

Fall 2020

Master's Thesis (in progress)

Master in City and Regional Planning

Georgia Institute of Technology

## **What Politics Can Social Media Play in Urban Development:**

### **A case study of the anti-redevelopment movement in Euljiro street in Seoul, South Korea**

#### **Abstract**

Social media is part of the civic discourse in contemporary cities. Both planning practice and academia have actively adopted social media to either utilize the large data about human activities in urban space or to take advantage of the new communication platform for democratic and open conversation with citizens. Yet, only a few studies have embraced the impact of citizen-led activism and collective actions on planning practices, empowered by social media. In diverse domains of civic life, citizen activism using social media has been growing and the term “civic media” has been used to describe the practices and to examine the impact of social media on social movements. Since the volume of bottom-up civic media cases intervening urban development is also increasing, there is a need for the planning profession to recognize the process and impact of bottom-up use of social media and citizen activism on urban development. This case study contributes to fulfill the need by examining the use and impact of social media in an anti-redevelopment movement ongoing in an old manufacturing district called ‘Euljiro’ in Seoul, South Korea. Combatting the forced demolition and eviction that threaten the manufacturers, a young activist group named ‘Cheongyecheon Euljiro Bojon Yeondae’(CEBY) leveraged social media to publicize the redevelopment and to advocate for the public value of the manufacturing district since January 2018 till now. The research questions are threefold: first, how the different groups active on the redevelopment site perceive area, second, how the activists’ use of social media impacted their activism, and third, how the digital discourse changed once CEBY started their online activities.

I used a mixed approach, combining in-depth interviews and social media text analysis to capture the different perceptions posed on the area by different groups and to figure out the impact of social media activities on community building and public discourse. The result demonstrated that social media helped activists build trust and new relationships with the manufacturers and citizens. Also, text analysis of the tweets that mentioned ‘Euljiro’ using LDA topic modeling showed that the activists' posts had elicited discussions more engaged with the manufacturing district and community within the social media that was once dominated by food place reviews and commercial experiences. By testifying the impact of bottom-up civic media in urban development, I urge planners to expand the usage of digital media including social media in planning to enhance the capacity of citizens. Lastly, I nest the findings of this study in the

theories of insurgent and feminist planning, advocating for the synergy between the transformative traditions and grassroots civic media.