

# A Study on Characteristics and Regional Distribution of Seoul's Cultural Resources

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## Summary

Amid a steady increase in the amount of cultural resources, market domination of corporations with large capital has become increasingly prevalent. There arises the need to support artists in their pursuit of art. Meanwhile, continuous effort should be devoted to establish more cultural facilities at the community level.

## 1. Introduction

### **The Seoul Metropolitan Government needs to produce and accumulate comprehensive data about the cultural state and condition of Seoul**

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Today, a large number of Seoul citizens enjoy a higher standard of living and seek a way to further improve the quality of their lives. As a result, citizens of Seoul have become increasingly interested in various kinds of cultural programs and activities. Earlier in the 1990s, the national government saw cultural policy as a branch of social welfare service. From this point of view, it concentrated on expanding access to cultural programs for the socially or economically marginalized. However, the focus has shifted to new direction. Since 2000, the public demand for a wider range of cultural programs and the expansion of related facilities has soared. As a result, the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture has been established. Moreover, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) has expedited the process of setting up cultural facilities and supported the development of various cultural industries. It has done so, recognizing the undeniable role of culture in economic development. At present, SMG's cultural policy aims to erect a symbolic cultural facility that can represent the unique and rich cultures of Seoul. It also labors to



carve Seoul citizens' daily environment into a cultural zone.

Yet the SMG is confronted with difficulty arisen from a lack of data required for developing an effective cultural policy. There is currently no system that systematically tracks and analyzes changes in the cultural state and condition of Seoul as a whole. At the moment, the nation, the SMG, autonomous district governments, and other governmental entities collect statistical or administrative data for themselves according to their own needs. This has resulted in scattered data. Until now, SMG has never undertaken a thorough study on the cultural resources of Seoul. However, such investigation is necessary if the government wishes to design and implement effective policies on behalf of its citizens who are looking for more diverse and satisfying cultural experience.

**A fact-finding investigation on the city's cultural resources is required to obtain basic data, which in turn can be utilized to assess and increase the efficacy of cultural policy**

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Besides Korea, numerous other countries around the world also have an inadequate system that fails to systematically produce comprehensive data on cultural resources. A plausible excuse would be that the definition of culture is too wide and rapidly evolving: Culture can be defined in several different ways, for it encompasses a variety of elements from artistic activities to, in a wider sense, lifestyles and values. In the meantime, technological advancement has created a new kind of deformed art and the fusion of different artistic genres. This has widened the scope of investigation, rendering the process more time consuming and costly. Despite such challenge, it is essential that the government produces reliable information, based on which it can properly analyze and assess the efficacy of its cultural policy. Without this being done, policy makers cannot form an evidence-based policy to make cultural progress by expanding the public's cultural capacity.

## **City of Seoul needs to obtain data related to the cultural state and conditions of Seoul from a fact-finding investigation on the city's cultural resources**

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Before all, the SMG must gather and secure data about Seoul's cultural resources. It is the very first step for ensuring that the government carries out its cultural policy in the right direction. As explained earlier, data produced in the previous studies are outdated to be used as relevant references of current cultural activities. Given that, this report investigates the current condition of cultural resources and facilities in Seoul to determine the city's actual cultural state. It looks at every aspect of cultural activities taking place in Seoul from creation to consumption in pursuit of finding how cultural resources are interrelated. In addition, this report compares its findings with those of the previous studies to first see what changes have been made in the cultural state of Seoul and then to anticipate coming changes. This study is expected to serve as a reference for the SMG to decide in which direction it will pursue its cultural policy.

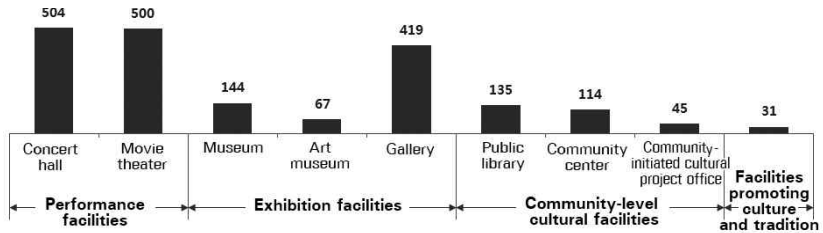
## **2. Main Findings**

This paper divides Seoul's cultural resources into historic, artistic, visual, and community-level resources. Then, it analyzes the current state and trend of each.

