# The Landscape of Club Culture and Identity Politics: Focusing on the Club Culture in the Hongik University Area of Seoul

Lee Mu-Yong

Lee Mu-Yong (Yi, Mu-yong) is an associate research fellow at the Seoul Development Institute and a member of the Department of Social Development and Seoul Marketing Research Center of the Institute. He received his Ph.D. in Geography from Seoul National University in 2003. His major works include numerous research projects and studies concerning urban cultural geography, the cultural politics of space, and place marketing strategy.

**Abstract**

This paper analyzes the landscape of club culture and identity politics focusing on the clubs in the Hongdae area of Seoul. Landscape can be understood as something that is formed, changed and terminated through sociohistorical process, based on the interaction between the physical space environment and the subjects of daily life who live in that space. Following this concept, this paper uses the tricircle diagram of landscape interpretation consisting of space, subject and society. More concretely, this paper uses the six analytical factors of the cultural politics of landscape, that is, visibility, significance, sociality, historicity, power, and identity. In other words, this paper will be observing the visual presentation of a club space and its symbolic meaning, the history of club culture and the social relationships within it, and finally conflict, power relation and hegemony negotiation that evolve around the value and characteristic of the club culture through languagescape, lifescape and bodyscape. In conclusion, it was confirmed that the club culture in the Hongdae area has the spatial identity of a carnivalesque space of communitas, a local culture space and a space of contested meaning.

**Keywords**: landscape, club culture, cultural politics, identity politics, spatial identity, Hongdae area

## Introduction: The Cultural Politics of Landscape

Since the introduction of landscape as a cultural concept according to which Europeans during the Renaissance viewed nature and their external world, socioeconomic development has brought about a number of changes in its definition. In this sense, landscape can be regarded as a historical and cultural concept, and the views on landscape vary accordingly, which are, for example, categorized as follows: landscape as scenery, landscape as analysis of the visual environment and formation technique, cultural landscape as the object of regional studies, and landscape as ways of seeing and signifying system. There are also diverse landscape study methodologies. The most prominent ones are: landscape morphology, which focuses on the object that is actually seen; landscape significance, which places emphasis on the meaning and significance beyond the object; landscape experience, which focuses on people's awareness and experience of the landscape; landscape management, which emphasizes environmental formation and its management methods; cultural landscape, which focuses on the changes in landscape formation following social changes; and finally, landscape materialism, which focuses on the material basis of landscape formation and the power relations involved in the process (Lee 1999).

The theoretical and practical significance of landscape analysis is that it enables us to recognize the identity of daily life and life space and to create a better life and life space through changing the landscape. Landscape analysis is therefore a reflexive, critical, and practical study that comprehends the sociocultural identity of daily life space, perceives sociocultural conflict and contested meanings appearing physically and symbolically through landscape, and seeks to establish spatial identity and create a new alternative landscape through these processes. The concept of landscape originates from the concept of "perspective," which reflects the observer-centered way of thinking in which the observer bestows the objects with hierarchical order. In this regard, a value or a notion of "visual technique" that aims to reconstruct and control space is immanent in the concept of landscape, which thus includes sociopolitical implications. However, landscape studies have so far been applied to environment formation as an object of art or to a simple regional studies methodology, which greatly diminished its political, social, and ideological significance. Recently though, the scope of landscape studies is

widening with the reemergence of critical landscape studies based on the concept of "landscape as ways of seeing and signifying system" (Cosgrove 1985; Daniels 1988) or the idea of "landscape materialism." By adopting the former view, this article will focus on the diversity of meanings embedded in landscape, its symbolic and discursive construction, and the socio-political process of landscape formation. This paper will also examine how subjects of daily life interpret landscape, how its meanings are contested, and how power relations work during the process.

Landscape can be understood as something that is formed, changed, and terminated through sociohistorical processes, based on the interaction between the physical space environment and the subjects of daily life who live in that space. Following this concept, this article will use the tricircle diagram of space, subject, and society as the conceptual framework of landscape analysis, as shown in fig. 1 (Lee 1999).

Figure 1. The Tricircle Diagram of Landscape Interpretation

I will use the six analytical factors of the cultural politics[1] of landscape shown in fig. 1—visibility and significance,[2] sociality and historicity,[3] and power and identity[4] to

[1] Cultural politics, based on the recognition of a "culture=signifying system" and "politics=power relations," means the exploration of the power relations surrounding the signifying system or a series of practical activities to rearrange the signifying system and power relations. In other words, cultural-political ways of thinking or practices presuppose the linking of all aspects of the signifying system that people find and create in everyday life to political processes. Therefore, the cultural-political analysis of landscape is an inclusive, situational, and contextual one that is based on how power and resistance clash, how various meanings are contested, negotiated, and expressed through landscape, and how a new landscape is formed as a result.

[2] "Visibility" is an external trait of the landscape that consists of visual aspects, and "significance" refers to the invisible meanings and symbols that exist beyond the visible landscape. This paper will examine the visible aspects of the club landscape and its symbolic significance.

[3] "Sociality" is the characteristic of the subjects involved in landscape formation and of their system of social relations, while "historicity" is a distinctive quality of the history of landscape formation. Here, the nature of the subjects involved in the formation of the club landscape and the characteristics of this formation will be examined.

[4] "Power" is the characteristic of the conflict and power relations existing behind the process of landscape formation. "Identity" signifies the true value and the characteristic of the landscape.

analyze the club culture landscape of the Hongik University area (the so-called Hongdae area or *Hongdae ap*) in Seoul. In other words, I will examine these factors through the languagescape, lifescape, and bodyscape: the visual presentation (visibility) of club spaces and their symbolic meaning (significance); the history of club culture (historicity) and their social relationship (sociality); and finally conflict, power relations and hegemony negotiation (power) that evolve around the value and characteristics (identity) of club culture.[5]

## The Hongdae Area and the Club Culture

As seen on Map 1, the Hongdae area includes Seogyo-dong, Changjeon-dong, Sangsu-dong, and Donggyo-dong in Mapo-gu, Seoul, stretching over 1,372,123㎡.

Map 1. The Location of the Hongdae Area

Beginning as an ordinary residential area in the 1950s and the 1960s, the Hongdae area developed into an art culture district, where artists' studios began to cluster with the establishment of Hongik University, in particular its College of Fine Arts, in the 1970s.

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This article will examine the assignment of meaning to the nature of the club, as well as the conflicts and contested meanings surrounding the club.

