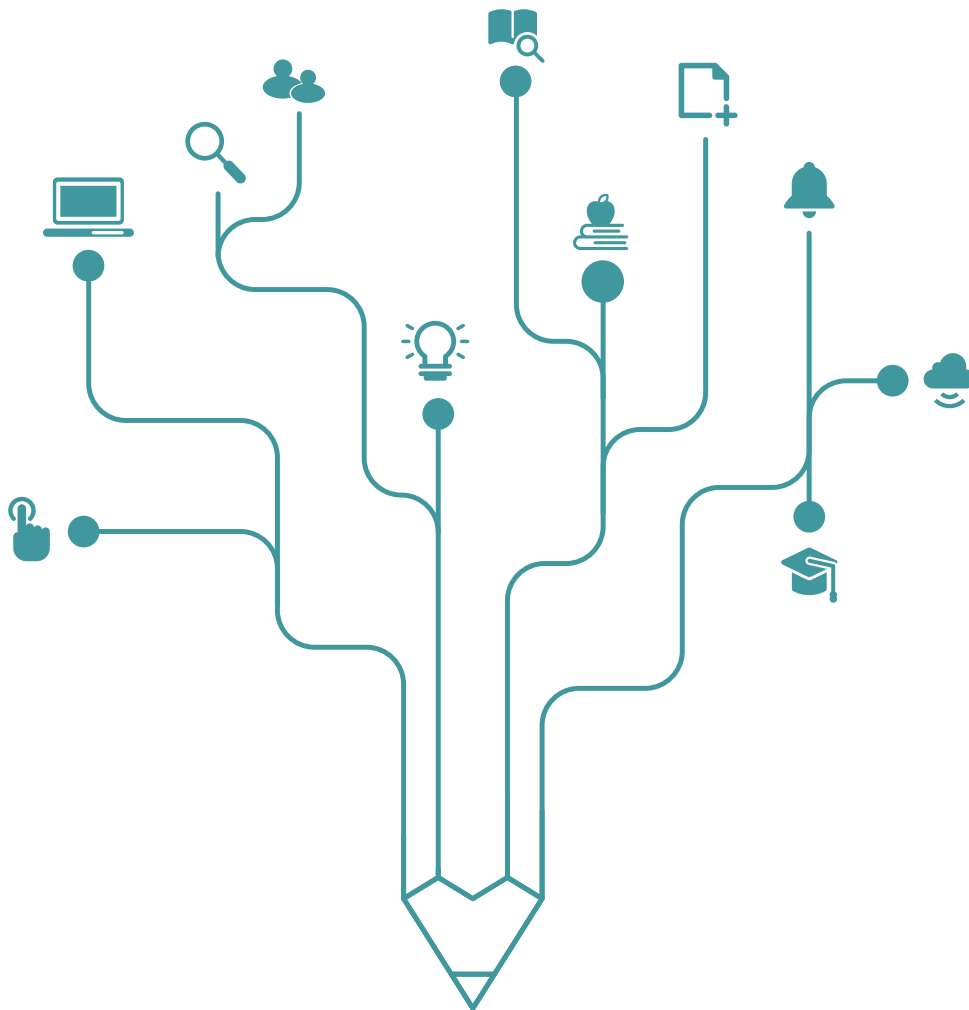


## Going Slow to Build Resilience: Cittaslow in Korea's Rural Regions

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## **Going slow to build resilience: Cittaslow in Korea's rural regions**

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### **Abstract**

For remote rural regions, facing structural decline, the Cittaslow (Slow City) movement provides an alternative to conventional development strategies. This paper examines Cittaslow in South Korea, a country known for its fast-paced economic and urban development, with a case study on Cheongsando—the first community to receive the Cittaslow designation in Asia. Despite past research on Cittaslow in other countries, there has been little attention to its application in Korea. In contrast to Korea's policy that has led to unbalanced regional development, we explain how Cittaslow is an adaptive planning strategy to build resilience in neglected rural areas. It is both a response to globalization and also a strategy for harmonizing local entrepreneurial behavior with state-assisted rural development. We argue that Cittaslow can be an effective place branding strategy for small communities and provides opportunities to enhance local identity, market appeal, and rural community development.

**Key words:** Slow city; rural development; resilience; place branding; placemaking

### **Introduction**

Globalization has led to uneven development, with global capital and national policies often favoring megacities or new satellite city developments under fast urbanism (Datta and Shaban, 2017). With the rise of mega-city regions, powered by agglomeration economies, small cities and rural regions outside the core have struggled to participate in the fast-paced global economy (Wirth et al., 2016; Lorentzen, 2013). These patterns of uneven development have been examined under various lenses, such as shrinking cities (e.g., Hospers, 2013; Martinez-Fernand et al., 2012; Mallach et al., 2017) and peripheralisation (e.g., Wirth et al., 2016; Kühn, 2015). What has been highlighted is the difficulty of pursuing typical, market-oriented growth strategies in areas facing structural economic and social challenges.

The Cittaslow approach provides an alternative mindset towards development. When discussing policies for shrinking cities, Hospers (2013) identified four strategies including trivializing shrinkage, countering shrinkage, accepting shrinkage, and utilizing shrinkage. Cittaslow is suggested an example of utilizing shrinkage, with a positive view of taking advantage of shrinkage (Hospers, 2013, p. 8). Similarly, discussing the economic decline and population shrinkage, leading to spatial inequalities of peripheralization, Wirth et al. (2016) suggested “negating quantitative growth” as an alternative policy option for the peripheries (p.72). Cittaslow is mentioned as an example where the quality of life and environment can be pursued over economic growth (Wirth et al., 2016, p. 67).

