

**Brooklyn of Korea:  
Place branding as a process in production of space**

by

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
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## **Abstract**

In planning and development practices, branding is often used as a promotional tool to attract investments and tourists, and thought of as a mechanism to portray a selected image of a place. In this thesis, I argue that the branding process can be one of the driving forces of neighborhood change and that place brands play an active role in producing sense of place along with physical and social changes. As cities increasingly choose images to communicate outwards and reposition themselves after the decline of industry, it is important to understand the role place brands play in the production and transformation of space.

This thesis examines a neighborhood in transition, Seongsu-dong, Seoul, South Korea. From being one of Seoul's few semi-industrial zones to a "hot place" for cultural and commercial activities, Seongsu has seen large shifts in the past decade, widely branded with the label "Brooklyn of Korea." With diverse parties using the Brooklyn brand in different ways while leveraging similar qualities, Seongsu provides a rich case study on how branding as a process not only shapes images of a place, but can also impact the built environment. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, this thesis tries to bridge the gap between portrayal of neighborhood change and tangible changes and answers: How are place brands created? What are the brands and how do they relate to neighborhood change? And what can place brands tell urban planners about neighborhood change?

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# 01 Introduction

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## Arts and Cultural Redevelopment in the Post-industrial Era

Post-industrial urban areas globally share the task of reinventing themselves as they find alternative production modes, economic development strategies, and uses for empty industrial spaces. Arts and cultural industries have been at the forefront of re-occupying emptying spaces used by both grassroots and planning or development initiatives. Grassroots transformations start with artists who are attracted to cheap or no rent and the large floor plans of industrial spaces. For example, artists converted lofts to live/workspaces in SoHo, NYC and guerilla artists installed artwork using the remnants of factories in Detroit, Michigan. (Campo, 2019; Currid, 2009; Yoon & Currid-Halkett, 2015; Zukin, 1982) Artist-led transformations bring new value to abandoned urban spaces and thus have been considered effective in revitalizing disinvested communities with the increased attention and investment from the public and private sectors.

Planners and developers also leverage arts and culture as urban revitalization tools to fill empty industrial spaces. (Currid, 2009; Evans, 2003) Cities have brought large arts institutions to post-industrial areas, creating anchor sites to support neighborhood economic development such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao, Tate Modern in London, and MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts. More broadly, art and the culture associated with art became desirable amenities of urban life, alongside a trend of increased demand in downtown living and a growing concentration of jobs in

the cultural economy in the urban core. (Shkuda, 2015; Zukin, 1987) Arts as a revitalization tool has been used as a way to attract a highly educated, middle-class population, identified as the “creative class” by Richard Florida. Popularized in the early 2000’s, the creative class strategy emphasized creative talents’ potential to generate economic development for cities, which encouraged cities to become attractive to a certain demographic. (Bruck, 2019; Currid, 2009) Additionally, cities and developers in efforts to shift cities’ images from an abandoned urban core to a lively cultural hub, “converted [cities] into profitable brandhubs, or, to put it in real-estate terms, urban entertainment districts.” (Klingmann, 2007) These developments often use historical or post-industrial buildings to host shopping and cultural experiences, putting urban centers back on the map as desirable destinations. Through both artist-led or city-and-developer-driven initiatives, arts and cultural redevelopment in post-industrial spaces has transformed spaces that were originally built for industrial production into spaces for art production and cultural, commercial consumption.



Figure 1. A success case of post-industrial adaptive reuse marketplace, Chelsea Market in Manhattan is a collection of shops and eateries and a model being exported to other cities. Image source: NYCGO.com

## Gentrification in “Authentic” Neighborhoods

Arts and cultural redevelopment is also discussed as a stage in gentrification that triggers the displacement of existing communities or the communities that helped revitalize the neighborhood. Gentrification in this paper takes from the Brookings Institute definition: “the process of neighborhood change that results in the replacement of lower income residents with higher income ones” and change of neighborhood character. (Kennedy & Paul, 2001, p.1) In the case of artist-led neighborhood revitalizations, the artist community is priced out as middle-class residents and businesses start moving in. (Baum & Christiaanse, 2012) Sharon Zukin brought this phenomenon to public attention in her book *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* in which she documents how residential conversion of industrial lofts became trendy through pioneering artists in SoHo, attracting middle-class residents and investment into the neighborhood, eventually pricing out the original residents, the artists. (Zukin, 1982)

Additionally, scholars have written about how this type of gentrification affects neighborhood characteristics as the original community that transformed disinvested areas and made the area attractive are pushed out and replaced with higher income communities and businesses with larger capital. (See Campanella, Lloyd, Currid, Zukin.) These neighborhood changes are discussed in relation to an “authentic” culture being co-opted by the newer populations. Zukin in her more recent book, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* chronicles how the rise of counterculture and the pursuit of authenticity shape contemporary urban spaces. The social diversity in old immigrant, working-class neighborhoods attracts artists and gentrifiers who are in search of “authenticity” and consequently brings in outsiders at the expense of those who are part of the original culture. (Zukin, 2010) Arts and culture when used as development and planning tools are “strategic variables in an overall economic development scheme aimed at attracting people and firms” because they serve as symbols of authenticity, a desirable feature for urban life. (Currid, 2009, p.370) Richard Lloyd describes the desire for “authenticity” as a repositioning of “grit as glamour” or “neo-bohemia”, which appeals to not just to the people participating in the production of that culture, but also to consumers of the culture from the outside. (Lloyd, 187) This influx of outsiders through gentrification impacts the existing culture that made it attractive in the first place.

## Neighborhood Change and Cultural Displacement

The identification of an “authentic” culture establishes an image for the neighborhood that in turn also communicates what is “inauthentic.” In other words, the changing neighborhood characteristics towards a specific authenticity sends a message of who is welcome and who is not welcome in the transformed neighborhood. This contributes to a cultural displacement of existing communities that are not included in the new, changing neighborhood culture. This can be seen through changes in businesses as retail stores choose aesthetics to help communicate a neighborhood’s identity. By prioritizing a certain image over another, businesses in gentrifying areas exclude those who do not belong, mostly existing residents. (Martucci, 2019) Moreover, initial businesses that formed the neighborhood’s culture are pushed out as well as rents rise and large capital comes in. In West Chelsea, NYC, early-comers in the arts and cultural industries, which replaced manufacturing, did not survive well compared to the late-comers, which presumably are galleries and firms with more capital. (Yoon & Currid-Halkett, 2015) Businesses adapting to a newly selected culture and late-comer businesses with large capital both exemplify how selecting a certain culture excludes communities that do not fit the new culture.

There are interventions to help prevent the displacement of existing communities and the loss of authentic cultures. Social preservationists as identified by Japonica Brown-Saracino might be demographically alike to a gentrifier, but are distinguished in that they are self-aware of displacement threats and seek to preserve the “authentic” urban culture they were attracted to. (Brown-Saracino, 2010) For social preservationists, the definition of “authentic” is directly related with the social and cultural practices of original residents (old-timers) and they try to resist inauthentic neighborhood change by engaging in political and social practices that attempt to preserve existing culture. (Brown-Saracino, 2010) This concept is important in that it acknowledges the need for cultural preservation beyond historical, architectural preservation and the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion that results from defining a specific “authenticity.”

This section reviewed urban trends in arts and cultural redevelopment in post-industrial spaces, its implications on gentrification, and the trends in neighborhood change that prioritize certain cultures over others. With this foundation, this paper will delve into social theories of sense of place and how place brands fit into the theories of sense of place.



# 02 Theory and Framework

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“Place” is one of the trickiest words in the English language, a suitcase so overfilled one can never shut the lid.

- Hayden, 1995

## **Sense of Place as a Social Product**

While some theories of sense of place focus on physical qualities, this thesis takes from theories of social production of sense of place to understand how place is constructed by diverse forces and is a contested, complex concept. (See Jivén & Larkham, 2003 for an overview on theories about sense of place.) Dolores Hayden in her book *Power of Place* applies a combined approach of aesthetics (which is based on works from geography and environmental psychology) and politics (which draws from social sciences and economic geography) to the history of urban landscapes, emphasizing the social reproduction of space and the everyday life. (Hayden, 1995) She calls for a collective process of urban preservation that will create identities and “public spaces, in all parts of our cities, to mourn and to celebrate who we really are” and depart from a selective, monumentalist approach to urban landscapes that focus on iconic structures or stories. (Hayden, 1995, p.237) This thesis draws from Hayden’s holistic approach in trying to understand how the different experiences of diverse demographics affect sense of place and the assumption that sense of place is a complicated, ever changing perception. Sense of place is also a product of a place’s relation with outside factors as much as it is a representation

of internal elements. Doreen Massey says “what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus.” (Massey, 1994, 154-155) This thesis also takes from the concept that sense of place is “extroverted” especially in the context of a globalizing world and the local space can be understood by realizing its relation with the world (Massey, 1994)

## Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre’s dialectical theory on production of space offers a construct to understand the different forces in social production of sense of place and how branding can fit into the process of production of space. The theory operates under the assumption that space is social and that space does not exist, but it is *produced* within social reality through three dimensions that happen simultaneously. (Schmid, 2008)

Lefebvre identifies three ‘moments’ in the production of space, which serve as his conceptual tools: spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation. These ‘moments’ are interconnected. (Stewart, 1995)

“Spatial practices” refers to the material aspects of space and the social interactions of people that constitute urban space. This process is based on empirical observations of physical presence of people, including not just residents but also people who work in, visit, and have cultural exchanges in the space. (Brenner et al., 2012) This dimension refers to how people generate and perceive space. (Stewart, 1995)

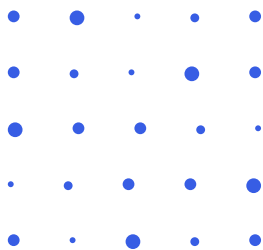


Figure 2. Abstract diagram of the spatial practice dimension. Image by author.



Figure 3. Abstract diagram of the spaces of representation dimension. Image by author.

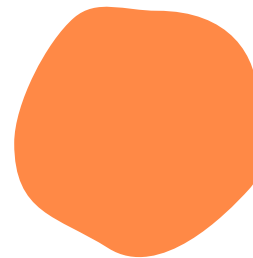


Figure 4. Abstract diagram of the representation of space dimension. Image by author.

“Spaces of representation” are processes of creating symbolism within a space. The meaning of a space is created by the lived experiences of people in the space, making this production of space a more local form of knowledge. These socially produced spaces embody the heterogeneous and on-the-ground experiences that conflict with the “representations of space.” (Brenner et al., 2012) “This dimension denotes the world as it is experienced by human beings in the practice of their everyday life.” (Schmid, 2008, p.40)

“Representations of space” is a depiction and knowledge of a space, connected to institutional power such as planners, architects, and designers who create boundaries in space through discourse. (Stewart, 1995) Also referred to as the “conceived,” space, this process is a result of society’s images of and words about the space or a “frame of reference for communication, which permits a (spatial) orientation and thus co-determines activity at the same time.” (Schmid, 2008, p. 37) And since in a modern, urban space, there are many ways of defining the city, “definitions of the city always contain mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and thus become battlegrounds for a variety of strategies and interests.” (Brenner et al., 2012, p. 51) This thesis focuses on this dimension as I argue that branding is a part of “representations of space.”

## **Place Branding as a Part of Representation of Space**

This thesis considers place branding as a process that contributes to the “representations of space” dimension and explores the role of brands in neighborhood change and changing sense of place. I define place branding as a *strategic process* that generates an image to communicate what the place stands for and/or a vision in service of a goal. For example, planners and developers use branding strategies to attract target audiences to places such as tourists, companies, retail businesses, talent, residents, etc. A famous case of place branding is the “I ♥ NY” campaign that the New York Department of Commerce commissioned in 1977 in hopes to attract tourists and revive a crime-ridden, financially-troubled city. (Shank, 2017) The now iconic slogan was a result of a branding process that had a goal to portray a new, free, and loved New York that would unite the city inwards and invite tourists from the outside. Similarly, new innovation districts create identities that appeal to tech companies and young talent. For example, Kendall Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts and the Research Triangle Park in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina have branding strategies that emphasize the collaborative nature of their spaces with slogans like “where people and ideas converge” and

amenities such as great eateries that help attract talent and as a result, companies.

There are two aspects of place branding that contribute to the “representations of space” process. The first is that through place branding, places portray a place’s unique assets to outsiders. Branding strategies in general first understand what the product’s values and strengths are and then, investigate how their competitors are positioning themselves in order to find the white space that will make them stand out. As cities strive to be competitive, they try to stand out by applying branding strategies that express “the meaning of the place to its residents and the world: explains its character and its purpose.” (The Editorial Team, 2017) Business Improvement Districts (BID) and local businesses on a smaller scale use branding to showcase their unique traits to attract foot traffic to their areas. “Keep Austin Weird” was an effort among local businesses to encourage people to buy locally instead of at chain stores and used existing characteristics as brand assets such as the slogan. (Bueche, 2018) The BID for the Meatpacking District in NYC markets themselves as the “quintessential 24 hour neighborhood” to emphasize the sense of community and the diverse types of stores that people can visit around the clock. These branding strategies communicate the type of experience that only that place can offer using existing qualities, differentiating the place from others.

