

# Soil for Cultural Production

Supporting the spatial continuity of cultural ecology under gentrification

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**Urbanism Graduation Project**  
Cluster 14  
Regional Space in Transition





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Supporting the spatial continuity of cultural  
ecology under gentrification

by

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# Abstract

***Is culture still alive in the city?*** Culture is widely recognised as an essential element that shapes urban vitality, local identity, and economic value. As a result, many cities actively seek to implement culture as part of urban regeneration strategies. However, culture is not something that can simply be installed or imported. While art may be produced through individual creativity, culture emerges through collective processes, requiring sustained interactions between those who produce it, those who experience it, and those who support it. In this sense, culture operates as an ecology rather than an object.

This research argues that the role of urbanism and spatial design is not to insert cultural artefacts, but to cultivate the ground that allow cultural production to persist. When culture is treated as an accessory or image, its relational foundations are easily overlooked, resulting in places where culture remains visible but no longer alive. Gentrification intensifies this process by prioritising the most profitable and symbolic aspects of culture, while undermining the spatial and relational foundations that previously sustained cultural production.

Using the indie music scene in Seoul as a case study, this research examines how cultural ecology forms through network of actors and its operation in space. It then explores how this system is disrupted under gentrification, transforming living culture into branded image. The study begins in Hongdae, once a thriving centre of indie culture but now better known for its popularity than for ongoing cultural production. It then traces how cultural ecology relocates within the city and how it is transformed through this movement. Ultimately, it investigates how cultural ecology operates spatially, what kinds of spatial continuity support its persistence, and what role spatial design can play in sustaining cultural production under context of urban change.

**Keywords:** *Cultural ecology, Cultural production, Gentrification, Urban transformation, Indie music scene, Seoul*



# Introduction

## 1.1. Problem

While art may originate from individual acts of creation, culture is inherently collective, formed through shared social processes. Artistic practices become culture only through ongoing interactions among those who create, experience, and support them. In urban contexts, cultural production does not occur in isolation, but is sustained through interdependent relations between cultural producers, spaces of production, participants, and supporting local economies. Through repeated and everyday interaction, these actors collectively sustain cultural practices over time. In this sense, cultural production operates through an ecology, in which cultural practices rely not on individual creators alone, but on the proximity, affordability, and everyday interaction of multiple actors.

In contemporary cities, such forms of cultural production play an increasingly significant role in shaping the character and vitality of urban environments. In some contexts, cultural production contributes not only to place identity but also to broader urban economies. While cities increasingly rely on cultural activity to generate value and distinctiveness, cultural production also depends on specific spatial conditions in which it can take place. Cultural ecologies are inherently spatial, relying on urban context that enable cultural practices to emerge and persist over time. However, it remains unclear whether the spatial conditions and qualities that support cultural production are adequately protected or supported within urban environments, as the places occupied by cultural producers have repeatedly been exposed to gentrification pressures.

The problem is that the spatial continuity of such cultural ecologies proves highly vulnerable under ongoing urban transformation. As cultural production contributes to shaping the distinct character of a place, it often reveals the area's economic potential and attracts external interest. Culture is then increasingly mobilised as a resource for revenue generation, where everyday cultural practices are reinterpreted as branded images to draw visitors and investment. As profitability becomes prioritised, rising rents and shifts in ownership place pressure on small-scale venues, restaurants, and cafés that previously supported cultural production. The displacement of these spaces weakens the relational networks among cultural producers, spaces, and participants, ultimately undermining the conditions necessary for cultural production to persist.

One case in which the formation and subsequent weakening of a cultural ecology can be observed is Hongdae, a neighbourhood in Seoul where South Korea's indie music scene initially emerged. The concentration of small music venues enabled repeated interactions among musicians, audiences, venue operators, and surrounding businesses, allowing niche musical practices to develop through everyday use. As the area gained popularity, however, increased attention from the real estate market prioritised profitability over existing cultural practices, leading to rising rents, changes in ownership, and the displacement of small venues that had sustained the local cultural ecology. While the cultural image of Hongdae has largely remained, the conditions necessary for ongoing music production have weakened, resulting in a significant decline in everyday cultural practice within the area.

### **1.1.1. Problem statement**

Taken together, these observations point to a structural problem in how cultural production persists under urban transformation. Therefore, the problem can be stated as follows:

*Cultural production relies on a networked cultural ecology; however, under gentrification, this ecology struggles to maintain spatial continuity, resulting in the decline of ongoing cultural production while only symbolic representations of culture remain visible*

## **1.2. Relevance**

This section outlines the relevance of the research by situating the identified problem in relation to the actors involved in cultural production, as well as urban professionals and policy actors who engage with culture in the context of urban transformation. The section also addresses the broader societal relevance of the research and its scientific relevance within urban studies, framing how the research contributes to ongoing discussions on culture, space, and gentrification.

### **1.2.1. Relevance across actors**

This problem is relevant to a wide range of actors involved in cultural production. Musicians, venue operators, and small-scale entrepreneurs experience its consequences directly, while local residents, visitors, and public institutions are also implicated through culture's contribution to place identity and urban vitality. Recognising these shared stakes, different efforts have been introduced to respond to the pressures of gentrification. These include grassroots instruments such as cooperatives, mutual support networks, and collective claims to remain in place, as well as institutional measures such as urban regeneration programmes, district-level agreements, and cultural facilities intended to support cultural activity. Despite their different positions and priorities, these instruments reflect a common concern with sustaining cultural production in the city.

However, these efforts largely remain fragmented, making it difficult to understand how their effects might be combined or sustained over time. Most instruments focus on individual actors, single spaces, or isolated economic conditions, while the broader relationships through which cultural production operates are left insufficiently addressed. This highlights the relevance of approaching cultural production as an interdependent ecology rather than a collection of discrete elements. For those seeking to sustain cultural production, the challenge lies in reinforcing the relational networks and spatial conditions that allow cultural practices to be produced, shared, and maintained over time, rather than relying on isolated interventions alone.

### **1.2.2. Societal relevance**

The societal relevance of this situation lies in the structural separation between those who collectively produce cultural value and those who are able to capture its benefits. In Hongdae, musicians, venue operators, and small-scale entrepreneurs contributed to the cultural character and vitality of the area through everyday practices and interactions. Yet the value generated through these collective activities was not distributed among those who produced it.

This condition is articulated in the declaration of the Cooperation for Self-Reliant Music Producers, which states: “After fifteen years of busting our asses making music, all it did was raise land and property values in the area, feeding only landlords and property owners.(J. Lee, 2011)” The statement reflects a broader societal contradiction: cultural value is generated through collective and place-based practices, while its economic benefits are largely captured by actors who are not directly involved in its production.

Urban systems and regulations tend to prioritise property ownership over use, contribution, and everyday participation. As a result, actors who actively shaped the cultural identity of the area had limited capacity to secure continuity of place and livelihood. Rising rents and redevelopment pressures were therefore not experienced as isolated market changes, but as structural conditions that systematically disadvantaged cultural producers and local merchants.

