A divided nation: Land tenure, governance and Korean (re-)unification

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Research background
The Korean peninsula is the only separated region in the world, leaving a large task for the whole world and the Korean (re-)unification is a very complex process dealing with political, socio-economic and cultural dilemmas. It is also very difficult to anticipate societal problems that may arise after (re-)unification since Korean (re-)unification is a future fact that we have not experienced. Land and land tenure are key component of state re-structuring process since it is fundamental to facilitating socio-spatial identities revolving around symbolic and historical meaning of territories. Spatial integration needs development alongside integration of social and legal institutions, of which land is a notable feature. Hence, the reorganization of land tenure in a single Korea would affect terms of economic and social integration.

Problem statement
In the Korean (re-)unification discourses, limited attention is given to how the highly different systems of land tenure can be unified in a comprehensive land governance framework. The major problem is it remains difficult to predict and prepare for future possibilities and multi-dimensional problems. Therefore, only limited studies address these land issues. This highlights uncertainty of (re-)unification, high sensitivity to government (re-)unification policies and limited access to North Korean data. Due to these constraints, theoretical foundations for ascertaining linkages, between land tenure and (re-)unification processes, their inter-relationship and significance are insufficient.
Research objective

The overall research objective are:
(1) To identify what (re-)unification is and describe how, where and when land tenure could be significant in a (re-)unification setting [Article 1];
(2) To demonstrate which tools are appropriate to evaluate land governance transformation in a different state restructuring process [Article 2];
(3) To examine how existing and more traditional LT-related data can be synthesized and visualized in conjunction with EO data into land management practices as well as peace and conflict research [Article 3];
(4) To ascertain the problems of land governance framework for Korean (re-)unification and what factors can create impediments and how can policies be designed and implemented for responsible land governance during and after Korean (re-)unification [Article 4].

Research methods

The research project has been conducted as a publication-based thesis, which consists of four peer-reviewed papers. Moreover, this is multi- and inter-disciplinary research ranged from theoretical and methodological standpoints to empirical, and synthetic approaches (see Fig. 1). A wide range of methodology has been adapted (or will be applied) to address the focal research questions.

Firstly, the ‘CIMOC’ framework has devised in order to derive a composite research questions in Article 1 (see [1]). Secondly, the different land governance transformation has demonstrated using illustrative case studies using SN, LA and DTO-oriented approaches in coupling of structuration theory and government tools-based approach (in progress). Thirdly, Earth Observation (EO) data combining with ground-based socio-economic data will be utilized in detecting pattern changes of land management in (re-)unification settings. Lastly, explanation-building techniques and the competency-based interviews (e.g. with the experts and refugees) will address which implementation measures of land tenure and governance transformation are fit-for-purpose according to possible (re-)unification formulas beyond the policy scenario mapping.

Expected results

The discussion of land tenure and governance matters in a state re-structuring process have so far focused on monolystical and pragmatic problem-solving rather than the start of a more fundamental discussion: how to re-shape land governance institutions. The emerging theoretical insights and applied methodologies in this research project, therefore, can be widely recommended into land use policy sciences as well as peace and conflict researches.

References