Another aspect of place branding that contributes to “representations of space” is its goal-oriented process that crafts a vision of a place and thus, conceives an ideal image. Branding strategies help brands depart from the current image to a new one that embodies an aspirational image. Companies undergoing rebranding would identify a new audience and the values and lifestyles they have in order to reposition the brand to appeal to them. So, place branding processes produce representations of space that show the ideal image of the place. Eleonora Pasotti in her book *Political Branding* takes from marketing literature to demonstrate how brand politicians build their brands around a redefinition of being a citizen in their city, consequently representing an ideal version of the city. (Pasotti, 2010) Similarly, I argue that planners use branding strategies for similar purposes. For example, certain planning documents can act as marketing tools in that they communicate to the wider public a specific vision for the place represented via renderings, images, and labels. Documents such as strategic plans convey images of how the city wants to strategically change. SoWa (short for South of Washington St.), a post-industrial area in Boston’s South End



Figure 5. Studio Eduardo Aires created a visual system for Porto's brand, abstracting Porto's traditional, signature tiles into symbols that represent the experiences and landmarks that are unique to Porto. Image source: Silvestre, 2019.

neighborhood, is a direct example of using both aspects of place branding, leveraging existing assets and portraying a vision. GTI Properties, the owner of the mills in SoWa, designated the area with a moniker that took inspiration from SoHo, portraying their vision of a creative arts district. The branding leveraged existing assets in that, before formal development, artists were squatting in the abandoned industrial buildings. What started out as a cluster of artist studios is now a destination in Boston for “art galleries, interesting boutiques, artsy stores and SOWA open market” through intentional place branding initiatives. (*SoWa Open Market (Boston) - 2021 All You Need to Know BEFORE You Go (with Photos)*, n.d.)

## Place Brands as an Exclusionary and Crowdsourced Practice

Understanding place brands as a part of the driving forces in producing space is important because “even discursive everyday practices, such as the decision to use one nomenclature over another to refer to a place, and how to define the scope and boundary of that place, can be complicit in reinforcing a certain group’s legitimate claims to a place while excluding others.” (Hwang, 2016 cited by Lee, 2019) Conceived urban spaces “are directly connected to rules and norms that define who and what is admissible or prohibited and what is included or excluded in urban space.” (Brenner et al., 2012, p. 51) If place brands are reflections of the prioritized qualities of the place and the aimed version of change, they become representations of who has right to the place and who does not. In instances where planners and developers use branding strategies to shift the image of a place, the conceived image might exclude certain communities that do not fit the vision of the transition and thus, has implications on how the space is produced. Moreover, the practice of branding today goes beyond differentiating products and services from competition with lists of functional benefits. Rather, brands are a representation of who people want to be. (Pasotti, 2010) Brands today also participate in political conversations and take a stance in current events. Therefore, today’s brands, as representation of values that people buy into, serve as political messages.

It is also important to note that place brands can also be generated organically as a collection of images by diverse sources. A brand, by definition, is an image or association of what someone or something is, a “personal and social identity, an expression both of who we think we are and with whom we want or expect to be compared.” (Klingmann, 2007, 56) Therefore, place brands can be pluralistic, subjective, and created by multiple parties. Nowadays, because of the crowdsourced nature of content creation through social media platforms and review websites, place brands are influenced by a more democratized process compared to only a strategic, top-down process led by planners or developers. Individual associations, through crowdsourced media and curated content on social media networks, organically become part of the place brands and part of larger public’s associations with a place. Entrepreneurs and local businesses also have a role in place branding as they become associated with the area and they use the place brand as part of their marketing efforts. Because of the variegated entry points

and usage of place brands, analyzing place brands has the potential to reveal holistically what the contemporary viewpoints of a place are. It also means that the conceived images of a place are more complex and can differ by how different users interact with the space.

In summary, it is important, in the context of urban planning, to understand the place branding process as well as what the place brands are because the conceived images communicate prioritized narratives and therefore, signal who is included and excluded, driving neighborhood change in specific directions.

## Framework

This project takes a holistic look at neighborhood change drawing from the production of space theory to better understand the implications of conceived place brands on the built environment. Putting it all together, the framework for this study takes Lefebvre's three dimensions of production of space as a foundation to analyze the forces in the production of neighborhood change and adds branding as an active role in producing conceived spaces (representations of space). The framework also assumes that all dimensions are interlinked and occur at the same time rather than representing a linear change based on a causal relationship. The dialectic nature of the framework allows for dimensions to be, at times, contradictory to one another, and the opportunity to understand gaps between representation and experience.

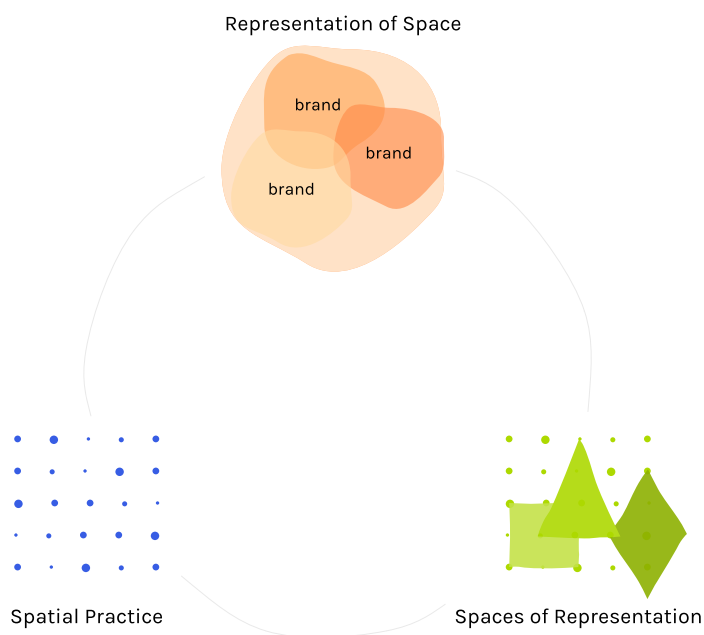


Figure 6. Diagram of the project framework. Image by author.

# 04 Research Questions and Methodology

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## Research Questions

This thesis tries to understand how place brands affect neighborhood change by answering the following research questions:

- How are place brands constructed?
- What are the brands of the place?
- How do the place brands relate to the spatial changes and the lived experiences?

## Methodology

To answer the research questions and understand the relationship between a place brand and the actual neighborhood changes, this thesis uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative data.

For the first two questions, I examine qualitative data to determine who is creating brands, how the brands are constructed, and what the brands represent. I analyze articles from publications, crowdsourced content such as social media posts, planning documents, and descriptions of the place brand from interviews to understand the diverse entry points to crafting the place brands as well as the qualities of Seongsu's brands.

To evaluate the spatial changes and the lived experiences, I use quantitative data and results from 10 semi-structured interviews. For quantitative data analysis, I use business permit data and



industry data as a proxy to measure social change culturally and geographically. I also conduct a design analysis to understand how the built environment is changing and what the changes can tell us about people’s interactions with the produced space. I interviewed a diverse array of people: visitors, residents, employees, small business owners, and a District planner for Seongdong-gu.

# 05 Context

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## History of Seongsu-dong

Seoul comprises 25 Gu (District), each with a District Mayor and a local government. Each Gu is further divided into Dong (Neighborhood) for administrative purposes. In this study, I focus on 4 administrative Dong, Seongsu 1 Ga 1,2 Dong and Seongsu 2 Ga 1, 3 Dong, which are collectively referred to as “Seongsu-dong” or “Seongsu” throughout the paper. This neighborhood is part of Seongdong-Gu and spans approximately 5km<sup>2</sup> just north of the Han River, directly across the bridge from one of Seoul’s most expensive neighborhoods, Apgujeong-dong. (See Fig. 7)

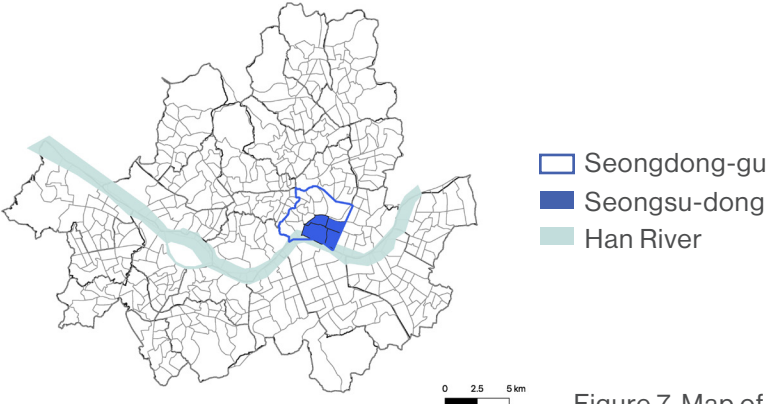


Figure 7. Map of Seoul. Map by author.

“Seongsu,” meaning holy water, was designated as a semi-industrial zone in 1964 and is one of the few areas remaining in Seoul with industrial zoning. Since the 1960’s, starting with the Monami pen factory moving to Seongsu in 1963, the area has become famous for industrial production with shoe making factories, leather workshops, auto body shops, and printing factories. (Seoul History Archive, n.d.) By the 1980’s, Seongsu was known for labor in sewing, and became the center for the shoe industry with 44.4% of Korea’s shoemaking industry concentrated in Seongdong-gu by the mid-2000’s. In 2013, it was the largest area for shoemaking in Seoul with 6,000 employees in related businesses. (Shim & Koo, 2017) However, with cheap imports, the decline of manufacturing in Seoul, and the rise in rent in Seongsu-dong, many industrial factories are moving out of the neighborhood, risking a disconnection in the reproduction of new labor in the industries. (Shim & Koo, 2017)

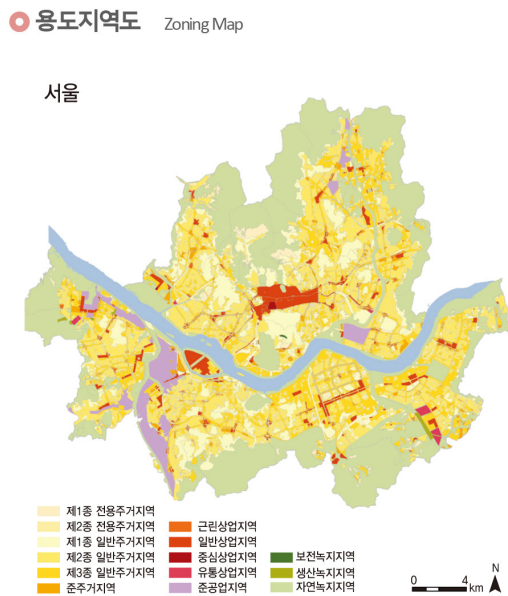


Figure 8. Zoning map of Seoul that shows that Seongsu is one of the few areas zoned for industrial, shown in purple, in a majority residential zone city. Image source: The Seoul Research Data Service, 2015.

Starting in the early 2000’s Seongsu experienced many changes catalyzed by two major City- and District-led plans. A large part of Seongsu’s original identity before the 1990’s was the horse race track in the southwest corner. The track was built in 1954 just after the Korean War and closed in 1986 to move to Gwachun, a city just outside of Seoul, leaving a large plot of land unused for 17 years after the closure. The long-available land opened up debates on what should be developed, placing the trajectory of the neighborhood into

question for many years. In the early 2000's there were discussions about making a cultural tourism town focused on commercial development, but with Mayor Lee Myungbak's Neighborhood Green Space agenda and push from environmental non-profit organizations, the plan for a Central Park-level green space, spanning 48ha, was approved in 2003. (Kim & Son, 2015) Even with unfavorable conditions for housing such as close proximity to industry, Seongsu's housing prices increased significantly compared to other areas in Seoul after Seoul Forest's opening in 2005.(Shin et al., 2006)

In 2004, the area just north of the Forest (83,870m<sup>2</sup>) was zoned for 50% building coverage and 400% FAR with a maximum height of 160m, allowing for high rise development. (Kim & Son, 2015) The City also announced a plan for the Han River Renaissance in 2006 and as a part of the plan in 2009, the residential area by the river increased height allowance to up to 50 floors. And as a result of upzoning, development, and the new green space amenity, housing prices in Seongdong-gu increased 34.9% whereas Seoul average was 16.8%, with a more drastic increase in closer proximity to Seoul Forest in 2006. (Shin et al., 2006) Galleria Foret, which introduced luxury apartments to the area just north of the Seoul Forest, welcomed its first residents in 2011. Marketed by emphasizing famous celebrities that bought units, the building was aimed for the wealthy as apartments were priced higher than the neighborhoods that held the records for highest selling price. (Yoo, 2018) While Galleria Foret's site was originally planned for cultural and commercial uses that could be connected to Forest, its zoning inclusion for apartments allowed for luxury apartments to be built. (Kim & Son, 2015) These planning changes not only altered the skyline and physical makeup of the neighborhood, but also changed the land use and demographics bringing gentrification in the form of neighborhood characteristic change.



Figure 9. A 1974 aerial photo of the horse race track.  
Image source: Seoul History Archive, 1974.