### **1.2.3. Scientific relevance**

While existing research on gentrification and cultural production has largely focused on socio-economic dynamics such as displacement and rent escalation, the spatial dimensions for cultural production remain insufficiently articulated. Previous discussions have often reduced the spatial requirements of indie music scenes to affordability alone.

This leaves a gap between what existing research accounts for and what remains unexplained in the operation of cultural ecology. While spatial conditions such as affordability have been widely examined, the qualitative aspects of space that support interaction between actors are rarely addressed. As a result, affordability alone captures only part of the spatial factors through which cultural production emerges and persists, leaving the relational and everyday dynamics of cultural ecology insufficiently explained.

This research therefore approaches cultural production as being sustained not only by spatial conditions, such as the availability of affordable spaces for artistic practice, but also by spatial qualities, including proximity to everyday activities and opportunities for informal interaction. From this perspective, cultural production depends on a broader assemblage of spatial factors that enable artistic practices to be produced, experienced, and shared, eventually allowing art to persist and develop into culture.

## **1.3. Aim and objective**

This project aims to support the persistence of cultural production as a networked ecology. It approaches cultural production not as the outcome of individual activities but as a process sustained through a relational network between multiple actors, as well as spatial factors supporting it. Within the context of gentrification and urban transformation, the project seeks to clarify how such cultural ecologies can continue to sustain cultural production and how spatial design can contribute to this process without prescribing or controlling cultural practices.

To achieve this aim, the project pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it develops a detailed understanding of cultural ecology as a relational network. For this, research examines how indie music production in South Korea operates through interactions among involved actors. Second, it translates these actor-based insights into a set of spatial factors that sustain cultural production, identifying both spatial conditions and spatial qualities that enable relational dynamics to operate. Third, it articulates the role and limits of spatial design in supporting cultural ecology. Here, spatial design is approached not as a primary solution, but as a complementary instrument that operates alongside existing institutional and community-based efforts, focusing on enabling and maintaining the spatial conditions through which cultural ecology can function.

## 1.4. Research question

In line with problem statement and research aim, the research question is formulated to examine cultural ecology, and how it can persist under the pressure of gentrification. The sub research questions support main question covering social dynamics, spatial factors, and role of design in order to achieve setted objectives.

*How can spatial design strategies enable and support cultural ecology under the pressure of gentrification?*

1. *How do actors in cultural ecology form networks and how do these networks respond to gentrification?*
2. *How do spatial conditions and qualities shape cultural ecology and how are they transformed under gentrification?*
3. *What is the role and limit of spatial design in enabling and supporting cultural ecology and how can it complement existing instruments addressing gentrification?*

## 1.5. Study area

The spatial scope of this project follows the trajectory of indie musicians in Seoul, focusing on how cultural ecology has been reconfigured through their movements over time. This does not imply that cultural ecology relocates as a whole. Instead, the research traces how it is repeatedly reassembled as core actors move and re-establish their activities in new locations. Following this trajectory, the research categorises the spatial habitats of indie music ecology into three groups.

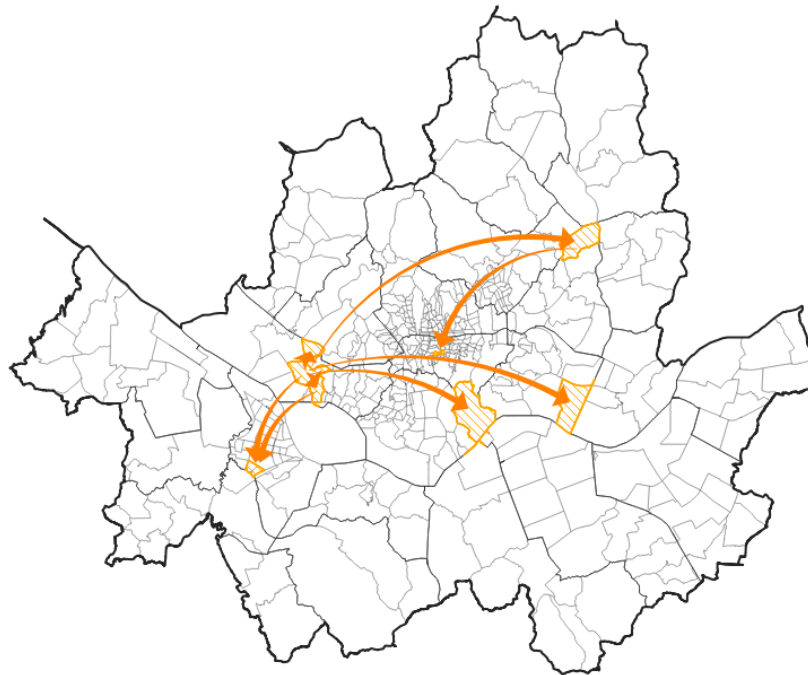


Figure 1.1: Neighbourhoods indie music scene located and the trajectory between them. Created by Author.

The research takes Hongdae as a **reference point**, particularly during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the cultural ecology of indie music was most densely configured. This period is not treated as an ideal or normative model, but as a historical phase in which spatial conditions and qualitative characteristics for cultural production were most intensively co-located. As such, Hongdae serves as a baseline against which subsequent spatial transformations of indie music ecology can be examined.

In comparison to this reference, areas of relocation are examined as **sites of analysis**. Following displacement from Hongdae, cultural venues and related small businesses relocated to different parts of the city, creating new spatial contexts in which indie musicians attempted to re-establish their activities. These relocation cases vary in both context and outcome. Most of them struggled to sustain, due to renewed displacement associated with gentrification, or other reasons such as noise-related issues, or fragile governance and operational structures. Examining these diverse cases allows the research to identify multiple spatial and social factors affecting cultural ecology, rather than attributing its vulnerability to gentrification or economic pressure alone.

As the final stage of tracing this trajectory, the project identifies recent or potential relocation areas as **sites for design exploration**. In contrast to areas where indie music ecology has either displaced or fully stabilised, the persistence of cultural ecology in these locations remains undetermined. This indeterminacy indicates that spatial conditions and qualities are still in formation, leaving room for spatial design to support the persistence and reconfiguration of cultural ecology.



# 2

## Approach

### 2.1. Methods

#### 2.1.1. Actor-centered network analysis

This method is designed to initiate the research by establishing an understanding of the subject prior to spatial analysis. This means giving answer to first sub-research question: *How do actors in cultural ecology form networks and how do these networks respond to gentrification?*, through examining the formation and transformation of cultural ecology. acknowledging that cultural ecology is not a fixed condition but a dynamic system shaped by environmental change, the method follows history of the indie music scene in Seoul, focusing on individual actors, their relationships, and shifts in their positions over time. By approaching urban transformation from the perspective of different actors, this method identifies elements that are critical to the formation and persistence of cultural ecology.

