

Categorical Mismatch in the Artist Policy: The case of Korean Artist Welfare Act

Seoul National University Pil Joo Jung

1. Aim

Korean Artist Welfare Act(KAWA) of 2011 has importance as one of the rarest welfare laws for artist, which intends to help artists to sustain their art practices by securing economic stability. The case of KAWA therefore could provide a chance to examine how artist could be ill-defined at the policy level and what its consequence would be.

Since welfare policy requires social consensus for its resource distribution, specifying who the targeted people are is inevitably called for. However, KAWA-making process virtually avoided the chances of gaining legitimacy on “who is artist” as the recipient of the welfare provision. Without proper understanding on artistic labour, KAWA is virtually giving priority to contracting artists over self-employed artists through the industrial accident insurance coverage benefits and privilege in the state grants. Hence, this article seeks to demonstrate that KAWA is ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy, which treats ‘all’ artists in a comprehensive but exclusionary manner. This article then would like to argue that the categorical mismatch in KAWA is making the value of artistic labour more marginalized than it was in Pre-KAWA.

2. Data & Methods

With literature review, in-depth interviews of street-level bureaucrats were performed in order to know what/how the KAWA’s problems are actually recognized in the field. Face-to-face in-depth interview was chosen prior to questionnaire survey, because the interviewees are civil servants working for government, who tend to be reluctant to talk officially about the policy they are in charge of.

3. Results

Three types of ‘categorical mismatch’ were discovered in KAWA’s formation and implementation. The first one is about the type of artistic labour. Self-employed or freelance artists, who are seldom involved in contracts and account for more than 50 % of the total artist population in Korea, were neglected to be considered as a targeted policy object. The second mismatch in category is about age. This study shows that many young artists are discouraged to apply for KAWA or they are being rejected to be entitled to KAWA. Contrarily, those who are already established in the art world are being more easily accepted into KAWA’s boundary. Lastly, art genre mismatch exists. Many artists find it hard to specify only one genre because they find KAWA’s genre classification too rigid.

4. Conclusion

The KAWA documents and interview data show that those who don’t fit KAWA’s category have no choice but to blame themselves. The bureaucrats tend to dismiss the reason of artists’ failure as simply the artists’ individual dimension such as psychological preferences including the pride of ‘different’ people and personal choice, rather than as social structural dimension. The failure of welfare policy by mismatch between the welfare provision with wrong definition of artistic occupation and artists’ needs, is beyond economic concern. Mismatch in KAWA can dismantle their attachment to the general society and exclude them from citizenship.