Building on these ideas, our paper explores how Cittaslow takes place on the ground in South Korea (hereafter “Korea”)’s rural regions. Korea used to be a low-income rural country before its rapid industrialization that began in the early 1970s. While the country has emerged as one of powerful economies in Asia, its economic success came with drastic changes in rural communities. The urbanization rate that used to be 28% in 1960 jumped to 74% in 1990. Today, more than 81% of Koreans live in cities, leading to severe economic and population decline in rural regions. Coupled with the fact that Korea now has the world’s lowest fertility rate, the prospects for rural regions appear dim.

In this context, Cittaslow has become a popular strategy among the neglected regions in Korea, prompting detailed examination of whether and how it can be an alternative policy solution for rural development. While the country is known for its fast-paced economic development and urbanization, popularized by the expression, “ppali,

ppali” (translated as “hurry, hurry”), it is the first non-European country to embrace Cittaslow and currently has 17 slow cities. Its interest in the movement rivals even Europe, where the idea originated, with only three European countries (i.e., Italy, Germany, and Poland) hosting more than 17 communities.

In addition to investigating the question as to what role Cittaslow can play in rural development in Korea, this study contributes to the slow city literature by examining planning and placemaking within the context of decentralization and industrial restructuring in Asia. Cittaslow research in the West has been largely focused on communities with a longer history of local autonomy, citizen empowerment, and deindustrialization. The Cittaslow in Korea needs to be seen within the context of recent patterns of democratization and decentralization of authority, as well as continued urbanization, growth, and development in Asia.

This paper examines Cittaslow in Korea as an adaptive response to industrialization and urbanization by focusing on one of the earliest adopters in Cheongsan Island, Wando County, located in South Jeolla Province in the southeastern tip of the peninsula. This is a region of the country with many small islands. Cheongsando translates from Korean to English as green (cheong) mountain (san) island (do). The place name is significant in terms of identity and connection to the natural environment and local culture. Kim and Freitas (2018) have argued that islands are special places because of their remoteness and culture but also because of the need to develop adaptive systems for planning, development, survival, resilience, and sustainability. Cheongsando and Cittaslow provide broader understanding of social processes, planning, and adaptive responses to globalization.

## **What is Cittaslow? Cittaslow as an alternative development strategy**

The Cittaslow movement dates back to 1999, when small-town mayors in Italy came together to oppose globalization and the loss of local identity (Petrini, 2001). Tied to the “slow food” movement, proponents saw deceleration as a means of not only retaining ownership and jobs, but also profits and promoting healthier lifestyles, improving environmental quality, and preserving history and culture. In small, rural communities facing depopulation and disinvestment, planners saw Cittaslow as a strategy to support agriculture and local food production (Parkins and Craig, 2011), linked to tourism and historic preservation (Özbek and Erikçi, 2014). Cittaslow has spread to many small towns in Europe. Of the 288 recognized slow cities across the world today, 211 are in Europe. There are only two in the United States with all located in California (Sebastopol and Sonoma).

Conceptually, Cittaslow can be seen as a form of protest and resistance to fast-paced global urban development (Pink, 2009) and standardized modernization (Knox, 2005; Pink, 2008), with emphasis on local production, deceleration, and disengagement from the global economy (Miele, 2008; Tomlinson, 2007). Others describe the movement as an innovative approach to sustainable development (Knox and Mayer, 2009; Semmens and Freedman, 2012). Cittaslow can also be framed as a form of adaptive resilience to natural and man-made hazards and threats (Pink and Lewis, 2014). The Cittaslow movement, arguably, represents an alternative to neoliberal policies that rely on global capital, deregulation, and weakening of environmental and worker protections.

Therefore, the Cittaslow movement differs from competition-driven and uniform local development strategies. It has been shown to protect unique local values and encourage economic vitality in local communities (Knox, 2005; Pink, 2008; Pink and Lewis, 2014). There are, in fact, elements of entrepreneurship, promotionalism, and marketing with Cittaslow. At its core, however, Cittaslow is about the widening of strategies beyond attracting global capital. It underscores nurturing unique local assets and preserving culture and ways of life. It is also attuned to improvements in local ownership and social equity. Slowness as in participation and governance affords more opportunity for inclusion, deliberation, and ensuring a more equitable distribution of benefits. Slow, deliberative processes provide opportunity to visualize and integrate the “invisible” aspects of power, influence, and authority (Mignolo, 2020). Hence, it is not just the pace of development which is important but also the engagement and empowerment of those typically left out of the development process.

In addition to slow and deliberate governance processes, the concept of “slow” in Cittaslow can have other different meanings. Slow can also refer to the sensory experiences of residents and visitors (Pink and Servon, 2013). Servon and Pink (2015) argue that “the *slow* in Cittaslow cannot be defined as literally as it can be in slow food” and “encompasses a wider range of activities and sentiments” (p. 329). It also can be translated into alternative measures of economic success beyond conventional indicators which do not sufficiently capture quality of life and local betterment (Parkins, 2004).

The diverse meanings of slowness have been recognized by the Cittaslow organization, as communities applying for formal designation are evaluated on 72 different criteria (Cittaslow, n.d.). The criteria are grouped into categories including

energy and environment, infrastructure, quality of life, agricultural, touristic and artisan policies, hospitality, awareness and training, social cohesion, and partnerships (Cittaslow, n.d.). Only communities with a population size of less than 50,000 are eligible to apply. Applications are evaluated and processed by the headquarters in Italy. Applicants must score 50% or above on all criteria to be designated as a Cittaslow community. Finally, once certified, every Cittaslow community must be re-certified every five years.

The wide-ranging criteria enable small localities across the globe to apply for Cittaslow based on their diverse attributes. As of April 2023, 33 countries on six continents have at least one designated Cittaslow community. In Asia, China has 13, Japan has two, Taiwan has five, and South Korea with 17 is the clear leader (Cittaslow, n.d.). Cittaslow also has 20 national networks, including the Cittaslow Korea network, allowing for additional considerations in determining slow cities. Miele (2008) argues that “what makes Cittaslow a successful invention is its fluidity,” noting that “Cittaslow is moving to distant localities and is producing many new versions of Slowness” (p.148).