Although the method follows the history of the indie music scene, the materials are selected not to construct a descriptive stories but to collect analytical inputs that enable an actor-centered understanding. The method draws on a range of materials that foreground situated, temporal, and relational information, giving a qualitative interpretation of space from actors' perspective. These materials are organised into three groups. First, **self-produced narratives**, including personal blogs, quotes from interviews, published writings, and online communities, which articulate actors' perspective and their situation. Second, **Independent media sources**, which are blogs, and webzines, documenting informal practices done by actors, as well as indie music history. These capture the ecology as it was collectively observed and discussed within the scene, addressing the temporality. Lastly, **Official media**, usually newspaper articles, showing relational informations by documenting conflict- and cooperation-oriented events as publicly recorded cases. Direct interviews are not considered as primary source of data, as they are less suited to capture temporal interpretations of actors, produced at the moment when events occurred.

In order to understand cultural ecology as a process, three phases are adopted to trace the transformation of networks over time. First, **network formation** is examined by identifying relationships that enabled the emergence of cultural ecology. In the case of Hongdae, symbolic actors illustrate this phase, such as *Lee Sukmoon* (이석문)(see 2.1), the owner of the live club DRUG (see 2.2), and Crying Nut, the band that was discovered through the venue and later became a symbol of Korean punk. Their relationship demonstrates how early connections between venue operators and musicians supported mutual recognition and visibility to audiences, contributing to the formation of an indie scene.

▼ Lee Seokmoon (이석문)



Owner of first live club in Hongdae,  
'DRUG'

called as 'DRUG uncle', who takes care  
of punk music bands and musicians.

Founder of indie label 'DRUG record',  
produced compilation album of punk  
yearly

Figure 2.1: Profile of Lee Sukmoon. Created by Author. *Image source:* (Drug Records, 2008)

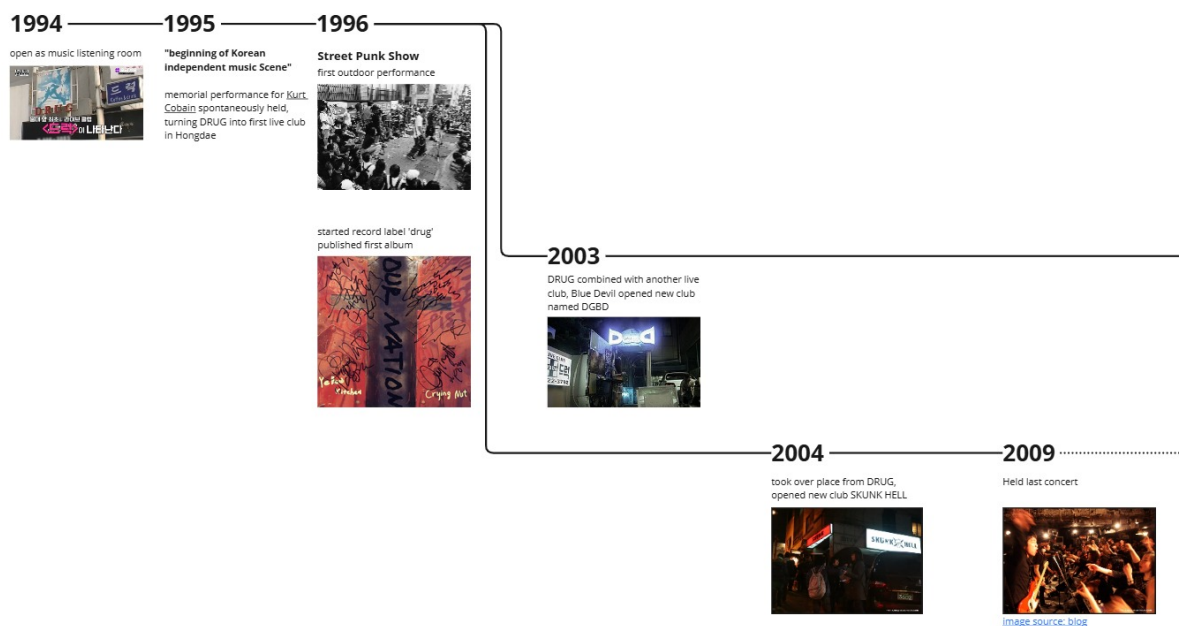


Figure 2.2: Timeline of DRUG and related live clubs. Created by Author *Image sources:* (AKS Digital Humanities Wiki, n.d.; Julpansojang[질판소장], 2009; Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), 2021; Sound Network, n.d.)

This is followed by **network exposure**, which refers to the broader network that had already formed as the cultural ecology expanded, but became visible only when it was threatened by gentrification. A representative case is **Duriban (두리반)**, a restaurant in Hongdae that resisted gentrification. As the relocation conditions offered were incompatible with the restaurant's continued operation, the owner refused accept eviction order from new land owner, insist to keep staying in the building. As story of Duriban spread out, artists mobilised in support forming alliances with local businesses and the public (see 2.3). This case reveals how gentrification functioned as a moment in which latent networks were exposed through collective resistance.

**Cultural events for resistance**



Figure 2.3: Cases of cultural events held in Duriban. Created by Author *Image sources:* (Byuri[별이], 2010; J. Kim, 2011; C.-y. Lee, 2011; Silcheon Munhaksa, 2010)

Finally, **network reconfiguration** addresses how actors reshaped their relationships in order to sustain cultural practices after displacement. In the post-Hongdae trajectory, artists adopted diverse adaptive strategies, ranging from strengthening internal network to forming new networks with external actors. The example of former is cooperation for self-relying musicians [자립음악생산조합] (see 2.4), and for the latter, engagement with governmental frameworks was tried through participation in urban regeneration processes. Taken together, the three phases constitute a processual model of cultural ecology that can be traced across different neighbourhoods, rather than a singular narrative of Hongdae.

▼ **Musicians**

who tried to find out way to be self-reliant by themselves

Danpyeonseon

단편선



musician (until 2017)  
 widen his profession to IT, project planning, and marketing

Hanbad

한밭



musician  
 became activist after duriban case

Bak Daham

박다함



musician, specialised in 'noise music'  
 opened own music club 'lowrise' in munlae  
 now also working as performance director

Figure 2.4: Profiles of musicians actively participated in cooperation for self-relying musicians [자립음악생산조합]. Created by Author *Image sources:* (Jeong, 2015; T.-h. Kim, 2012; Ko & Lee, 2019)

The outcome of this method is an actor-centered interpretive framework that adapts the perspectives of actors involved in cultural production who have experienced gentrification. The findings are synthesised through multiple analytical outputs, including actor profiles, timelines, network mappings, and documented cases of conflict and solidarity. Together, these outputs clarify relational positions, modes of response to change, and, most importantly, overlooked needs for cultural production. Based on this synthesis, the method establishes criteria for identifying what spatial factors should be considered for cultural practices to persist, providing a strategic reference for positioning design interventions in later stages of the project.