Figure 10. Map of Seongsu-dong. Map by author.

The neighborhood is located in an attractive part of Seoul with convenient connections to the north and south areas of Han River and access to two large universities, making the area attractive for new development. Two major subway lines go through Seongsu: Line 2, one of Seoul's oldest subway lines, runs across the neighborhood via an elevated track and two stations (Ttukseom and Seongsu) within the neighborhoods, connecting Seongsu to the east and west sides. The immediate stop west of Ttukseom Station is Konkuk University Station, a large university famous for their design and art departments. The Bundang line, which is a newer line with the Seoul Forest Station put in in 2011, connects the neighborhood with Apgujeong just south of the river as well as with Bundang, a satellite city just out of Seoul.

In the mid-2000's, as Seongsu-dong saw an increase in development and investment, Knowledge Industry Centers, which are apartment style factories that allow more than 6 manufacturers to rent, started to be built with about 40 by 2016. (Kim, 2016) This brought new types of production in the area especially in the knowledge-based industries and high-tech industries. Seongsu, compared to other areas of Seoul that had strategic development of Centers, saw more individual, unplanned development of Centers throughout the neighborhood. (Lee & Choi, 2019) This meant the Centers, while they are mixed in with existing manufacturing buildings, stand out physically because the Centers are often tall and glassy, differentiated from traditional manufacturing structures which are low-density and warehouses. And starting in 2014, the City and District promoted the handmade shoe industry, creating shopping centers dedicated to Seongsu-made shoes and setting visions in

making the district a competitive shoe making industry within the global landscape. (수제화 허브센터 소개. [Handmade Shoes Hub Center Intro], n.d.) The District designated part of the main thoroughfare as the Handmade Shoe Street and the City created Seongsu Shoes, a program to help promote the shoemaking businesses. The District was leveraging the history of Seongsu's manufacturing industry for tourism and being known for shoe making as other neighborhoods in Seoul are known for their products e.g., Dongdaemun as the clothing district.

## From Redevelopment to Regeneration

In December 2014, an area within Seongsu was designated as one of 9 Urban Regeneration areas. City-wide, Urban Regeneration was being promoted as a departure from previous models of Urban Redevelopment, which involved urban renewal strategies of clearance and reconstruction with “sweeping away technique”. (Na, 2014, p.33) With Urban Regeneration projects, Seoul was aiming for preservation strategies of existing activities and structures. (Na, 2014) Seongsu's project was funded 10,000,000,000 won (around 1 million dollars) for 2015 through 2018. The District, as rationale for Urban Regeneration, pointed out that while industry started declining, the neighborhood started seeing opportunity for change centered around new IT businesses, Seoul Forest, arts and cultural organizations. The District also emphasized the existing rich arts and cultural resources, especially those repurposing existing structures such as cafes and murals, as potential avenues for growth through Urban Regeneration. (City of Seoul, 2017)



Figure 11. The area outlined in red is the Urban Regeneration project area, total of 88ha. Map by author.

## Artisanal Village that Creates Hope Together

### WORK

Job creation through preserving and strengthening the area's industries

### LIVE

Increase in quality of life through improvements in everyday environments

### REST

Value creation of Seongsu's unique traits

### COMMUNITY

Urban regeneration centered around local community

Figure 12. Author's translation of Seongdong-gu's goal for Seongsu's Urban Regeneration project. Image by author.

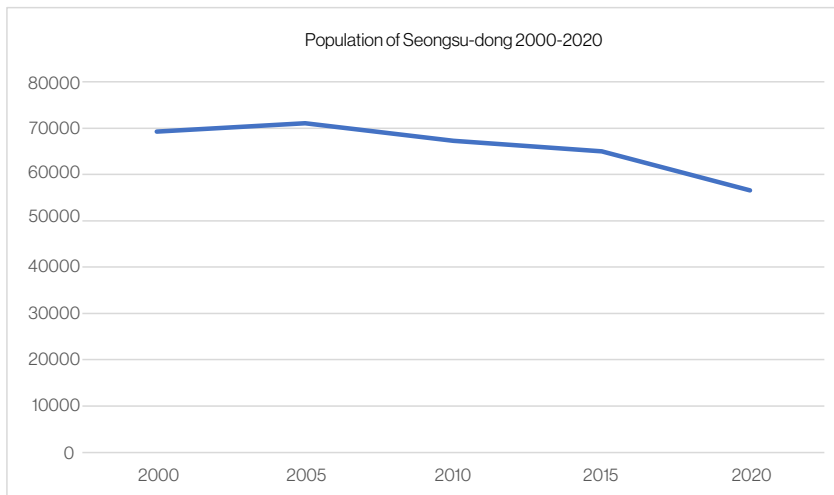


Figure 13. Population in Seongsu has been declining since 2005 with an estimated decrease of 13% in 2020 compared to 2015. The decrease in population was one of the criteria for Urban Regeneration project areas. Data source: Census and Resident Registration Data.

## Gentrification in Seoul

The transition from Urban Redevelopment to Urban Regeneration was met with hesitation from the public because of the existing connotations of gentrification and displacement linked with Urban Redevelopment. (A. Song, personal communication, May 16, 2021) The word “gentrification”<sup>1</sup> began to appear in Korean

<sup>1</sup>The word is not translated into Korean, but rather used as a loan word, which phoneticizes the English letters into Korean Hangeul.

media around 2010 as a differentiated word from “forced eviction” of residents that resulted from the entrepreneurial government demolishing run down places in redevelopment, reconstruction, and new town projects. (Cho & Chi, 2020) State and private capital had mainly been focused on building apartments in Seoul during the “developmental state” but with a structural shift to commercial investment concentration, “gentrification has largely become associated with tenant shopkeepers’ dispossession and displacement since the term gained traction around 2015.” (Lee, 2019, 3) Yewon Andrea Lee in *Reframing Gentrification: How Tenant Shopkeepers’ Activism in Seoul Radically Reframed Gentrification* uses a cultural practice called “right money”<sup>2</sup> to present the changing dynamics that places tenant shopkeepers as victims of gentrification. Right money “captures the intangible value added by a tenant shopkeeper to the commercial real estate,” but with large, private investments flowing

8 alleys with gentrification in Seoul

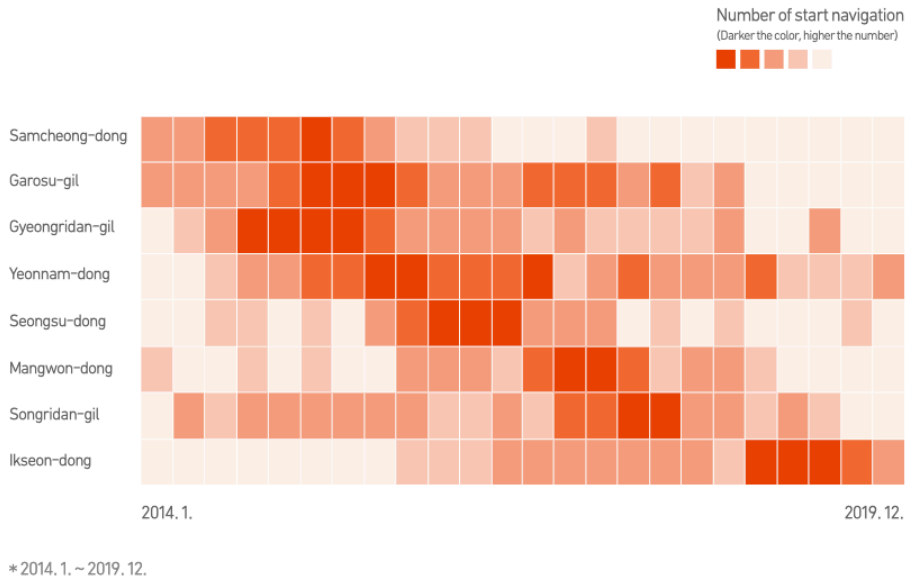


Figure 14. Data analysis from T Map shows the changes in commercial alley foot traffic density, demonstrating the rapid turnover in popularity. Each row represents alley districts in Seoul and the X axis is the time period between January 2014 and December 2019. The color gradient represents the number of navigation started in the alley districts. The blue outline shows Seongsu and how the number of navigation times are high only for a short period of time. Image source: T Map, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “Right money refers to a large one-time payment made by an incoming tenant to an outgoing tenant when the lease on commercial property changes hands... if the incumbent tenant shopkeeper successfully increased the desirability of the place of business—increasing foot traffic in the area or putting the location on the cognitive map of the wider public—the next incoming tenant is likely to be willing to pay a higher amount of right-money.” (Lee, 2019, 6)

in, landlords have been terminating leases before the new tenant signs a lease, eliminating the right money process. (Lee, 2019, 6) This creates a gentrification phenomenon where residents or pioneer shopkeepers are displaced and replaced by “franchised shops armed with big capital because of the extreme commercialisation and rising rent.” (Lee & Han, 2020) This type of gentrification is connected to the cultural displacement of authentic communities that helped revitalize disinvested areas: an analysis of GPS data by T Map defines the origin of gentrification as artists and small businesses entering underdeveloped urban centers that have cheap rent and creating a unique, cultural street. Eventually, large amounts of capital enter the area and displace the original community that initiated transformation, decreasing the quality of culture in the area. (*T map Trend Map 2020*, 2020) This phenomenon in Korea is often discussed in relation to the fast turnovers in popular alley districts as they are popularized as local, authentic culture, then overly commercialized. (Fig. 14) Citing a market analysis by Seoul City, the T map study says that over half of new stores in Seoul do not survive longer than 3 years, demonstrating the rapid changes in the commercial landscape in Seoul. (*T map Trend Map 2020*, 2020)



# 06 Production of Neighborhood Change

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## How Did Seongsu's Image Become "Korea's Brooklyn"?

With Seoul Forest, luxury development, City investment, and new labor forces, Seongsu has been experiencing diverse change since the 2000's, departing from just a shoe making district. In a 2016 study by Kim Sanghyeon and Yi Han-na, in which they conducted text analysis of Naver news articles that had "Seongsu-dong" in the title, topics about Seongsu started shifting from residential redevelopment to commercial real estate investment in 2010. By 2015, topics focused on outsiders coming into the neighborhood for commercial activities, solidifying the neighborhood's shift to commercialization. (Kim & Yi, 2016) Along with the increase in commercial activities, in the past 7 years, Seongsu-dong has become a hip, cultural destination, shifting its image from a lagging industrial town to a place where Millennials who are sensitive to trends visit in search of "hip" things. (Park, 2021) Introductions of Seongsu in the media often include the label "Korea's Brooklyn" further qualifying with terms such as "hip," "hot place," or "cool." While the exact origin of the label is unclear, journalists, users on social media platforms, Seongdong-gu, and developers use the "Brooklyn" brand to communicate their specific image of the neighborhood. Large brands that come into the neighborhood also use the Brooklyn label such as Blue Bottle, a global coffee shop brand described their first store in Korea as being in a neighborhood as a place where "cafes and galleries are springing up to serve the up-and-coming area referred to by some as the Brooklyn of Seoul." (*Seongsu Cafe | Seoul Blue Bottle*, n.d.)

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<sup>3</sup>Naver is Korea's dominant search engine portal.

Seongdong-gu and the District Mayor use “Brooklyn” in various ways as well, including in the District Mayor’s re-election campaigns. In an interview with City Planner A, she noted that the District Mayor has been claiming the term “Korea’s Brooklyn” since 2014 and was aiming to turn Seongsu into Brooklyn. And she believes the term, as used by the District Mayor, has been fully established in 2021 in the sense that diverse industries and arts and culture coexist and that trendy contents are first brought into Seongsu before other neighborhoods. In a 2019 interview, the District Mayor Chung stated that through Urban Regeneration efforts, Seongsu was able to become Korea’s Brooklyn with exhibitions in empty factories, higher housing prices, but with no gentrification effects. (Kim, 2019)

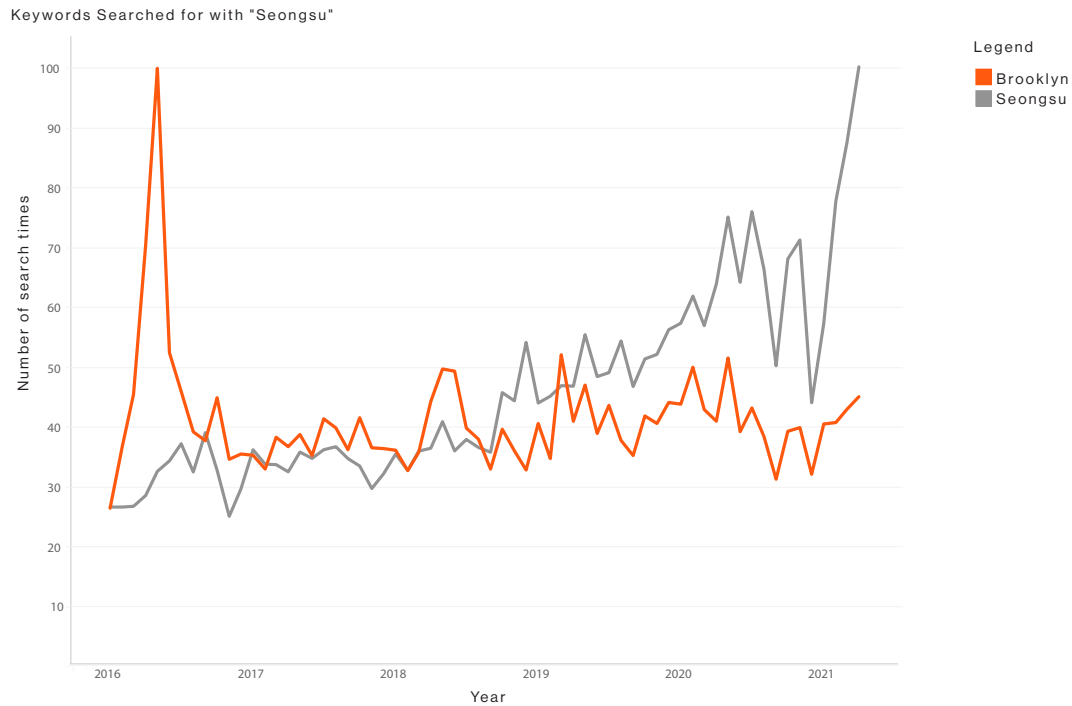


Figure 15. Naver search results that had the keywords “Seongsu” and “Brooklyn” together reached its peak in 2016 while searches with just the word “Seongsu” occurred the least during that period.<sup>4</sup> Overall interest in Seongsu increased over the last 5 years while the association with Brooklyn was strongest in the beginning stages of neighborhood transformation as 2016 coincided with early years of Urban Regeneration and the formation of adaptive reuse commercial businesses. Data source: Naver Data Lab; Graph by author.