What is the Korean version of Cittaslow? Once heralded as “Dynamic Korea” for its fast-changing economy, urban landscapes, and modern lifestyles, Korea is more known for rapid economic growth than slowness. There have been longstanding efforts to balance rural and urban development and growing recognition of regional and sectoral disparities along with increased attention to quality-of-life in Korea. Previous research on the topic of Korea’s Cittaslow has mainly centered on tourism (see for example, Han et al., 2019; Park and Lee, 2019; Meng and Choi, 2016). The explanation of Cittaslow in Korea within the context of the country’s socio-political development is described in the next section.

## **Cittaslow and rural development in Korea**

“Slowing down” represents an alternative to dominant patterns of growth and development in Korea, which have emphasized fast, industrial development, factory production, and export-oriented mass production of consumer goods. Korea’s economic success during the latter half of the twentieth century has been accompanied by strategic urbanization through targeted development of industrial cities along the southeastern coast for export-oriented manufacturing (Chon, 1992; Joo, 2019). Seoul—as the capital city and the command and control center of state-led industrialization—faced explosive growth during this period as well (Joo, 2019). In fact, the strategy of unbalanced development was widely embraced in many countries (Scott and Storper, 2003). In the process, many rural areas were largely left out of the industrialization and urbanization.

There have been notable efforts to develop rural communities in Korea, including the Saemaul Undong (new village movement) launched in 1970 and based on traditional cooperative and self-governing villages. Moore (1984) argues that rural Koreans identify with both village and national collectivities. He describes Saemaul as evolving into a “mélange of activities” with political indoctrination, training programs, and range of support activities to increase agricultural productivity and incomes (Moore, 1984 p. 589). In spite of these programs, the gaps and disparities between rural and urban communities have widened. The disparities have led to demands for increased autonomy and decision-making authority at the regional and local levels of government (Park, 2008).

In 1995, the country implemented widespread decentralization of subnational governments. Governors, mayors, and district heads, once previously centrally appointed,



were elected to office. These changes also spawned local political economies in which investment and development projects became part of the calculus for winning local elections. An uneven pattern of development and resource allocation persisted as certain areas and regions of the country were economically and politically stronger than others (Park, 2008; Sonn, 2007). In particular, the Seoul Metropolitan Area, which has half of the nation's population, was the dominant economic and political center and thrived during this period of growth and change. While Seoul pulled ahead of the rest of the country, manufacturing industries faced increased competition from China and other countries with lower wages and less regulation (Douglass, 2000). Small, rural communities were largely ignored with the focus on global competition and realignment of national priorities to make Korea more competitive.

Local authorities, especially in the rural regions, are far from having full autonomy in Korea. They are required to comply with national policies and mandates and depend heavily on financial assistance from the national government. These dynamics can be complicated. Sonn (2007) has argued that the central authorities need to be insulated from local growth alliances but also need "solidarity" with regions to maintain power and implement national policies. At both local and national levels in Korea, the need to address development challenges in marginalized cities and rural areas along with uneven development, social justice, and quality of life concerns is apparent. There have been longstanding efforts to balance rural and urban development and growing recognition of regional and sectoral disparities along with increased attention to quality-of-life in Korea.

It is not difficult to understand why local governments in Korea have turned to Cittaslow. As an international movement, Cittaslow provides valuable publicity and marketing for tourism development. Local rural development plans backed by the Cittaslow international brand are likely to be welcomed by the national government. Tourism has been central to Cittaslow in Korea. Among 17 Cittaslow communities, 16 of the local governments oversee and manage Cittaslow under their tourism departments. Sohn, Daehyun, a professor in tourism brought the idea of Cittaslow to Korea and became the head of the Cittaslow Korea organization.

Because of its emphasis on tourism and the quality of life based on local assets, Cittaslow has become an attractive strategy in rural communities with limited options. A local administrator of a Cittaslow town reported: “we wanted to become a slow city because we wanted to survive [...] The whole point is to make profit while promoting the slow lifestyle as much as we can” (Lee, 2011). While tourism is a common element of Cittaslow, not just in Korea but in slow cities across the world, (Servon and Pink, 2015, p.334, Miele, 2008), the emphasis on hospitality and the visitor industry with Cittaslow in Korea raises challenges.

Tourism can be a double-edged sword because the attractiveness of destinations can be diminished by successful tourism, resulting in crowds, commercialization, and gentrification (Knox, 2005, p.8). Some have questioned whether Cittaslow has prioritized tourism to the point of undermining its inherent values (Kim, 2012; Song, 2013; Yonhap News, 2017). In 2013, one of the first towns in Korea, Jangheung, to have received Cittaslow designation was denied recertification because conditions deteriorated and it no longer met the necessary criteria (Song, 2013).

However, Cittaslow should be distinguished from other entrepreneurial, tourism-centered city promotion strategies by its emphasis on planning and quality of life for residents. Tourism is not the “primary motivation” for Cittaslow but making “a better place to live for its inhabitants” is (Radstrom, 2011, p. 100). Cittaslow is meant to reduce conflicts between residents and visitors and between exploitation and preservation of natural and cultural assets. It emphasizes design strategies to respond to challenges faced by shrinking cities and rural areas (Kim, 2019). Korea’s slow cities pursue tourism but also showcase unique products, natural and cultural heritage, and local production. Slow cities use historic preservation and deep connections between food production and local landscapes to reinforce important social values and “regain lost geographies” (Wiskerke, 2009).

### **Cittaslow in Korea and Cheongsando**

#### *Cittaslow Communities in Korea*

The first designations of Cittaslow communities in Asia in 2007 were in four communities in South Jeolla Province, including Cheongsando. There have been additional designations, with the latest Chuncheon city newly joining the Cittaslow in 2021 and Jangheung county (one of the first Cittaslows in Korea but disqualified in 2013) rejoining in 2022. The majority of Korean Cittaslow communities are in rural or agricultural areas or conservation districts with potential for cultural tourism or ecotourism (Table 1). The table summarizes the locations, date of designation, activities, attractions and notable products. Nearly all feature natural scenery and preservation of

rural lifestyles. Exceptions include Hanok Village in Jeonju—an urban historic district with many significant traditional buildings—and the small, historic port city of Mokpo.