	Market-Hybrid	Self Determined	Sustaining	Activist
Art	Music is a profession	Music for oneself	Music to sustain life	Music as a tool for resistance
Market	Strategic engagement	Obstacle to autonomy	Seeking alternatives	-
Politics	-	Avoids political framing	Engage to sustain life	Clear political purpose
Solidarity	With the broader audience	Within niche music scenes	Among self-reliant musicians	With struggling communities
Place	Symbolic roots	Base for autonomy	Shared infrastructure	Mobile

Figure 2.5: Typology of musicians as an analytical profile. Created by Author

### 2.1.2. Spatial transformation analysis

The method investigates how the needs of actors are manifested in space, building on the actor-based understanding of cultural ecology developed in the previous method. The objective is to translate actors' perspective into spatial factors, which are spatial conditions and qualities that shape cultural ecology. In doing so, this method addresses second sub-research question: *How do spatial conditions and qualities shape cultural ecology, and how are they transformed under gentrification?* Approaching space as a changing combination of spatial factors, the method analyses its transformation over time in order to understand which conditions and qualities are critical to the continuity of cultural practices.

The analysis uses temporal spatial data to identify critical changes in the urban environment and the spatial factors associated with them. It is based on the assumption that changes in actor networks identified in previous method are accompanied by corresponding changes in space. To capture these dynamics, the method draws on change in space across multiple scales, from buildings to streets until neighbourhoods and whole city. The type of data can be grouped into three. First, visible changes such as satellite imagery and street view records. Second, less visible changes, including change in building use and ownership patterns using yearly GIS data. Lastly, structural factors influencing spatial transformation, for example development plans and proposed projects. Rather than conducting new fieldwork, these materials are treated as analytical inputs for tracing spatial transformation over time.

The method follows a series of analytical steps to identify spatial factors that affect cultural ecology. First, it extracts keywords from the actor-centered network analysis, focusing on terms that overlap across different actors. These recurring terms are translated into spatial qualities that can be used to describe how space supports or constrains cultural practices. Considering pre-conducted research, these are expected to be spatial qualities:

- **Supportive:** tolerance for noise, flexibility of use
- **Occupational:** affordability, relationship between cultural producers and property owners, ownership pattern
- **Uniqueness:** former undesirability, long reserved urban fabric
- **Connectivity:** close distance from core, easy access by public transport

Second, these spatial qualities are examined through spatial mapping, where each quality is represented by appropriate spatial data. At this stage, temporal spatial data are used to trace changes in these qualities over time. For instance, observation from actors regarding the sudden increase of commercial shops in a neighbourhood are examined through building-use data (see 2.6), while street view imagery is used to capture more experienced changes in the streetscape (see 2.7). Moreover, satellite imagery and historical maps are employed to identify changes at larger scales and over longer timeframes, showing how context around certain place has transformed (see 2.8,2.9) .

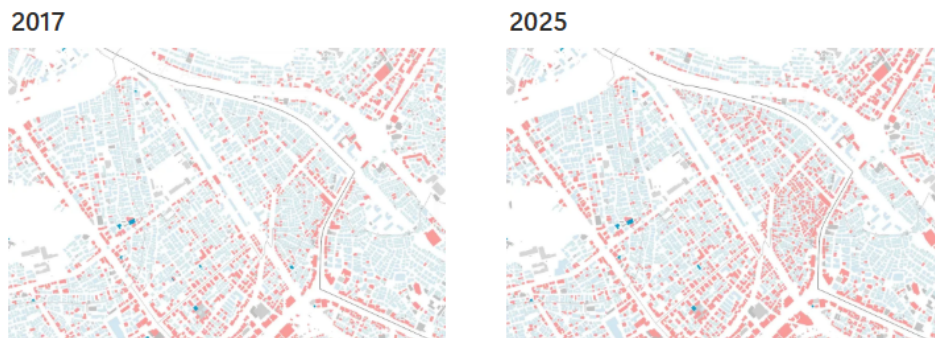


Figure 2.6: Change in building-use distribution in Yeonnam [연남(동)], one of relocation area of artists. Created by Author.



Figure 2.7: Change in street view of Sungsui-ro [성수이로] of Sungsu [성수(동)], one of relocation area of artists. Created by Author. *Image sources:*(Kakao Corp., 2008, 2020, 2025)

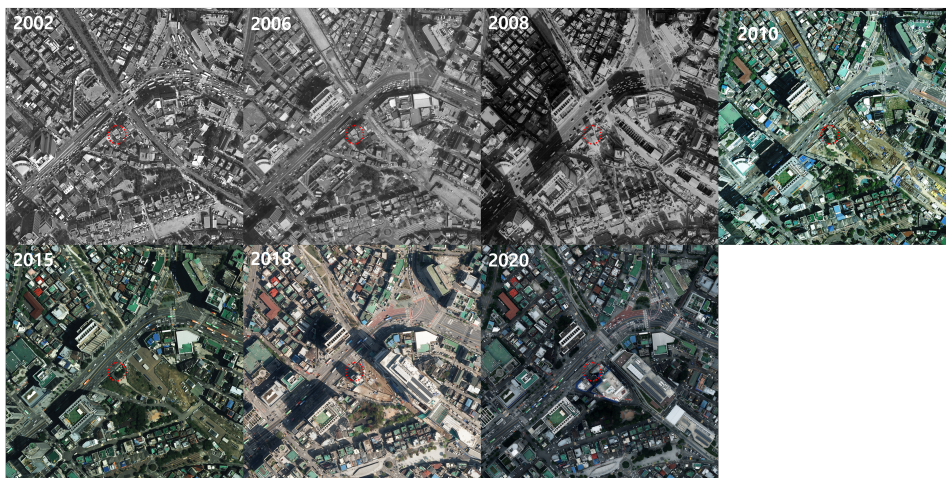


Figure 2.8: Change in satellite image around Duriban [두리반]. Created by Author.

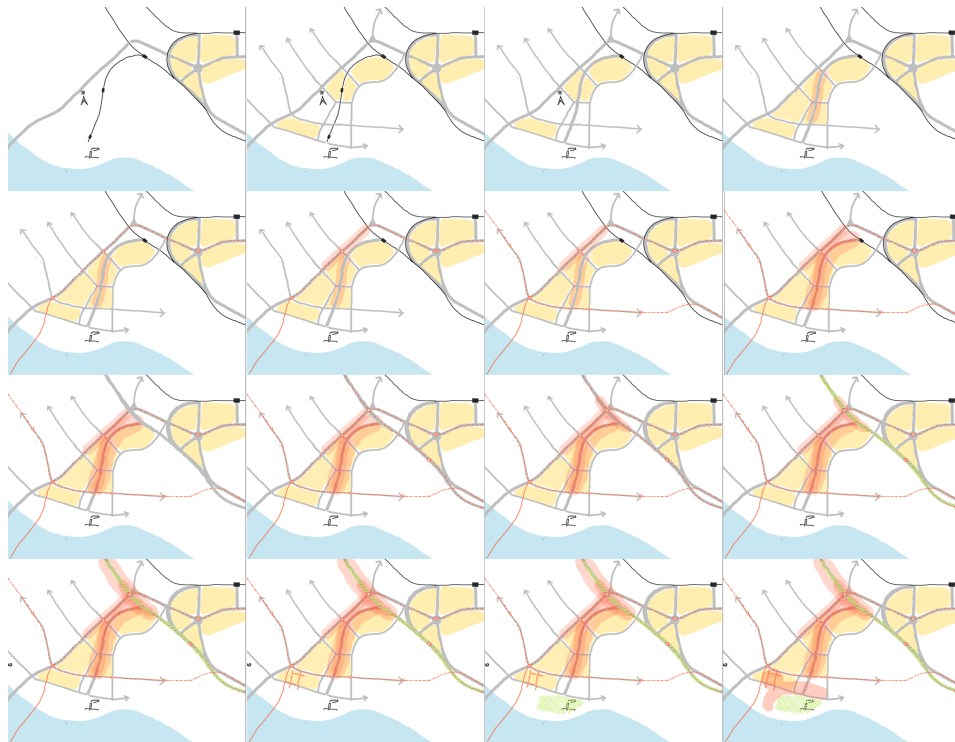


Figure 2.9: Change in area of Hongdae, related to urban development history. Created by Author.

