

Local Arts and Cultural Ecosystems: Focusing on the Role of the UCCN Program*

Keebom NAHM**

Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of a cultural ecosystem with particular emphasis on its components and characteristics, including cultural creators, distributors, and the exchange of content with aesthetic and cultural value. It highlights the importance of a comprehensive and balanced approach to such ecosystem, especially in the context of local or regional ecosystems. The paper outlines the development trajectories of a local arts and cultural ecosystem and its relationship with creative city programs. It also explores the role of local arts and cultural leadership and governance systems. It emphasizes the importance of strengthening mutual relationships and enhancing the competitiveness of each ecosystem member. It also introduces the concept of place-based local cultural ecosystems, emphasizing the interconnectedness of arts and cultural creators within diverse communities. It discusses factors that influence cultural participation from the perspectives of both local residents and policymakers, including economic resources, institutional networks, and cultural infrastructure. Furthermore, the paper explores the utilization of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) program to enhance cultural ecosystems. It discusses how UCCN can contribute to sustainable development, promote cooperation among cities, and enhance city branding. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of long-term action plans for sustainable communities with cultural abundance, while mentioning the Quintuple Helix theory, which highlights the interplay of various stakeholders in fostering culture-driven sustainable communities.

Keywords: cultural ecosystem, place-based local cultural ecosystem, UCCN, sustainable communities

* This paper was presented at the 8th Jinju UNESCO Creative Cities International Forum held in Jinju on July 7, 2023.

** Keebom NAHM is Professor of Urban Sociology at the University of Seoul. He received his Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Saskatchewan. He has served as president of the Economic Geographical Society of Korea and the Korea Academic Society of Industrial Cluster. He is currently working for the Korean National Commission for UNESCO as a member of Advisory Council for UNESCO Creative Cities Network. His research interests focus on urban cultural policies, social innovation, and metropolitan regeneration. E-mail: nahm@uos.ac.kr.

1. Introduction

The concept of a cultural ecosystem involves the mechanisms that govern the components and characteristics of ecosystem functions (Spencer 1857). It also encompasses the exchange and utilization of content with aesthetic and cultural value among cultural creators, distributors, and participants. To understand cultural ecosystems, we must adopt a comprehensive, systematic, and balanced perspective that takes into account cultural institutions, intermediaries, and the unique attributes of local or regional cultural ecosystems. These attributes include the three key aspects of people, places and organizations:

- (1) **People:** Comprising cultural workers, supporters, and local participants;
- (2) **Places:** Representing the material foundations for cultural activities such as cultural sites and communities;
- (3) **Organizations:** Encompassing entities involved in cultural activities, such as arts and nonprofit organizations, cultural industries, public arts, and intermediaries.

This paper will explore the development trajectories of local arts and cultural ecosystems, the co-evolution process between local arts and cultural ecosystems and creative city programs, and finally, the leadership and governance systems in the realm of local arts and culture.

2. Definitions: “Ecosystem” and “Cultural Ecosystem”

2.1. Ecosystem

According to Spencer’s definition of the ecosystem, the “law of organic progress is the law of all progress. Whether it be in the development of the earth, in the development of life upon its surface, in the development of society, of government, of manufactures, of commerce, of language, literature, science, art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex,

through successive differentiations, holds throughout” (Spencer 1857, 234). The general ecosystem has four phases of evolution, which include: 1) exploitation: the colonization of disturbed ecosystems where species capture easily accessible resources. It is the beginning of establishing order within a chaotic system; 2) conservation: stability, rigidity, strong interdependencies; 3) release: the opportunity that fuels the creative destruction phase; resulting from some external disturbance, the tightly knit connected structures of the ecosystem come undone and large amounts of stored capital and energy are released; and 4) reorganization: restructuring, highest uncertainty, a new order begins (Auerswald and Dani 2018).