[5] A landscape analysis includes analysis of fixed spatial structures, moving images (lifescapes), such as people's appearances and actions, and various media that represent the landscape (maps, pictures, films, music, etc). In this regard, this article attempts to analyze the club's spatial forms, historical events that took place in the process of the formation of club culture, the club's everyday life, the fashion and behavior of subjects related to the club, and numerous representational media (such as pictures, articles, and posters) that reflect club culture phenomenon. The reason I am using the concept of landscape rather than a more general spatial concept is because the concept of landscape focuses on the subject's awareness of and the meanings he/she assigns to the space, that is, the person (or the subject) who interacts with the landscape, as seen in the Korean word of "landscape" (*gyeonggwan* 景觀) that combines the scenery (*gyeong* 景) as an object that is seen and the subject who sees (*gwan* 觀). Also, when the landscape concept is adopted, representational media such as the maps and pictures that reflect the subject's awareness and behavior are used to analyze the space. Accordingly, I take the concept of landscape in a sense that I analyze spaces by using related visual media (such as pictures), and focus on people's awareness and contested meanings regarding the space. Also, I emphasize the fact that by using landscape analysis as a more critical and comprehensive analytical concept rather than as a simple analysis of the visual and physical forms of space, we can expand the scope of landscape studies itself.

In the early 1990s, a trendy café culture was created in postmodern buildings, followed by the concentration of clubs in the late 1990s. At this time, the area's spatial identity as a club culture district began to emerge. After 2000, there was an increased clustering of people engaged not only in fine arts and music, but also in film, publication, design, advertisement, and Internet development, turning the area into a complex cultural district.

Through these historical changes, the Hongdae area has developed into one of the most culturally diverse districts in Korea. The area houses various cultural spaces and facilities, including over 10 galleries and small theaters, 20 art studios, 10 handcraft furniture shops, 50 art institutes, 70 publishing companies, 70 unique consumer culture spaces, and 40 clubs. There are also more than 100 DJs and 300 "indie" bands, and those active in the area include artists, young people, and foreigners who are unique, open-minded, and sensitive. Diverse arts and culture festivals, such as the Seoul Fringe Festival, the Korea Experimental Arts Festival, the Street Arts Exhibition, the Free Market, Live Day, Club Day, the Road Club Festival, and Sound Day take place here. More than 30 culture-related organizations operate in the area. The Hongdae area is considered a cultural powerhouse, cultural incubator, culture engine, or culture factory where new cultural experiments based on cultural diversity are continuously carried out.

Clubs are the focal points that create and reinforce the spatial identity of the Hongdae area. A wide variety of people active in the Hongdae area gather at the clubs, and the spatial identity of the area changes with the development of the clubs. Historically, clubs appeared as places where people met regularly and explored common interests. Clubs developed in close relation with music, dance, and region. As places where live music was played regularly, they grew with certain genres of music such as rock, blues, and jazz. Clubs are also places where techno artists (DJs and musicians) play dance music (techno, rock, hip hop, etc.) and have contributed to the creation of a regional culture by establishing a regional and community-based network (for example, Liverpool Sound, Detroit Techno, and Chicago House). In Korea, clubs began to appear in the 1990s around the Hongdae area under various names as Live Club, Techno Club, and Dance Club. In June 2004, there were 44 clubs in total, consisting of 19 live clubs and 25 dance clubs.

The first person to conceptualize club culture was Sarah Thornton. She defines

club culture as "the colloquial expression given to youth cultures for whom dance clubs and their eighties offshoot, raves, are the symbolic axis and working social hub . . . club cultures are persistently associated with a specific space which is both continually transforming its sounds and styles and regularly bearing witness to the apogees and excesses of youth cultures" (Thornton 1996, 3). She also suggests "taste cultures" as an important characteristic of the club culture. She goes on to say that "club crowds generally congregate on the basis of their shared taste in music, their consumption of common media and, most importantly, their preference for people with similar tastes to themselves" (Thornton 1996, 3). Based on Thornton's definitions, club culture can be understood as a youth subculture with a distinct style formed, shared, and changed through the mediation of the club, which serves as a complex cultural space where unique music, dance, people, and conversation coexist.

## Cultural Political Understanding of Club Culture Landscape in the Hongdae Area

### *The Visibility and Significance of Club Culture Landscape: Club as Carnivalisque Space of Communitas*

The visibility and significance of club culture landscape can be observed through the physical features of the club space itself. Most clubs in the Hongdae area range between 100 to 130 $m^2$ and 230 to 260 $m^2$ in size. They are cultural spaces where culturally-minded clubbers enjoy dancing as a form of body language and music as an aural language while the DJ plays diverse genres of the latest music, thus forming a community through these mediums.

The visible landscape that prescribes the character of a club can be divided into six landscapes: a signboard landscape that notifies the location and the existence of the club; entrance and passage landscape that connects the outside and inside of the club; the DJ booth landscape, where the DJ's beat-centered musical performance takes place; a floor landscape where clubbers dance; the clubber landscape, in which clubbers dress in their unique style and enjoy themselves; and finally the bar and extra table landscape where clubbers create a psychological atmosphere or drink in order to recharge

themselves (fig. 2).

Figure 2. The Interior of the Club Cargo

1) Signboard Landscape: Illegibility, Distinction, and the Aesthetics of Concealment

Club signboards do not expose themselves easily. That is, those visiting for the first time cannot be sure whether the club they are about to enter is a dance club that represents Hongdae club culture just by looking at the signboard. The word “club” is omitted from the board in most cases (see fig. 3). Even when the word “club” is included on the signboard, it is difficult to recognize the place as a club, as it is used by other businesses such as nightclubs, pubs, or bars. Some clubs use the word “bar” in their names, creating an overall impression that clubs’ signboard landscapes are illegible, inconsistent, and ambiguous.

The only ways to find a certain club are either to be guided by clubbers who are familiar with the area, read the maps on a club party’s promotion posters in the streets, or guess the club’s nature from the words written on the signboard (for example, house, trance, hip-hop, future sound, etc., which symbolize club music). This signboard landscape indicates that rather than being a popular space that can be easily found, clubs are a minority culture space in which only clubbers who can distinguish a club simply by looking at the signboard and the entrance landscape can enter, and a taste culture space in which they share such club culture style between themselves. It is a place where the unconscious “distinctions” made by the clubbers who know and share the culture code operate. Additionally, the present legislation that defines these clubs as illegal forces people to avoid exposing themselves, and encourages feelings of secrecy amongst club owners and clubbers, which in turn reinforced the illegibility of the signboard landscape.

Figure 3. Signboard Landscapes
(Left to right. Top: Club Ska, M.I., Jokerred, and Hodge Podge.
Bottom: Jokerred, 108 and Myungwolgwan

2) Entrance and Passage Landscape: Liminal Space of the Passage Rites

The entrance to clubs consists of an inside entrance that directly connects to the floor, and an outside entrance that connects to a passageway (stairway) leading to the inside entrance. The passage from the outside entrance to the basement, as seen in fig. 4, is a long stairway with dimmed and blurry lights that project the image of the club. At this stage, clubbers may feel as if they are stepping into an other-worldly space, reconfirming their existence, and being pulled into an abyss--an experience similar to that of a rite of passage. The inner part of the club after the inside entrance emits a secretive and dreamy atmosphere, which makes people feel that they have entered a new world. The DJs infinite repetition of simple rhythms creates a phantasmal sensation making the clubbers feel ecstatic, and they embody this sensation in their dance. Clubbers' distinct clothing known as "club wear" and props such as fluorescent sticks also enhance the club atmosphere. In this regard, the entrance and passage landscape marks a border, a liminal space[6] of passage rites where people enter a new, even sacred space, one markedly different from the space of everyday, secular life.