Third, after the spatial mapping is conducted for multiple areas, comparison between location is held to identify recurring changes in spatial factors. Through this comparative process, these recurring changes are synthesised into phased patterns of spatial transformation, highlighting critical spatial factors that enable, intensify, or threaten the continuity of cultural ecology.

The final product of this method is a set of spatial factors, linking each factor with specific phase of transformation. The spatial factors consist of spatial conditions that are necessary for cultural ecology to emerge, and spatial qualities that support its intensification or makes it vulnerable when altered or removed. These factors are synthesised into phases of spatial transformation, clarifying how cultural practices emerge, stabilise, and become vulnerable under changing urban environment. The outcome functions strategically as a set of criteria for test site selection, which reveals potential for cultural ecology to evolve. This also serves as an empirical grounding for design principles, linking actor-based needs to spatial characteristics.

### 2.1.3. Instrument mapping and design positioning

The method examines existing instruments that have been employed in response to gentrification and displacement in order to clarify how spatial design can complement, support, or extend their effects. This method addresses sub-research question 3: *What is the role and limit of spatial design in enabling and supporting cultural ecology, and how can it complement existing instruments addressing gentrification?* Rather than evaluating instruments or comparing their effectiveness in resisting gentrification, the method focuses on understanding how different forms of intervention operate, what they aim to protect or enable, and how multiple instruments function together as a combined set. Through this mapping, the method seeks to clarify where spatial design can play a meaningful role, and where its involvement is limited, within the broader landscape of interventions.

The instrument can be found on a range of publicly available materials through which different types of instruments become visible. First category is policy and institutional documents which reveal how formal instruments frame and regulate spatial intervention. The examples are urban regeneration plans, and cultural policy reports. Second, Media such as newspaper articles, are used to document conflict- and event-based instruments, including resistance actions, agreements, and negotiations. In addition, materials produced by self-organised groups are examined to understand how grassroots instruments are operated by actors themselves. This includes websites, online platforms, and archived activity records. Finally, knowledge-based materials, including research publications and reports, are considered as instruments in their own right, recognising the role of knowledge production in shaping public awareness, policy discourse, and subsequent interventions.

Based on these sources, the method maps instruments relationally as a combined landscape of interventions. Each instrument is first examined through a set of recurring questions: who initiated it, what it targeted, how it engaged with space, and whether it contributed to improving or worsening the situation for cultural actors. This step establishes a consistent reading of both institutional instruments and self-organised movements without ranking their effectiveness.

The analysis then compares instruments, focusing on the gaps between the arrangements they address. One example can be comparison between instruments from institutional side and those emerging from self-organised initiatives. For example, institutional spatial interventions, such as major regeneration projects or designated cultural zones, tend to operate at broader scales and through formalised mechanisms, often foregrounding visibility, regulation, or area-wide transformation. In contrast, grassroots instruments emerge in response to these approaches by addressing more specific and situated needs, such as long term occupancy or minimised initial investments. Self-organised forms of cooperation, for instance, reveal attempts by actors to secure autonomy and long-term stability in ways tailored to their own practices (see.2.10)

Finally, building on the comparison between instruments, the method shifts focus to the position of design among existing instruments. Addressed arrangements are compared with spatial conditions and qualities discovered in previous method. This is to see if there are spatial implications behind each arrangement, which can be linked to crucial spatial conditions or qualities. Based on the link between arrangement and spatial factors, the role of spatial design can be set, showing strength and limits of design in terms of arrangements it can address. As a result, this step distinguishes contexts where spatial design can actively intervene, and where its involvement is limited or counterproductive. Therefore, this step clarifies how spatial design may support or extend existing instruments.

The end product is an instrument matrix that translates existing instruments into their roles in sustaining cultural ecology. This matrix links different instruments to the arrangements they seek to secure, allowing a distinction to be made between those that can be articulated through spatial design and those that must be addressed by other sectors. Through this mapping, the outcome clarifies the role of spatial design as part of a broader landscape of interventions, positioning it strategically as a complementary practice that can support, extend, or spatially articulate the intentions of other instruments.

## Cooperation of merchants who hope to run business without worrying

### 맘상모 (맘편히 장사하고픈 상인모임)

Formed on May, 2013 some merchants suffered from eviction gathered together to inform their situation to public.

After some media exposure, more merchants who suffered, or in danger of displacement joined to survive together

#### self-organised activities

#### Guardian of the Alley

##### 골목지킴이 양성과정

train and educate merchants to assert one's right to keep business in their alley, eventually keep the local alleys as it is

#### Saving your go-to place

##### 단골집 지키기

held parade together with artists and local residents to announce small businesses' suffering in gentrified area

publish gift coupon for member shops and promote them thorough their own channel

#### collaboration with government and national assembly

#### Protection act for Commercial building lease

##### 상가건물임대차보호법

legal protection for tenants from eviction.  
rental agreement is ensured for minimum 5years if tenant don't want to leave

#### Win-win Agreement

##### 상생협약식

agreement between district office and local merchants to revitalise local businesses

Figure 2.10: Grassroots instruments of 'Cooperation of merchants who hope to run business without worrying [맘상모, 맘편히 장사하고싶은 상인 모임]'. Created by Author.

#### 2.1.4. Site-Specific Design Exploration

The method employs site-specific design exploration to test how the positioning of spatial design, derived from previous methods, can be spatially articulated in a concrete context. As an extended response to Sub-Research Question 3, this method explores where and how spatial design can intervene within a real urban setting, using the selected area as a test site. Rather than proposing a completed design for the entire area or a normative model for cultural space, the method treats design as an experimental tool to examine how spatial conditions and arrangements may support the persistence of cultural production alongside other urban processes. This design exploration tests and spatially articulates the findings of the previous methods, using a site selected based on identified spatial factors and a design positioning derived from instrument mapping.

