

## A Study on Policy Proposals Based on the Analysis of the Declining State and Causes of Daehak-ro's Theater District\*

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### ABSTRACT

This study thoroughly examines the current situation of Daehak-ro and reaffirms its historical and cultural value, offering solutions to the major problems it faces. The analytical methods of the study used are fieldwork and interviews. The findings reveal that Daehak-ro is confronted with challenges such as gentrification, rising rents, and employment instability among performing artists, all of which are limiting the area's cultural and artistic activities. It emphasizes the necessity of public support for small theaters, which are struggling financially despite having operational autonomy. To ensure the sustainable development of Daehak-ro, the study proposes four key policies: providing affordable performance venues, offering long-term and sustainable support, establishing stable employment structures, and encouraging corporate donations. If implemented, these measures will not only maintain and enhance Daehak-ro's reputation but also positively impact the national cultural and artistic ecosystem. This research provides policy guidelines that can be applied to other cultural and artistic areas, helping Daehak-ro continue its role as a true cultural and artistic hub.

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## 1. Introduction

Since its designation as a pedestrian-only zone by the government in 1985, Daehak-ro, stretching from Ihwa Intersection to Hyehwa Rotary in Jongno-gu, Seoul, has truly become South Korea's hub of arts and culture. This move prompted numerous cultural organizations to relocate here and led to the opening of about ten small theaters, marking the inception of Daehak-ro as a renowned cultural district (National Archives of Korea, 2023).

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However, following the revocation of its pedestrian-only status, Daehak-ro experienced a period of decline until 1991, the “Year of Theater and Film,” when the gradual increase in the number of small theaters reestablished it as Korea’s premier “Theater Street.” Since then, Daehak-ro has solidified its status as a cultural center, attracting audiences and subsequently leading to an increase in commercial establishments. This influx of people has driven up local rental rates, posing a significant threat to the livelihood of performing artists and jeopardizing Daehak-ro’s position as a cultural epicenter. To address these challenges and preserve the cultural and historical value of Daehak-ro, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (2023) and Jongno District Office designated it as a cultural district in May 2004. They introduced policies such as relaxation of height restrictions for buildings attracting theaters, tax reductions for landlords, and regulations on new cultural businesses (Jeon, 2015).

While these measures have acknowledged Daehak-ro’s value as a unique concentration of performance-related venues and aimed to preserve this status, they have been critically limited in eliminating the threats to artists’ locales and ensuring environments conducive to quality performances (Lee, 2016). Consequently, not only have these policies failed to curb rent hikes, but they also haven’t translated into sustained support for the performance entities, leading to ongoing departures from Daehak-ro (Lee, 2016).

Therefore, analyzing the current situation of Daehak-ro as a cultural center and devising activation strategies based on these findings is timely and essential. This study aims to assess the current challenges facing theaters located in Daehak-ro through field surveys and literature reviews, and to propose activation strategies by analyzing existing and planned policies from government bodies and legislators to preserve the value of Daehak-ro.

Daehak-ro, recognized as a cultural hub in Korea, holds high value but faces several challenges including rising rents, and job insecurity among performing artists. These issues are gradually diminishing the area’s cultural activities and are complicated by the conflicting interests of various stakeholders.

Moreover, most theaters in Daehak-ro are small and privately operated, which increases operational autonomy but also highlights the economic difficulties faced by many small theaters. Therefore without ensuring employment stability for performing artists, sustainable development in Daehak-ro is deemed challenging.

