Creating a New Commons: A Case Study of iCOOP’s *Natural Dream Park*

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• A co-operative community has been making a common space in the remote area of a small city since 2012. (in Gurye, a city in Jeollanam-do, South Korea).

• A wind of change has been blowing hard across the area from this space.
Gurye Natural Dream Park
• Over 150,000 consumer members (from seventy-eight member co-ops) financed a bigger logistics center, hoping for safe and adequate supplies of food. → *Gurye Natural Dream Park*, a common property of iCOOP members.

• At the very beginning, the space was imagined as only a logistics center. → demands of individual members → several processing factories, a coffee house, cafeteria, a cinema, and accommodations were added. → The space opened to the public in April 2014, even though it is the private property of iCOOP.

• (Paid) visitors: over 350,000 (April 2014 ~ December 2016)
  - The monthly average number: 13,000 (in 2016), an increase of 200 percent compared to 2014.
• 511 workers.

This space has become quite popular and has helped to activate the local economy.

• The local government values *Gurye Park* as an outstanding case of activating the influx of the population and development of the local economy.

• The case of *Gurye Park* could be a new alternative way of developing a community.
Research Purpose

• This paper aims to explain the process of arrangement of *Gurye Natural Dream Park*, to examine how a community creates a commons and does “commoning”.

• There were some rough ideas in the beginning of this research;
  - why don’t we recognize *Gurye Park* as the “commons” of iCOOP community?
  - Why don’t we understand the making of *Gurye Park* as “commoning” by various groups, including iCOOP KOREA, the regional county, the local community people, and so on?
• Could assembling and operating the *Gurye Natural Dream Park* be considered as ‘commoning’?

• A co-operative as a community creates a ‘commons’ (as common property resources) in a region. Then the co-operative could open the commons to the public in the area, which seems possible only under a co-operative system. As a result, a common property can be used as common pool resources. A sizable co-operative can afford to buy land and build the public space.

• Explaining the process of creating “a commons” by a co-operative may also present practical ideas to local governments on how to make commons and develop communities.

• For this reason, this paper would be worthy of attention.
Gurye Natural Dream Park as a commons

• About iCOOP KOREA:
  – a consumer co-operative association, was founded in 1997 and operates an eco-friendly and organic food business.
  – iCOOP KOREA aims to spread ethical consumption and production practices through solidarity with member co-ops, which consumers and producers manage together.
  – 250,980 individual members, 91 member co-ops (as of December 2016)
How have over 150,000 members from all around the country a common space in Gurye?

- Due to the rapid increase of the number of iCOOP’s individual members since the end of the 2000s, the co-op outgrew the logistics center’s space, which was located in Suncheon.

- The center needed to move somewhere not far from Suncheon.

- Information was obtained (an agricultural industrial complex being constructed on the town’s periphery by Gurye County)

- iCOOP decided to move into the site. (merit: the expressway near the site, deeply discounted prices, Gurye County’s promise, etc.)
The cost of building the park was covered by retained earnings of iCOOP and funds raised from individual members. Every member could become involved in Gurye Natural Dream Park through fund-raising, which would allow members to have a sense of ownership.

This is the way, *Gurye Natural Dream Park* became common property of iCOOP members.
“Commoning” of *Gurye Natural Dream Park*

• iCOOP KOREA opened the doors of their common space in April 2014.
• On the site, factories for food processing were built first. After, cultural facilities such as accommodations, an experience center, a movie-theatre, a restaurant, a fountain, a grass-square, a coffee-house, and a beer-house, etc. were added leading to *Gurye Natural Dream Park’s* current form.
• Everyone has access to the space even though it is owned privately by iCOOP, meaning this space is open to the public as well as the co-op members.
“Commoning” of Gurye Natural Dream Park

- Successful cooperation among iCOOP, the employees of the park, Gurye County, and local resources was an important factor for establishing Gurye Natural Dream Park as a ‘commons’.
- The spatial structure and certain spaces of Gurye Natural Dream Park were also crucial factors for this space being a ‘commons’.
- Hence Gurye Natural Dream Park finally became ‘common pool resources’ to the people. To them, it doesn’t matter whose it is.
Restoration drawing of Owen's co-operative village
- quadrangle
- self-contained, closed community

Map of Gurye Natural Dream Park
- a rectangular shape
- open, extrovert community
• *Gurye Natural Dream Park* has two access ways, from the east and the south.

• There are no gatekeepers or barriers to cross at the entrance. There is no special rite of passage. -- ‘everyone has free access to the place.’

• Every facility, even factories, in the space is open to everybody. Therefore strangers can even enjoy a fountain, have a picnic or play a game in the vast grass square without an entrance fee, and walk around the movie-theatre, restaurant, coffee-house, food shop, beer-house, etc. along the streets. Even though the space was built with iCOOP members’ money, it is open to the public.
Beer-house, fountain, food shop, coffee-house, restaurant, etc.

Movie-theatre
“Do commoning” of *Gurye Natural Dream Park*

- While assembling and running *Gurye Park*, iCOOP has had a strong link with the local government, the employees of the park, other local co-operatives and some local organizations.
- *Gurye Park* has certainly become part of Gurye community, and has turned into a ‘commons’ (common pool resources).
• An example of “do commoning”: Rock Festival
• Gurye County commissioned iCOOP to hold a music festival.
• iCOOP gladly accepted.
• Several meetings to organize the festival.
• They decided that a rock festival was the best way to attract the young generation.
• Staff of iCOOP devotedly support business related to the festival.
• Every August since 2015 at the grass square in Gurye Park.

• *Gurye Park* has certainly become part of Gurye community, and has turned into a ‘commons’(common pool resources).
• At the very beginning *Gurye Natural Dream Park* was planned to meet the economic needs of both iCOOP and Gurye County.

• They **did not approach** *Gurye Park* **as a commodifiable resource**, but rather made it into a commons.

• iCOOP, Gurye County, the employees of *Gurye Park* and the local residents as **commoners** define for themselves the rules according to which they are accessed and used.

• Communities are sets of commoners (De Angelis). They do not necessarily have to be bound to a locality, and could also operate through translocal spaces. **-- iCOOP, Gurye County, the local people, the employees of *Gurye Park* and new co-operatives formed communities by a common pool resource, *Gurye Natural Dream Park***.
• This article has tried to make people aware that *Gurye Park* is not a private property but a commons created by commoners of iCOOP members and local residents. It is needed to evoke again that iCOOP is a co-operative, and has a characteristics of co-operatives, such as a democratic decision-making structure, different from private companies.

• Through this article, I have also tried to make people, including members, become aware of that their commoning is a sort of disobedience movements against capital and authority.

• This paper has its theoretical significance in exploring *Gurye Natural Dream Park* with the concept ‘commons management system by community’.

• The theme of concern for communities by a co-operative has never been researched in relation to “theories of commons” in Korean Co-operative studies. Hence it is hoped that this research will arouse a large number of interesting debates.