Fig. 4. Club Entrances and Passages as a Liminal Space of Passage Rites (Left to right. Top: Club Cargo, Saab, and Jokerred. Bottom: Jokerred, Hodge Podge, and M.I. The last picture on the bottom row shows clubbing with chemical lights at M.I.

As well as being the place where entrance fees are paid,[7] the outside entrance and the street in front of the club are where clubbers come out to rest, meet, and converse with other clubbers. Thus people are often seen gathered in front of the clubs (fig. 5). The outside entrance where private space meets public space, i.e. the street, extends the

[6] The term "liminal space" indicates a situation where heterogeneous elements blend together and consequently makes the character of the space ambiguous. "'Limen' literally means 'threshold,' a doorway where one stands betwixt or between social worlds and statuses. At this point, the social norms of one side of the doorway meet those of the other and a borderline at the threshold can be distinguished at which social norms are momentarily suspended" (Keith and Pile 1993; Zukin 1991).

[7] During the week, clubs take the entrance fee on the inside entrance or halfway down the passage stairway, but during the weekend or when there is a party, fees are normally paid at the outside entrance.

liminal space, obscuring the point where the club actually begins.

Figure 5. Outside Entrance of the Club. Clubbers who take a break and meet other clubbers at the outside entrance the reinforce liminal spatiality of the club (Outside entrance of Jokerred and Hodge Podge).

3) The DJ Booth and Floor Landscape: Disappearance of Boundaries and the Formation of Unity

Unlike the coffee shops of the past, in which DJs played music inside a glass box, the DJ booths in clubs are open spaces placed above the floor, where DJs can look down upon the dancing clubbers (fig. 6).

Figure 6. DJ Booth Landscape
(Left to right: Myungwolgwan, Jokerred, DD, Hooper, Saab and M.I.)

There are turntables, records, and sound machines in these booths, and the walls hold pictures, logos, or slogans that represent the club image. Clubbers usually face the DJ and dance to the DJ's choice of music. DJs, "techno-shamans" who cast their spell on the clubbers, induce, change, gather, or disperse the clubbers' movements. The DJs hardly make eye contact with the clubbers, concentrating instead on the music, while the clubbers focus on the music rather than the DJ. Music is the medium through which the DJ and the clubbers seek unity.

Figure 7. Floor and Extra Table Landscape (Left to right. Top: DD, Saab, and Hodge Podge. Bottom: Myungwolgwan, M.I., and Jokerred)

The club floor, situated in front of the DJ booth, is a space for dancing. However, as seen in fig. 7, the boundary between the floor, bar, and extra tables is not clearly marked. In fact, since the entire space of the club acts as a floor where clubbers dance and enjoy the music, the liminal spatiality of boundary disappearance and ambiguity appears again with the floor.

4) The Clubber Landscape[8]: The Individualistic Community, Self-reflection, and Self-immersion

Clubbers are the actual subjects of production who enjoy the music and dance and who create the club culture. As the DJ is in charge of the music at the clubs, dancing becomes the most important aspect for the clubbers. At first glance, the way clubbers dance appears to be quite individualistic. They do not dance in groups, but face the DJ and dance individually to the music in a self-engrossed fashion. The DJ's performance lasts for approximately two hours, and the clubbers do not seem to think about anything particular but appear self-absorbed, perhaps using the opportunity to reflect on their lives.

Figure 8. Clubber Landscape. Top: Clubbers dancing in single file facing the DJ
Middle: Self-immersion and reflection. Bottom: Individualistic community

According to the club's genre of music, the mode of dancing may vary, but in general the clubbers dance in a similar style. Their dance includes four repetitive phases that follow the flow of the music—the introduction, development, turn, and conclusion. Clubbers start by moving their hands, relaxing slowly. As the music accelerates with regular rhythm, they dance passionately, as if participating in a shamanic ritual. In the end, they come back to the more relaxed movements of the beginning. The DJ leads these dance sequences, observing the clubbers' movements and improvising the musical performance according to the overall atmosphere. From a clubber's point of view, he or she may seem to be dancing individually, but from an overall perspective, the clubbers are in fact dancing in groups, forming a great harmony. This club atmosphere encourages dancers to immerse themselves in their own worlds, unaware of others. However, each gradually becomes part of a larger dancing whole, together creating an exciting atmosphere. The clubbers naturally learn constitutive and intersubjective self-awareness, and form a type of individualistic community (See fig. 8).

[8] The "clubber landscape" refers not only to the external styles of the clubbers, but also to their daily activities, i.e. their lifescapes.

5) Bar and Extra Table Landscape: Refreshments

The bar, in which coupons are exchanged for drinks, is a revitalizing space where the clubbers, emotionally heightened from music and dancing, come to recharge their psychological and physical energy. The clubs sell alcoholic drinks, and most are registered as general restaurants. However, as this is a space to heighten the clubbers' enjoyment of music and dancing, only drinks and snacks that do not require cooking are served, and the staff is defined as no different from other clubbers. There may be physical boundaries between the floor and the bar, but there is no psychological boundary between the staff and the clubbers. The bar is also used as a cloakroom, playing an active role as a service area for the clubbers. In addition, the extra table area is not a space to eat and converse, but an area to take a short break or to enjoy music. Sometimes, in the rock-café dance clubs, DJ booths are placed inside the bar. As mentioned above, there is no cultural or psychological boundary between the DJ booth, floor, bar, and extra table area, which confirms the unity and liminal spatiality of the club.

Figure 9. Bar Landscape
(Left to right. Top: Club Cargo , NB and M.I.
Bottom: Ska, a rock-café style bar where the DJ booth is situated inside the bar)

6) Synthesis: Club as a Carnivalisque Space of "Communitas"

A club's visible landscapes of signboard, entrance and passage, DJ and music, clubber and dancing, and floor and bar can be compared to the conditions and props of a shaman before the ritual, as defined by Fiona Bowie (2000): a sacred place as a center of the world (DJ booth), music consisting of drums and songs (DJ's performance), dance, distinct costumes, and hallucinogens (drinks at the bar). Such spatial characteristics of the club as a modern ritual explain how the DJ can be likened to a modern shaman and the club culture to techno-shamanism.

In this regard, the visibility and significance of the club can be compared to Victor Turner's notion of "communitas." Turner (1969) defined the sacred and religious

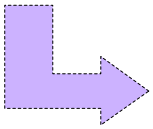
moment when a ritual for the supernatural being takes place as a stage of "liminality," and the people or the circumstances in which such people gather as "communitas." The concept of liminality, derived from the word "limen," meaning "a threshold," supposes the existence of a space where a subject can engage in behavior that would normally be considered taboo. Liminality is not permanent, but only a temporary state. And as abnormal situations are expressed in a very compressed way, it is considered sacred. An extreme sense of excitement, danger, and deviation are acceptable at this stage. Turner (1969) points to freedom, equality, friendship and homogeneity as possible phenomena of the "communitas." People are freed from various social restrictions and are given the opportunity to wear clothes or make-up that they may not be allowed to otherwise. Distanced from socioeconomic status and hierarchical order, people form horizontal and equal relationships within which they form an immediate and strong friendship with strangers, and are united in this homogeneity (Ryu 2003, 17-18).