## **2. Prior Research**

Based on papers indexed in the Academic Research Information Service, a total of 81 papers have been published under the keyword “Daehak-ro” from 2005 until December 2023. Out of these, eight papers focus specifically on the analysis and revitalization strategies for Daehak-ro. These include Kim’s (2016) discussion on the theatrical environment through cluster analysis, Kim and Ko’s (2020) exploration of the gentrification of Daehak-ro, Lim’s (2009) analysis of the economic impacts of theaters in the area, and Lee et al.’s (2011) study on the developmental directions for Daehak-ro by comparing it with global cultural towns. Other significant contributions are from Hong and Kim (2005) who studied the impact of specialized local policies on architectural changes focusing on cultural facilities, Hwang et al.’s (2018) research on management characteristics and

improvement strategies for cultural districts, and Kim and Hwang's (2019) work on sustainable strategies for art-led urban regeneration in London's Hoxton area as a case study. Lee and Yang's (2019) empirical analysis of survival and closure risks for businesses in cultural districts also provides crucial insights.

In their 2020 study "The Unfolding and Characteristics of Gentrification in Daehak-ro," Kim and Ko (2020) analyze the situation in Daehak-ro from the perspective of gentrification. They point out that government support policies intended to preserve the value of Daehak-ro have paradoxically led to adverse effects. This paper attempts an empirical analysis based on data to shed light on the ironic consequences of such policies. Furthermore, it examines the construction activities and changes in the performance environment around Daehak-ro to highlight the negative impacts of gentrification triggered by the designation of the area as a cultural district. According to the study, in 2017, 34 out of 1,146 reported theater closures in Seoul occurred in Jongno District, where Daehak-ro is located, accounting for 24.7% of the total. This high rate of closures is significantly associated with the rising rental fees for performance venues that have been increasing since 2010.

In the study "Research on the Improvement Directions for Daehak-ro Based on the Formation and Management Processes of Cultural Art Towns Worldwide," co-authored by Lee and others, an analysis is conducted on the development and operational strategies of cultural art towns globally, with a focus on establishing future directions for Daehak-ro, a prominent cultural art town in Korea. The paper examines cases from Germany, France, Russia, and the United States, analyzing the systems supporting performances and their evolutionary processes. These international examples are compared and contrasted with the formation process of local cultural art towns. The study aims to identify challenges and propose improvement strategies by linking these findings to Daehak-ro, endeavoring to contextualize and address the issues within the framework of Daehak-ro's unique cultural and artistic landscape.

In the study "Research on Ensuring the Sustainability of Artist-Led Urban Regeneration: A Case Study of Gentrification and Artist Support Platforms in Hoxton, London" by Kim and Hwang, the focus is on identifying practical solutions for the current challenges faced by Daehak-ro. This paper highlights the significant role of local governments, not merely critiquing their leadership in support policies but discussing the balance between government aid and private sector autonomy. The study argues that overcoming the cycle where artist-led regeneration eventually displaces the artists themselves requires a well-coordinated effort, emphasizing the interplay between governmental initiatives and private independence to sustainably nurture and support artistic communities.

Not included in the previously mentioned eight papers, Ahn's "Statistical View on the Daehak-ro Theater Ecosystem" and Lee and Lim's "Analysis and Improvement of Support Policies for Daehak-ro Creative Performances (Theater/Musical): Focusing on the <Performing Arts Incubation Support Project>" are also integral to the preliminary research. Ahn initiated a detailed investigation into the theater ecosystem of Daehak-ro after noting insufficient data on the market effects of support policies following the designation of Daehak-ro as a 'Theater District' by Seoul City in 2010. The study provides specific statistical data on the actors, venues, productions, audience, and market size, offering insights into the changes in the number of theaters from 2004 to 2010, as well as details on the distribution, operation, and size of the venues. This data allows for a critical evaluation

of the policies implemented since the area's designation as a cultural district. Notably, a survey involving 300 theater professionals revealed a predominantly negative perception of the Daehak-ro support policies, highlighting significant implications for policy effectiveness (Ahn, 2012).

Lee and Lim (2018) critically analyze the current commercialization of the cultural and performance scene in Daehak-ro, scrutinizing the effectiveness of the government's Performing Arts Creation Incubation Support Project, referred to as the 'Support Project.' This study assesses the project's ability to preserve creative diversity and provide financial support to performing groups. While the 'Support Project' has shown effectiveness in these areas, it has not succeeded in ensuring the self-sufficiency of these groups. This analysis provides important insights into the future direction of support policies, highlighting the need for adjustments to enhance sustainability and independence among performing arts organizations.