<sup>4</sup> The graph shows a relative monthly change of keywords searched between January 2016 and April 2021.

The District's use of "Brooklyn" can be interpreted as a part of Lefebvre's definition of representation of space as the place branding comes from a top-down process led by a position of authority. It is an example of a strategic place branding process that co-opts a crowdsourced place brand to communicate a certain vision and representation of the place. With no one definition of what Brooklyn means in Seongsu, the narrative told through Brooklyn varies depending on who uses the label and in what context.

Using the Brooklyn label is a cultural phenomenon seen in other cities in the world as well. Brooklyn has become a brand that is exported to other cultures as a representation of authenticity, democratization of business, and renaissance. (Ellin, 2014) And "Brooklynization" as a popular culture term, is a form of creating placelessness through the widespread, global use of the Brooklyn "brand" and replicated sense of place. (Lindberg, 2015)

## **What Does Brooklyn Stand for in Seongsu?**

This section is divided into 3 parts where each analyzes ways "Brooklyn" is used as a place brand for Seongsu. The first part shows how the cultural and commercial redevelopment through adaptive reuse led to the Brooklyn brand and mass media helped promote the brand. Brooklyn, depicted in curated guides and social media, stands for the juxtaposition of old, industrial heritage and new, cultural activities. The District participates in the establishment of the Brooklyn brand and reinforces this narrative through the Red Brick Village program and tourism marketing material. The second use of Brooklyn is to communicate a desire to remain at a certain stage in neighborhood change. The District proactively addressed concerns of gentrification happening similar to Brooklyn by advocating for the pioneers of cultural redevelopment. Through the Anti-gentrification Ordinance, the District is an active player in reinforcing a certain image of Brooklyn. The third part shows how the District's use of the Brooklyn brand is evolving to help describe a new vision for the neighborhood as an entertainment and tech hub.

# Part 1. Juxtaposition of Transition

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“Take one part post-industrial grit, one part hipster chic, mix together well and what you’ve got is Seongsu-dong.”

– Koehler, 2015

## Brooklyn as a Shorthand for Old and New

The origin story of the shift from an industrial production district to a destination for commercial consumption is often attributed to Daelim Changgo (Daelim Warehouse), which opened in 2010. A rice mill turned warehouse turned gallery and cafe, Daelim Changgo is a pioneer of post-industrial adaptive reuse in the area. The building maintains the original signage and the red brick structure. Contrary to the industrial exterior, inside is a massive, crowded cafe with artwork displayed in its own exhibition corners as well as on all walls and from the ceiling. In articles, curated guides, and social media posts, the image of Daelim Changgo is often used to show how old (the exterior and structure) and new (programming, people, and activity) coexist in Seongsu. Juxtaposition of unexpected elements is a common characteristic talked about in what makes Seongsu’s experience unique and the remnants of manufacturing are what makes Seongsu Brooklyn. Results from an Instagram hashtag search “#한국의브루클린” (Korea’s Brooklyn) show images of the combination

of art and industry, and industry and greenery to represent the unexpected juxtaposition that is unique to Seongsu. These images in association with “Brooklyn” reinforce the Brooklyn brand as representing the transitional, but preserved point in the neighborhood.

#Korea'sBrooklyn  
2016



2017

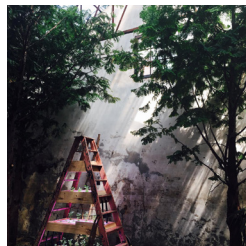


Figure 16. Images taken from #Korea'sBrooklyn on Instagram. Image source: Instagram hashtag search.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Images are selected from a hashtag search on Instagram for #한국의브루클린, which is translated as Korea's Brooklyn.

One of the qualities of neighborhood change that are explained through the Brooklyn label is the unassuming nature of the new establishments hidden within the original fabric and the experience of discovery that accompanies it. A TimeOut article titled Eclectic, industrial Seongsu says “If you carefully explore the area between Seongsu Station and Ttukseom Station, you might discover your new favorite hang out spot when you least expect to.” (Kim, 2016) *Walking Seoul’s Brooklyn*, an article from the lifestyle section of Joongang Ilbo (Joongang Daily) describes the experience of walking in Seongsu as going on a trip in their own city, being able to discover the new stories in an old industrial space. (Park, 2015) Images and descriptions of Seongsu in this light tell the story of an area that was neglected from the public but has rediscovered its value in pleasantly surprising ways. This narrative fits in with the larger Urban Regeneration trend that started in 2015 and the popularization of small alleys as unique urban experiences such as the ones Seongsu is described with in Fig. 16. In fact, Seongsu was also referred to as the second Hongdae, which is an area that was popularized by young artists through counter cultural spaces but now a highly commercialized area with mainstream brands. It is also compared with Moonrae-dong, an area that also experienced adaptive reuse of industrial spaces for arts and cultural ones.



Figure 17. OrEr repurposed a low density mixed-use building (commercial, industrial, and residential) to create a multi-floor cultural space that hosts exhibitions and seminars and a cafe on the first floor. This pictorial layout that shows an old-timer hair salon, still operating, next to the new space is a popular image on social media. ([Seoul Hiptown Tour -Seongsu-dong edition-], 2019) Image source: author, 2020.

*I Know Here*, a publication that introduces the ins and outs of neighborhood experiences, say these keywords describe Seongsu: red brick buildings, industrial district, shoemakers, and most importantly, “space regeneration.” ([Seongsu-dong shops and space regeneration—I Know Here curation], n.d.) Other spaces that are featured in the same post as well as other articles about the genesis of neighborhood change are Zagmachi, OrEr, Onion, Veranda Industrial, Amazing Brewing Company, and SuPy (Successful Pyrates), which are located near Daelim Changgo. These spaces repurpose industrial or old mixed-use buildings, leaving the outer structure as is but creating a new type of space inside. Curated guides like *I Know Here* present these adaptive reuse spaces as the pioneers that follow Daelim Changgo — the first stage of neighborhood change similar to how the artist communities identified by Lloyd, Campanella, and Zukin started businesses that signaled transformations. These spaces established and came to represent the aesthetics and Brooklyn sense of place in Seongsu-dong.



Figure 18. An article titled “Seongsu-dong Style” was accompanied by this image of an art gallery in an old metalworking shop.

Image source: Koehler, 2015

- 01 Existing structure
- 02 New element
- 03 Rusty windowpanes
- 04 Evidence of time



city\_cut\_ 성수동

city\_cut\_ #성수동 과 #브루클린 의 상관관계

01 자유분방하지만 어쩐지 오묘한 질서가 느껴지고, 러프한 분위기가 주를 이루지만 들여다보면 디테일이 있는 성수동만의 분위기. 그런데 이 동네 무드, 뉴욕의 브루클린과 비슷하다고 생각하는 건 저 뿐만이 아닌 것 같습니다.

02 그도 그럴 것이, 사실 성수와 브루클린은 닮은 구석이 많습니다.

- 지하철 2호선이 성수 부근을 지날 때 지상을 지나는 것처럼, 브루클린 또한 지상열차가 지나가는 점
- 길거리 옆 자리하고 있는 공장들, 인더스트리얼한 분위기
- 하지만 그 사이사이 세련된 카페와 힙한 문화 공간
- 낮엔 직장인이, 밤엔 문화인이 모여들어 24시가 느껴지는 새도가

Figure 19. An Instagram post explaining the relationship between Seongsu-dong and Brooklyn. Image source: City\_cut\_, 2021

- 01 “Free souled but weirdly organized”
- 02 “Rough but looked at closely, detailed”

In summary, Seongsu’s brand that is communicated through “Brooklyn,” stands for unexpected discovery in which people find diverse activities coexisting with each other. The brand was first associated with the sporadic adaptive reuse of industrial buildings for commercial and cultural use. And now, the brand is used as a shorthand for the coexistence of old and new through images of preservation of exterior structures and repurposing interior spaces for creative activities. Overall, the narrative that is told through the Brooklyn brand by popular media is how the neighborhood is overcoming neglect and revitalizing with cultural development while preserving the image of its manufacturing past.

## Red Brick as a Manifestation of the Old and New

The District also subscribes to and endorses the version of Brooklyn brand that symbolizes coexistence of old and new. Fig. 20 shows a tourism guide on Seongdong-gu’s website that introduces a tour course where people can experience old and new together. However,



the District-recommended spots do not include the adaptive reuse cafes and art galleries that popular media associate with Brooklyn; it goes through an alley with a collection of long-standing Korean barbeque restaurants, a City-funded shopping center made of used intermodal containers, and Seoul Forest. Nevertheless, the District also emphasizes the juxtaposition of old and new, further identifying it as the harmony of the Seoul Forest and red brick buildings.



Figure 20. The District's guide to "Seongsu Brooklyn" describes an urban center where history and trends coexist in Seongsu's village. Image source: Seongdong-gu

The District's intentional use of red brick in reference to Brooklyn not only nods to the industrial past in that warehouses and factories were made of red brick, but also expands the Brooklyn brand to low-density residential adaptive reuse. Red brick as a symbol of preservation enabled the Brooklyn brand to spread out geographically throughout the neighborhood, encompassing different types of adaptive reuse. While the aforementioned, pioneering cultural spaces were in the industrial part of the neighborhood (later to become adjacent to the City-designated Seongsu Cafe Street), the establishments that repurpose residential buildings for commercial uses are mainly clustered near Seoul Forest (now labeled as the Red Brick Village). The Red Brick Village businesses started appearing in 2015 as well. These spaces are smaller in scale due to the nature of low density housing with narrower streets. And because of its proximity to Seoul Forest, the perception of the cafes in that area is a slower and more intimate experience. Cafe Owner C, whose cafe is right next to the Forest, used keywords such as "relax" and "chill" to describe the atmosphere. Media portrayal also reflects the difference from the industrial area: *Walking Seoul's Brooklyn* makes a visit to the then nascent area as well, describing the area as "charming alleys," contrasted from the industrial area. (Park, 2015)



Figure 21. Seongsu has two distinct commercial districts that were both designated by the City and District and use adaptive reuse tactics for commercial development. Map by author.

The use and preservation of red brick of residential buildings has been formally supported and driven by the District through the 2019 designation of the Red Brick Village and a program providing subsidy in construction fees of new construction or renovations using red brick. The goal of the program is to preserve red brick buildings that were a trend in 1970's and 1980's residential construction. (SEONGSUDONG, 2019) City Planner A of the Seongdong District Office expressed that the Red Brick Program is an important policy in preserving Seongsu's historical identity and a great demonstration of the District's goal to be an inclusive place. The District also won the award for Best Landscape Administration given out by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport in 2019 for successfully leveraging red brick buildings' symbol of low density urban housing as the neighborhood's brand. (Shin, 2019) From a branding perspective, by advocating for a specific urban design style, the District is choosing the image of red brick as a priority for the neighborhood's brand. This way, the District is not only participating in the conversations of the Brooklyn brand but actively reinforcing the brand through the preservation of neighborhood building heritage. And as aforementioned, the District Mayor supports this narrative by using Brooklyn as a goal for the neighborhood through Urban Regeneration efforts and as a symbol for valuing preservation of neighborhood characteristics.



Figure 22. A flyer explaining the Red Brick Village Preservation program.  
 Image source: SEONGSUDONG, 2019

## How is the Brooklyn Brand Manifested in the Built Environment?

Since the Brooklyn brand is not part of an official District slogan or a BID marketing campaign, there are no explicit or formal signs of the image in the neighborhood. Rather, the Brooklyn brand can be found in the built environment and in how the neighborhood businesses have changed.