### **There are total 1,959 cultural facilities based in Seoul. Concert halls and public libraries have been instrumental in the growth of cultural resources**

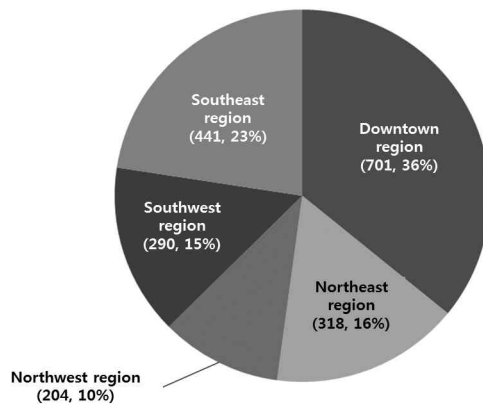
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The amount of cultural resources has been on a rising trend since 2000. The growth has been witnessed in every area related to culture including employment in the culture contents industry. In particular, the number of art facilities like concert halls, movie theaters, and museums including ones particularly built for art exhibition has shown stark increase. As of June 2015, Seoul had total 1,959 cultural facilities, of which the overwhelming majority are performance facilities.



<Figure 1> Cultural Facilities in Seoul

Concert halls and public libraries have been the major driving forces of the increase in the number of cultural facilities. Since 2007, each has grown by 218 and 69. However, the rate at which the number of cultural facilities rises has plummeted significantly: from the average growth rate of 83.7 percent between 2002 and 2007 to 27.3 percent between 2007 and 2015.



<Figure 2> Current Distribution Status of Cultural Resources among the Five Regions in Seoul (No. of resources & share)

Today, cultural resources are still concentrated in the Downtown and Southeast region of Seoul. They are especially clustered in the former area, resulting in imbalance among the regions. For instance, Jongno, Gangnam, and congested urban areas near Hongik University still remain as the most popular nesting sites for

cultural resources. However, according to the comparative study of cultural resources in the five regions of Seoul, the concentration of cultural resources in Downtown has been slightly weakened since 2007. In particular, palpable change has been afoot in Jongno-Gu. Meanwhile, Northeast and Northwest regions have come increasingly into possession of cultural resources.

**SMG has made notable change in its cultural policy, preserving a wider range of historic resources such as cultural assets and harnessing them for a variety of social purposes**

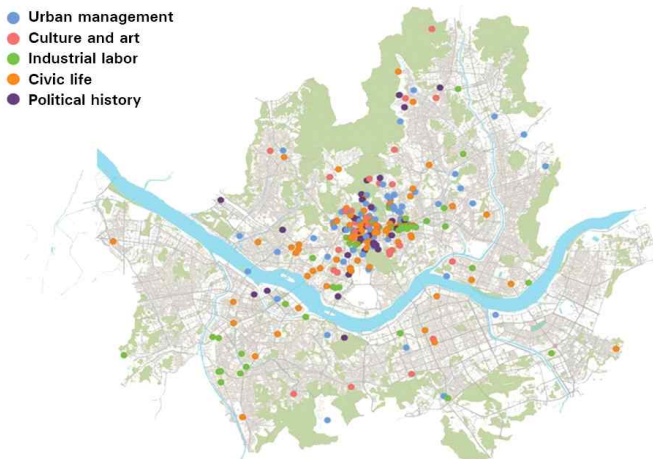
Among hundreds of the state-designated heritages in Seoul, 326 are consisted of immovable and intangible cultural assets. They are not preserved nor exhibited at the museum, but found in certain places in the forms of buildings, sites, and monuments. More than the majority of them (173, which represents 53.1 percent) are concentrated in the Downtown region. The rest are located across the four regions: 73 in Northeast (22.4 percent); 30 in Southwest (9.2 percent); 26 in Northwest (8.3 percent); and 24 in Southeast (7.4 percent).

