



# The Dissonance between Old and New Industrial Landscapes:

*Centrally-led local industrial restructuring and the emergence of new industrial landscapes*

## Background

The emergence of decontextualised Industrial landscape due to government-led industrial restructuring policies. Central governments often implement industrial restructuring to revive regional economies following deindustrialisation. While economic recovery is important, the impact on local industrial landscapes is often overlooked.

### Decline of a coal mining town in South Korea

In the 1990s, the South Korean government phased out the coal mining industry. New industries were introduced without considering the region's history and geography, leading to poorly integrated development.

*Sabuk*, once a wealthy coal mining town, saw economic decline following coal mining phase-out policy. The incongruity between the abandoned coal mine industrial landscape and the new casino landscape has created a disharmonious industrial landscape within the town.

This study examines how central government-led industrial restructuring can lead to the creation of disconnected industrial landscapes within the region. **The use of industrial heritage can help to conserve regional identity, thereby ensuring more contextually relevant transformations.** Rather than prioritising economic factors alone, **policies should integrate local heritage to promote geographically sensitive industrial landscapes.**

## Policy Recommendations:

### How should industrial policies be designed to consider local scenic assets?

#### 1. Uncovering the economic potential of local industrial heritage and landscapes

- Repurposing industrial heritage can drive local economic growth.
- For example, since the late 2010s, towns like *Sabuk* have turned abandoned mines into museums and cultural spaces. This preserves regional history while attracting tourism and investment.

#### 2. Stepping slightly away from centrally driven policy

- A movement to revitalise local landscapes through the collaboration of local communities, local and central government.
- Ease regulations on industrial heritage utilisation to encourage private sector involvement.



Efforts are underway to restore the industrial landscape by representing industrial heritage (Source: the author)

## Case Study

### 1. Introduction of Gambling Industry in 2003

Kangwon Land, the only domestic casino, opened under a special law to revitalise the abandoned mining town of Sabuk. Sabuk's industrial landscapes shifted from coal mining to gambling-related businesses.

### 2. Unintended Consequences

Instead of a glamorous renewal of local landscapes, Sabuk saw a rise in pawnshops and massage parlours. Neon signs and abandoned collateral cars became defining features of the new industrial landscape within the local area.

### 3. Mismatch between local histories and the new landscapes

The new industrial landscape clashed with the region's historical and geographical identity. This is due to centrally-led policy focused solely on economic recovery, marginalising regional geographical and historical landscapes.

### 4. Policy Implications through the case

Industrial restructuring should align with local contexts to avoid creating discordant landscapes. Economic recovery efforts must balance industrial change with preserving local identity.



New industrial landscape is dominated by pawnshops after the industrial restructuring (Source: the author)

## Key findings:

### Centrally-led industrial restructuring policy would make decontextualised industrial landscapes

While there is broad agreement on the need for industrial policies that consider regional contexts, it is difficult to summarise and generalise specific approaches. **In the case at hand, a couple of policy directions can be proposed.**

- For policy makers, this underlines **the importance of industrial landscape policies that balance economic growth with cultural and spatial coherence**, ensuring that industrial change enhances both regional identity and long-term economic sustainability.
- **Contextualised industrial restructuring is a key driver of regional economic revival**, shaping economic revitalisation and reevaluating industrial heritage. **This process not only influences economic growth, but also reshapes industrial landscapes**, transforming old facilities into heritage sites while fostering new industrial zones.

The industrial landscape of a region records its economic ups and downs. Its value will be maximised when the landscape records and narratives the region's geography and history, harmonising with the new industrial landscape rather than being 'replaced' by the new one.

**Policies that consider the geographical contexts are needed instead of those that prioritise economic rationality.**

### Acknowledgement

This policy note was produced based on research conducted by Dr. Jungsuk Woo. He is an economic geographer at the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies, Newcastle University. His research interests are industrial strategies and policies in East Asian countries and Evolutionary Economic Geography.

For further information contact Dr Jungsuk Woo  
([j.woo2@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:j.woo2@newcastle.ac.uk))