Based on the analysis of these studies, we found that there are two problems with the current Daehak-ro. First, it is not easy to provide stable performance venues due to high rents. Second, the financial independence of performing organizations and performers is not structurally possible. However, these studies do not provide specific or sufficient measures to solve these problems. Therefore, this study aims to further investigate the solutions to these issues raised by these previous studies.

### 3. Research Scope and Method

#### 3.1 Research scope

Daehak-ro is renowned for its dense concentration of theaters, extending from Dongsoong-dong Ihwa Intersection to Hyeohwa Rotary, and covering areas around Dongsoong-dong, Hyeohwa-dong, Changgyeonggung-ro, and Sungkyunkwan-ro. The name "Daehak-ro" does not represent a precise administrative region but has evolved naturally over time, making it difficult to define its boundaries clearly. Reflecting this, previous studies on Daehak-ro often lack a specific definition of the area, frequently using the "Daehak-ro Theater Guide"<sup>1)</sup> provided by the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture as a reference. This guide, which covers the area from Dongsoong-dong Ihwa Intersection to Hyeohwa Rotary, does not specify clear boundaries and includes subjective criteria such as excluding venues that engage in solicitation. Due to these ambiguities, this study limits its scope to 94 performance venues located along Daehak-ro-gil and Dongsoong-gil in Jongno-gu, Seoul, focusing on the current situation of Daehak-ro post-pandemic, as most previous research addresses the situation up to 2015.

#### 3.2 Research methodology and procedures

To address the current situation of "Daehak-ro," a preliminary literature review was conducted.

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1) Daehak-ro Theater Guide

[https://www.sfac.or.kr/upload/archive/2014/03/12/010//20140312143025C52939\\_ORG.pdf](https://www.sfac.or.kr/upload/archive/2014/03/12/010//20140312143025C52939_ORG.pdf), 2024. 01. 04

This included selecting studies published after 2005 using “Daehak-ro” as a keyword that analyzed the area’s conditions and issues, along with statistical data from Seoul City from 2019 onwards and the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture’s “Daehak-ro Theatre Status Survey Report.” Based on this data, several hypotheses about the current state of Daehak-ro were developed. A structure for onsite visits and interviews was then drafted, selecting specific areas and individuals for these interviews. The research methods and procedures are as follows:

First, interviews were conducted with performance planners to identify the primary challenges in securing stable performance spaces in Daehak-ro.

Second, the perceptions and opinions of performance practitioners regarding Daehak-ro as a “Street of Culture and Arts” were gathered for the year 2023.

Third, interviews with local politicians and municipal officials working within the Daehak-ro area provided insights into the challenges of policy implementation.

To ensure consistency and professionalism in the interviews, tools were developed beforehand. The development of these interview tools was informed by reviewing various previous studies and statistical data on Daehak-ro. The selection of interview content was guided by references such as the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture’s 2013 “Daehak-ro Theatre Status Survey Report.”

Stage	Contents	Research Methods
Literature Analysis	- Select and analyze papers discussing the conditions and challenges of “Daehak-ro”; conduct additional related literature reviews.	Literature analysis method.
+	+	
Case Study Analysis	- Analyze statistical data from Seoul City created since 2019 and the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture’s “Daehak-ro Theater Status Survey Report”; perform analyses based on scale and operator type	Case Study Analysis Method
+	+	
Expert Consultation & Stakeholder Feedback	- Period: January 23-26, 2024 - Method: Interviews - Sampling Method: Stratified sampling based on job roles, distinguishing between performance planning personnel and performance practitioners.	Interviews
↓	↓	
Conclusions and Recommendations	- Conclusions and suggestions for future improvement directions. - Recommendations	