The design exploration focuses on a street or neighbourhood that exhibits spatial qualities identified through spatial transformation analysis. For test site, it should be also considered if cultural actors are already present or beginning to emerge along their relocation trajectory. Moreover, the research expects that in test site conditions or qualities are not yet fully stabilised and future development paths remain open, indicating both potential for cultural production and emerging pressures of gentrification.

Within this context, the design exploration tests a set of guiding questions that may include, for example:

- how long-term occupation by cultural actors be supported spatially;
- how self-organised cultural production could be enabled without prescribing fixed uses of space;
- how individual practices coexist with institutional frameworks without losing autonomy.

To explore these questions, the design deliberately avoids fixed programmatic assignments or fully determined spatial outcomes, instead incorporating areas of non-intervention as an integral part of the method. Design is approached not as a means to deliver a complete cultural facility, but as a way of establishing a spatial background that enables cultural practices to emerge, adapt, and sustain themselves over time. This involves working with open-ended spatial structures and a phased logic, where certain elements are gradually completed, adapted, or left unresolved, allowing cultural actors to appropriate and transform the space according to their own needs.

Rather than developing a single, idealised scenario, the design exploration employs multiple exploratory representations. This means design speculates on different possible trajectories through which cultural practices might inhabit and reshape the site over time. These representations are used as analytical tools rather than predictive models, allowing the design to test how openness and flexibility provided by spatial structures can create room for culture. Through this process, the exploration examines how space may be gradually occupied, negotiated, and redefined by cultural activity alongside other urban processes.

The outcome of this method is a site-specific spatial design exploration. It is presented through a set of exploratory representations, including actor–space interaction diagrams, phased spatial scenarios, and vision map from cultural ecology's perspective. Rather than proposing a fixed spatial solution, the outcome demonstrates how spatial design can support flexible and autonomous cultural use. It illustrates how cultural activities may establish a long-term presence within an open spatial structure, even under ongoing pressures of gentrification.

### 2.1.5. Project Planning

The project follows a week-based planning structure that aligns research consolidation, and design exploration with the assessment moments (A2–A4). Each assessment period will work as a milestone to show progress of each elements mentioned.

#### A2 | Research Consolidation

Following A1, the project phase focuses on consolidating research outcomes and translating them into a spatially grounded design agenda until A2. This phase prioritises organising existing cases, examining different neighbourhoods along the trajectory of cultural relocation, and identifying where spatial design may meaningfully intervene.

- Week 2.10: address full trajectory of indie music scene and prepare a long list of neighbourhoods to be investigated.
- Week 3.1: case study 1 | origin area (Hongdae), including first draft of synthesized outcome from pre-research during Q2
- Week 3.2: case study 2 | first relocation areas (Munlae, Sungsu, etc)
- Week 3.3: case study 3 | second relocation areas and potential relocation areas. (to be figured out during Wk 2.10)
- Weeks 3.4: synthesis of findings 1 | Actor-oriented Framework
- Week 3.5: synthesis of findings 2 | Spatial Conditions and Qualities
- Week 3.6 synthesis of findings 3 | Instrument-Spatial Pattern Matrix
- Week 3.7: A2 report writing.
- Week 3.8: A2 presentation.

#### A3 | Site Selection and Design Exploration

The A3 phase centres on site-specific design exploration, where spatial design principles are set and tested. Design work during this phase focuses on translating research insights into spatial scenarios, and validating the design principle through iterative testing.

- Week 3.9: site selection for design exploration
- Week 4.1: set design principles
- Week 4.2: validation of design principles via expert feedback
- Week 4.3: design exploration 1 | spatial scenarios
- Week 4.4: design exploration 2 | instrument combination
- Week 4.5: design exploration 3 | phased strategies
- Week 4.6: A3 report writing
- Week 4.7: A3 presentation

#### A4 | Articulation and Reflection

Due to the limited time between A3 and A4, this final phase focuses on articulating the project outcome and reflecting on the role and limits of spatial design in supporting cultural ecologies. No new design is introduced during this phase.

- Week 4.8: articulation, reflection
- Week 4.9: A4 presentation

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

This section structures the theoretical framework around three conceptual categories, namely cultural ecology, place, and gentrification, in order to establish cultural ecology as an analytical lens. Rather than treating these categories in isolation, the framework brings them together to address the research questions concerning how cultural production is sustained and transformed under urban change. The subsequent sections develop this synthesis through interpreting the case of the Seoul indie music scene.

### 2.2.1. Cultural Ecology

This section adopts different approach to define *cultural ecology* as an analytical lens to understand cultural production as a relational and situated process rather than an outcome of individual creativity alone. Instead of tracing the conceptual genealogy of the term, this framework selectively draws on different literatures that conceptualises culture as embedded in social networks and shaped by contextual conditions. The section provide a theoretical basis for understanding cultural production as a relational system that depends on both social networks and the environments that support them.

#### Culture as a relational system

Within this framework, culture is formed through network of social relations rather than through isolated individual actors. Sampson' s ecological approach provides a critical foundation for this perspective by giving attention to structural conditions that shape social interaction. Importantly, this approach does not dismiss individual agency, but instead situates it within broader relational contexts. As Sampson argues, "Ecological explanations do not deny individual action, but seek to explain how patterns of social interaction are shaped by contextual and structural conditions" (Sampson, 1988).

#### Local friendship ties as the mechanism of cultural continuity

To specify how such relational systems operate at the local level, Sampson introduces the concept of *local friendship ties*. These ties describe the social infrastructure through which cultural practices are maintained within specific places. Sampson defines local friendship ties as "the density of acquaintances and friendship networks rooted in locality-based social interaction" (Sampson, 1988).

#### Supportive environments and environment–behavior relations

While relational networks are central to culture, they do not sustain solely on themselves. In line with this, Fischer addressed importance of place lie this: "Urban social relationships are sustained through routine encounters in localized settings such as cafés, bars, and neighbourhood institutions." (Fischer, 1982) Moreover, Rapoport suggest that the formation and continuity of culture affected by specific environmental conditions that support repeated interaction. From an environment–behavior relations (EBR) perspective, Amos Rapoport conceptualises this role through the notion of *supportive environments*. He defines such environments as follows: "Environments may be defined as good to the extent that they are supportive for the people who live in them" (Rapoport, 1983). Crucially, Rapoport emphasises that environments do not directly determine social or cultural outcomes. Instead, shaping the qualites which affects actors who makes interaction : "Environments are not determining, but they do have effects on people, particularly under conditions of high criticality" (Rapoport, 1983).

### 2.2.2. Place

This section introduces place theory to examine how cultural relations are spatially experienced and sustained over time. Rather than understanding space as a neutral container, the literatures discussed here conceptualise place as something produced through inhabitation, everyday social interaction, and prolonged care. In this sense, place is understood not as a static spatial condition, but as a lived and relational phenomenon. The section frame place as a lived condition shaped by repeated practices, informal encounters, and long-term attachment.