<Table 1> Number of Immovable and Intangible Cultural Resources in Seoul (as of 2007 and 2015)

Category	National treasure		Treasure		Historic site		Scenic site		National intangible cultural heritage		Important folklore cultural heritage		Total	
	2007	2015	2007	2015	2007	2015	2007	2015	2007	2015	2007	2015	2007	2015
Entire city	6	8	23	47	67	67	0	3	39	55	131	146	266	326
Downtown	6	8	23	38	35	35	0	1	24	27	60	64	148	173
Northeast	0	0	0	5	14	14	0	2	9	19	28	33	51	73
Northwest	0	0	0	3	7	7	0	0	4	5	11	11	22	26
Southwest	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	2	3	22	23	28	30
Southeast	0	0	0	1	7	7	0	0	0	1	10	15	17	24

Under the guidance of its past cultural policy, SMG used to merely focus on preserving historic artifacts. In recent years, it has taken the initiative in expanding a range of historic heritages and cultural resources for preservation and utilizing them for various purposes. The government has been preparing to apply for UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the Han Yang Fortress Wall. In addition, it plans to excavate and seek the UNESCO recognition for Pungnapdoseong, the putative site where a royal palace was erected in the era of Hanseong Baekje.


SMG has expanded the definition of historic and cultural resources from relics and historic sites inherited from past generations to modern and contemporary cultural assets in Seoul. Then, it has designated these new cultural resources “heritages for future generations” and been using them for the benefit of the public. For example, it has transformed a water intake station located in Guui-Dong<sup>1</sup> into a cultural art space; the house where Mr.Geukyeong Yun, the renowned writer of numerous children’s songs, lived into a child education center; and the residence in which non-violent human rights activist, Mr.Seokheon Ham, lived into a place for teaching Korean history.



<Figure 3> Current Distribution Status of “Heritages for Future Generations” in Seoul

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Dong’ is an area unit that refers to a smaller sub-area within ‘Gu (i.e. district)’



Museums are important in that they collect, preserve and exhibit historic and cultural resources. In Seoul, the number of museums has gone up by 29.7 percent to 144 from 2007. A particularly noticeable increase has been made in the number of national and public museums. They form the biggest cluster in Downtown region: It comprises of 66 museums, representing 45.8 percent of the total number of museums based in Seoul. Northeast and Southeast regions have the second and third largest number of museums, respectively.

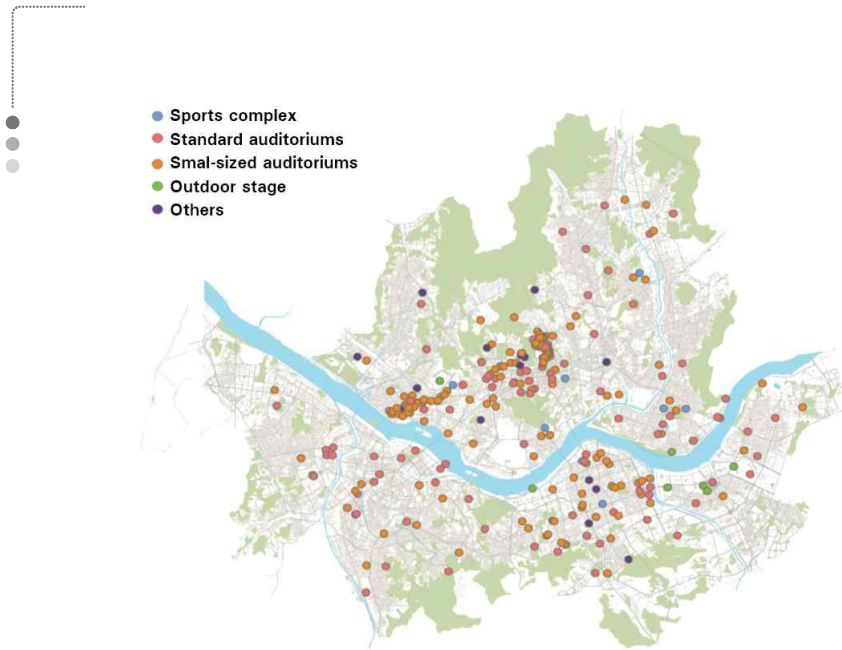
### **Public entities should keep a balanced number of cultural resources among regions amid the growing investment of the private sector**

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Concert halls provide a venue for artists to perform and interact with audiences. There are total 504 concert halls in Seoul, of which only 122 are operated by public entities. The rest of 382 are in hands of private enterprises. Overall, concert halls funded and managed by the private sector are equipped with many more seats.