Cafe Owner C pointed out that because initial establishments in the Red Brick Village opened as a minority in a majority residential area, the early shops and cafes did not have signage to not be a nuisance to the residents. Instead, they installed floor-to-ceiling windows to showcase the interior and used small, minimalistic sandwich boards as signs that were outside only during business hours. Other adaptive reuse commercial spaces use similar design practices that transform the space while maintaining the overall structure. They have minimal signage or continue to use the old signs from the use before them famously done by Daelim Changgo. These designs are expressions of the Brooklyn brand and the juxtaposition of old and new. The new establishments that reinforce the Brooklyn image use “old” elements on the outside such as red brick, raw concrete, and metal doors while using the transparency of glass doors and windows to juxtapose the “new” inside. The preservation of existing exteriors while altering a few features to showcase the

changed interior activity creates an exclusivity through the discovery experience, attracting visitors who enjoy finding local gems and like exploring cities on foot. The opened up nature of the new spaces compared to the privacy of factories and residences signals activities that engage the passer by and activate the pedestrian space, extending the public realm.



Operating manufacturing facility



Operating pasta restaurant

Figure 23. The manufacturing facility has a large sign but closed doors and no windows. The pasta restaurant has glass windows and doors with a small, hard-to-see sign. While the restaurant blurs the boundary between inside and outside by exposing the interior, there is a sense of exclusivity in that it is not obvious what the place's function is just by looking at the exterior. Image source: author, 2020.



Figure 24. Another example of a luxury boutique shop repurposing the first floor of a residential building. The sign is not visible but the full activities inside are visible to passersby. In a way, it turns pedestrian activity into cultural consumption and extends commercial activities to the public realm. Image source: author, 2020.

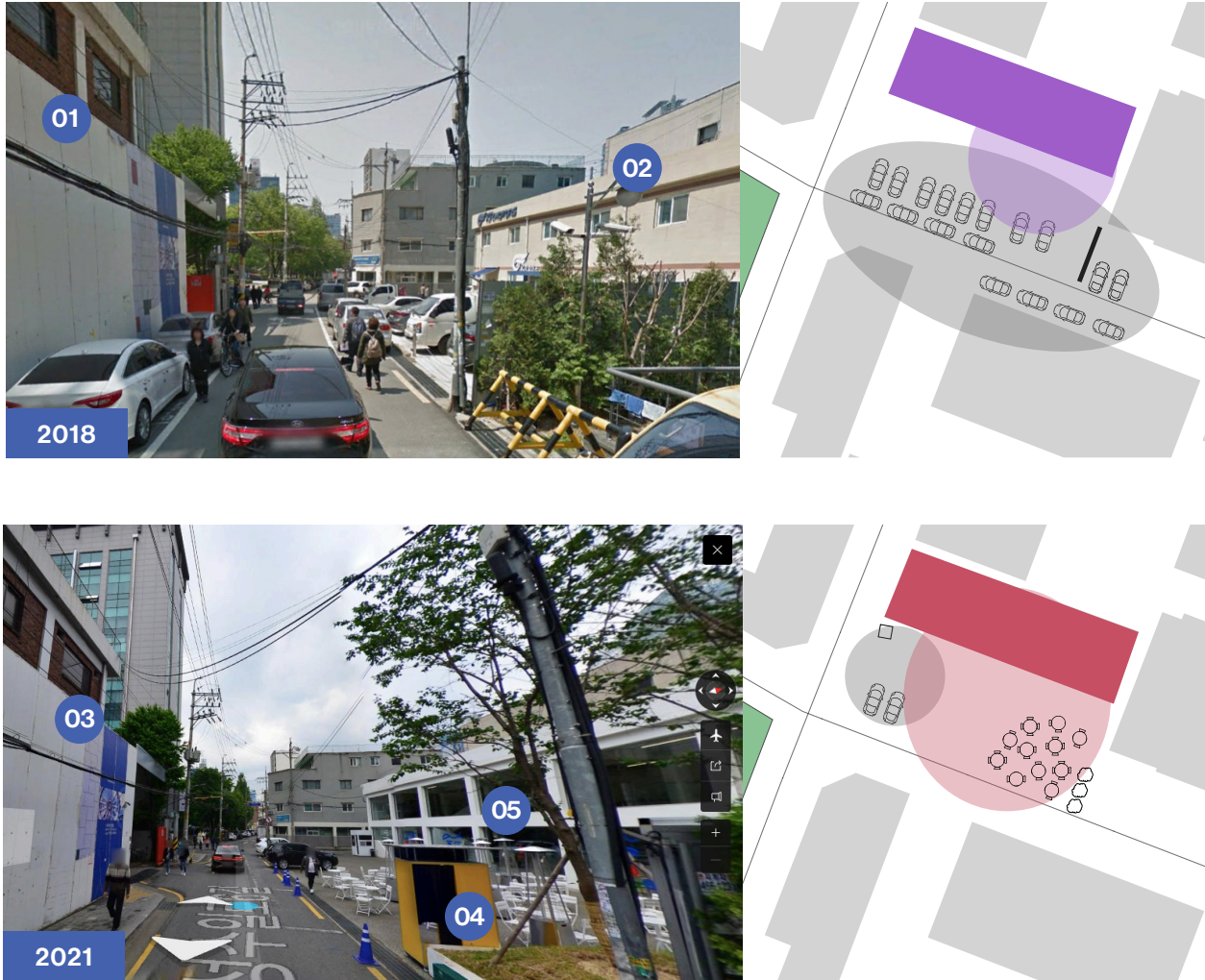


Figure 25. The two diagrams demonstrate how the public realm has changed into a pedestrian-centric space and how the commercial space is blurred with public space. It also shows how the new structure takes cues from the popular adaptive reuse image rather than preserving the previous structure, indicating a new style being created. Image source: Google Earth, 2018; Naver Map, 2021. Diagrams by author.

- 01 03 Sock manufacturer
- 02 Motorcycle manufacturer
- 04 Photobooth
- 05 Cafe and boutique shop

There are also more direct design elements that signal the change in how the built environment is used differently and the juxtaposition of old and new. Similar to the aforementioned examples, these places also activate previously closed or hidden spaces but use explicit signage to convey the new activity and invite the public in.



Figure 26. Explicit signs that lead people to new activities in old places. Image source: author, 2020



Figure 27. An under construction sign that shows with images, the old corner market and how it will be transformed as a new cafe. Image source: Luna, 2021a.

# New Developments Latch onto Existing Neighborhood Characteristics

New commercial developments in Seongsu across the neighborhood, apply design that leverage original physical characteristics, which consequently adds to the Brooklyn-ness as they continue the look of adaptive reuse. Due to the Red Brick Village subsidy program, new developments in the designated area use red brick in new construction and renovations as well as follow other design guidelines such as creating an outdoor space through planters or benches. Most new developments maintain the lot size and a similar height to existing low-density residential buildings. However, the new developments can be differentiated from the old by the color of the bricks and the design. (Fig. 28)



Figure 28. Side by side pictures of two buildings in the Red Brick Village show the difference in brick color and building design. Image source: author, 2020.

Even outside the Red Brick Village, developers intentionally use red brick and industrial elements that contribute to preserving the neighborhood’s identity and reinforcing the visual brand. For example, Seongsu Yeonbang, a shopping center that renovated an old chemical factory, used red brick and black metal as the two key materials. Another new, large cultural and shopping center, Seongsu Naknak takes direct inspiration from the industrial buildings— the developer, SK D&D discussed the choice of red brick and the gable roof as a way to portray the qualities that make Seongsu attractive. They considered boutique design shops situated in old factory structures and narrow alleys as Seongsu’s attraction to Millennials. (Park, 2021) Visually, original neighborhood industrial characteristics

as well as juxtaposition of old and new are being preserved and reinforced. There is a constant back and forth relationship in the Brooklyn brand and the built environment in that the brand influences the decisions in new developments and simultaneously the increase in Brooklyn characteristics in design reinforce the brand in how space is activated differently from previous uses. The feedback loop between design and brand drive neighborhood change towards the direction of the brand and shows how place brands can play an active role in producing space, consequently contributing to the sense of place.



Figure 29. On the left is Seongsu Yeonbang's side facade and logo and on the right is an operating factory right across the street. Seongsu Yeonbang takes design elements from the existing built environment for new land use. Image source: author, 2020.



Figure 30. Promotional material from IKEA announcing a pop up store for the brand's sustainable products. The building is Seongsu NakNak that created the design to leverage the industrial characteristics of the neighborhood. Image source: ikea.com, n.d





Figure 31. In renovating a 1970's building and yard, Architects H2L + Hyun Changyong designed emphasizing the 1970's granite walls and brick to exhibit "the compatibility of the 70s with modern architecture, blending into the quirky urban character of today's Seongsu-dong, with its beautiful harmonization of both old and new." (Hyun, 2019). Image source: Hyun, 2019.

## How and Where is Commercialization Happening?

The Brooklyn brand thus far represents new commercial activities tucked within existing industrial fabric. To understand how the local businesses changed alongside the promotion of the Brooklyn brand, I analyzed business types as a proxy to understand the target audiences the neighborhood serves. According to Shop Owner F, when his cafe/surf shop opened up in 2016, his shop was the only commercial business in the immediate area with mostly factories and distribution centers around his shop. He described the image of Seongsu as a challenger, where people try new things in unexpected spaces. Now, he says there's several cafes and boutique shops nearby, which he generally welcomes as there is more commercial activity in the area but noted the change in the more mainstream culture of new businesses.

Overall, the number of net open businesses in Seongsu-dong has seen a steady increase since the 1980's. Compared to 2010 when Daelim Changgo was the only cafe in the industrial neighborhood (4,843 businesses), there was a 119% increase in the total number of businesses operating in 2020 (10,618 businesses), which demonstrates overall neighborhood growth. While this dataset

does not include auto body shops and other industrial businesses that Seongsu is traditionally known for, it provides a part of the picture of commercialization and serves as a proxy of how users of the neighborhood changed.

Open businesses in Seongsu by category

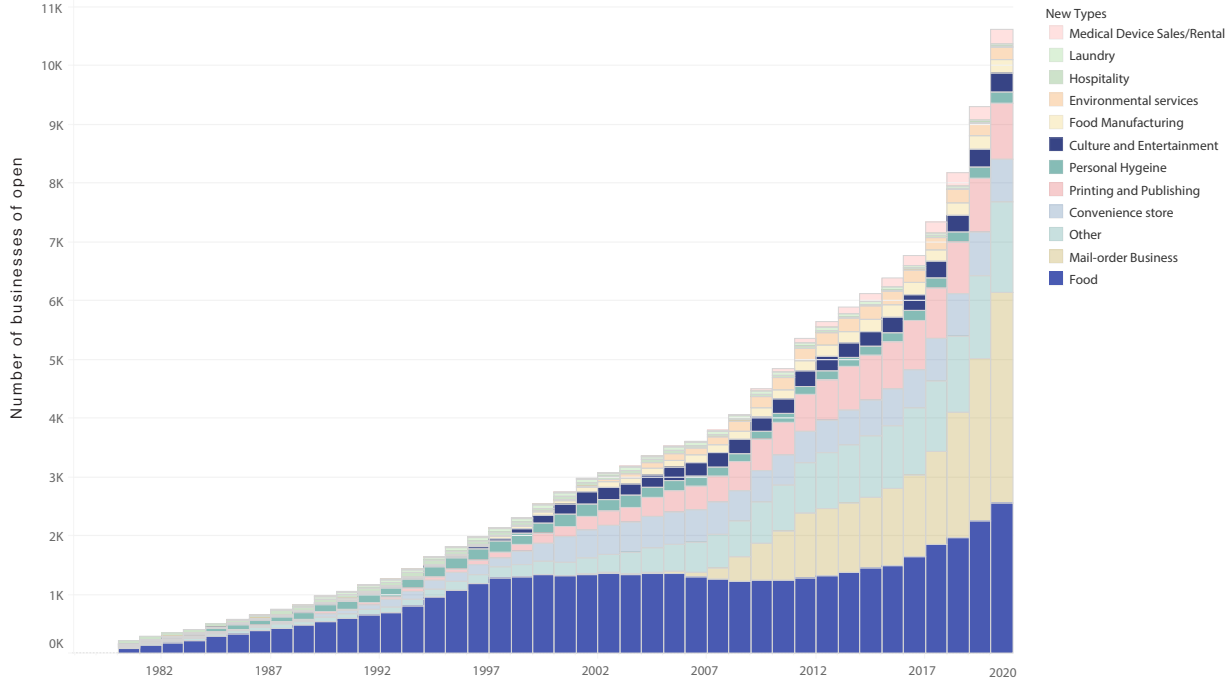


Figure 32. Total net open businesses per year in Seongsu-dong 1980-2020 by category. Data source: Local Data Business Permit. Graph by author.