County/city	Designated place(s)	Region	Cittaslow designation date	Principal activity	Assets and Attractions	Notable product
<b>Shinan county</b>	Jeungdo Island	South Jeolla	Dec 1, 2007	Ecotourism	sustainable farming, sustainable energy, natural reserve	Sun dried sea salt
<b>Wando county</b>	Cheongsando Island	South Jeolla	Dec 1, 2007	Agriculture	preserved buildings, sustainable farming, traditional fishing	Abalone
<b>Damyang county</b>	Changpyeong town	South Jeolla	Dec 1, 2007	Cultural tourism	preserved buildings, historic significance, traditional food making	Fermented foods
<b>Hadong county</b>	Akyang town	South Gyeongsang	Feb 6, 2009	Agriculture	traditional food making, historical significance	Wild green tea
<b>Yesan county</b>	Daeheung town Eungbong town	South Chungcheong	Sep 4, 2009	Cultural tourism	historical significance, unique foods, community activities, outdoor recreation, natural reserve	Straw crafts
<b>Jeonju city</b>	Hanok Village	North Jeolla	Nov 27, 2010	Cultural tourism	preserved buildings, traditional food making, urban district	Bibimbap
<b>Sangju city</b>	Hamchang town Ian town Gonggeom town	North Gyeongsang	Jun 25, 2011	Cultural tourism	sustainable transportation, sustainable farming, handicrafts, outdoor recreation	Dried persimmon
<b>Cheongsong county</b>	Budong town Pacheon town	North Gyeongsang	Jun 25, 2011	Several	handicrafts, preserved buildings, unique foods	Apple
<b>Yeongwol county</b>	Kimsatgat town	Gangwon	Oct 21, 2012	Cultural tourism	historical significance, preserved buildings, community activities	Grapes
<b>Jecheon city</b>	Susan town Bakdaljae Pass	North Chungcheong	Oct 21, 2012	Cultural tourism	traditional medicine, historical significance, outdoor recreation	Traditional medicine
<b>Taeon county</b>	Sowon town Taeon Seaside National Park	South Chungcheong	May 12, 2017	Ecotourism	traditional fishing, unique food, natural reserve, outdoor recreation	Garlic
<b>Yeongyang county</b>	Seokbo town	North Gyeongsang	May 12, 2017	Cultural tourism	historical significance, unique foods, night sky protection	Chili pepper
<b>Gimhae city</b>	Bongha Village Hwapocheon Wetland Ecological Park	South Gyeongsang	Jun 22, 2018	Ecotourism	preserved buildings, handicrafts, unique foods, sustainable farming, natural reserve, historical significance	Ceramics
<b>Seocheon county</b>	Hansan town	South Chungcheong	Jun 22, 2018	Ecotourism	historical significance, natural reserve, unique foods, handicrafts	Traditional spirits
<b>Mokpo city</b>	Oedaldo Island, Dalido	South Jeolla	June 19, 2019	Cultural tourism, Ecotourism	historical significance, preserved buildings, natural reserve, unique foods	Traditional spirits, Dried laver, cutlassfish
<b>Chuncheon city</b>	Sile village	Gangwon	March 25, 2021	Cultural tourism, Ecotourism	agriculture, mountains and lakes, historical significance,	Noodles, Chicken ribs
<b>Jangheung county</b>	Yuchi town, Bangcheon cultural village	South Jeolla	April 26, 2022. (re-designated)	Agriculture	Temple, historical significance, natural reserve	Seaweed

**Table 1. Comparison of Cittaslow Communities in Korea**

Source: Cittaslow Corea Network. (2018). *Annual Report 2018* and [Cittaslow.co.kr](http://Cittaslow.co.kr)

Cittaslow communities are located throughout the country, with at least one slow city in each of the seven major regions (not including Jeju Island, designated metropolitan areas, and the Seoul Metropolitan Area). Among the 17 communities, 11 are in the rural counties. Some are in mountainous areas while others are located in lowlands, fertile river valleys or along the coasts. Most of the Cittaslow communities—including Cheongsando—are located far from Korea’s metropolitan cities.

Many Cittaslow communities in Korea are vulnerable to natural hazards, including flooding, heat waves, typhoons, and earthquakes, as well as landslides and wildfires especially in mountainous areas. Drought is a growing concern especially for agricultural communities, as climate change has affected snow and rainfall. Disasters, such as the 2007 Taean oil spill, can further impact coastal communities for years. Among the greatest challenge in rural communities is depopulation and loss of traditional knowledge and assets. Most of the communities face aging populations and outmigration of residents, as workers and businesses have been drawn to the major cities as a consequence of the country’s economic development.

The amenities and attractions of Cittaslow communities in Korea vary widely (Koehler, 2016). One town (Seokbo) promotes night sky viewing as a special asset, while others (Sowon and Bongha) offer access to pristine natural areas. Notable products include naturally occurring salt and wild green tea, cultivated products (apples, garlic, persimmon, abalone, and chili pepper), and prepared specialty products (bibimbap, fermented foods, and traditional medicines). Several places showcase unique handicrafts such as ceramics and lacquerware. See Koehler (2016) for more about the connections between slow cities and traditional culture in Korea.

Cittaslow communities in Korea promote the appreciation of unique products and artifacts from different historical periods across regions of the country. Kimsatgat Town, for example, has renamed itself to honor a famous Joseon-era poet buried there. Akyang Town, Korea's first tea plantation, continues to cultivate and preserve traditional strains of tea. In addition to connections with agriculture and nature, these places also emphasize distinctive aspects of traditional Korean lifestyle and culture. In spite of mass production and globalization of Korean products and culture, Koreans today recognize and value special goods and products coming from a particular town or region, similar to the concept of terroir. Through increased local production, communities can preserve not only landscapes and agriculture but also special skills, knowledge and cultural assets.