### **Place as inhabitation and collective practice**

For this research, Friedmann's concept of place is used to understand cultural environments not as fixed spatial settings, but as outcomes of sustained inhabitation. This perspective is particularly relevant for analysing place-based cultural production, where the continuity of everyday presence and routine interaction is more critical than spatial form. Rather than treating place as a designed object, Friedmann frames it as something that emerges through the repeated act of between actors. From this viewpoint, cultural spaces persist only as long as the actors who use them remain present and engaged in everyday practices. As Friedmann argues, "The point is that the very act of inhabiting a neighborhood will shape its character, its daily and seasonal rituals, and the recurrent socio-spatial patterns that imprint themselves on its memory" (Friedmann, 2010).

### **Third places and everyday social interaction**

In this research, Ray Oldenburg's concept of *third place* is used to clarify the types of everyday spaces that enable social relations to persist through routine presence, rather than formal organisation. Drawing on Oldenburg's discussion, third places can be understood as informal public gathering places that foster regular, voluntary, and informal social interaction (Oldenburg, 1989). The relevance of third place lies not in the function of space, but its role as ordinary settings where familiar actors encounter one another routinely. As Oldenburg notes, "Regular patrons of third places create a sense of rootedness and belonging" (Oldenburg, 1989). From this perspective, third places matters that they sustain relational continuity, making them particularly significant for place-based cultural practices that depend on repeated interaction.

### **Fields of care and public symbols**

Yi-Fu Tuan distinguishes between different types of place based on how meaning of the place is produced and sustained. He contrasts *places as public symbols*, which derive meaning from visibility, representation, and external recognition with *fields of care*, whose significance emerges through prolonged experience, maintenance, and everyday involvement. (Tuan, 1977) Fields of care are shaped through inhabitation and attachment over time, while symbolic places often prioritise outstanding image and legibility. This distinction highlights that there are different ways to give meaning to place, not only representation but also affection.

## **2.2.3. Gentrification**

In this research, gentrification is approached as a structural process that reshapes the conditions under which cultural practices can be sustained, rather than as a consequence of individual intentions or moral choices. Instead of focusing on who moves into a neighbourhood and why, this perspective emphasises how shifts in capital investment and valuation redefine what kinds of activities, spaces, and livelihoods become viable. Gentrification is therefore understood as a process that reorganises both economic and symbolic conditions of place. This section provide a framework for analysing gentrification as a process driven by capital investment and change in priority, while remaining attentive to local variation and context-specific outcomes.

### **Gentrification as capital-driven restructuring**

Neil Smith's theory provides a structural explanation for what makes gentrification. Rather than attributing urban change to the preferences or intentions of newcomers, Smith argues that gentrification is fundamentally driven by the movement of capital. As he states, "gentrification is a back to the city movement by capital, not people" (Smith, 1979). Central to this argument is the concept of the *rent gap*, defined as the disparity between the current value generated under existing use and the potential value that could be realised through redevelopment (Smith, 1979).

### Cultural revalorisation and symbolic control of space

Sharon Zukin focuses on how culture becomes instrumental in legitimising and organising urban transformation. In her analysis, culture functions are a means of economic development and a way of controlling urban space (Zukin, 1982). Through processes of *cultural revalorisation*, selected, aesthetic aspects of local culture are amplified and promoted, while practices that are less profitable, less legible, or more disruptive are gradually marginalised. As a result, cultural identity may persist at the level of image or branding, even as the critical conditions for cultural production are progressively undermined.

### Contextual variation and uneven outcomes

David Ley challenges explanations of gentrification that rely on a single dominant mechanism. He argues that no single explanation can adequately account for the complexity of inner-city gentrification (Ley, 1996). From this perspective, gentrification unfolds unevenly by different context. This approach highlights that even similar structural pressures may lead to different outcomes, making cultural practices to either disappear, persist in altered forms, or relocate to other areas depending on local contexts.

## 2.2.4. Theoretical Synthesis

The following sub section brings together the previously discussed theories through a process of intersection, interpretation, and synthesis. Rather than presenting a closed model, it develops a place-based theoretical framework through the reading of the indie music scene in Seoul.

### Theoretical Intersections and Research Questions

The research positions cultural ecology, place, and gentrification as complementary perspectives whose intersections structure the research and design questions. Each theory addresses a distinct dimension of the problem, while the pair-intersections generate the sub-research questions. The main research question is therefore situated in the middle, where three theories overlap. (see 2.11)

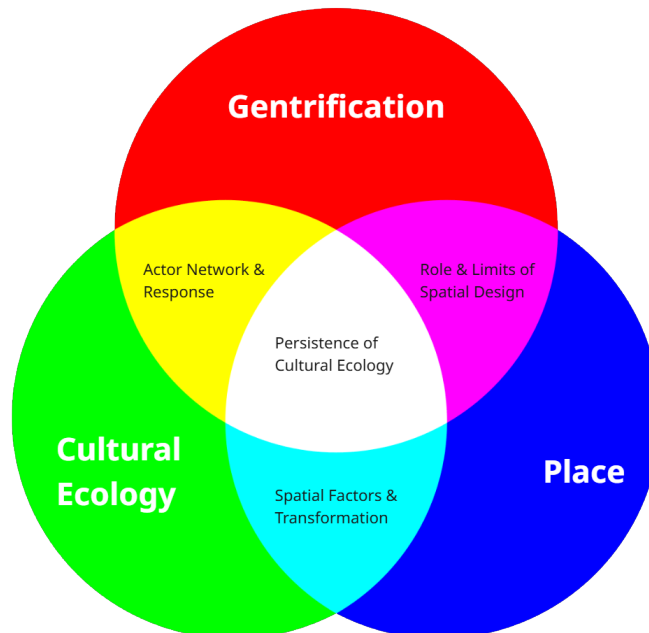


Figure 2.11: Venn diagram of three theory categories and its intersections. Created by Author.

The first sub-research question about actors, network and their response emerges at the intersection of cultural ecology and gentrification. As established in the preceding sections, cultural ecology conceptualises cultural production as a relational system of interdependent actors, while gentrification describes the structural pressures introduced through capital-driven urban transformation. Their intersection foregrounds how cultural actors form and maintain networks and how they are affected by gentrification.

The second sub-research question about spatial transformation and the factors affected is situated at the intersection of cultural ecology and place. While cultural ecology highlights relational dynamics among actors, place emphasises lived, experiential, and contextual qualities of space that enables cultural ecology. Bringing these perspectives together examine how specific spatial conditions support the persistence of interaction that sustain cultural ecosystems.

The third sub-research question about role of spatial design is located at the intersection of place and gentrification. Place theory underscores that spatial meanings and uses are produced through everyday practices, while gentrification foregrounds driving forces that reconfigure these meanings. Their intersection frames how different instruments can be interpreted in means of resisting, or intensifying driving forces that leads to gentrification.

### **Interpreting indie scene in Seoul**

In the beginning of indie music scene, live clubs in Hongdae functioned as a third place for musicians and audiences alike. Drawing on Ray Oldenburg, such places did not merely provide venues for performance, but operated as everyday settings in which informal public gathering enabled regular, voluntary, and informal social interaction. From an environment–behavior relations perspective of Rapoport, this condition can be further understood as a supportive environment. Although Hongdae was not intentionally planned as a centre for indie music, its spatial and social character created critical conditions that supported repeated cultural interaction. This enabling role of the environment aligns with Sampson's emphasis on contextual and structural conditions that shape patterns of social interaction. At this stage, Hongdae's significance lay not in its capacity to facilitate interaction by providing a permissive setting in which cultural relations could begin to form.