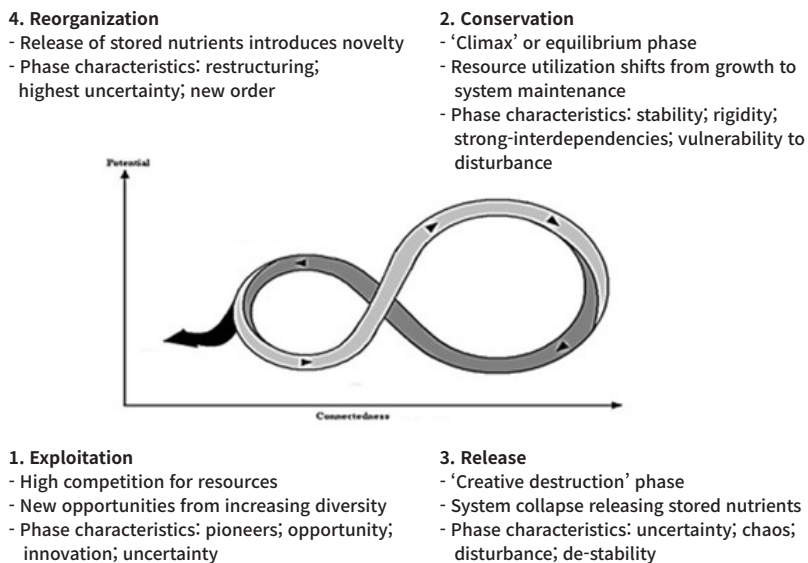


Figure 1. Cycles of Ecosystem
 Source: Auerswald and Dani (2018).

2.2. Cultural Ecosystem

Cultural ecosystems mirror the components and characteristics of ecosystems, but focus on the exchange, utilization, and creation of content with aesthetic and cultural value. Cultural institutions and intermediaries play crucial roles in this context. Local arts and culture often develop through cooperative systems among consumers. The production, distribution, and consumption of culture, facilitated by digital technologies, differentiate cultural products from artistic ones. Cultural institutions within a region should possess ecological knowledge to understand and apply the principles of ecosystems, fostering sustainable human communities.

In order to secure a circulation structure of the cultural ecosystem, cultural producers should have a higher ratio than distributors and consumers in terms of quantity, but a smooth circulation structure is ensured when the total number of the participants is greater than the number of cultural producers. The mutuality must be secured while each stage has a round qualification and status. Independent and

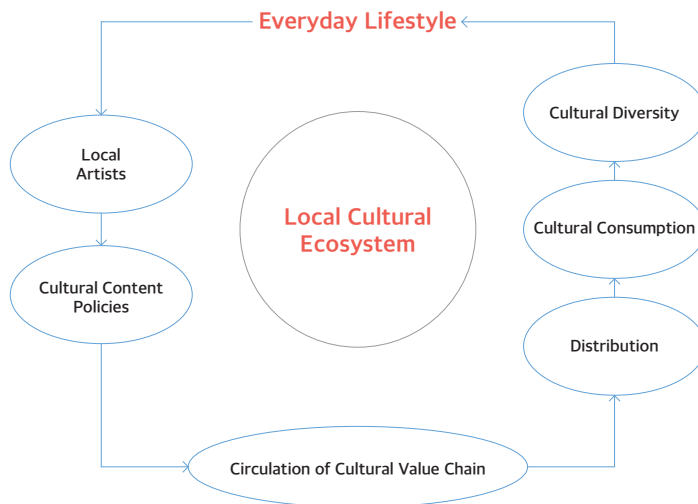


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of the Cultural Ecosystem
 Source: Adapted from Chungbuk Research Institute (2012).

organic relationships must be formed, but it is difficult to secure organic characteristics in the sub-structures. An ecosystem within which individual organizations are born, grow, thrive, or pass away, and examine the contextual factors that constrain or sustain them (McGill, et al. 2014).

In an ecosystem, the most important thing is the establishment of a circulation structure. The circulation structure refers to the circular flow of energy, and the most crucial factor is the existence of the primary producers, which have the largest number, and their production activities provide the most significant driving force for energy circulation throughout the ecosystem. The strengthening of mutuality between each group within the ecosystem is also essential. Reciprocity can only be achieved on the basis of equality, and it is therefore necessary to ensure the equal status of primary, secondary and tertiary producers. Evolution and development can be achieved in a state where the harmonious equality of all populations is ensured, and it is not easy to ensure the beginning of development in a less competitive or non-competitive environment. To strengthen mutuality, the cultivation of each individual's inner competence becomes the most important issue. The ability of each entity can serve as the most important indicator of the competitiveness of the entire ecosystem, which is an indicator of the health of the ecosystem. It can be confirmed that the health of an ecosystem is not manifested through the abnormal growth of a specific population, but through the competitiveness of each member, and that the ecosystem can grow and develop together in such an environment (Ivanova and Zhang 2022).

2.3. Place-based Local Cultural Ecosystem

“An arts and cultural ecology encompasses the many networks of arts and cultural creators, producers, presenters, sponsors, participants, and supporting casts embedded in diverse communities. Forty years ago, scientists and policymakers realized that treating plants, animals, minerals, climate, and the universe as endlessly classifiable, separate phenomena did not help people understand or respond to environmental problems. So they created the integrated field of environmental ecology. In similar

fashion, arts producers, advocates, and policymakers are now beginning to strengthen the arts and culture sphere by cultivating view of its wholeness and interconnectedness” (Markusen, et al. 2011, 8).