**Fig. 1.** Research methods and procedures

## 4. Analysis of the Current State of Daehak-ro Theater District

### 4.1 History of Daehak-ro's theater district

The area from Ihwa Intersection to Hyehwa Rotary in Dongsoong-dong, Jongno-gu, Seoul, is popularly known as “Daehak-ro,” historically a center of education. This region was home to Sungkyunkwan, established in the seventh year of King Taejo’s reign during the Joseon Dynasty, serving as the highest educational institution of the time, akin to today’s national universities. Originally, this area was named “Sunggyobang (崇教坊),” which signifies ‘revering education.’

During the Japanese colonial period, this area was renamed to “Dongsung-dong.” During this time, several patriots initiated movements to establish a national university to educate Korean youths, but these efforts were thwarted by Japanese interference. Instead, the Japanese government revised the Chosun Education Order and established Keijo Imperial University in Dongsung-dong and Yeon-gyeon-dong in 1924. The Chosun Education Order aimed to disseminate the Japanese language and cultivate loyalty to the Japanese Empire.

The establishment of Keijo Imperial University was partly due to Dongsung-dong’s relatively tranquil environment, but also because the area already hosted several educational facilities. After liberation, this university was transformed into the National University of Seoul, and numerous colleges of Seoul National University came to be located around Daehak-ro.

When Seoul National University was located in Dongsung-dong, the area was known as “Munridaegil.” A local stream called Heungdeokdongcheon flowed through the area and was popularly referred to as “the Seine” by the students, who frequented it. In 1975, Seoul National University relocated to the Gwanak Campus, and Marronnier Park was established on the old site.

Daehak-ro was designated as a pedestrian-only street in 1985, attracting cultural organizations to the area and establishing it as a cultural hub with the opening of multiple small theaters. However, the revocation of its pedestrian-only status led to a temporary decline. Later, an increase in the number of small theaters helped Daehak-ro to regain its status as a leading theater district in Korea.

In 2004, the area was designated as a cultural district, initiating various policies to attract more theaters. These efforts are recognized as part of the endeavors to preserve Daehak-ro’s value. However, these policies have not effectively addressed fundamental issues like the rise in rent that threatens the survival of performing artists, due to the lack of sustained support for the performance stakeholders.

### 4.2 Seat capacity status

The theater locations in the area, stretching from Dongsoong-dong Ihwa Intersection to Hyehwa Rotary along the straight road known as “Daehak-ro,” demonstrate the extensive range of “Daehak-ro.” In fact, the name “Daehak-ro,” used to describe this area, does not signify a precise administrative district. It has naturally come to be called this over time. Therefore, the boundaries of “Daehak-ro” are not clearly defined. Consequently, “Daehak-ro” typically refers to the area surrounding the road leading from Ihwa Intersection to Hyehwa Rotary, making it challenging to produce accurate statistical data on the theaters in “Daehak-ro.”

According to the latest data from Seoul Metropolitan Government (2023), the “Status of Registered Theaters in Seoul (as of the end of March 2023),” accessible at <https://opengov.seoul.go.kr/pub->

lic/28190638 as of January 4, 2024, there are a total of 94 theaters located in Daehak-ro. When classifying these theaters by the number of seats, they are categorized as follows: large theaters with over 500 seats, medium theaters with 300 to 499 seats, and small theaters with fewer than 299 seats.