As indie music culture continued in Hongdae, repeated interaction among people gradually strengthened and expanded the surrounding cultural ecology. Over time, the growth of the indie scene was accompanied by the proliferation of cafés, small venues, restaurants, and other cultural spaces. These settings provided multiple and overlapping contexts for social interaction, allowing encounters to become routinised and embedded in everyday life. As Fischer argues, urban social relations are sustained through such encounters in localised settings, where interaction becomes ordinary rather than exceptional.

Through this process, repeated encounters were stabilised, forming what Sampson describes as local friendship ties. These ties broadened the cultural ecology beyond musicians alone, incorporating audiences, small entrepreneurs, and neighbouring actors into an interdependent relational system. In this sense, Hongdae can be understood as an inhabiting neighbourhood shaped by musicians, local merchants, and regular visitors, whose everyday presence produced shared routines and social rhythms, as described by Friedmann. This accumulated continuity and attachment can be conceptualised as a field of care proposed by Tuan. Here, Hongdae's significance did not derive from symbolic representation or external recognition, but from prolonged everyday involvement through which different actors came to care for, rely on, and identify with the place over time.

However, as processes of gentrification unfolded, many of the inhabiting activities that had sustained Hongdae's indie scene became increasingly difficult to continue. This was closely tied to the erosion of everyday infrastructures such as live clubs, cafés, and small venues that had previously functioned as third places in Oldenburg's sense. Drawing on Smith's analysis, this displacement were due to economic impossibility under rent gap, where market pressure introduced rise in rent, making small businesses hard to sustain in the area.

With the weakening of these everyday infrastructures, Hongdae increasingly shifted away from functioning as a field of care toward a place as public symbol. While the image of “indie” culture remained visible and legible, the lived practices and relational continuity that had sustained cultural production were progressively undermined. This tension is articulated in the founding declaration of the Cooperation for Self-reliant Music Producers, which explicitly rejects the term “indie,” arguing that where live music scenes no longer exist, the label functions only as a “ghost-like false consciousness” (J. Lee, 2011).

At the same time, the declaration expresses a desire to rebuild local music scenes capable of coexisting with surrounding communities (J. Lee, 2011). This was from memory of collective resistance where musicians and local merchants mobilised together to resist eviction of local restaurant, showing evidence of local friendship ties formed in Hongdae. The desire shows desire to re-establish fields of care through relational continuity, which leads to relocation of cultural ecology after gentrification. While investigating relocation cases, David Ley’s critique is particularly relevant, as it cautions against interpreting gentrification as a uniform trajectory. Relocation areas therefore should not be understood as spaces where Hongdae’s experience is reproduced, but as contexts in which past experiences of inhabitation and care inform new attempts to construct cultural environments under different spatial and socio-economic context.

### Final theoretical framework

By interpreting existing theories through the Hongdae indie music scene, a theoretical framework can be developed that links cultural ecology and gentrification through processes of spatial transformation. Rather than treating these theories as separate explanatory lenses, this framework positions place as the medium through which cultural relations are enabled, stabilised, and eventually reconfigured under structural pressure. This process can be summarised as a sequence of spatial transformation, moving from third places to fields of care and ultimately to place as public symbol, as illustrated in the framework (2.12).

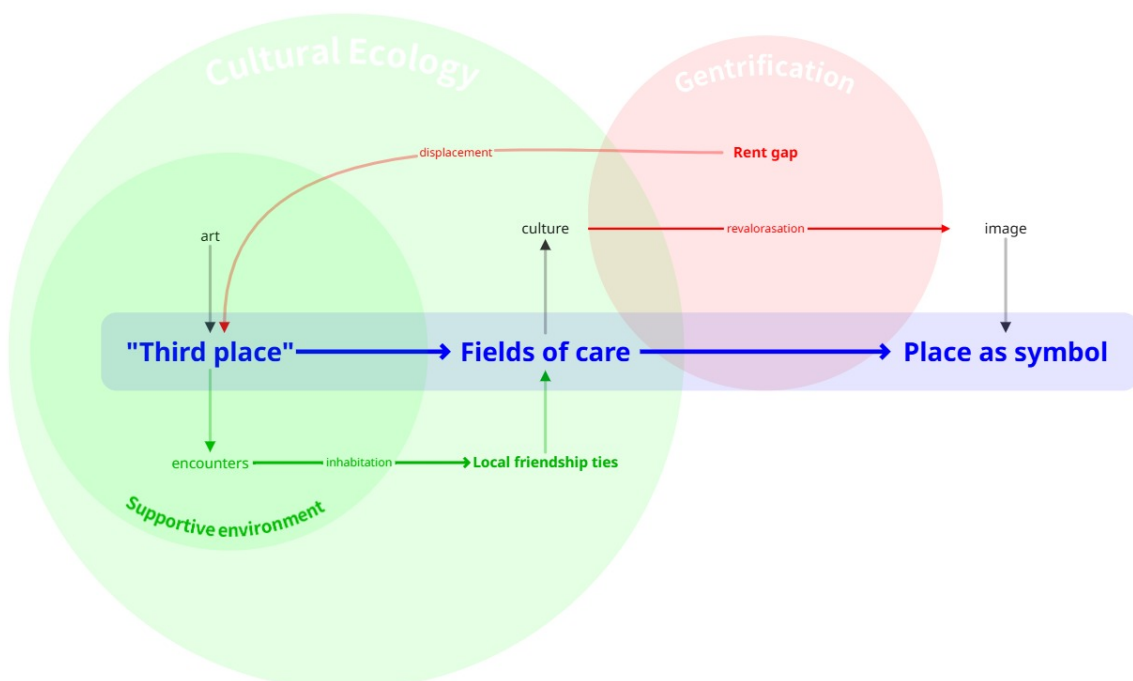


Figure 2.12: Theoretical framework. Created by Author.

Third places emerge within supportive environments that provide permissive spatial and social conditions for interaction. These conditions enable encounters between actors, allowing cultural production to emerge without being explicitly planned or institutionally organised. As such interactions are repeated through inhabitation and routine encounters, they stabilise into fields of care, where local friendship ties are formed and cultural production is able to prosper through relational continuity.

Under gentrification, however, these accumulated culture is increasingly revalorised primarily as economic value. As economic value becomes prioritised, a rent gap emerges between the potential value of the area and its value under existing use. Driven by this rent gap, less profitable third places are displaced, indicating that exchange value begins to outweigh relational continuity. As the conditions for cultural production are progressively undermined, the relational foundations that sustained cultural ecology are weakened. Through this process, the area shifts toward functioning as a place as public symbol, where the image of culture remains visible while the lived practices and relations that once sustained it are diminished.

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