There are two key perspectives for understanding cultural participation: local residents and policymakers. From the perspective of local residents, what matters most to cultural participation are: (1) individual economic resources—disposable income, a subjective assessment of economic situation (Can I afford it?); (2) resources of reference groups (Are my friends and relatives heavy users of culture?); and (3) tangible resources related to culture, i.e., the infrastructure of cultural institutions (Is there a place where I can enjoy some cultural atmosphere and content in my place of living?). On the other hand, from the perspective of policymakers, what matters most to cultural participation include: (1) the size of the budget devoted to culture (How much can be spent on culture-related projects?); (2) institutional networks resources (Have private and non-profit partners identified with whom we could collaborate in the implementation of arts and culture policy?); and (3) tangible resources related to culture, i.e., the infrastructure of cultural institutions (What cultural institutions could be kept in our cultural policy portfolio?)

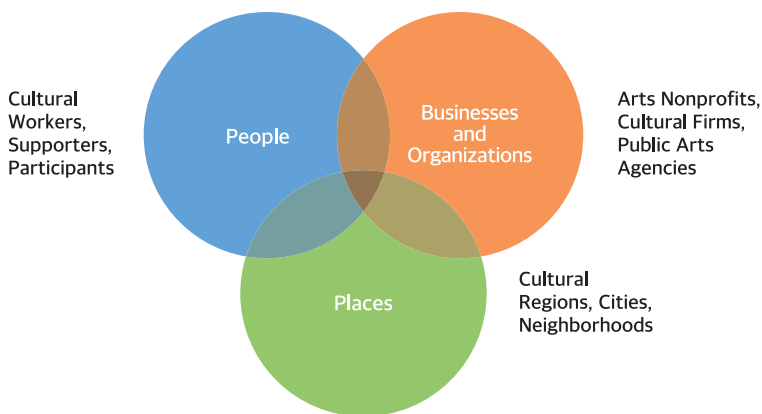


Figure 3. Place-based Local Cultural Ecosystem
Source: Markusen, et al. (2011).

The criteria for place-based local cultural ecosystem can include: (1) possessing positive aesthetic properties; (2) being expressive of emotion; (3) being intellectually challenging (i.e. questioning received views and modes of thought); (4) being formally complex and coherent; (5) having a capacity to convey complex meanings; (6) exhibiting an individual point of view; (7) being an exercise of creative imagination (being original); (8) being an artifact or performance which is the product of a high degree of skill; (9) belonging to an established artistic form (music, painting, film, etc.); (10) being the product of an intention to make a work of art; and (11) art traditions and institutions.

3. Arts and Cultural Leadership and UCCN

3.1. People for Public Spaces

Arts and cultural leadership is “a suitable test ground for developing engagement and governance practices and routines in places. Relatively limited financial resources still encourage the inclusion of a wide set of stakeholders, whose participation means a more diverse range of interests, which in turn, require more complex and innovative engagement and negotiating processes” (Nemeth 2016). The way in which local cultural programs are managed is changing to a more bottom-up, flexible system of governance that empowers people to do things. Cities are well positioned to gather ideas and information that can help people to achieve their goals. The problem is being able to channel all these individual desires into a dynamic that allows the city as a whole to thrive. In designing a governance structure for programs and platforms, it is important to have a mandate that enables them to act, achieving legitimacy in terms of organization and being able to access resources. The organization of such a program should be transparent and compact. Partnership is vital for small organizations to achieve things, but it is not always possible to act together (McGill, et al. 2014; Mulligan and Smith 2011).

There are four phases of local cultural activities in public spaces:

- (1) **Mobilization:** Mobilize resources to achieve a cultural agenda. The municipality can act to identify and gather the resources. The direct involvement of municipal government can act as power-broker and ensure openness and equity is essential.
- (2) **Visibilization:** Much of the work occurs behind closed doors through meetings, discussions, and lobbying. In the formal cultural programs of branding and marketing, visibilization can include formal programs of branding and marketing, which are usually aimed at achieving media coverage and support from citizens and other stakeholder groups. Visibilization is not just a top-down process, but also a grassroots process that can involve all the actors using the city. Cultural programs visibilize through everyday practice and repetition.
- (3) **Sensibilization:** Making a programme visible is also just a first step in a long process. In order to maintain the momentum of a program, it needs to be understood and used by people on a regular basis. To reach wider audiences among the users of the city, the program concept needs to be made accessible to others. This can involve: 1) **Translation:** interpreting the often technical or academic language of project conception into everyday, accessible language. For example, an artist's perspective can be interpreted in terms of universal themes that were relevant for residents and visitors as well as the global media; 2) **Adaptation:** making the content of the program relevant and immediate for audiences and publics; 3) **Empathy:** even if the message of the programme is communicated via techniques of translation and adaptation, it will have limited effect unless people feel they are connected to it.
- (4) **Festivalization:** events serve a central function in processes of place-making because they provide the 'liquid urban culture' that can make things happen in cities. Events can make places because of their catalytic function within urban systems. However, not all events can change things. In fact, many more events are 'iterative', serving to reinforce the status quo rather than challenge it. Relatively few events can be seen as 'pulsar' events capable of acting as catalysts that physically or symbolically change places, although these are often the