The significance of the club culture landscape I have observed so far from various visible landscapes of clubs—the liminal space of passage rites, the disappearance of boundaries and the formation of unity, self-immersion and self-reflection, individualistic community, and a revitalization of life—is very similar to Turner's notion of communitas. The PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity and Respect) ethic, which is the motto of club culture, also has implications for the clubbers' individual and independent selves, and at the same time emphasizes harmony, integration, mutual respect, and group ecstasy, which reflects the characteristic of the club as a festival space of communitas (fig. 10).

Figure 10. The Visibility and Significance of Club Culture Landscape

The Visibility and Significance of Club Culture Landscape

- Signboard: Illegibility, Distinction, and Aesthetics of Concealment
- Entrance and Passage: Liminal Space of Passage Rites
- DJ Booth and Floor: Disappearance of Boundaries and Formation of Unity
- Clubber: Individualistic Community, Self-reflection, and Self immersion
- Bar and Extra Table: Refreshment



Festival Space of Communitas
→ Freedom, Equality, Friendship and Homogeneity
Peace (P), Love (L), Unity (U) and Respect (R)

*The Historicity and Sociality of Club Culture Landscape: Club as A Local Culture Space*

The historicity and sociality of club culture landscape can be understood by examining the historical process through which the clubs in the Hongdae area have come to be established, and how the social network surrounding the clubs took shape. Club culture landscape is at once a university culture landscape that has formed with Hongik University College of Fine Arts as a mediator and a local culture landscape that has been established in close connection with the location of the Hongdae area. It therefore creates a community landscape through the networking of local cultural subjects.

1) The University Culture Landscape: From Studio to Bar to Club

The Hongik University College of Fine Arts played an important role in the emergence of clubs in the Hongdae area. A large number of culturally-minded alumni with unique personalities continued new and experimental activities that expressed their creativity and personality.

One example is found in the studios that later became the basis of clubs. Studio-style cafés and bars run by the artists from the College[9] began to appear in the late 1980s. These cafés and bars, which were art works in themselves, held daily performances and acted as gathering places for artists, thus becoming prototypes for today's clubs. For example, Baljeonso (Powerhouse), established in 1992, is a studio-style bar, which is considered a representative model of the clubs in the Hongdae area. This club was initially designed as both a studio and a bar. The artists hand-painted and

[9] Examples are "Electric," run by one of the professors at the University, and "Baljeonso," which is run by a student.

decorated the walls. Rock, jazz, ballads, classical music, and Korean traditional music favored by the owners were played, as well as techno music not yet widely known in Korea at that time. This choice of music attracted people and dancers who had come to dance to that style of music. Impromptu performances were held from time to time, and Baljeonso became a model of underground culture where customers started holding their own performances. Rock cafés were another type of club establishment. Foreigners residing in Korea were mostly at the center of the rock café culture, and they created spaces where people could enjoy music sitting down or dance between the tables. Ska, a rock café that opened in the Hongdae area in 1992, was the first rock café of its kind (fig. 11).

Figure 11. Symbolic Signboards Reflecting the Change from Studio to Bar to Club
(Left: Baljeonso, the matrix of the club. Right: Ska, a rock café style club)

Following this lead, rock café clubs specializing in rock music (Hodge Podge, Oldrock, Hooper, etc.), techno clubs (M.I., Jokerred, Myungwolgwan, Matmata, Saab, etc.), and hip-hop clubs (NB, DD, etc.) began to appear after 1995. Some signboards have both "bar" and "club" written on them, suggesting the process of change from studio to bar to club (fig. 12).

Figure 12. Examples of Signboards Showing the Change from Studio to Bar to Club
(Left to Right: Techno club Jokerred, hip-hop club DD and rock club Oldrock)

Other factors related to the emergence of clubs in the Hongdae area from the early 1990s include prosperity resulting from the "three lows"—low interest rates, ~~the~~ low ~~cost of~~ oil prices, and low dollar—in the late 1980s. This was followed by the establishment of a middle class, the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988, active exchanges with foreign cultures, and the increase in the number of students studying abroad after the liberalization of foreign travels in 1989. With the advent of globalization, Korea also witnessed an overall increase in the number of foreigners living in Seoul, such as students, diplomatic personnel, and businessmen. Under such circumstances, the techno culture, which was popular abroad at the time, began to be introduced regularly to the

Hongdae area.[10] In particular, the nearby Yonsei University's Korean Language Institute acted as the basis for the influx of foreign students, most of whom lived in the vicinity and frequented the Hongdae area, which they found to be compatible with their cultural codes.

When the existing culture artists in the Hongdae area got together with foreigners living in the area and Korean students who had studied abroad, clubs satisfying their cultural needs began to appear one by one. This explains the fundamental difference between the 1980s nightclubs and the clubs of the 1990s (see table 1).

***Table 1. The Difference between a Nightclub and a Dance Club***

| | Nightclub | Dance Club |
|---|---|---|
| Price | Over 100,000 won, including the standard charge per table | 5,000-10,000 won |
| Customers | - Youth<br>- People who like alcoholic drinks and dancing, and are interested in meeting members of the opposite sex | - Diverse people with no age restrictions<br>- Emotionally sensitive youth engaged in professional fields |
| Purpose | - Alcoholic drinks, dancing and meeting members of the opposite sex | - Music, dancing, and community |
| Space formation | - Big halls ranging from 700 to 2,000 $m^2$<br>- Halls full of tables, special stage for dancing, DJ booth, etc. | - Small halls ranging from 130 to 200 $m^2$<br>- Halls without tables, no special stage for dancing, DJ booth, etc. |
| Management | - Waiters and touts<br>- Related to gangs<br>- No parties | - No waiters or touts<br>- No relation to gangs<br>- Frequent parties |
| Owner's objective | - Financial gain | - Promotion of music and culture |
| Mode of usage | - Lots of drunken dancing | - No one drunk, only music and dancing |

[10] Cultural exchange at a global level began with the 1988 Olympic Games, which provoked the intellectual curiosity of the elites. This curiosity was concurrent with the economic boom of "the three lows," giving people the opportunity to go backpacking abroad and take foreign language and academic courses abroad. After experiencing underground cultures abroad, they started returning to Korea in the early 1990s, and some opened exotic cafés and restaurants in the Hongdae area, establishing what came to be known as Picasso Street. Also, when the Apgujeong area, a hangout spot for both upper-class students studying abroad and overseas Koreans, became a social issue, they moved to the Hongdae area, spreading postmodern consumption culture and techno culture.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | - Awareness of other people, frequent bumping and fighting<br>- Frequent "bookings"[11] | - Unaware of others, no bumping or fighting<br>- No "booking" whatsoever |
| Mode of performance | - CD mixing<br>- Focus on enjoying dancing<br>- Slow dancing at intervals | - LP mixing and DJ improvisation<br>- Music style is made by watching the clubbers so that they can concentrate on the music and relieve stress<br>- No slow dancing. The music does not stop at any point |

In summary, the club culture landscape in the Hongdae area was established historically, reflecting the university culture that was based on both the process of transition from studios, to bars, to clubs, aided by Hongik University of Fine Arts, and the socioeconomic circumstances of the time.