Unlike other areas in Korea, Seoul has most of its concert halls dominated by private organizations. Meanwhile, almost a half of concert halls in Seoul are concentrated in Downtown region (48.6 percent). Jongno-Gu has the greatest number of concert halls in the region: Of 504 concert halls in the city, 199 (39.5 percent) are located in Jongno-Gu. Other districts such as Mapo-Gu, Gangnam-Gu, and Seocho-Gu each has 43, 37, and 35 concert halls, respectively.

Recognizing the rapidly growing popularity of culture among citizens, many corporations are now taking part in culture business. Among 382 concert halls in possession of private entities, corporations own 55 places, increased by 129.2 percent from 2007. Along with large corporations, medium-sized companies are also showing their interests in the business. Another noteworthy trend is that an increasing number of corporations are outsourcing the work of operating and managing their concert halls. Meanwhile, a rising number of concert halls are being designed or redesigned to serve audiences with shows of particular genres such as musicals, concerts and K-pop performances.



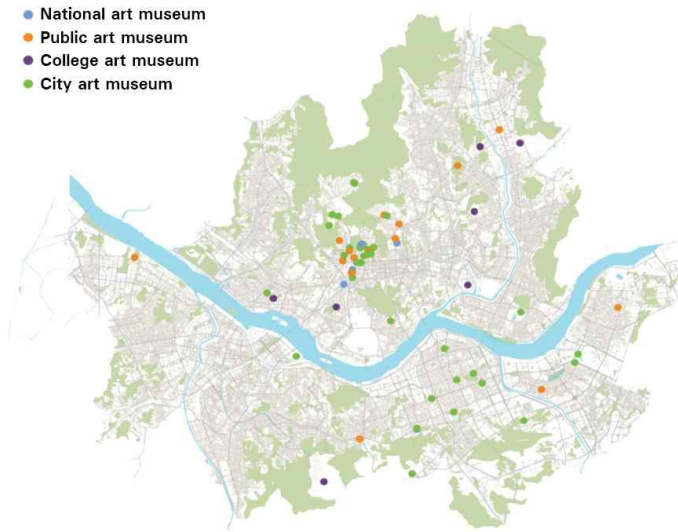
<Figure 4> Current Distribution Status of Concert Halls in Seoul

Art museums and galleries are where people find paintings, sculptures, crafts and other sorts of visual arts. Art museums, in particular, are used as a venue to exhibit and preserve artworks. Compared to 2007, the number of art museums in the city has soared by 42.6 percent to 67. The most welcoming news would be that the number of public art museums has more than doubled from 7 to 15, of which 4 have been established in the Northeast region. It is the culmination of the government’s relentless effort to foster a culture-friendly environment for residents in this area, which has long been deemed as a region with scant cultural resources. Downtown region has 34 art museums, meaning that 50.7 percent of art museums in Seoul are clustered there. Southeast region records the second largest number of art museums (16). Meanwhile, more than the majority of art museums are operated by private organizations (38, representing 56.7 percent).

Galleries, on the other hand, serve as the venue for the distribution and sales of artworks. Their number currently stands at 419, of which 92.8 percent are private.



They are concentrated in Downtown (225, 53.7 percent) and Southeast (136, 32.5 percent) regions. In particular, they form large clusters in Jongno-Gu (46.1 percent) and Gangnam-Gu (24.6 percent).



<Figure 5> Current Distribution Status of Art Museums in Seoul

Publishing companies and bookstores are the places where printed materials such as books and magazines are produced and sold. There are 3,513 publishers and 881 bookstores based in Seoul. Their numbers have been on the rise. In particular, the number of chain bookstores has more than doubled from 22 to 47. In increasingly fierce competition against those large chain bookstores and emerging online bookstores, small local bookstores have struggled for survival. Instead of giving up, some of them have taken various innovative approaches to remain in the market. For example, they have established co-operatives and evolved from mere bookstores into space where customers interact with each other and promote community culture.