Fig. 32 highlights the two types of businesses that are linked with Seongsu’s cultural adaptive reuse development: businesses that obtained a permit under the categories “Food” and “Culture and Entertainment.” The “Food” category has been increasing steadily since 2009 and the “Culture and Entertainment” category saw a jump in 2015 and has been increasing since, which supports the brand. Proportionally, the “Food” category has steadily been approximately 24% of the business makeup since 2014, showing that this category is one of the growing sectors in the neighborhood. Moreover, examining the sub-categories within the “Food” category, shows that the types of establishments have changed, altering the experiences and the types of patrons that they attract. “Rest Spaces”<sup>6</sup> that includes cafes was 10% of “Food” businesses in 2010 and increased to 18% in 2020 while

<sup>6</sup> “Rest Spaces” which is translated into places that sell small bites, include places that sell coffee, tea, and ice cream or are fast food restaurants at airports, and cannot serve alcohol.

“General Restaurants”<sup>7</sup> was 75% in 2010 but decreased to 65% in 2020. Increase in cafe-like establishments is evidence of the Brooklyn brand gaining more prominence in the neighborhood as the Brooklyn-ness was established around industrial spaces creatively reused as cafes.

Increase in the number of “Rest Spaces” is considered an indicator of gentrification and neighborhood change towards attracting outsiders; as shown in Fig. 33, Seongsu sees a steep increase in cafes while the number of neighborhood stores that serve the local community decreases simultaneously. (Yoon & Park, 2016) This data is used to demonstrate that the sense of place is affected by change in business types because the new businesses cater to outsiders rather than serving local residents. The shift in business types consequently changes the demographics of people visiting the neighborhood. Looking at users of the Seongsu Cafe Street, in 2019, a monthly average of 51% of cafe patrons in the area were women and 70.6% of total revenue was people 20-40 years old. (Won, 2020) Designer R backed this data with her experiences: when she was a fashion design student at Konkuk University in 2012, she used to go to Seongsu to buy leather pieces. Back then, there was no place to hang out and on the streets were mostly older men working in factories—now, her friends from the University are opening up design stores and cafes in the area specifically targeting women in their 20’s and 30’s and designing the spaces to accommodate their photo needs. Ultimately, all these changes add up to altering the sense of place as the neighborhood changes are moving towards non-local visitors and younger demographics that come to the area for commercial activities, departing from local residents or those who work in the manufacturing industries.

To understand where the increase in commercial activity was happening, I created heatmaps that show the locations and density of businesses. (Fig. 34) Overall, there is a wider distribution of businesses across the neighborhood in 2020 suggesting an overall growth in the neighborhood. A few areas maintain similar density patterns throughout the decade—these areas are highly residential with multiple apartment danji (complex) next to each other. One area near the Han River that has a hotspot is the Ttukdo Sijang (Market), which is a traditional semi-outdoor market serving the local community, which continues to be active today. The areas that saw a

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<sup>7</sup> “General Restaurant” category is defined as sit-down restaurants that cook and serve food and are allowed to serve alcohol.

large expansion in distribution and/or increase in density were mainly the areas around Seongsu Cafe Street and Red Brick Village, both designated and supported by the District government.

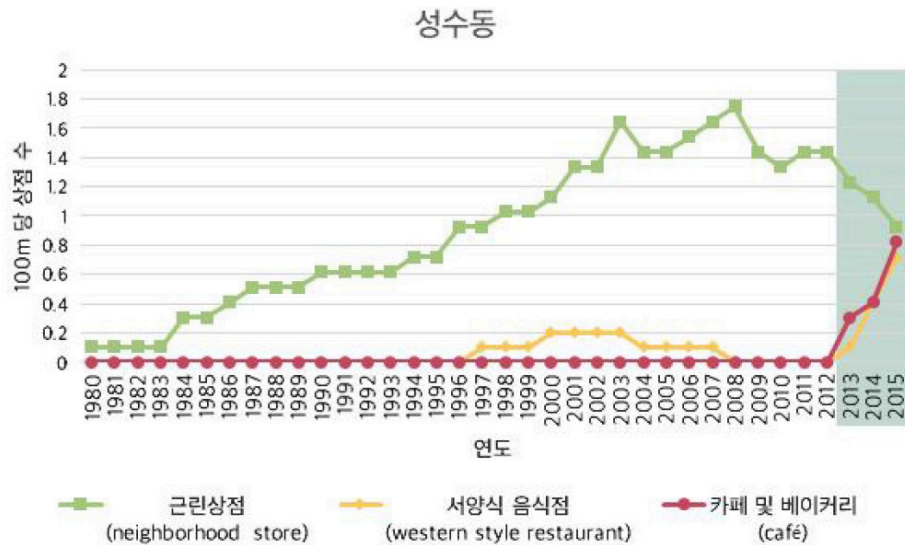


Figure 33. In The Rate of Commercial Gentrification in Seoul focusing on Changing Type of Business, Yoon-chaе Yoon and Jin-A Park show how in Seongsu-dong, there is a trade-off between neighborhood stores, and western style restaurants and cafes. Graph source: Yoon & Park, 2017



Figure 34. Left: Heatmap of “Food” businesses open in Seongsu in 2010. Right: Heatmap of “Food” businesses open in Seongsu in 2020 with highlights of areas with large increases. Maps by author.

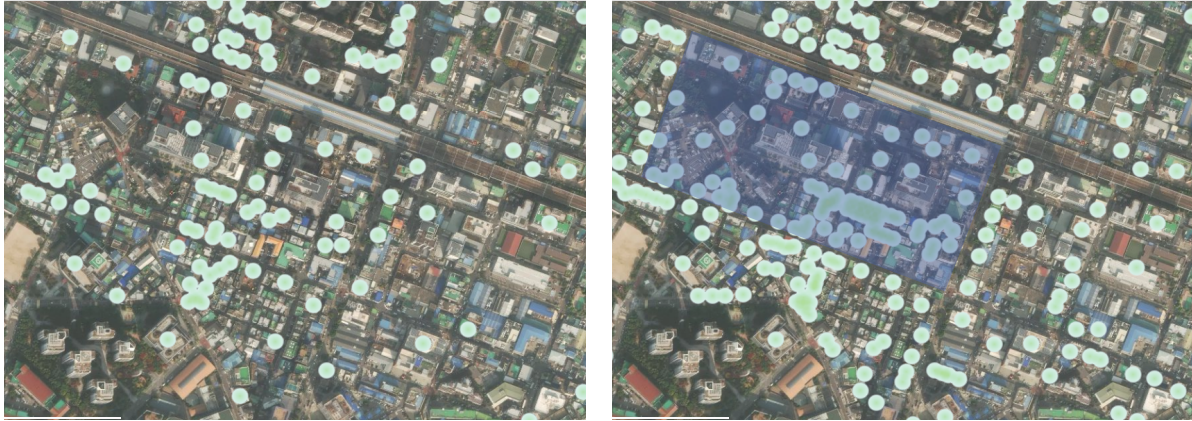


Figure 35. Left: Map of “Food” businesses open in 2010. Right: Map of “Food” businesses open in 2020 with Seongsu Cafe District highlighted. Maps by author.

Zooming into the Cafe Street area— within a 900m radius, there were 62 “Food” businesses in 2010; In 2020, there were 138, which is twice as many in 2010. Compared with Fig. 36, the area is also where many shoe manufacturers have left. According to a study by Kim and Lee, Seongsu-dong as a whole saw a 40% decrease from 2013 to 2019 in shoe manufacturing companies, with one of the reasons for leaving being the increase in rent due to the rise in the number of cafes. (Kim & Lee, 2019) This implies that more recent conversions of industrial spaces in the Cafe Street area could have resulted from or contributed to the displacement of manufacturers rather than utilizing empty manufacturing facilities.



Figure 36. This diagram shows the locations of closed shoe manufacturers as of 2019 in black circles. Image source: Kim & Lee, 2019

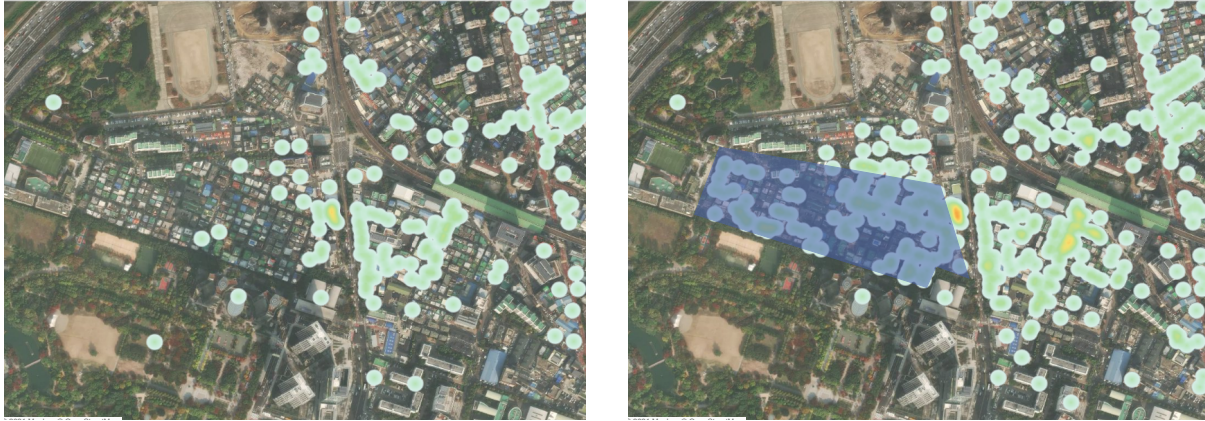


Figure 37. Left: Map of “Food” businesses open in 2010. Right: Map of “Food” businesses open in 2020 with Red Brick Village highlighted. Maps by author.

In the Red Brick Village, there is a more drastic change to commercial uses. Comparing historical aerial photos of the area, the lot sizes and structures mainly stay the same aside from the adjacent luxury high-rise being built in 2011. And because of the Red Brick subsidy program, the commercial buildings are repurposed residential buildings or new buildings that are maintained in scale and are built with red brick. While the physical traits are intact, the land use has gone from mostly residential to mostly commercial, serving as examples of the adaptive reuse narrative related to the Brooklyn brand. In the case of the Red Brick Village, it is displacing existing residents and disrupting the lives of those still living in the residences. Cafe Owner C talked about the ongoing tension between residents and new cafes over parking spaces: “Cafes want the space in front of their shop clear to attract foot traffic, but residents have always used that to park so there’s always an underlying conflict.” She mentioned that the few residents that remain in the area do not use the spaces as their primary residence and for those who do, they tend to be older and have been living there for a long time. She also mentioned the residents file complaints to the District about the construction noise, so much so that a District employee measures the decibel level every week and building owners are fined regularly. All in all, while the repurposed and renovated facades preserve the physical identity, the sense of place throughout the neighborhood is being altered through the prioritization of shift to commercial activities, leaving out original communities such as local residents and manufacturers who are part of the “old” image that is crucial in the juxtaposition. The designation of the commercial districts by the City and District, while not explicitly branding them as “Brooklyn,” also encourages development towards commercial activities that maintain original neighborhood

characteristics. The shift towards commercialization reinforces the Brooklyn brand but at the same time as commercial businesses increase, the other land uses that enabled the juxtaposition of old and new decrease, consequently weakening the original, authentic brand qualities.



Figure 38. Top image shows the original low-density, multi-family housing in 2011 in the Red Brick Village. The bottom left shows the building undergoing construction in 2018 with a sign that says “Commercial building for rent” and the right image shows the renovated building in 2020 which now houses a burger joint and a boutique shop. Image source: Naver Map.

## Strong Sense of Place for Strong Stories

To the people who live, work, and play in Seongsu, Seongsu cannot be labeled as one brand. All interviewees stated that Seongsu has a unique, strong sense of place, something that they emphasize as being difficult to find in other places in Seoul. Some physical qualities of sense of place mentioned were the large scale of lots in industrial areas, proximity to Seoul Forest, and diverse types of cuisines compared to other office areas in Seoul—not too far from the media portrayal of Seongsu. However, one differential and recurring theme was that there is no unified brand for the neighborhood, contrary to the catch-all Brooklyn brand used in the media. Rather, Seongsu is a place where people can tell their unique stories.

For creators of space, Seongsu is a place to be experimental. “Seongsu is full of cafes and shops trying new things—just like us,” Shop Owner F said sheepishly. Resident Y remembered how starting in 2019, famous chefs who had fancy restaurants in Apgujeong would open up second restaurants in Seongsu to try more experimental menus. “They were trying to say, we’re hip too,” she added. “Spaces in Seongsu each have a strong story. The creators know what story they want to tell,” said Gallery Owner P. When asked about the motivations behind her space, she said she created a space that allows Korean artists to define what Korean contemporary art is, without compromising who they are. City Planner A’s description of Seongsu as being a platform for trends to generate and grow aligns with other interviewees’ perspectives.

Gallery Owner P also wanted to have a fast rotation of exhibitions and offer diverse programming so that people would want to come back for new experiences. This was a shared sentiment with other space creators in that they do not want to be an Instagram hot spot where people visit once for pictures. They want their space to be a place people want to return to and engage with. For example, Cafe Owner C referred to Momento Brewers, a coffee shop near her cafe, as a place with a clear story. The founders studied coffee in Melbourne and designed the space to bring the Australian coffee culture to Seoul and to educate people on coffee so they can enjoy coffee at home, an activity still new to many Koreans.