**Table 1.** Status of theaters by scale

Capacity based on seating capacity	Number	Theater Names
<b>Large Theaters (500+ seats)</b>	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Daehak-ro Arts Theater Main Hall</li> <li>- UNIPEX Hall 1</li> <li>- ARKO Arts Theater Main Hall</li> <li>- Hongik University Daehak-ro Art Center Main Hall</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Theaters (300-499 seats)</b>	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Good Theater</li> <li>- Plus Theater</li> <li>- Daehak-ro TOM Theater Hall 1</li> <li>- Fantastic Exclusive Hall</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Art One Theater Hall 1</li> <li>- Yes24 Stage Hall 1</li> <li>- Link Arts Center Bugs Hall</li> <li>- Link Arts Center Payco Hall</li> <li>- Dream Arts Center Hall 1</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Theater Quad</li> <li>- Dongduk Cotton Hall</li> <li>- SKON (Skon) Hall 1</li> </ul>
<b>Small Theaters (50-299 seats)</b>	76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mu Theater</li> <li>- Artto Theater</li> <li>- The Theater</li> <li>- Picasso Theater</li> <li>- Sewoo Art Center Hall 2</li> <li>- Small Theater Festival</li> <li>- Dalbang E&amp;C Theater</li> <li>- Lecos Art Theater</li> <li>- Bluebird Theater</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Star City Huam Stage</li> <li>- Maru Art Hall</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Theater M</li> <li>- 001 Stage</li> <li>- Dream Theater</li> <li>- HyeHwaDang Theater</li> <li>- Full Light Theater</li> <li>- Sky Theater Hall 2</li> <li>- Zion Art Hall</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Arts Theater Small Hall</li> <li>- Hongik University Daehak-ro Art Center Small Hall</li> <li>- Culture Theater</li> <li>- Mulbit Theater</li> <li>- Masterpiece Theater</li> <li>- Art Forest Hall 2</li> <li>- Art Hall Marika Hall 2</li> <li>- Green Theater</li> <li>- Olleh Hall</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Theater Play HyeHwa</li> <li>- Blue Theater</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Art One Theater Hall 3</li> <li>- Sewoo Art Center</li> <li>- Fox Star Theater</li> <li>- Space Owl</li> <li>- UNIPEX Hall 3</li> <li>- One Pass Art Hall</li> <li>- Star Stage</li> <li>- CJ Art Hall</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Batanggol Small Theater</li> <li>- Hanyang Repertory Theater</li> <li>- Hakjeon Blue Small Theater</li> <li>- Art Hall Marika Hall 1</li> <li>- Hama Theater</li> <li>- Art Forest Hall 1</li> <li>- Content Ground</li> <li>- ROOM</li> <li>- Raon Art Hall</li> <li>- Batanggol Small Theater Hall 2</li> <li>- TinTin Hall</li> <li>- Daehak-ro TOM Hall 2</li> <li>- QC Theater</li> <li>- Yes24 Stage Hall 3</li> <li>- UNIPEX Hall 2</li> <li>- Freedom Theater</li> <li>- Daehak-ro Art One Theater Hall 2</li> <li>- Yes24 Stage Hall 2</li> <li>- Artistan Hall</li> <li>- Art House</li> <li>- Platform 74</li> <li>- Naksan Theater</li> <li>- Youth Theater</li> <li>- Short Play Theater</li> <li>- Marronnier Theater</li> <li>- Cotell Art Hall</li> <li>- Spring Day Art Hall 1</li> <li>- Spring Day Art Hall 2</li> <li>- Berry Company Hall 2</li> <li>- Berry Company Hall 1</li> <li>- Shinyeon Art Hall</li> <li>- The Seed and the Core Small Theater</li> <li>- Zoltan Theater</li> <li>- Contents Box</li> <li>- JS Hall</li> <li>- Yegreen Theater</li> <li>- Dream Art Center Hall 4</li> <li>- Dream Art Center Hall 3</li> <li>- Dream Art Center Hall 2</li> <li>- Sh art hall</li> <li>- SKON (Skon) Hall 2</li> </ul>

The theaters located in Daehak-ro are predominantly small venues. Of the total 94 theaters, 4 are large theaters, which include Daehak-ro Arts Theater, ARKO Arts Theater, UNIPEX Hall 1, and Hongik University Daehak-ro Art Center. There are 12 medium-sized theaters, including The Good Theater, Dongduk Cotton Hall, Dream Art Center Hall 1, Link Arts Center Bugs Hall and Payco Hall, Seokyeong University Performance Arts Center Hall 1, Art One Theater Hall 1, Yes24 Stage Hall 1, TOM Hall 1, Plus Theater, Fantastic Exclusive Hall, and Quad. The remaining 76 theaters are small theaters with less than 300 seats, of which 35 have fewer than 150 seats. This predominance of small-scale operations reflects the challenging circumstances many theaters face, struggling to cope with a 126% increase in rent over the past decade.