2) Local Culture Landscape: Place Identity as Freedom and Individuality

Club culture in the Hongdae area is closely related to the place identity of the area. The existence of club culture has played the most important role in portraying the image of the Hongdae area as a free and open space, cultural incubator, cultural powerhouse, and cultural engine.

Even from the early 1990s, youth with distinctive styles, who freely expressed their individualities by dying their hair, wearing particular clothes, and sporting body piercings, were abundant in the Hongdae area (fig. 13). Clubs had become a big part of their everyday lives. Club culture also played an active role in turning university students, artists, people working in cultural fields, and foreigners into the main consumer group of the area, because the clubs were a space where diverse people who were culturally minded got together. This is because the underground club culture is not a popular culture shared by the masses but rather a minority culture or a subculture shared by those with similar emotions and musical taste. Therefore, only those people who are seeking to meet others with a similar style and who wish to enjoy their company and form communities with them come to the clubs. For this reason, club

[11] "Booking" (introduction request at a night club) is a Konglish (Korean English) word that means a ritual at night clubs in which, at the request of men, waiters ask women to meet men at other tables. The practice of "booking" is common at Korean clubs as a way to introduce singles to one another without having to go through a pickup line by men.

parties and clubber communities are quite lively.

Figure 13. Clubber Landscape: Free and Unique Clubbers in the Hongdae Area

Club culture in the Hongdae area is based on the unique spatial identity of the area, such as that created by the existence of Hongik University College of Fine Arts and the emotionally charged natures of youth and culture artists. At the same time, such spatial identity reinforces the cultural identity of the Hongdae area by acting as a community space or base where diverse people who have created this space can get together. In this regard, the club (clubber) landscape reflects the local culture.

Figure 14. The Clubber Landscape of Foreigners in the Hongdae Area

3) Community Landscape: Cultural Subject Networking

The formation and development of club culture was made possible through the process of community building with diverse participation, networking and the formation of partnerships. Club culture is formed not only by "inside subjects," such as the club owner, DJ, musician, and clubbers, but also by "outside subjects," such as promotion companies that hold the parties and online clubber communities. Local NGOs and network organizations that focus on the potential of club cultures are also actively involved in the club culture development and the club legalization movement.

The two representative club culture network organizations are the Space Culture Center, a non-profit organization, and Club Solidarity, an organization founded by the club owners who came together voluntarily to overcome the insecurity caused by club illegalization and the trifling profits due to the small scale of their businesses. The Space Culture Center plays the role of cultural mediators, making strategic plans for place marketing of club culture, networking cultural organizations and spaces in and out of the Hongdae area, and acting as a communication channel between the local authorities and the government.

The Space Culture Center founded the Club Day Promotion Committee, a

partnership organization of Club Solidarity, and has planned the Club Day festival,[12] which is used as a core strategic product of club culture marketing. The Center has also established the Hongdae Area Culture Forum, a local network organization, and initiated a variety of projects such as Club Tour Bus, Free Market, and Playground Project, thus promoting different ways of stimulating local culture. Recently, the Center organized the Club Culture Association and is strengthening public relations and the system of the club culture projects by employing outside professionals as CEO and consultants.

Figure 15. Examples of Community Landscape(1)
Reflecting Efforts for Community Formation
(Top: Club Tour Bus initiated by Hongdae Area Culture Forum. The first picture shows live and dance club owners gathered for the Club Tour Bus project. Bottom: Free Market)

Figure 16. Examples of Community Landscape(2)
Reflecting Efforts for Community Formation
(Playground changed by the Playground Project. Left: Old Playground. Center: Design for the new playground. Right: New playground)

4) Synthesis: Club as a Local Culture Space

As seen above, the historicity and sociality of club culture landscape is both a university culture landscape, which was formed based on the existence of the Hongik University College of Fine Arts and the distinct spatial identity of the Hongdae area, a local culture landscape. With local culture subjects creating a community landscape where continuous and diverse networking is experimented, clubs show their potential and possibility as a local culture space (fig. 17).

[12] Club Day, a local event uniting the Hongdae dance clubs, is a buffet-style club culture festival where clubbers can enjoy over ten clubs for a 15,000 won (US$13) ticket the last Friday of every month.

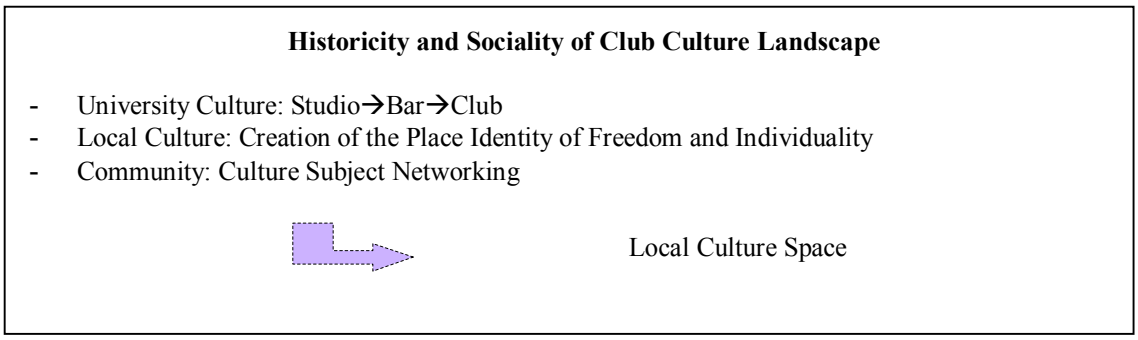



Figure 17. Historicity and Sociality of Club Culture Landscape

*The Power and Identity of the Club Culture Landscape: The Club As a Space of Contested Meaning*

The power and identity of club culture landscape can be understood by looking at various conflicts surrounding the clubs and by examining the identity of club culture that is sought through the resolution of such conflicts. The power of club culture landscape is represented by the "legislative conflict landscape," "generational conflict landscape," "racial conflict landscape," and "status conflict landscape." The identity of the club culture landscape is expressed through the clubs' missions or the politics of identity between those who aim to control the hegemony of the landscape as the subjects of club culture, such as by establishing a "play culture landscape," "cultural powerhouse landscape," and "community landscape."

1) The Legislative Conflict Landscape: Legal or Illegal?

The legislative conflict that surrounds the club culture originates from present legislation that prohibits dancing at clubs. Table 2 shows the category of food service businesses defined by the Food Sanitation Act that illegalizes clubs.