**There are total 83 movie theaters in Seoul. They are being reorganized into giant multiplex cinemas under the lead of conglomerates**

Movie theaters provide the public with arts that rely on moving figures in a visual and audio medium. Seoul citizens most often go for a movie in their leisure. There are total 83 movie theaters and 500 screens in Seoul. Twenty three movie theaters have nested in the Downtown area, making the region most populated by movie theaters. However, 119 and 112 screens (which account for nearly a half of total number of screens in Seoul) are found in Southwest and Southeast regions, respectively. In particular, there is a concentration of movie theaters in Jung-Gu, Jongno-Gu and Gangnam-Gu. Dobong-Gu, which is located in Northeast region, is the only district without a movie theater. In terms of screen number, 16 movie theaters have a single screen, whereas 55 movie theaters are equipped with more than five screens. The greatest number of screens owned by a single movie theater is 21.

Among 83 movie theaters in Seoul, 61 are operated by cinema chains (73.5 percent). Cinema chains have 453 screens in total, representing 91.2 percent of total number of screens in Seoul. This clearly illustrates that the film distribution market is dominated by big companies. Compared to 2007, the number of multiplex cinemas has escalated by 74.3 percent, accompanying 90.3 percent surge in the number of screens. Medium-sized multiplex operators have exited the market, leaving only three giant cinema chains.

<Table 2> Current Status of Cinema Chain Operation in Seoul

Category	No. of theaters	No. of screens	No. of seats
CGV	26	202	33,421
Lotte Cinema	22	161	29,181
Megabox	13	90	15,156
Total	61	453	77,758



The number of Seoul-based film production companies stands at 1,228, increased by 69.8 percent from 2007. They are concentrated in Southeast region, especially in Gangnam-Gu (36.1 percent). Among those located in Gangnam-Gu, 47.2 percent are found in Nonhyeon-Dong. Clusters of film production companies are also seen in Mapo-Gu (12.6 percent) and Seocho-Gu (8.9 percent). There are total 544 broadcast program production companies, whose number has surged by 49.8 percent from 2007. They are concentrated in Southwest region, particularly in Yeongdeungpo-Gu: 37.3 percent of broadcast program production companies are based in this district, of which 30.5 percent are found in Yeouido-Dong. Others have nested in Mapo-Gu (19.1 percent) and Gangnam-Gu (14.9 percent). Both film production companies and broadcast program production companies are manifesting the most rapid growth in Southeast region.

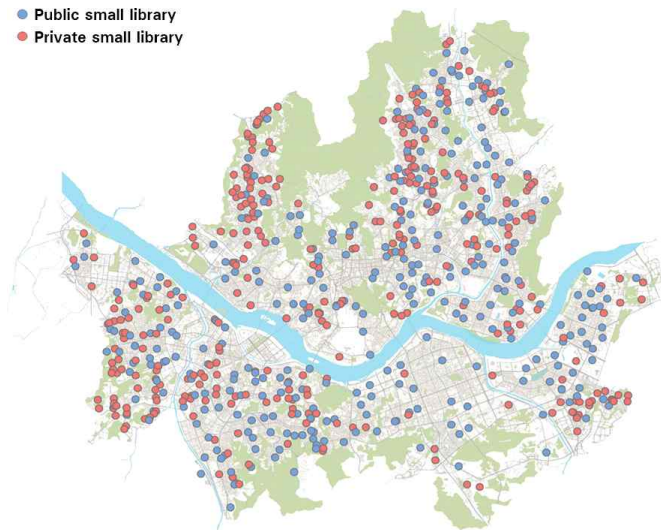
**More and more cultural spaces are being created at the community-level for residents to have easy access to cultural programs and engage in various activities.**

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There are total 135 public libraries in Seoul. Compared to 2007, the number has spiked by 104.5 percent. More than a half of public libraries in the city have nested in Southwest (31.9 percent) and Northeast (29.7 percent) regions. The rest are found in Southeast (20.7 percent), Downtown (10.4 percent), and Northwest (7.4 percent). It draws a stark contrast with the distribution of facilities for art and historic resources, which are mostly concentrated in Gangnam region below Han river. With more libraries in their communities, people are prompted to visit libraries more often and borrow more books. In this sense, the government can achieve desired outcomes.

Public libraries are managed by both public and private organizations: They are each in charge of 131 and 4 libraries. The most notable public library would be the Seoul Metropolitan Library. The building used to be the city hall. Later in 2012, the SMG has remodeled and opened it to the public. It is recognized as a landmark of Seoul.