Despite economic difficulties, most small theaters in Daehak-ro have historically managed both production and operations. However, the economic impact of the pandemic has forced many theaters to either suspend operations or switch to leasing. When examining the employment situation of performing arts professionals, it is evident that actors, directors, planners, and stage technicians typically engage in short-term contracts associated with specific projects, with the average employment period being less than 90 days. Consequently, many performers must take on additional part-time jobs to sustain their livelihoods, and it is reported that actors often appear in multiple productions simultaneously to cope with financial instability.

#### 4.3 Status by operating entity (public/private)

Upon examining the management structure of the 94 theaters in Daehak-ro, it becomes evident that except for three, all are privately operated. This means that 91 out of the 94 theaters on Daehak-ro are managed by private entities. When compared nationally, where approximately 52% of theaters are managed by public institutions, the mere 3% public operation rate at Daehak-ro is strikingly low. This scenario indicates that the cultural performance landscape in Daehak-ro is predominantly reliant on the private sector. Excluding the few publicly managed theaters, the vast majority are under private control, demonstrating that the region's performing arts activities are significantly dependent on the creativity and capital of the private sector.

**Table 2.** Interview survey structure

Number	Interview items
1	Perception of 'Daehak-ro' in general
2	Affiliation type
3	performance form
4	Evaluation of support policies
5	Request for support policy
6	activity area
7	employment type
8	'Daehakro' performance experience
9	Average number of active days per year



Although Daehak-ro in Jongno-gu, Seoul, is relatively small on a national scale, its significance and symbolism in the performing arts cannot be ignored. Daehak-ro is an area dense with theaters, a rarity on a global scale, emphasizing its unique value. Thus, preserving and maintaining the cultural value of Daehak-ro cannot be solely reliant on the private sector. There is a pressing need for active public participation and support to further enhance the cultural potential of this area, demanding careful consideration and a strategic policy approach.

If the value of Daehak-ro were assumed to lie merely in maintaining the number of theaters, achieving this goal might not be too difficult, as large theaters operated by corporations or universities are often replacing smaller theaters as they disappear. However, this does not necessarily mean that the establishment of large theaters in Daehak-ro is detrimental. If the true value of Daehak-ro as a street of culture and arts lies in fostering challenging and experimental creative activities, and in providing an environment that encourages such creative freedom, then public support and intervention are essential to protect and enhance this. It suggests that beyond merely maintaining a numerical count of facilities, there is a need for policies that support and protect the qualitative aspects, thereby underpinning the cultural diversity and creativity of Daehak-ro.

#### *4.4 Interview results*

In this study, to supplement the survey data, interviews were conducted from January 23 to January 26, 2024. The sampling method employed was quota sampling based on job roles, dividing the subjects into performance planners, performing arts practitioners, and government officials. The specific content of the interviews is as follows:

According to the interview statistics, a total of 8 people participated, including 2 performance investigators and 6 performance planning associates. The responses, organized by interview item, revealed that 33.3% are involved solely in performance production, 16.7% in theater management, and 50% in both roles. These results indicate that most respondents expressed negative opinions about their employment status and support policies. Particularly noteworthy is that half of the participants are involved in both production and theater operation, suggesting that many in the performance sector juggle multiple roles.