types of events that cities need (Richards and Duif 2018).

3.2. Enhancing the Cultural Ecosystem through the Utilization of the UCCN Program

From the business development perspective to the creative field awareness and lifelong learning process, from festivals to professional and artistic exchange programs, from sustainable urban development measures to international network, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development.

The OECD claims that the “17 SDGs will not be reached without proper engagement of and coordination with local and regional governments” (OECD 2020). All the 17 SDGs and many of the 169 targets relate directly to the responsibilities of local and regional governments (UCLG 2018), and each goal contains at least one target that is relevant for local governments. The SDGs have “convening potential” in that they offer a framework for dialogue between stakeholders with very different agendas, including cultural organizations and activists, private companies with commercial imperatives, and community groups and civil society organizations concerned with inequality and social justice. The adoption of SDGs has different meanings: For some, it signifies a focus on achieving “green growth,” while for others, it serves as a tool to address urban inequalities, providing a mechanism for city officials to connect with peers in other cities and share information.



Figure 4. Sustainable Development Goals

Source: United Nations (2017).

3.3. UCCN City Branding

Networks are also used to brand cities. This is especially true in the case of UNESCO, which carries a high degree of international prestige, thereby improving the image and competitive advantage of a member city. The benefits resulting from membership of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) and the concomitant use of UNESCO's name and logo vary from an increased inflow of tourists and investment to a stronger

sense of satisfaction and pride among city residents and businesses. Becoming a member of the UCCN can provide many benefits, ranging from the designation as a “badge of honour” to opportunities to share experiences and knowledge with other UCCN cities. However, it also has some problematic aspects, such as the network’s rapid growth, many administrative duties, and a bureaucracy designed to deal with nation-states, all of which result in a deficit of actual creative networking. The UCCN provides a platform to promote the use of creativity as a key element in a city’s social and economic development. To join the network, cities must agree to strengthen the role of cultural activities, make cultural life accessible to everyone, and create opportunities for directly linking creativity, innovation and sustainable development.

Sharing knowledge, best practices and experiences is one of the main objectives of the UCCN. However, the city branding is also of great significance and brings several benefits for member cities. Membership in a prestigious network can help to create a distinctive brand identity for the city. One of the key elements for city branding is more frequent media coverage of the city at the local, national and international levels. In addition, residents perceive benefits from UCCN membership and the branding of their city, as they feel proud and satisfied to live in that city.

The 2020 Rome Charter emphasizes:

- (1) **DISCOVER cultural roots**, so that they can recognize their heritage, identity and place in the city, as well as understand the contexts of others;
- (2) **CREATE cultural expressions**, so that they can be part of and enrich the life of the city;
- (3) **SHARE cultures and creativity**, so that social and democratic life is deepened by the exchange;
- (4) **ENJOY the city’s cultural resources and spaces**, so that all can be inspired, educated and refreshed;
- (5) **PROTECT the city’s common cultural resources**, so that all can benefit from them, today and in years to come.