Table 2. Category of Food Service Businesses Defined by the Food Sanitation Act

| Category | Main Means of Business | Additional Means of Business |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Snack bar | Cooking and selling food | - No alcohol, no singing by customers<br>- Performance provided by the owner only; no dancing |
| General restaurant | Cooking and selling food | - Meals with alcoholic drinks, favored foods such as coffee<br>- Performance provided by the owner only; no singing and dancing |
| Karaoke bars | Cooking and selling food and alcoholic drinks | - Singing by customers<br>- Performance provided by the owner only; no dancing |
| Amusement bars | Cooking and selling food and alcoholic drinks | - Staff and facilities for entertainment<br>- Performance, alcoholic drinks, singing, and dancing |

According to this category, amusement bars are the only places where people can dance, placing dance clubs in this regard closer to amusement bars. The category of food service businesses is determined by the Urban Planning Act and the Building Act, according to the usage of the building. Since the Hongdae area is categorized as a general residential area with neighborhood living facilities, clubs cannot register as amusement bars, which are restricted to commercial areas with entertainment facilities. Even if clubs are able to register as such, the tax is too high to maintain their business.

Currently, as the authorities categorize most of the dance clubs as general restaurants, dancing in such places is illegal. However, clubs are not at all similar to general restaurants and they cannot be considered either karaoke or amusement bars. Therefore, it is unrealistic to categorize clubs as food service businesses. This shows a need to establish a separate category in the present system that fits the clubs' content or a more appropriate category of business. The linguistic landscape and the landscape of the club legalization movement have appeared as a result of clubs' illegal status, and they reflect the government's understanding of what clubs are.

The displaying of placards during the World Cup 2002 and the naming of Club Tour Bus are examples that demonstrate how the government understands the clubs. The government's recognition of the Hongdae area and the clubs as a tourist site can be seen on a placard hung during the 2002 World Cup: "World Cup Tourist Site

Neighborhood Under Road Maintenance" (fig. 18).

Figure 18. The Linguistic Landscape Reflecting the Government's Understanding of Clubs

During the 2002 World Cup games, the Seoul Metropolitan City temporarily acknowledged the existence of club culture in the Hongdae area as a tourist site. However, the illegal status of the clubs immediately led to the crackdown of the participating clubs in the Club Day festival. This led to changing the name "Club Tour Bus," which was planned to link the clubs in the Hongdae area with those in the Sinchon area, to "Culture Tour Bus." The Hongdae Area Culture Forum submitted the bus design under the name of "Club Tour Bus"(picture 3) and also held an event under the title "The Opening of the Club Tour Bus" (picture 2). In reality, however, the bus that actually appeared was named "Culture Tour Bus" (picture 4). This is a symbolic linguistic landscape of contested meanings between the government--which avoided using the word "club" in the official title because the clubs are illegal--and the local subjects who recognized the clubs as legitimate.

Another hint into the thinking of city planners was the Seoul Metropolitan City Government's crackdown on the clubs, despite the fact that the government had appointed the Club Day festival as an official cultural event and promised its support before the World Cup games. Clubbers staged large-scale protests both on- and off-line, bringing about the landscape of the club legalization movement. As seen in fig. 19, petitions for club legalization took place on the Club Day festival (pictures 1 and 2) by more than 2,000 Korean and foreign clubbers. Posters appeared at the entrance of the clubs reading, "Clubs are a healthy playground. There is no reason to oppress or repress them. Just let us dance" (Picture 3) along with placards that read "I WANNA DANCE" (Picture 4). To inform the clubbers about the legal status of the clubs, most of whom were unaware of the fact that dancing at them was in fact illegal, signs such as "Dancing is illegal," "Do not dance," or "Dancing is illegal at all clubs in the Hongdae area" were posted on people's bodies (Picture 5), signposts (Picture 6) and the streets (Picture 7 and 8) in the entire area. Also, to satirize the reality that in order to dance legally one had to go to a nightclub where "booking"[13] is a central activity, phrases such as "Women, *book*

[13] See note 11.

if you want to dance" and "Women, go to the nightclub and *book*" were pasted on traffic signs, forming a symbolic linguistic landscape of street politics.

Figure 19. The Landscape of the Club Legalization Movement

2) The Generational Conflict Landscape: Clubs for All Ages?

The generational conflict landscape consists of the linguistic landscape that prohibits teenagers from entering the clubs and the alienation landscape of those in their 40s. The fact that clubs are off-limits to teenagers is inevitable since the clubs sell alcoholic drinks. Therefore, a sign reading, "You must have an ID card to enter" is included on all the promotional posters for Club Day festivals or parties and at every entrance. Under such circumstances, in order to overcome the exclusion of teenagers, the need for events such as Youth Club Day, the Alcohol-free Party, and educational programs such as DJ School was raised so that these potential customers could also enjoy the club culture.

As seen in fig. 20, the alienated age group that includes people in their 40s and over remains passive observers who are unable to mix with other clubbers. Club culture should be enjoyed by diverse age groups. However, with its short history in Korea, club culture is still limited to people in their 20s and 30s. Therefore, there is a need to design club culture programs that correspond to the lifestyle of diverse age groups.

Figure 20. Alienation Landscape of the Middle Aged

3) The Racial Conflict Landscape: No G.I and No Drug Area

The racial conflict landscape around the club culture involves the issues of the forbidden entrance of the American military personnel and drug checks. The strongest ban is, as seen in fig. 21, on drugs. The linguistic landscape banning the use of drugs and entrance after taking drugs is found at the club entrance: "No drug area," "Do not buy, sell, and do drugs. All informants will be rewarded," etc. Drugs are usually circulated by overseas Koreans or Koreans who are on vacation from studying abroad (groups who are thought to have lost their identity as Koreans), and this causes conflict

with those who despise such behavior.

Figure 21. Linguistic Landscape Declaring a Drug Free Area.

The second racial conflict landscape concerns the entrance of American military personnel. The occasional negative behavior of American soldiers' continued to cloud the club atmosphere, thus signs prohibiting their entrance have been posted at the clubs from late 2002 (fig. 22). Even before this time, this issue had been discussed among the clubs, but was always dealt with flexibly by putting up signs such as "No foreigners without a membership card will be allowed" ("foreigners" here meant American soldiers), as it was felt that it would be difficult to ban only the American military from the clubs.

Figure 22. Linguistic Landscape Prohibiting the Entrance of American Soldiers

4) Status Conflict Landscape: The Codes of Behavior

The status conflict landscape of club culture consists of behavioral codes that isolate people acting in certain ways. Behavioral codes ban those who are drunk, inappropriately dressed, harassing others, and fighting from entering the club (fig. 23). The posters at the entrance of the clubs make it clear that such people will either be banned from entering or asked to leave.

Things Not to Do at Hongdae Clubs

- Anyone fighting will be kicked out of all Hongdae clubs.
- Anyone harassing other customers will be kicked out of all Hongdae clubs.
- Anyone drunk beyond control will be kicked out of all Hongdae clubs.
- Anyone caught with drugs will be turned over to the police.