Secondly, Regarding the overall perception of Daehak-ro as a street of performing arts, 67.5% of respondents rated it negatively with 25% stating it was 'very poor' and 37.5% 'poor'. Only 12.5% considered it 'good' and another 25% 'very good'. This negative perception reflects the challenges facing performing arts activities in Daehak-ro and indicates a pressing need for policy improvements to better support its role as a central hub for performance arts.

Additionally, when asked about their evaluation of the support policies implemented after the designation of the cultural district in 2005, 66.7% of respondents rated these policies as 'poor', with none rating them as 'good' or 'very good'. When discussing potential participation in future support policies, respondents expressed a strong need for policies that provide direct benefits to artists in Daehak-ro (mentioned by 5 participants) and suggested strongly removing aggressive street promoters and enhancing support and promotion for small theaters and their performances (mentioned by 2 participants). Respondents particularly emphasized the need for enhanced benefits for artists

and support for performance publicity.

To indirectly assess the situation of Daehak-ro's theater district, the characteristics of the respondents were examined. All respondents had over five years of experience in the performing arts, indicating substantial involvement in the industry. However, all were also employed on a project basis with short-term contracts, and they reported an average annual active working period of less than 90 days. This employment instability underscores the economic insecurity faced by performing arts professionals, which can negatively affect their creative activities.

The interview results highlight the need for practical and specific policy interventions to address the challenges faced by Daehak-ro as a street of performing arts. To ensure the sustainable development of the performing arts sector, measures must be implemented to guarantee employment stability for practitioners and to actively support their creative endeavors.

## 5. Policy proposal through status and cause analysis

### *5.1 Policy to provide stable, affordable performance venues*

The prolonged pandemic undoubtedly had a significant impact, but a more fundamental cause seems to be the high rental rates and the reluctance of so many lesser to renew leases. A symbolic example of this situation is the closure of Hakchon Theatre, announced for March 15, 2024. Established in 1991 and representing the 'Theatre District' for 30 years, Hakchon's closure appears to have been decisively influenced by the pandemic-induced financial difficulties and the landlord's refusal to renew the lease (Choi, 2023). Although the lessor's reluctance is not the only reason for this closure, it is one of the main reasons.

This closure illustrates the negative aspects of rising rents, a typical effect of gentrification. In a context of continually increasing rents, such increases are particularly burdensome for small theaters without a solid revenue structure. Therefore, for small theaters that mostly rent their venues (Ahn, 2012), a solution akin to providing affordable public housing to low-income families could be implemented for theaters. This could involve renting performance spaces through a public acquisition-rental scheme similar to those run by LH (Korea Land & Housing Corporation) or SH (Seoul Housing & Communities Corporation), potentially resolving these challenges.

### *5.2 Establish long-term and sustainable support policies*

The fundamental elements of professional and sustained support policies should be predictable and continuous support, creating an ecosystem where beneficiaries can easily anticipate the aid they will receive (Park, 2022). Instead of merely providing financial relief for rent — which is akin to giving a fish — it's crucial that support helps organizations develop the capacity to improve their revenue structures. Therefore, government support should not just focus on short-term project-based aid, but should also establish plans and operational structures that enable performance organizations to become economically self-sufficient, offering more long-term and continuous support strategies.

### *5.3 Establishing a stable form of employment*

Stable performance organizations can be achieved through stable team members. Currently, most members of performance groups are freelancers without steady income, unable to secure stable employment. Moreover, due to the unpredictability of income from performances, many employment contracts are formed on a minimal basis with additional payments determined by final profits, often agreed verbally (Park, 2022). Therefore, employment support policies targeted at small and medium-sized enterprises should be extended to performance groups, enabling them to employ their members as regular staff. This approach would provide a foundation for more secure and reliable operations within the cultural sector.

