need for continuous improvement of the current system.

Based on the analysis of the current planning and building regulations, chapter five presented the general direction of improvement in planning and building regulations. The suggestions are as follows. First, designate areas of compliance based on the analysis of current built conditions. Second, seek variation through the act of building by allowing

different types of architecture to emerge. Third, establish integrated regulatory provisions which reflect the characteristic of individual streets and districts. In accordance to the general directions, the principle of improvement was presented as first, differentiating regulations according to the types of problematic conditions, second, downsizing of compliance areas, and last, differentiating building regulations. Within the boundaries of the current system, the study proposed the downsizing of zoning areas, designating special zoning areas which respond to the problems of neighborhood environment, the refining of district unit planning regulations, the active use of special architectural districts, and expanding and refining the use of special streetscape districts(in relation to the pre-announced revision of the Building Act).

In conclusion, this study holds value in that it investigated the possibilities and limitations of planning and building regulations in the perspective of forming and managing successful neighborhood areas. Developing from the suggested general direction and improvement measures, this study proposes that in the future issues of defining the types of problematic conditions on a street and district basis, directions for resolving the identified problematic conditions, and the implementation methods of setting in motion the new regulations are further considered. It is important to note Habraken(2000)'s argument that the subject for architecture and urban experts are not of a single building but the whole built environment, and that the duty of experts should be of forming the everyday environment of people. It is anticipated that planning and building regulations become means of improving neighborhood areas and their standard of living, rather than focusing partially on urban growth and aesthetics.

Keywords : planning and building regulations, neighborhood environment improvement