Figure 23. Things Not to Do at Hongdae Clubs

Dress codes restrict certain clothing, as reflected in the linguistic landscape, in phrases

such as “Dress code: No shorts or slippers allowed” or “No shorts, no slippers” found at the club entrances (fig. 24).

Figure 24. Linguistic Landscape of the Dress Code

In some clubs, the linguistic landscape of space restriction appeared, asking the clubbers not to hang around the club’s entrance (fig. 25). Due to the clubs’ limited space, they tend to get very hot and crowded, especially during the summer. Consequently, many clubbers choose to hang around the entrance, causing shop owners and residents in the neighborhood to file complaints. The lack of club space and programs utilizing the outside area of the clubs has created this linguistic landscape.

Figure 25. Linguistic Landscape on Space Restriction

5) Identity of Club Culture Landscape: Play Culture, Cultural Powerhouse, Community or Entertainment Space?

Club cultures can be defined as the unique subcultures that are generated, shared, and changed around a club, which is a multicultural space with unique music, dance, people, and communication. Such club culture identity comes from the following identity of the club. First, a club is a space where music is played. Clubs play diverse genres of music leading the musical trends of the time. Second, a club is a space where people dance. Dance is a body language that makes it possible to communicate with all other people. Third, a club is a space where people congregate. Clubbers share similar cultural codes and tastes. Fourth, a club is a space where people communicate. Through communication, people transmit information, help others, and form communities (Lee 2003, 116-117).

Based on the above definitions, the identity of club culture can be summarized by “taste and party culture,” “alternative and digital culture,” and “local and community culture.” Firstly, club culture is a taste culture as well as a party culture in the sense that, in clubs, people with similar tastes in music, media consumption, and lifestyle gather, build friendships, and share information and interests. In this aspect, clubs with music and dance as intermediaries are significant as a healthy play culture space for youth, and

create a play culture landscape (fig. 26).

Figure 26. Club's Play Culture Landscape

Secondly, club culture is an alternative culture in which new culture is planned, experimented with, created, and communicated, as well as a non-mainstream/underground culture in which various fields of art such as music, fine arts, and design cross over. It is also a digital culture where boundaries disappear, sensitivity is expanded, and diversity coexists through the development of musical and digital technologies. In this aspect, clubs become a cultural powerhouse that sublimate young peoples' sensitivity and passion into cultural arts, and where new cultural trends in music, dancing, fashion, and technology can be read (fig. 27).

Figure 27. Club's Cultural Powerhouse Landscape

Finally, club culture is a local culture that communicates with the local community, creates an image and identity of the (local) community, and provides the driving force for local development. It is also a community culture that takes root in the local community both in reality and in cyberspace. In this regard, a club is a community space where people with similar tastes communicate and where relationships between individuals and between individuals and local community are established. It also creates a community landscape, as seen in fig. 28.

Figure 28. Club's Community Landscape

However, there are perspectives that emphasize the club's commercial identity by viewing clubs as entertainment spaces or as nightlife spots in the tourist area, ignoring the club's cultural identity.

6) Identity Politics around Club Culture Hegemony

There is a history of hegemonic struggle over who controls the identity of club culture in the Hongdae area. This is reflected in the contesting hegemony between live clubs

and dance clubs since the late 1990s, passing through the Live Club Leading Period, Dance Club Leading Period, and the Hegemony Negotiation Period (fig. 29).

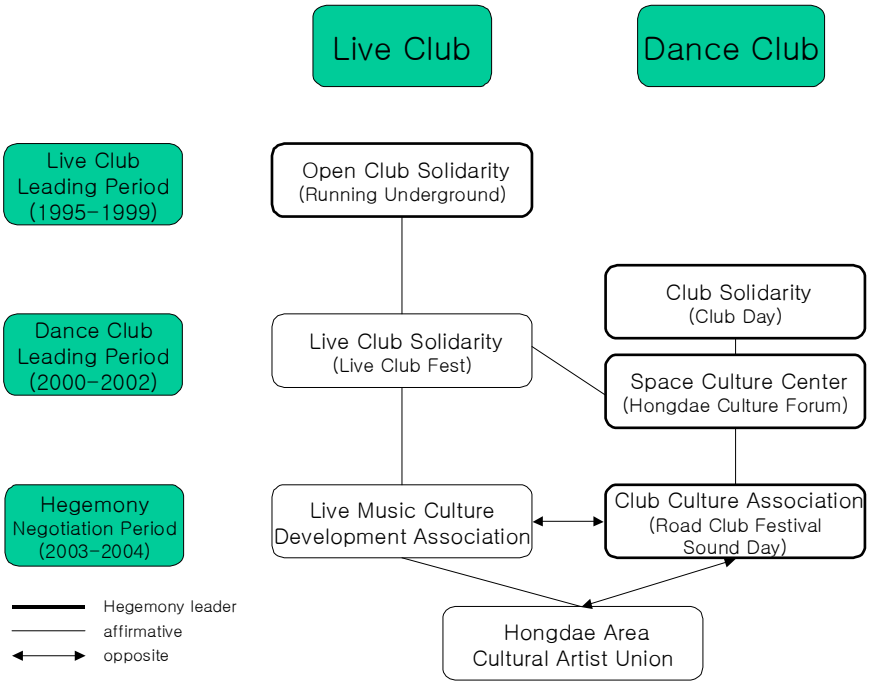



Figure 29. Changes in Club Culture Hegemony

The Live Club Leading Period started in the late 1990s with the first appearance of clubs. Various “indie” bands and live clubs advocating underground indie and punk music were concentrated in the Hongdae area, peaking in 1997. The media provided wide coverage of the discourses on these clubs and indie culture, and the Hongdae area began to be recognized as a mecca for club culture. In this atmosphere, the Open Club Solidarity group was formed to protest against government legislation (Food Sanitation Act) that made bands with more than three members illegal. The Solidarity initiated an event called Running Underground, a movement for the legalization of live clubs, which led to the legalization of band performances at live clubs. However, after legalization, these clubs began to decline, mostly due to financial difficulties.

The World Cup in 2002 marked the advent of the Dance Club Period. Dance clubs, which were the basis of night culture for people in their 20s and 30s and foreigners, and which were also considered tourist spots during the World Cup, began to

attract the government's attention. In order to turn this atmosphere into an opportunity to stimulate club culture, the dance club owners formed Club Solidarity. This organization began holding Club Day from 2001, a cultural event to oppose government legislation (Food Sanitation Act) that banned dancing in the clubs, launching an official dance club legalization movement (fig. 30).

Figure 30. Posters for Club Day

In 2002, a non-profit organization called the Space Culture Center joined the clubs as a professional planning organization for a club culture activation program that included Club Day. The Space Culture Center established itself as a culture leader group in the local community by organizing the Hongdae Area Culture Forum, a local organization based on the partnership between government and non-governmental groups, and was subsidized by the Seoul Metropolitan City for the World Cup. As Club Day and the Space Culture Center became established, dance clubs slowly assumed hegemony over local culture.