Planning entails the setting of broad visions and direction-setting goals, as well as the specific actions and interventions to support the values, goals, and programmatic actions of Cittaslow. As Illsely, et. al., (2010) describes, "community innovation can occur in the soft spaces of planning" (p.303). Cittaslow, with attention to both culture and business brings together formal "hard" spaces of governance as well as the more collaborative, organic, and cross-sector activities common in rural areas. These aspects of placemaking and planning are examined with the case of Cheongsando.

### *Cheongsando: A special place*

This section is based on a site visit and interviews with residents, farmers, business operators, and others informants in Cheongsando. Over a three day period in March 2019, most of the island was visited. The research strategy was to investigate the physical infrastructure, transportation improvements, visitor accommodations, and small business

operations. In addition to meetings with tour operators and local community leaders, there were site visits to coastal, mountain, forest, and agricultural areas.

Like many rural communities in Korea, Cheongsando experienced protracted economic decline prior to its Cittaslow designation. According to an informant, in one year alone, more than 50 people left the island because of the lack of jobs and economic opportunities. Those who remained were mainly older residents engaged in agriculture and fishing. The economic stagnation, according to several informants, created social problems including alcohol abuse, social conflicts, and petty crime. As one of five remote islands in Wando County, Cheongsando faced ongoing depopulation and disinvestment. The future for this community in the 1990s looked bleak, while the rest of Korea was enjoying economic growth and prosperity.

According to informants, Cheongsando was somewhat buffered from the 1997 Asian financial crisis as well as the economic restructuring that followed. The crisis led to major restructuring of Korea's economy and patterns of urban investment, with increased foreign investment in Korea and competition from outside multinational corporations. An informant described the movement towards Cittaslow as a "coping strategy" for Cheongsando to decouple from national and global economic systems, relying on local materials, shorter supply chains, and locally produced and consumed goods and services. During this period, agriculture and fishing has increased to comprise most of its economic activity, despite having only 10% of its 33 square km of land being suitable for rice farming. The island currently has a total of 2,182 residents. (See Table 2 for key attributes of Cheongsando).

<b>Population</b>	
<b>Household</b>	1,168
<b>Total Population</b>	2,182
<b>Male</b>	1,038
<b>Female</b>	1,144
<b>Foreign-born Population</b>	62*

<b>Economic Base (%)</b>	
<b>Agriculture and Fisheries</b>	87.6
<b>Service</b>	11.9
<b>Others</b>	0.5

**Note:**

\* Vietnam or Sri Lanka (60) / China (2)

**Jeon :** Land to cultivate non-water-intensive crops

**Dab:** Land to cultivate water-intensive crops (ex. rice)

<b>Land use</b>	
<b>Total Area (km2)</b>	32.963
<b>Jeon (Farmland)</b>	3.93
<b>Dab (Farmland)</b>	3.417
<b>Forest land</b>	23.325
<b>Urban Area</b>	0.583
<b>Others</b>	1.708

<b>Roadway</b>	
<b>Total Length (km)</b>	115.2
<b>Government Roads</b>	17.5
<b>Roads in Fishing and Agrarian Areas</b>	25.2
<b>Forest Roads</b>	1.1
<b>Non-statutory Roads</b>	71.4

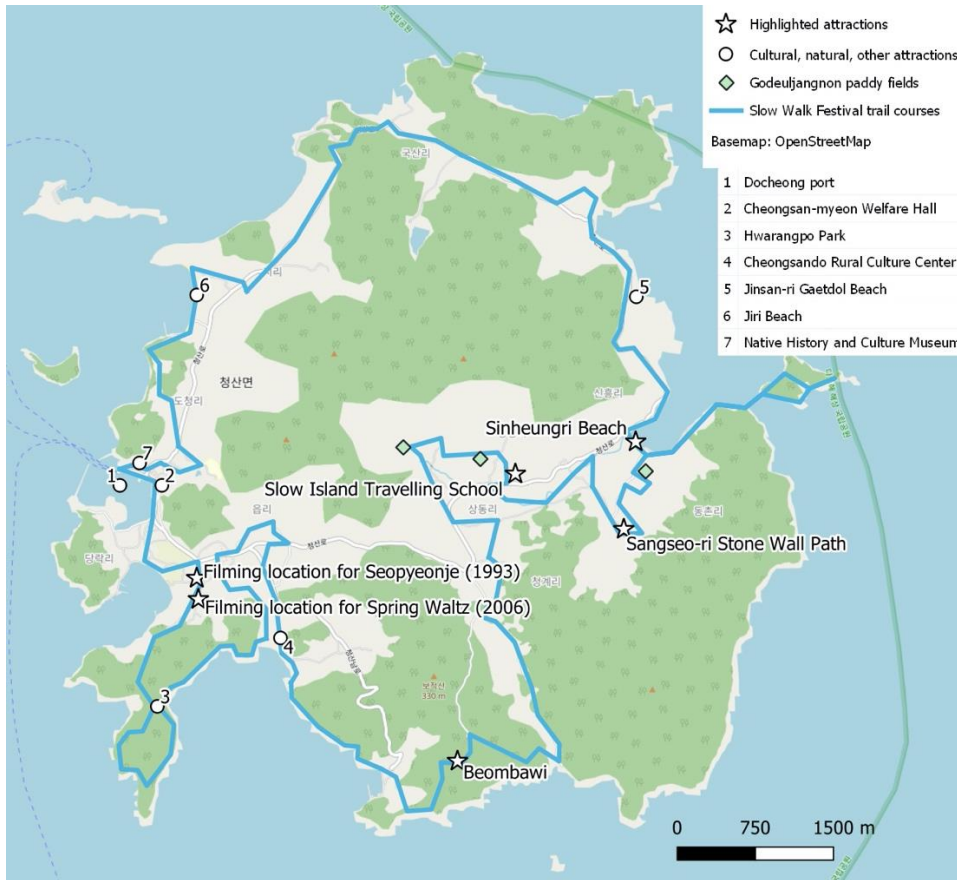
**Table 2. Attributes of Cheongsando**

Source: Jeollanam-do Islands government portal.