Recently, “Small Libraries” have been increasingly erected throughout Seoul. “Small Libraries” refer to those equipped with more than 1,000 books and at least ten seats in a space of minimum 33 square meter. They can be located in various places from a church, kindergarten, community center, village hall, apartment complex, correctional facility, probation office, military camp, company building to social and political campaign offices. Their number had jumped from 383 in 2007 to 857 as of 2015. They are found in every region of Seoul, with the largest number (277, representing 32.3 percent of the total) occupying in Southwest region. Northeast, Southeast, Northwest and Downtown regions have 254, 135, 129 and 62 Small Libraries, respectively. Among districts, Eunpyeong-Gu has most Small Libraries(73). Some Small Libraries located in an area with a modicum of cultural resources serve as the venue where people interact with one another. There people create and participate in cultural activities for themselves. It is premature to conclude that every Small Library serves such a positive role. Still it is noteworthy that Small Libraries have potential to ignite cultural development of communities.



<Figure 6> Current Distribution Status of Small Libraries in Seoul

Meanwhile, the number of the House of Culture (the place that the government has introduced for residents to get easy access to cultural programs) has plunged by more than 50 percent. Only eight are in operation. It is largely due to budget cut amid increase in the number of other cultural facilities.

Community Center for Art Creation is another community cultural facility. It is built at the community level and residents take the initiative in establishing and running the center. Seoul Community Service Center provides necessary support. Unlike other cultural facilities, which are mostly for professional artists, the Community Center for Art Creation is open for the general public. The center is built nearby residential area and offer various cultural programs at an affordable price, meaning residents can participate in cultural activities without taking a long trip to see expensive performances. There are total 32 centers operating throughout Seoul. They have their own management schemes and run different cultural programs. Yet, they all have firmly established themselves as a valuable place for residents to interact with one another in everyday life. It seems that the public will continue to demand this kind of venues.


### 3. Conclusions & Policy Recommendations

This report has drawn conclusions and policy recommendations as below.

**With increasing influence of corporate capital in the culture and art market, there arises the need to support the growth of artists with unstable livelihood sources**

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Recent surge in the number of cultural facilities has entailed growth in the culture and art market. According to the fact-checking investigation held in 2014, the number of performances and audiences have gone up by 18 percent and 40 percent between 2007 and 2013. Centralization of capital is behind this growth: Increasing number of corporations have been investing or taking part in the operation of concert halls; Chain cinemas and bookstores have been monopolizing the



distribution of films and publications; Art performances have become dominated by large-scale original and licensed musicals. The influence of big capital is growing more than ever.

Under these circumstances, the market of fine art is shrinking. In <sup>2</sup>Daehangno, owners of small private theaters fear that they might have to close down their businesses one by one like unstoppable dominoes. The market for performing arts seems to keep growing at least on surface. However, it is glaring that the visual arts market is withering. This would inevitably exacerbate the conditions for artists to pursue art.

Support should be provided to those in the field of fine arts. SMG should foster an environment in which artists can continue their pursuit of art. It should secure a workplace for rising artists and work together with private organizations to explore and assist creative artists.

### **SMG should establish more small-sized cultural spaces in people's daily environment, while supporting culture groups formed by citizens**

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As seen from the case of Small Libraries and the Community Center for Art Creation, numerous cultural spaces have emerged in people's daily environment. Once a venue where residents can gather is available, cultural activities are naturally created. This in turn helps bolster the tie among people and gives a sense of solidarity to the whole community. Given that, the government should labor to cultivate more cultural spaces in people's daily lives.

In general, Seoul citizens have a greater cultural capacity and demand for more quality cultural programs. In other words, they are inclined to refuse the homogeneous collection of cultural programs that the government and other public entities offer. Given that, the public sector should let residents to manage cultural

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<sup>2</sup> A neighborhood in Seoul (within Jongno-Gu and Seodaemun-Gu) known as the home to small theaters and degenerated cultural space for the youth

facilities and organize cultural programs on their own. And then, it should provide them with necessary support in regard to the space management of cultural facilities. At the same time, the government needs to look for culture groups formed by citizens (e.g. local culture communities, hobby clubs comprised of workers) and support their activities.