When explicitly asked about the Brooklyn association, interviewees either didn’t agree or at first didn’t understand the reasoning. Designer H admitted he does not know much about Brooklyn, but guessed that the connection is because of the



adaptive reuse of factories into cultural centers. Gallery Owner P was embarrassed when I mentioned Seongsu's association with Brooklyn saying the infrastructure is not at the Brooklyn level. She thinks that Seongsu has clustered destination spaces such as the Cafe Street but not enough places throughout the neighborhood to provide the type of exploratory pedestrian experience Brooklyn offers. She also pointed out scrapped cars on streets multiple times as evidence of how unpleasant walking around in Seongsu is. "It makes you think, do I belong here? Is this restaurant supposed to be here?" she commented. While the creators of space say they do not agree with the label Brooklyn, by creating one-of-a-kind spaces, they are participating in building and reinforcing the Brooklyn brand on the ground. Their spaces contribute to the "authentic" culture and unexpected discoveries the Brooklyn brand represents in Seongsu, acting as the origins of the brand.

## Part 2. On a Tightrope of Gentrification

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Williamsburg on the Hangang

Seongsu-dong's heyday as a center of Korea's footwear industry did not last long...Then came the hipsters. Priced out of or otherwise turned off by saturated neighborhoods such as Hongdae and Sinsa-dong, young artists and designers began flocking to Seongsu-dong in 2011, drawn by the low rents, urban grit, proximity to downtown and access to public transportation. They've helped bring the declining community back to life, so much so that there is now real concern that continued popularity may drive rents up, forcing out artists and shutting down factories.

– Koehler, 2015

## Brooklyn as a Shorthand for Old and New

Going beyond the physical references to the Brooklyn brand, the association is also used to talk about the looming gentrification over the neighborhood. In an editorial piece *Seongsu-dong and Brooklyn: A Tale of Two Cities*, Park ChanHyu writes about the similarities of the two neighborhoods as a resident of Brooklyn and a witness to Brooklyn's rapid gentrification. Park draws parallels between the moving gentrification in Brooklyn from Williamsburg to Bushwick and how quickly trendy neighborhoods change in Seoul. (Park, 2019) Similarly, Kim Jaewon, creator of Zagmachi and OrEr, two adaptive reuse cafes in the Cafe Street, compared Seongsu with East London in that they are both disinvested areas becoming a belated center for consumption. (Yoo, 2019) Gentrification is also introduced with data citing the decrease in population, old building stock (68% of buildings were considered old in 2018), and the rising rent pushing out old-timers in industry. "I hope that Seongsu does not follow Brooklyn's future," wrote journalist Yoon Shinwon expressing disappointment in the loss of Seongsu's character of the harmony of old and new. (Yoon, 2018)

There are also concerns of gentrification in the media with references to other neighborhoods in Seoul. "Seongsufication" (Seongsu + gentrification) has come to mean the departure of industrial spaces and more economically viable businesses such as cafes coming in. (Bae, 2019) In the comments section of a blog post introducing the opening of Seongsu Yeonbang, blog users expressed concern of Seongsu having the fate of other neighborhoods in the city that started out as artist enclaves but now have been taken over by large capital. News articles also portray the rapid gentrification, warning the area of large capital coming their way. In 2017, an article title *Seongsu-dong Cafe Street Rent Increase Rate #1...Fastest Rate of Gentrification* cited data that Seongsu saw a 4.18% increase in rent while the average in Seoul was 0.3%. (Bae, 2017) The opening of Blue Bottle's first Korean shop also fueled concerns about gentrification as a sign that large capital will start flowing in. The image of Seongsu that was created through these discussions was a neighborhood at an inflection point. Through the comparisons with other neighborhoods and the understanding of Brooklyn's gentrification process, the media shows two sides: Seongsu is not yet gentrified with desire to maintain the "original" authentic identity and gentrification has happened already.

## District as Social Preservationists

Seongdong-gu planning documents brought up the topic of gentrification in relation to Urban Regeneration. City Planner A commented, "Urban Regeneration is often thought of as slowly displacing people and reconstructing or redeveloping. Seongsu's Urban Regeneration project has progressed in a different way from the general public idea of those projects." In planning documents and reports, the District tied "gentrification" with "urban regeneration" as having the same etymological origins and emphasized the two terms' intentions of improving the conditions of an area, and qualifying that the definition of "gentrification" originally has a neutral connotation. (City of Seoul, 2019) And as a response to concerns of Seongsu becoming a victim to gentrification, the District quickly acted to put in an "Anti-gentrification Ordinance" in 2015, the first of its kind in the country, to proactively prevent gentrification effects. The District cited the increase in property prices and rent in 2015 and compared with other overly-commercialized areas in Seoul that have experienced rapid gentrification in commercial districts. They identified gentrified or gentrifying areas in Seongsu to designate as Sustainable Development Zones and benchmarked NYC's Community Board model to establish resident based committees that would have the power to limit the entry of businesses that would harm the existing commercial district. (City of Seoul, 2019) This demonstrates the District's commitment to engage local communities and to mitigate gentrification effects in Seongsu. However, the ordinance is limited in that it does not have legal power. There are also criticisms that the ordinance only addresses the already commercialized spaces of the neighborhood and does not provide protection for manufacturing or residential tenants in danger of displacement. (Cho & Chi, 2020) And as for the District subsidized commercial buildings, there is criticism that these buildings are not in areas with heavy foot traffic, making them not attractive for retail businesses. (Cho & Chi, 2020) Details of the ordinance are listed in Table 1.

Seongdong-gu, in planning documents, specifies 'gentrification' as a six-step process: 1) cheap rent 2) inflow of artists and social innovators 3) creation of regional characteristics increases foot traffic 4) large franchise commercial capital penetration 5) rapid rent increase causes displacement of original residents 6) loss of regional characteristics and destruction of local community. (Cho & Chi, 2020) The district takes the overall definition of gentrification from Ruth Glass' 1964 term describing outsiders, primarily middle-

| Name   | Description   |
|--|---|
| N/A  | Creation of district Gentrification department  |
| Sustainable Development Zones                        | Designation of Sustainable Development Zones based on projections of gentrification   |
| Sangsaeng (win-win) Agreement                        | Voluntary “win-win” agreement between tenants and landlords to help protect tenants from rising rent and displacement – if landowner agrees to rent stabilization, they can get building height restrictions waived in new construction |
| N/A  | Neighborhood committees for continuous discussions  |
| Seongdong Ansim Sangga (win-win commercial building) | City subsidized commercial buildings (70% of average neighborhood rent, maximum 5 year contract of stabilized rent)   |
| N/A  | Restriction of franchise businesses in Sustainable Development Zones  |

Table 1. Details of the Anti-gentrification Ordinance.

class and upwards, coming into underdeveloped urban centers and contributing to rising rent, consequently displacing original residents. By using these definitions and through ordinances that protect the initial tenants or innovators such as the restriction of franchise businesses, the District is advocating to preserve the second step in their definition of gentrification: the pioneer stage. And by choosing to protect the practices that established Seongsu’s qualities, the District is acting as social preservationists to preserve the “authentic” culture, which in this case is defined as the act of bringing in arts and culture to a depressed area. In this case, Seongdong-gu is actively preserving the “neo-bohemia” stage of gentrification and therefore promoting commercial and cultural places such as small-scale, independent cafes and boutique shops that the Brooklyn brand as described in Part 1 represents.

Moreover, through anti-gentrification mechanisms and media portrayals, Seongdong-gu is characterized as “Gentri-fighter” and “Gentri-doctor,” praised for the innovative ordinance as a benchmark for other districts. (Cho & Chi, 2020) Data from 2017 show that rent increase went from 17.6% to 3.7% and 62% of landlords agreed to

the Win-win agreement within the Sustainable Development Zones. (Kim, 2017) City Planner A reflected that Seongsu was able to keep its historical identity and able to continue to develop as a diverse place with fashion, food and beverage, craft workshops, gallery spaces, etc. because of District Mayor Chung's strong will. She credits efforts to preserve neighborhood identity to the District's wider strategy of becoming an inclusive city which has been used in reference to Brooklyn. She emphasized that even if the project funding from the government ended, there are continued efforts that carry out Urban Regeneration goals, which is another evidence of the District's success. These narratives help to establish a brand of Seongsu as an advocate for an inclusive community, fighting against gentrification, and authentic culture. While not always explicitly referring to Brooklyn's early stages of artist-led development, by advocating to preserve a certain stage in neighborhood change, the District is subscribing to the pre-gentrification Brooklyn brand and consequently prioritizes specific communities, in this case small business owners.

## **How Do People in Seongsu Interpret Anti-gentrification?**

"I think generally, the media portrays Seongsu accurately. But, I cannot agree with articles that say gentrification is under control," says Shop Owner F. He added that there are already so many shops that have had to close because of rising rent. Architect R has recently seen a lot of changes in the northern part of Seongsu, which he considers not a part of the hip area that the media refers to. There is a new vegan cafe and a shop with \$300 shirts, next to old residences and industrial spaces. He used these spaces as examples of how the hip parts of the neighborhood are permeating into other parts. He also questioned the restaurants that are priced for a nice dinner out but are in an area that is mostly empty at night because it is mostly an active industrial area, only operating during the day.

There is an ecosystem of gentrification that is being sensed within Seongsu-dong. Startup Employee J remembered how when he got off the Seoul Forest Station in 2020, he noticed the luxury high rises next to "dilapidated" buildings. "It was a weird feeling. I would always think that it's a matter of time that these old buildings will be torn down or repurposed. Then, where will these people go?" Resident Y mentioned that she knows of artists who had to move from Gangnam due to rising rent and also pointed out some areas that are slated for redevelopment in the next 5 years as being left disinvested

while other areas are seeing rapid development. These areas are the low-density residential areas by the Han River. She mentioned that there are stores that look like they're from the 1980's and have bad street quality compared to the Red Brick Village, "kind of how Bushwick was compared to Williamsburg."



**01** “Saechon Maeul” (New Town Village)

Figure 39. A hand-drawn map that is distributed for free at a local bookstore. Image source: Not Just Books, 2021.

Businesses that started out in the Red Brick Village had to move to other cheaper areas of Seongsu. Shown in Fig.39, a local bookstore, which was one of the first commercial businesses in the Red Brick Village had to move to another formerly residential area where now there are wine bars and cafes around the bookstore and called New Town Village. And in addition to rising rent, it has become inconvenient to conduct business for manufacturers because of the increased number of pedestrians, pushing them out to more outskirts of the neighborhood. (Lee & Lee, 2019) There are also empty storefronts adding to the changes in the neighborhood as landlords are raising rent, which affect sense of place by decreasing street activity. (Lee & Lee, 2019) Because of the rapid changes, Seongsu’s original strong sense of place popularized through the Brooklyn brand is in danger of extinction. The development in Seongsu still maintains the cultural and commercial categories of the pioneer stage but the nature of new businesses are different from the original ones. And as businesses are pushed out to move to other areas of the neighborhood, sense of place is being altered as gentrification makes its way around the neighborhood. Contrary to the District-driven brand of preserving early stages of a Brooklyn type of development,

the neighborhood has already experienced gentrification and is actively going through gentrification and displacement. Even with the Anti-gentrification Ordinance, which supports a certain brand and stage of neighborhood culture, the lack of formal policies or systems that protect those from displacement result in the lived experiences contradicting the promoted brand.



Figure 40. A brick wall with letters that say “Demolish” across the street from a high-rise mixed-use building, which provides a different landscape from the preservation happening in other parts of Seongsu. Image source: author, 2020.

## How are Spaces Changing?

Cafe Owner C agreed with gentrification already having made progress, saying that the spaces around her are changing every day. People who wanted to create spaces to tell their own stories are leaving and now there are new shops opening up constantly with more mainstream content compared to the strong individualities described in Part 1. “The older spaces were operated by the owners and we all knew each other, but now, I don’t know any of the new owners because they’re here to make money not to create space. I think this is gentrification?” Designer R complained about how overly mainstream Seongsu has gotten, adding as a matter of fact that the popularity will move to another neighborhood soon. “It is so crowded now. Cafes are asking for an entrance fee on the weekends. So naturally there are new cafes opening every week but they don’t have the same level of curation as the original spaces did. And soon, people will get bored and move on,” she predicted. Gallery Owner P commented on the number of branded pop-up shops in Seongsu leveraging the amount

of foot traffic of young people in the neighborhood. She is critical of this type of practice because it is not a sustainable neighborhood development strategy. “These pop-up shops will move to another neighborhood when trends move on.” She also thinks the people who live in luxury housing in Seongsu are the ones who want the Brooklyn atmosphere and more spaces catering to that audience. I also noticed that cultural spaces were being used for luxury car brands’ new launch and a new museum’s inaugural exhibition was of Hermes bags, a luxury brand. These new spaces are in service of a different demographic than the ones that made the neighborhood “cool,” which begs the question: For whom are the new spaces for? The anti-gentrification initiatives aim to preserve neighborhood change at a specific stage but in reality as the culture that has been branded as authentic and cool becomes popular, neighborhood change moves on to a different stage and caters to different audiences. This creates tension between the brand of preserving a certain Brooklyn and the gentrifying reality.