[http://islands.jeonnam.go.kr/viewer/A\\_isle/isle/view.aspx?isle\\_idx=30](http://islands.jeonnam.go.kr/viewer/A_isle/isle/view.aspx?isle_idx=30)

Cheongsando's name or "green mountain island" evokes images of the island landscape as it is approached from a distance by sea. Among a cluster of small islands, Cheongsando stands out because of its mountain peaks and verdant, forested landscape. Its name has special meaning and identity among Koreans. Figure 1 shows a map depicting mountains, forests, foothills and alluvial plains, accentuated by terraced rice fields and small villages. The map shows the location of Beombawi, a famous rock outcropping resembling a crouching tiger, along with beaches (see Figure 2 for a view of the coastal landscape). There are natural bays which have been converted for aquaculture and abalone production (Figure 3).





**Figure 1. Attractions in Cheongsando**

Note: Most of the island is forested, mountainous terrain (green areas on basemap), with a circuit of walking trails linking villages and attractions.

Source: authors



**Figure 2. The landscape of Cheongsando (photo by Kim).**



**Figure 3. Abalone farming in Cheongsando (photo by Kim).**

With a mix of rocky and sandy soils, the conditions are difficult for farming. From the 11<sup>th</sup> century, residents have developed terraced farming, a common practice in Southeast Asia but rare in Korea. A unique irrigation system called “Gudeuljang” with aqueducts and drainage culverts to feed low-lying rice paddies was constructed in Cheongsando. Built with flat stones, similar to the “ondol” stone floor heating system used in traditional homes in Korea, the irrigation system is a distinctive feature of the community (Figure 4). Stone walls also add a distinctive appearance to the built environment of Cheongsando (Figure 5). Building and maintaining these features of the community has required cooperative, collective actions with agreements and sharing of resources. In recognition of these assets, Cheongsando became the first community to receive national designation as an Agricultural Heritage Site by the Korean government in 2002.



**Figure 4. An elaborate irrigation system using flat stones (photo by Kim).**



**Figure 5. Stone walls are part of the distinctive features of the built environment (Photo by Kim).**

After receiving the Cittaslow designation in December 2007, Cheongsando improved the island's infrastructure and developed programs for tourism and human resources to support community development (MCST, 2014; Wando County, 2018). The infrastructure investments included construction of trails, pedestrian and bike paths and transportation facilities. With an extensive network of pedestrian paths (Figure 2 and Figure 6) connecting villages, visitors can walk to all natural and cultural attractions. The community has also installed multilingual signage identifying landmarks and cultural sites, such as the locations of famous movie sets and television dramas filmed on the

island. Cheongsando has embraced traffic calming with installation of speed bumps, road narrowing, and slow-down zones to improve traffic safety and encourage bike and pedestrian travel. Electric vehicles with charging stations have also been installed on Cheongsando since 2012 (Figure 7) to promote energy self-sufficiency, lower vehicle emissions, and increase environmental consciousness.



**Figure 6. Trails to encourage pedestrian activity (photo by Kim).**



**Figure 7. Electric vehicles parked in front of the Slow Island Tourism School (photo by Kim).**

The Cittaslow designation has led to improved transportation access to the island. To get there, a ferry is taken from another larger, more populated island, Wando,

connected to the Korean peninsula by a bridge. The journey takes approximately an hour with several scheduled trips each day. Ferry service, however, can be cancelled or postponed due to inclement weather or high seas. During the site visit, several scheduled trips were canceled due to high seas. The ferry carries passengers and motor vehicles and is the principal means of transport for goods going into and exported from Cheongsando. Since 2009, three more ferries have been added to this route, increasing the frequency of trips. According to residents surveyed by the local government, many regarded the improvements in transportation services as the second most important success of the Cittaslow designation, after development of walking trails and walking festivals (Wando County, 2014).

To promote pedestrianism, in 2009, Cheongsando started an annual Slow Walk Festival. During this festival, thousands of visitors travel to the island to experience the benefits and pleasures of walking. They connect with nature, see historical and cultural sites, and learn about the environment and ecology of the island. According to local informants, the majority of the festival visitors come for just the day of the festival. Others plan their trips to the island either to arrive just before or to stay after the events so that the island's limited capacity can absorb and accommodate all of the attendees.

Another innovative project on Cheongsando has been the redevelopment of a closed school into a slow island tourism school. Opened in 2012, visitors can stay on the property and learn how to prepare island cuisine using local ingredients. This program supports agricultural, marine, and forest products gathered, farmed, fished, or processed in Cheongsando. In addition to extolling the virtues of slow food and the Cittaslow movement, cooking instructors describe the relevance of time, season of the year,

temperature, and weather. They share with visitors the local knowledge and practices for gathering, cultivating edible plants and how to clean, cook, ferment, store, and prepare food for nourishment and survival in a remote island setting. Instructors describe the harsh conditions of living on Cheongsando and how they have learned to adapt, survive, and increase resilience through local practices of food preparation that are also good for health. Slowness is a component of fermentation procedures used to preserve food and enhance nutritional values in traditional communities. Figure 8 shows fermentation vats used in the production of slow foods characteristic of the island.