### *5.4 Activation of corporate donations*

The rising demand for corporate social responsibility today calls for companies to actively participate in social contribution activities, no longer as a mandatory obligation but as a means to “enhance corporate value” (Choi et al., 2009). This trend is evident in a report by the Korea Federation of Business, where the size of social contributions made by major companies in 2022 amounted to KRW 3.53 trillion, an increase of over KRW 600 billion from KRW 2.90 trillion in 2015 (Park & Yang, 2016). Of this amount, approximately KRW 485 billion was spent on the culture and arts sector, including sports. As seen in cases of library donation culture (Noh, 2014), many companies are already prepared to spend significant amounts on social contributions. Therefore, efforts by both the public and private sectors are necessary to expand corporate donations and sponsorships to revitalize ‘Daehak-ro’.

### *5.5 Documentation project in Daehak-ro Theater District*

It appears that the exodus of performance groups, which are central to Daehak-ro, South Korea’s hub of performing arts, is still ongoing. Therefore, analyzing the current situation of Daehak-ro as a center of performing arts and contemplating measures to preserve its value seems timely. To this end, efforts to highlight the significance of Daehak-ro as a cultural epicenter and to document the disappearing theaters of Daehak-ro are also necessary.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study examined the current situation of Daehak-ro in Seoul’s Jongno District, identified through literature and statistical data, augmented by site visits and feedback from locals, retracing the historic and cultural significance of Daehak-ro and analyzing the pressing issues it faces. Proposals for policies to address these challenges were also developed based on the findings.

Daehak-ro, recognized as a cultural hub in Korea, holds high value but faces several challenges including gentrification, rising rents, and job insecurity among performing artists. These issues are

gradually diminishing the area's cultural activities and are complicated by the conflicting interests of various stakeholders.

The research revealed that most theaters in Daehak-ro are small and privately operated, which increases operational autonomy but also highlights the economic difficulties faced by many small theaters. A lack of public support appears to be a contributing factor to these problems. Without ensuring employment stability for performing artists, sustainable development in Daehak-ro is deemed challenging.

Additionally, interviews revealed a high level of negative perception towards the cultural and artistic activities in Daehak-ro. This suggests that the current support policies are not effectively addressing the real issues faced by performing artists. Therefore, there is a clear need for specific and sustainable support policies that can create an environment conducive to creative activities for performing artists active in Daehak-ro.

Therefore, this study proposed the following four aspects, and if these suggestions are realized, Daehakro will be able to maintain and strengthen its reputation as a continuously growing and developing center of culture and arts. Additionally, these policies can serve as exemplary examples not only for Daehakro but also for other culture and arts regions, and will have a positive impact on the overall domestic culture and arts ecosystem.

First, the stable provision of affordable performance venues. The government and local governments must secure public rental performance venues and allow performing artists to use them at low costs. These policies can ensure the sustainability of performing arts and prevent the exodus of performing artists due to gentrification.

Second, long-term and sustainable support. Support from the government and local communities must be continuous, not one-off. Through long-term support, we must provide a foundation for performing arts organizations to become economically independent and maintain and develop the quality of performing arts.

Third, establishing a stable employment pattern: Employment support policies must be expanded so that performing artists can have stable jobs. The government must strengthen the employment subsidy system so that performing artists can be hired as full-time employees, and develop various programs to increase employment stability.

Fourth, encourage donations from companies. We must emphasize corporate social responsibility and encourage companies to participate in supporting culture and arts. In order to encourage donations to the field of culture and arts, incentives such as tax benefits should be provided to encourage companies to actively participate in supporting culture and arts.

In order for Daehakro to maintain and develop its original value as a street of culture and arts, it is urgent to establish a policy foundation that can practically implement these suggestions. This could be a guideline that can be applied not only to Daehakro, but also to other cultural and artistic streets across the country.

Of course, performing arts do not necessarily have to be the exclusive property of 'Daehakro,' but given that the historical and cultural value of 'Daehakro' is by no means small, efforts to preserve the value of 'Daehakro' can be said to be meaningful. Additionally, this research process can contribute as data that can be applied to cases in other regions.

## Conflicts Interest

No author has any other conflict of interest to declare.

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