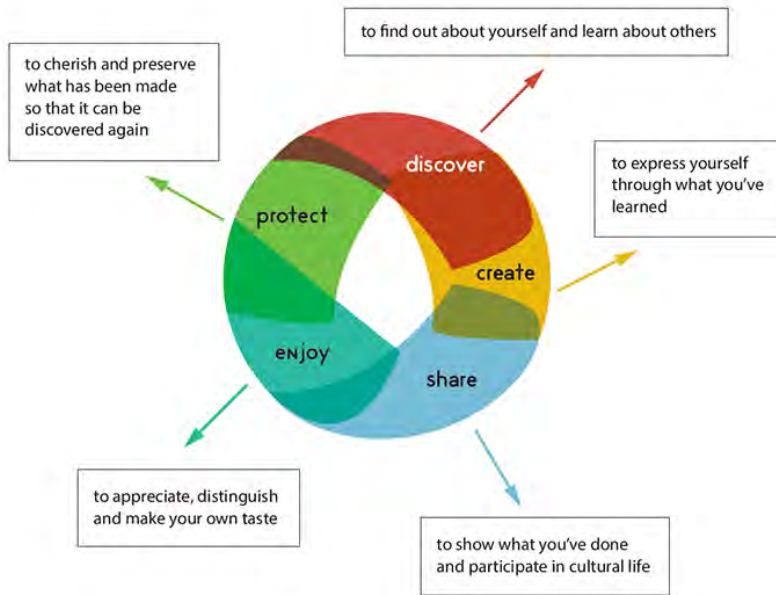


Figure 5. The 2020 Rome Charter
 Source: www.2020romecharter.org.

Conclusion

Through a city's UCCN designation, residents are reminded of their local culture and cultural traditions. Residents appear motivated to preserve their traditions in order to maintain their membership through various initiatives and projects that describe the ways in which UCCN membership can foster social capital. Active residents are also working to build partnerships and share knowledge. However, there is a lack of concrete ideas on the most effective approach to achieve this. Related to this issue are the coordination and transaction costs of network participation, which is a problem associated with most targeted networks. It is also important to recognize that through the UCCN, UNESCO can more easily encourage cities to develop strategies for using culture and creativity as a tool for sustainable development. Another related potential benefit is that the cities

designated as members of the UCCN also gain access to the UNESCO label, which is seen as very valuable by local residents. However, the emphasis on sustainability may in fact impede the ability of member cities to achieve the objectives outlined in their applications to join the UCCN. Along with the network's rapid growth, the increasing administrative duties can be a drawback in terms of the network's capacity to support the creative networking around branding that many cities are pursuing.

A sustainable community with cultural abundance needs to have long-term action plans for long-term impacts and outcomes. In the Quintuple Helix theory, the interplay among municipalities, industries, institutions, civil society, and the local (cultural) ecosystem plays a crucial role in fostering culture-led sustainable communities (Carayannis, et al. 2018). Civil society involvement, stakeholder participation, inclusive governance, sharing of the best practices, experiences, and knowledge through partnerships, culture-led social integration policies and ODA programs embody the zeitgeist of our times. The promotion of intermediary organizations and partnerships, as well as the branding of the UCCN cultural policies are also important. Therefore, it is necessary to enjoy the city's cultural resources and spaces, so that everyone can be inspired, educated and refreshed, while strengthening cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable development.

REFERENCES

- Auerswald, Phil, and Lokesh Dani. 2018. "Economic Ecosystems." In *The New Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*, edited by Gordon L. Clark, Maryann P. Feldman, Meric S. Gertler, and Dariusz Wojcik, 245–273. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carayannis, Elias G., et al. 2018. "The ecosystem as helix: an exploratory

- theory-building study of regional co-opetitive entrepreneurial ecosystems as Quadruple/Quintuple Helix Innovation Models.” *R&D Management* 48.1: 148-162.
- Chungbuk Research Institute. 2012. *Munhwa saengtaegye-reul tonghan jiyek munhwa hwalseonghwa jeollyak* (Regional Cultural Activation Strategy through Cultural Ecosystem), Chungbuk Research Institute.
- Ivanova, Victoria, and Gary Zhexi Zhang, eds. 2022. *Future Art Ecosystems: Art x Decentralised Tech*. London: Serpentine.
- Markusen, Ann, et al. 2011. *California’s Arts and Cultural Ecology*. California: The James Irvine Foundation.
- McGill, Larry, et al. 2014. *A Portrait of the Cultural Ecosystem*. Foundation Center.
- Mulligan, Martin, and Pia Smith. 2011. *Art, Governance and the Turn to Community: Putting Art at the Heart of Local Government*. Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University.
- Nemeth, Agnes. 2016. “European Capitals of Culture: Digging Deeper into the Governance of the Mega-Event.” *Territory, Politics, Governance* 4.1: 52-74.
- OECD. 2020. *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*. OECD.
- Richards, Greg, and Lian Duif. 2018. *Small Cities with Big Dreams: Creative Placemaking and Branding Strategies*. New York: Routledge.
- Spencer, Herbert. 1857. *Progress: Its Law and Cause*. New York: J. Fitzgerald.
- UCLG. 2018. *How UCLG Contributes towards the SDGs: Fostering Accomplishment of the 2030 Agenda from the Bottom up*. https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg_y_los_sdg-web.pdf.
- United Nations. 2017. *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017, Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations.