



A strategic approach to policy tasks for the development of Korea's island areas



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Abstract This study discussed the creation of a strategic approach to the policy tasks associated with the development of Korean island areas based on DEMATEL. To this end, after having derived the problematic elements hindering the development of Korean island areas, an attempt was made to structuralize residents' perceptions via the implementation of a DEMATEL survey with the leaders of island areas. The problematic elements hindering the development of Korean island areas were identified as serious aging society, shortage of resident welfare facilities, fragmented industrial structure, limited labor forces, decreasing income sources, underdeveloped public transportation to the mainland, underdeveloped public transportation within islands, shortage of educational services, low sense of solidarity in villages, shortage of accommodation and leisure facilities, poor residential environments, and the serious debts accumulated by fishing households. The residents of island areas perceived underdeveloped public transportation to the mainland as the most fundamental and central element hindering the development of island areas. Impacting the regional economy and overall resident welfare, these problematic elements can be regarded as exhibiting the structural characteristics of underdeveloped areas. As such, the prerequisite for endogenous development of island areas is the improvement of the underdeveloped nature of accessibility to the mainland.

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Introduction

A prolonged period of historical inertia has resulted in Koreans' perceptions of spaces revolving around land-centered lifestyles and thought. On the other hand, Koreans' perceptions of islands and oceans remain passive at best. More to the point, the policies regarding uninhabited islands and the

prohibition of fishing in place during the early Joseon period had the effect of creating an incorrect cognizance of the values of islands and oceans. Even after liberation in 1945, island areas continued to be perceived as being on the outskirts of development and even as problematic areas under mainland, and in particular, metropolitan and hub city-centered territorial development policies (Shin and Park, 2014). However, increased interest at the international level in ocean sovereignty and marine resources has resulted in islands becoming the subject of policy management measures associated with issues such as territorial integrity, securing of marine

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resources, balanced national development, and the development of various regional cultures.

By the end of 2010, there were a total of 3339 islands in Korea, a total that can be broken down into 463 inhabited islands and 2876 uninhabited islands (Ministry of Public Administration and Security, 2011). Independent and comprehensive island development measures began in earnest with the implementation of the 'Island Development Plan' that followed the Island Development Promotion Act of 1986. The Island Development Plan has been implemented in full since 1988, with two stages having been carried over the last 20 years. The third stage of the plan (2008–2017) is now being implemented. The ultimate goal of this plan is to build up the residential environment in which the residents of island areas can maintain their lifestyle through the advent of improvements to residential conditions.

The establishment of appropriate development policy and the effective implementation thereof constitute a necessary precondition to the development of island areas. The establishment of appropriate development policy should be based on a precise analysis of the current state of local areas, and the rational opinions of local residents. Although the focus of regional development has been physical elements, the ultimate goal remains the continuous development of local communities (Shin and Park, 2014). As such, much attention should be paid to the analysis of local residents' perception of development, and the values engrained therein. However, there have been few studies that have dealt with the awareness structure of the residents on islands in Korea. Recent studies on the topic have generally consisted of specific regional cases (Shin and Park, 2014; Kang and Doh, 2011; Kim et al., 2005, 2013; Kang, 2005).

In addition, differences in opinions have emerged in conjunction with existing studies on the development of island areas during the analysis of problems associated with regional development measures. This has been in large part due to the general subjectivity exhibited during the establishment of hierarchies and the ignoring of the need to conduct reviews of the relationship between problematic elements, a denouement which can in turn be attributed to the subjective standards set by researchers. Furthermore, the subjectivity in deriving and defining the problematic elements has influenced the composition and assessment of alternatives, leading to differences in opinions between the researchers regarding the alternatives and eventually lowering the effectiveness and implementation of such alternatives.

It is against this backdrop that the answers to the following questions are sought: First, what are the characteristics of the conditions surrounding the development of Korean island areas? Second, what are the elements hindering the development of island areas? Third, what are the relationships and hierarchal structure between these elements? Fourth, what direction should island development policy head in? To resolve these research questions and analyze the perception structure of residents, a DEMATEL (DEcision MAKing Trial and Evaluation Laboratory) analysis was carried out based on residents of underdeveloped island areas. Based on the results of this survey, a strategic approach to policy tasks for the development of island areas will be presented.

Material and methods

Development of island areas

Islands are generally narrow geographical spaces when viewed from the standpoint of human residence. This is because areas where residence can be taken up tend to be limited. These areas also have limited spatial contact with outside areas because they are surrounded by water (Shin, 1993). What are the characteristics of the development conditions surrounding Korean island areas? First, island areas exhibit characteristics such as limited available space and small-scale populations, which causes problems in terms of economies of scale and facility layout. The average population of inhabited islands in Korea in 2010 was 168 people, and the average area of such islands was 3.67 km². Second, island areas have faced the dual challenge of population decrease and an aging society. The worsening of the industrial base and living environment and the steady flow of people to urban areas has meant that the overall settlement rate has remained low. There has in particular been a lack of innovative young leaders capable of reviving villages suffering from an aging population. Third, island areas have been plagued by weak industrial bases. Island areas have mainly featured primary industries rooted in small-scale managerial structures. The problems associated with the distribution process and seasonal instability has placed limits on the creation of income. Fourth, island areas also face issues related to accessibility due to the uncertainty surrounding marine transportation. Obstacles to accessing the mainland include deteriorating weather conditions, the limited availability of transportation occasioned by issues relating to economic feasibility, and the excessive time required to reach such areas using low-speed transportation. Fifth, island areas are negatively impacted by poor living environments. Inherent limitations in terms of factors such as economies of scale, the critical threshold of facilities, accessibility, as well as shortages of drinking water and energy (electricity and gas) have translated into a weak living base as far as distribution, education, culture, medical and healthcare services are concerned.

What efforts have the Korean government made to resolve these problems? The government has in fact implemented various island-related projects, starting with the Comprehensive Island Development Project (Kim, 2013). However, despite these efforts, the phenomenon of population decrease has continued unabated. Rather than focusing on problems associated with a socioeconomic paradigm represented by urbanization and industrialization, the current study focuses on this phenomenon of population decrease and the government's lack of a strategic approach at the policy level. In addition, special attention was also paid to the results of policy alternatives based on a temporary band aid approach under which priorities are not assigned to the various policy tasks.

Derivation of problem elements in the development of island areas

What are the problematic elements hindering the development of island areas in Korea? To answer this question, problem elements suggested by existing studies were gathered in see Table 1. More specifically, the initial problematic elements

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