## **Not Starbucks, but Not Authentic Either**

As interviewees have mentioned, the types of spaces are changing to serve more mainstream audiences even if they are not driven by franchise capital. While the franchise ban as part of the Anti-gentrification Ordinance is stopping big brands such as Starbucks from altering the sense of place and propelling gentrification, the ordinance through its support of small businesses, attracts small scale cafes, steering the neighborhood change in a nonetheless commercialized direction. This is shown in the built environment through various ways. While the more original “Brooklyn” places did not have large signage and attempted to keep the industrial and/or residential elements, new establishments are designed to stand out. These spaces also do not curate their spaces based on the neighborhood sense of place but rather try to provide a differentiated experience. For example, Cafeteria Laluna is designed to look as if it is a small tapas restaurant in Spain and stands out among the existing built fabric. (Fig. 42) While it may be that franchise brands are not taking over small businesses, the changes are going towards commercialization geared towards outsiders and for destination experiences, consequently altering the sense of place.





Figure 41. Seoul Angmusae (Parrot) is a new cafe opened in 2021, and popular for Instagram pictures. Image source: Haatz, 2021



Figure 42. A Spanish restaurant near Ttukseom Station that opened in 2020. Image source: author, 2020.

Figure 43. An advertisement mural for a clothing brand, Musinsa, which is across the street from Daelim Changgo, showing the more mainstream use of Seongsu sense of place. Image source: author, 2020.



## Part 3. Brooklyn as the Future

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### Where Innovation Happens

In an interview done in February 2021, District Mayor Chung promised Seongsu will become Korea's Brooklyn as there will be an 800-seat performance center that will open as well as the Seoul Forest Cultural Sports Complex in 2022. In this case, he uses "Brooklyn" to communicate the vision of Seongsu becoming an entertainment and cultural hub, departing from previous associations with Brooklyn. He also cited that Seongdong-gu saw a 7% growth in Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) from 2018 to 2019, showing how his Seongsu-centric strategy of investment in jobs and economy paid off. (Park, 2021) This new image that the District is pushing via Brooklyn is pointing towards the future with less focus on preservation of the industrial heritage but concentrating on the growth of the neighborhood with culture and innovation at the center. It also demonstrates the evolution of how the Brooklyn brand has been co-opted by the District over the years.

In regards to new industries and jobs, Seongsu has been portrayed as an alternative to Gangnam as a new hub for startups and social ventures. The "Tehran Valley" in Gangnam has been known for startups and venture capital but its decrease in momentum has allowed Seongsu to become the next "cradle" as the "Social Venture Valley." (City of Seoul, 2019) Because of the impression that Seongsu is where trends happen first, companies that are sensitive to trends such as fashion and cosmetics are moving into the neighborhood. (Shin, 2021) This image of innovation began when Root Impact, a social venture capital focusing on impact investment started Hey Ground, a coworking space for social entrepreneurs. They cite a

combination of (then) cheap rent, access to public transportation, and proximity to Seoul Forest as a place to refresh as their reason for choosing Seongsu as their first location. Hey Ground markets themselves as a “co-working community for changemakers” and designed diverse common spaces within the building to encourage the engagement among the companies. Another coworking space Cow and Dog, short for “CoWork and DoGood,” opened in 2015 and helped establish the image of social impact and start-up culture in Seongsu. Their large cafe on the first floor is accessible to the public and is used as event space for conferences, talks, and other social events. Startup Employee J mentioned that people at his company liked working in Seongsu because they were the types of people who liked to explore cities and be in-the-know of new restaurants and cafes. Cafe Owner C mentioned she liked being in her location because people who work in the design and entertainment field would come and spend time in her cafe rather than other types of employees who rush to get back to their office with their takeout coffee.

Diverse companies in the cultural and fashion industries are making their move to Seongsu-dong. News articles that report on the moves emphasize how young people prefer to be in Seongsu and where trends first appear. SM Entertainment, one of Korea’s four largest entertainment agencies, is moving from their long-time location in Gangnam to Seongsu, signaling a shift in centers of entertainment. The move of corporate offices of Megabox, Korea’s major movie theater chain, and Clio, a large cosmetic company, into Seongsu are used as indicators of trend-setting organizations gathering in the neighborhood. (Choi, 2021)

Additionally, the District has been pushing the image of Seongdong-gu as the “best city for enterprises” since 2018. (Park, 2018) Citing Seongsu’s 45 Knowledge Industry Centers having more than 3,000 enterprises, Seongdong-gu conceived Seongsu’s image as a place with an abundance of jobs and young energy. They also provided incentives of FAR relaxation, 50% reduction of acquisition taxes, and 37.5% reduction of property taxes to businesses within the Knowledge Industry Centers. The District also strongly supports social ventures, cooperatives, and other social economic activities by forming the Seongdong Regional Cooperation Fund to provide loans to social enterprises and social ventures around the Seoul Forest area with less than 2% APR. (Park, 2018) These policies and narratives highly encourage the agglomeration of social ventures and other IT related companies in Seongsu, which is a different agenda from the anti-gentrification or preservation efforts.

# New Jobs, New People

New jobs introduce new types of people into the neighborhood. The IT industry increased by 54% and the telecommunications industry increased 25% from 2016 to 2019. (Choi, 2021) Employees in the telecommunications industry made up 3% of total employees in Seongsu in 2009 but in 2019 made up 11% of total employees. Similarly, the number of “Mail-order” businesses increased 326% since 2010. These “Mail-order” businesses are located in the Knowledge Industry Centers and range from businesses that sell furniture, food, clothing, etc. through the internet or other media. Examples of the types of “Mail-order” business in Seongsu are Temple, a small athleisure company run by women in their 30’s, Sigonsa, a publishing company that produces magazines and comic books, and Ryake, an entrepreneurial clothing brand. These companies range in size to one-person operations to mid-size companies. And with the increase in entertainment and fashion industries moving their offices to Seongsu, the demography of people coming to Seongsu every day for work has changed and will continue to change towards a younger, more creative population.

Open businesses in Seongsu by category

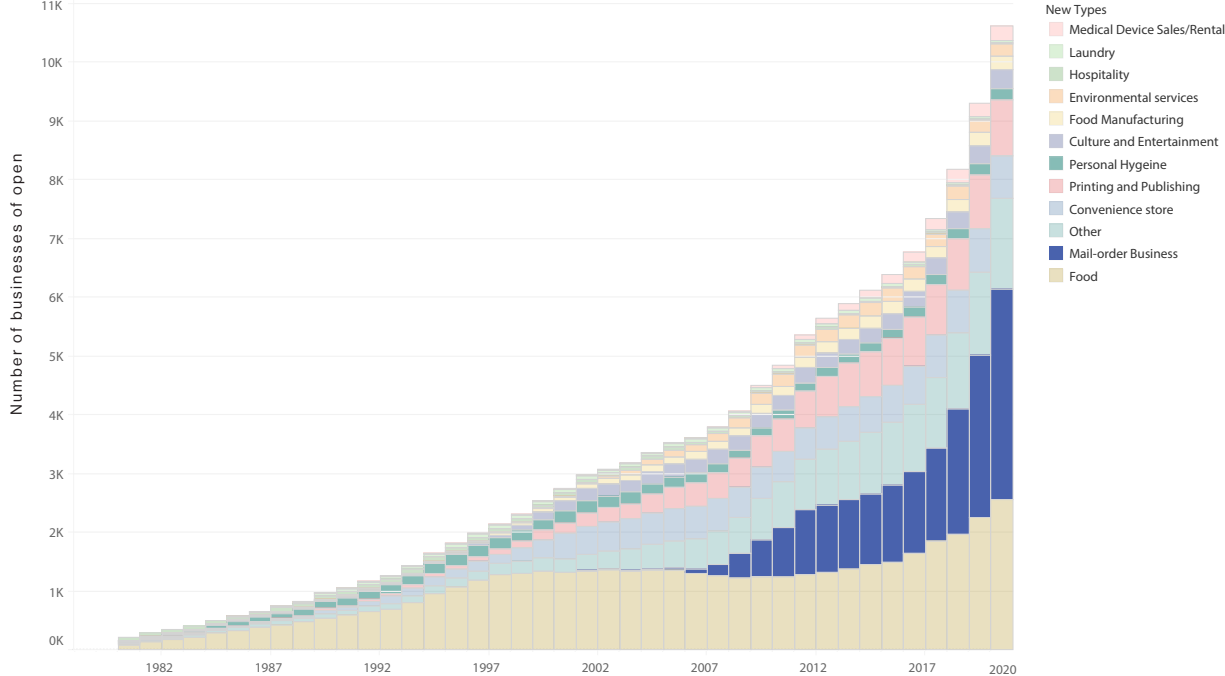


Figure 44. Mail-order Businesses increased drastically from 2006 to 2020. Data Source: Local Data. Graph by author.

These changes are manifested in the built environment in the types of buildings that are built to accommodate these new companies. Knowledge Industry Centers, because they have FAR allowance, are built higher than existing buildings and use glass as the main material rather than brick or concrete. These buildings stand out in the context of old manufacturing structures that are large in floor plate but small in density. Additionally, the buildings that are built for offices of fashion companies or arts organizations stand out through their creative, architectural designs, changing the physical sense of place in the neighborhood.



Figure 45. A Knowledge Industry Center stands out amidst low height industrial buildings. Image source: Luna, 2021b.



Figure 46. Clio's new office building that uses terraces as a design and experiential element. Image source: Namgung, n.d.

# 07 Conclusion

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This thesis, through the analysis of how the Brooklyn label is used in branding Seongsu tried to understand how place brands affect neighborhood change. It delved into the different use cases and how the use cases relate to the spatial changes and the lived experiences. The conclusion sums up takeaways specific to Seongsu and the Brooklyn brand and implications for urban planning.

## Seongsu Takeaways

Overall, the label “Brooklyn” evolves over time in Seongsu, and takes on new meaning as different parties and agendas leverage the label to communicate their goals for Seongsu. It serves as an all-inclusive, fluid brand. In the process of constructing a brand for Seongsu, Brooklyn’s image is selectively imported to help communicate the brand values and vision. Each brand chooses a version of Brooklyn that is desirable: adaptive reuse and hip culture, the pioneering stage of gentrification led by artists and cultural industries, and a hub for innovation. The brands act as reduced representations of Brooklyn, which in reality spans various different neighborhoods each with unique characteristics and complex histories. As a result, Seongsu’s brands told through fragmented representations of Brooklyn have limitations in capturing the contested and holistic realities. Rather, place branding through Brooklyn is a tool to communicate the goals of neighborhood change, which in turn sends out messages about the types of development that is prioritized. And as the District adopts the label, they use it in an opportunistic way to communicate a certain vision at different points in time.

Second, the place brand of Brooklyn affects neighborhood change by creating a feedback loop relationship between brand and built environment. The Brooklyn brand in Seongsu came to represent the preservation of old designs with new programming and the juxtaposition of old and new. The back and forth reinforcement of brand and spatial change resulted in the prioritization of commercial activities for outsiders as the brand became an attraction and destination. This results in displacement of existing communities not only through land use change, but also through cultural change as spaces are designed for outside users.

Finally, in analyzing the different ways “Brooklyn” is used as a descriptor for Seongsu, I found that the District’s role in branding Seongsu becomes more pronounced throughout the stages of neighborhood change. While Brooklyn-ness was promoted through mass media and crowdsourced media as a reflection of organic neighborhood change, the District inserted themselves into the conversation and took “Brooklyn” on to promote a certain aesthetic and development trajectory. The varied involvement of the District in pushing Seongsu’s brand as Brooklyn, shows how district-driven brands need the support of formal mechanisms in order to be reinforced in the built environment. Red brick is an example of how incentives reinforce the brand whereas the Anti-gentrification ordinance, without legal binding is not effective in aligning reality with brand. In order for the values and goals represented in place brands to be reflected in the lived experiences, there needs to be formal mechanisms or on-the-ground practices that ensure they become tangible.

## **Urban Planning Implications**

What can place brands tell planners about neighborhood change?

By studying the full picture of how space changes and is interacted with in parallel with brand creation and promotion, I show that brands and spatial changes constantly influence each other and therefore, branding is a process in producing space. Place brands can be conceived using existing neighborhood changes or characteristics, and therefore act as the sense of place that developments want to be a part of. Place brands also drive the neighborhood change narrative in that spaces want to become a part of the neighborhood’s sense of place, naturally prioritizing a certain type of development over another.

Moreover, place branding is pluralistic and always morphing. Crowdsourced brands can be co-opted by other parties such as businesses and municipalities to take on new meanings. And with new goals and continued neighborhood change, place brands, even if using the same label, can tell different stories.

Finally, cities, when promoting a certain brand, need to be cognizant of who they are excluding and how they will support the brand in the physical environment. As cities look to branding strategies to attract new target audiences it is important to understand how brands, on the surface, might promote existing neighborhood characteristics, but can contradict those qualities in the built environment as brands change the type of activities and experiences people have. Because place brands play a role in producing space and have the power to influence how people interact with the space, place brands go beyond being a communications and promotional tool. Place brands, although intangible, have tangible implications in the lived urban experiences.