**Figure 8. Jars for fermentation and preservation of traditional foods (Photo by Kim).**

To further promote tourism, Cheongsando has developed other festivals and special events including summer beach festivals, Korean traditional music concerts, autumn festival, arts and crafts festivals, and family tours for long-term stays (Wando County, 2018). The latest tourism event being promoted via YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram is Cheongsando's night sky and stars. The promotional materials regarding the Cittaslow designation and cultural amenities are presented in different languages in signs and brochures at the port facilities and on the websites<sup>1</sup>. Promotional materials are

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wando.go.kr/tourengr/tourist/main\\_tour/Cheongsando](http://www.wando.go.kr/tourengr/tourist/main_tour/Cheongsando).

also disseminated through conventional television, print, and social media. The promotion of Cheongsando as a visitor destination is listed as one of its important projects, along with investments in infrastructure and human capital (MCST, 2014). While the majority of visitors are from Korea, increasingly, foreign visitors—especially from countries familiar with Cittaslow and the slow food movement—have travelled to Cheongsando (Wando County, 2018). The island has also capitalized on the popularity of K-dramas and attracts Asian visitors seeking to visit sites seen on TV.

Alongside the promotional activities, Cittaslow has led to community development efforts with the goal of empowering local residents (MCST, 2014). There are five key areas including: 1) promoting resident-centered governance (e.g., establishment of Slow City Cheongsando management committee in 2008 and Slow City Cheongsando Union Corporate for Agriculture and Farming in 2011); 2) supporting local interest groups such as music performance or other cultural activities which are a part of festivals and events; 3) education programs for residents to support workforce development; 4) supporting local businesses with information, promotional activities, and other resources; and 5) supporting artisans and craftsmen by marketing and facilitating the sale and purchase of locally produced goods (Wando County, 2014; MCST, 2014). Residents of Cheongsando are not only well aware of Cittaslow in their island, according to informants, but they also take active part in the Cittaslow projects. Residents have formed a local organization called Cheongsan-Ae (Cheongsan Love) and serve as guides and commentators on local culture and ecology. According to the survey in 2014, residents found the top three benefits of Cittaslow to be: improved image of

Cheongsando (19.8%), improved transportation (16.3%) and increased personal income due to tourism (12.5%) (Wando County, 2014).

Tourism is a key element of Cittaslow in Cheongsando. Most of the projects, festivals, and events are dependent on visitors. Based on interviews on the island, residents welcome tourists and are engaged in homestays and providing visitor accommodations. Informants recognize the need for external sources of revenue. Furthermore, there are opportunities to garner outside funds to support development associated with the Cittaslow designation in Korea. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism have provided national funds for Cittaslow communities to develop tourism assets (MCST, 2014). This support from the national government has led to increased emphasis on tourism in Cheongsando and other Cittaslow towns in Korea.

Focusing solely on tourism could undermine broader goals of Cittaslow. As a small, remote island, Cheongsando may also have unique needs and assets related to agriculture and self-sufficiency. The interactions between the natural and built environments are more visible and contested in small islands (Kim and Freitas, 2018). Tensions initially increased when abalone cultivation was introduced as a new, profitable enterprise in Cheongsando. Residents expressed concerns about the environmental impacts to the nearshore ecosystem and the displacement of coastal activities such as fishing. Abalone production, however, has grown significantly, contributing to the income of residents. It has also created new jobs and livelihoods from the production, marketing, sales, and distribution of abalone. The tensions, nonetheless, illustrate awareness of the challenges in balancing limited natural resources in local economic development.



Amid the promotion of tourism and tourism-dependent development, Cheongsando has maintained and enhanced its quality of lifestyle as a slow island. Traveling to and within Cheongsando itself is about slowing down, detaching, and experiencing a place with distinct patterns, rules, and behaviors. The experience includes more walking, connection to nature, and appreciation of the island's culture, food, landscape, people, and beauty.

Cheongsando is starting to see the return of former residents and in-migration from other parts of Korea. Several informants described the pollution-free environment, lack of traffic congestion, and conviviality of Cheongsando as attributes not available in Seoul, Busan, or other cities in Korea. A tourist operator described improvements in physical and mental health since quitting his job as a "company man" to return to the island. A restaurant owner described how the sense of community is "much stronger than where she came from, and how the residents all know each other and help each other and greet each other, unlike a large city." A number of residents also described collective planning and working together not just during harvest and planting seasons, but in preparation for festivals and in the maintenance of paths and trails and other infrastructure to support the island visitor economy. Earning the Cittaslow designation has not only put Cheongsando on the map, thereby resulting in tourism economy and a number of related development projects, but also appears to have triggered the revitalization of the rural community.

### **Discussion: Cittaslow, tourism, and place branding**

Cittaslow designation seeks to address the longstanding problem of unbalanced regional development in Korea through support of locally initiated projects in neglected rural regions of the country. It differs from Korea's Saemaul Undong (new village movement) for rural development in that it attempts to harmonize promotional, entrepreneurial activity with government and industry led activities, including tourism, entertainment, and production of agricultural products and specialty goods. In fact, the literature has highlighted the need for the declining rural areas to modernize and diversify their economies and create desirable lifestyles for revival (Woods, 2005; Li et al., 2016), moving beyond their traditional agricultural production to include spaces of consumption and mass tourism (Shen and Chou, 2022; de San Eugenio-Vela and Barniol-Carcasona, 2015). In the process, place/rural branding becomes an important exercise to increase visibility and enhance attractiveness of the rural communities (de San Eugenio-Vela and Barniol-Carcasona, 2015).

From this viewpoint, how Cittaslow communities in Korea aggressively promote tourism becomes more understandable. Under highly uneven development in Korea, Cittaslow allows small rural communities to stand out, celebrate traditional lifestyles, and preserve livelihoods and cultural practices lost to modernization and globalization. Slowness enables marginalized rural communities to reframe "underdevelopment" into a valuable asset to attract tourists. It fosters production of local, high-quality, slow foods, preservation of culture, and showcasing natural assets. It is providing long-neglected rural communities an opportunity to diversify their economies, gain visibility and attention, allowing a chance for survival.