As dance clubs in the Hongdae area started exercising power, movements against it also began to rise. In early 2002, new clubs and bars that were not included in Club Day came together and formed a similar event called the Sound Parade, claiming an anti-Club Day spirit. However, they failed due to a lack of substance and networking. Inspired by the popularization of Club Day events, live club owners who led the club culture in the earlier days formed Live Club Solidarity. They began holding the Live Club Fest from May 2002, which led to the Hegemony Negotiation Period in 2003. Dance clubs reinforced their internal capacity by employing outside professionals and by organizing the Club Culture Association. They also held events such as the Road Club Festival and Sound Day, expanding the dance club culture with live performances.

Figure 31. Posters of the Main Club Culture Events
(Left to right: Sound Parade, Live Club Fest, Road Club Festival and Sound Day).

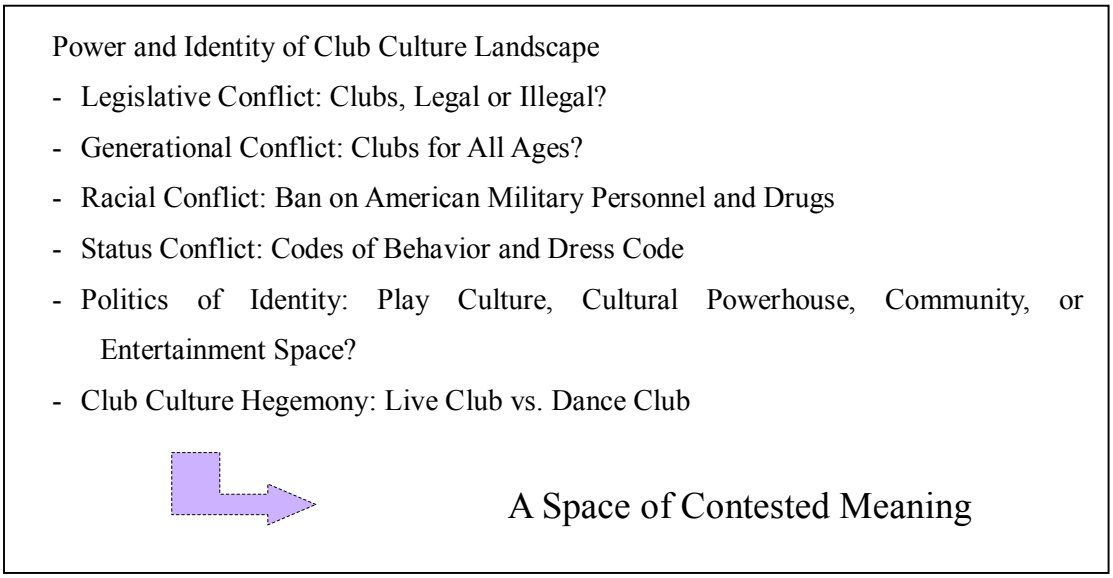
Live clubs also formed a nation-wide Live Music Culture Development Association in order to revive the weakened live club culture. In response to Sound Day, which focuses on live performances, live clubs hold Live Day as a way to emphasize that live

performances are unique to live clubs and to maintain their hegemony. In addition to these activities, local artists established the Hongdae Area Cultural Artist Union against the rapid commercialization of the area in 2004. With the leading members of the Union promoting the anti-dance club movement, conflict surrounding the hegemony of club culture is becoming more acute.

7) Synthesis: Club as a Space of Contested Meaning

In the political sphere of club culture landscape, there are various conflicts and contested meanings surrounding legislation, generation, race, and status. According to the perspectives and situations of the people involved, the significance and value of the identity of the club culture--as a play culture space (taste and party culture), a cultural powerhouse (alternative and digital culture), a community space (local and community culture) and a commercial space (entertainment culture)--are differently emphasized. There is also a conflict concerning who assumes the identity and hegemony of club culture. When viewed from the point of view of power and identity, the club culture landscape well reflects the characteristic of the club as a “space of contested meaning.”

Figure 32. The Power and Identity of the Club Culture Landscape




## Conclusion: New Cultural Trends in the Hongdae Area and the Future of Club Culture Identity

This paper analyzes the identity of club culture in the Hongdae area using six cultural political factors of landscape analysis. It confirms that the club culture in the Hongdae area has the identity of a carnivalisque space of "communitas" (visibility and significance), a local culture space (historicity and sociality), and a space of contested meaning (power and identity). However, this identity is not fixed, but is apt to change constantly in the interplay between subjects, systems, and spatial environments. The recent cultural trends that have been emerging in the Hongdae area predict the acute politics of identity concerning the changes in the club culture landscape.

From a legislative aspect, the process of designation of the Hongdae area as the Hongdae Culture District deserves examination. "Culture district" is a new governmental system that aims to preserve, activate, or construct an area where culturally significant facilities, subjects, and activities are concentrated. The Hongdae Culture District is promoted with the purpose of saving the culture of the Hongdae area that has been noted as a treasure of cultural diversity based on the underground, non-mainstream, and indie culture found there. However, cultural discourses cannot agree as

to whether or not to consider the presently illegal dance clubs as a culture space in the Culture District system. The government claims that since dance clubs are illegal, they should not even be an object of consideration for the Culture District policy. The artists of the area recognize clubs as a commercial space rather than a culture space, arguing that, as such, they cannot define the core of the Hongdae area culture. Live clubs, which are legalized, are demanding sole support for themselves in order to resume the hegemony of the club culture discourse in the Hongdae area they had in the past. However, dance clubs and related subjects view dance clubs as the representative culture space of the Hongdae area culture, and maintain that the present legal problems should be resolved through the Culture District system. Other remaining issues include questions as to whether the club culture should be institutionalized through the system of the Hongdae Culture District, whether clubs will become recommended spots in the Culture District, and whether live clubs and dance clubs will go together or go their separate ways.

A second point worthy of consideration is the change in culture subjects in the Hongdae area. Through various club culture events such as Club Day, new kinds of people are continuously being introduced to the Hongdae area. Not only clubbers with new musical and cultural tastes, but also researchers, culture planners, activists, and culture organizations continue to appear. The artists and culture planners who have been working in the Hongdae area for a long time are sometimes critical of this change. Some claim that only the culture that was created in the past was genuine or that indie culture in the Hongdae area is dead. There is a need to rediscover and redefine the club culture identity in relation to the identity of the Hongdae area.

Finally, there is a rapid reorganization of the spatial environment in the Hongdae area. With environmental changes, such as the designation of car-free streets and the Culture District, commercial spaces and buildings with clothes shops and restaurants are increasing rapidly. In addition, culture facilities such as club culture buildings, alternative spaces, and public cultural complexes, in combination with cultural events including an art flea market, the Road Club Festival, Youth Club Day, and Sound Day are also on the rise. In this context, the following questions are important to consider: Will the spatial environment be reorganized, centering around commercialism or culture? Can the commercial and cultural environments be

harmonized or must they remain exclusive? Depending on how these issues are actualized, both club culture identity and club culture landscape will change. Thus, this research needs to be followed up by continued research into these questions and issues.

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