Cittaslow is an established international brand that small, remote localities can take advantage of in order to boost their visibility. Once certified, they become part of the Cittaslow network, and the images that are attached to the slow city concept immediately become part of the locality's identity. Place branding usually refers to identifying and positioning a local area's own distinctive identities to the targeted audiences (Karvaratiz, 2004). While Cittaslow evokes shared images and identities of its joined members, it also allows members to highlight their local uniqueness which is inherent in the Cittaslow philosophy. What Cittaslow as a brand provides is a chance for small and remote rural areas to effectively market itself by leveraging the already established brand in the market, rather than taking on the risk to create a new brand from scratch. It has the agglomeration of economies in terms of the branding power by networking small communities under its big Cittaslow identity, which may be crucial for the marginalized rural areas.

Another point to highlight is the potential of Cittaslow to consolidate and strengthen local communities. Some rural branding literature has highlighted the rising importance of place branding in rural community development, moving beyond the market-oriented goals of place promotion (Vik and Villa, 2010; de San Eugenio-Vela and Barniol-Carcasona, 2015). Concept of place branding, in fact, has both external and internal dimensions, where the latter is about reinforcing local communities as their citizens identify and build consensus with their local identity (Kavaratiz, 2004; Joo and Seo, 2018). Cittaslow, by bringing in a new identity and goals for declining rural areas, can also act as an internal branding, revitalizing the community spirit that has been struggling over the past decades of decline.

The case of Cheongsando illustrates how a small remote island unknown to many Koreans, let alone international audiences, has gained a renewed attention and identity as one of the very first Cittaslow communities not only in Korea but also in Asia. Its underdevelopment and rural landscape are being turned around as the key assets to be promoted under the Cittaslow brand, and at the same time, Cittaslow brand is used to bring necessary development projects to the island and to promote community engagement.

In summary, Cittaslow as a survival strategy for rural communities in Korea is not just about preserving local assets against globalization; it is also an adaptive strategy in response to Korea's industrialization and urbanization policies. It exploits local assets for place promotion and development. Because of strong emphasis on marketing and tourism, it can be perceived as a form of entrepreneurialism. Cittaslow, however, allows for integration of place marketing and placemaking. Through the strengthening of local participation, planning, collective action, and governance, Cittaslow provides a vehicle for empowerment, redistribution, and improved social welfare in marginalized communities.

This view of the Korean Cittaslow aligns with Pink and Lewis (2014) who reconceptualize Cittaslow as a form of community resilience. Resilience includes being able "to co-exist with forces that are not consistent with their principles" (p.701). They argue that the Cittaslow framework "encourages an interweaving of the already existing elements of the local *in relation to* rather than *against* (for example) global retail flows or national and regional governance structures" (p.706). In Korea, Cittaslow provides a path towards resilience in localities deprived of investment through the Cittaslow brand,

national government funding, and alternatives to mass tourism and conventional development.

Cittaslow allows leveraging of local “specialness” in the face of continued modernization, standardization, and globalization. It is an antidote to sameness. Not all slow cities will succeed, but Cittaslow gives planners and development practitioners tools, indicators, best practices, and strategies for inclusion in local planning initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

Cittaslow has been mentioned in the rural development literature as potentially an alternative development strategy, especially for rural regions with structural decline. Indeed, Cittaslow as a concept blends quality of life elements with community development objectives, balancing economic development and progressive localism. Our paper explored how Cittaslow actually takes place on the ground and what role it can potentially play in rural development in Korea, which has been somewhat neglected during the country’s fast-economic development and urbanization.

Our findings highlight the value of Cittaslow as a place branding that remote rural communities can take advantage of, to increase their visibility (both in Korea and overseas), tourism, diversification of local economies, and community revitalization through branding and strengthening of local identity. Cittaslow focuses on the livelihoods and lifestyles in rural communities, turning the slowness of rural life, an attribute that the Korean society has largely forgotten, into an asset for neglected regions. Furthermore, Cittaslow has its appeal to marginalized small localities in Korea in that it provides them with not only an established international brand but also a local and international network

of Cittaslow cities. What started as a grassroots, bottom-up process of small town leaders sharing heaping plates of steaming, locally made pasta to protest the encroachment of global fast food chains in Italy, has evolved into a powerful international brand that encompasses broader system of planning and community development and international city network.

Resilience for small rural localities entails finding innovative ways of survival. While the slow city in Cheongsando could have had a stronger emphasis on participation and it leans towards conventional entrepreneurialism and tourism promotion, it does provide a successful example of local placemaking. The storytelling and narratives around its natural landscape, traditional farming, fishing, and cooking, and the morphology of pathways, aqueducts, rice terraces, stone walls, and structures provide meaning and a rationale for slowing down, observing, and learning about this place. While there may be disagreements over specific projects, the general direction and overall goals of Cittaslow have been widely embraced in Cheongsando.

Cittaslow in Korea differs from other countries, but there are common themes. One is the fluidity of Cittaslow in terms of its meaning and specifics of implementation, while providing the localities with the overarching Cittaslow branding. Another is the value of devising flexible and adaptive strategies to economic, environmental, and social disturbances, following the main Cittaslow philosophy. Adding to the cases on Cittaslow and community development throughout the world (Miele, 2008; Pink, 2009; Semmen and Freedman, 2012; Özbek and Erikçi, 2014; Pink and Lewis, 2014; Pink and Servon, 2014), this paper contains an assessment of the case of Cittaslow in Korea. Further

comparative analysis across countries and cultures, especially on the adjustments and adaptation to social forces and environmental change is needed.

Localities left behind under conventional development schemes need to find alternative pathways for prosperity. Cittaslow provides an alternative strategy for communities grappling with globalization, neoliberal policies, and competition with better-endowed cities. Korea's Cittaslow demonstrates the value of planning, place identity and branding, and place (re)making that include economic, social, and environmental targets. Producing a compelling narrative shared locally and beyond is part of the recipe for resilience and sustainability.

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