

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

YEOM, ChanHee
(iCOOP Co-operative Institute)

Introduction

- 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)

Gurye Natural Dream Park as a commons

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.

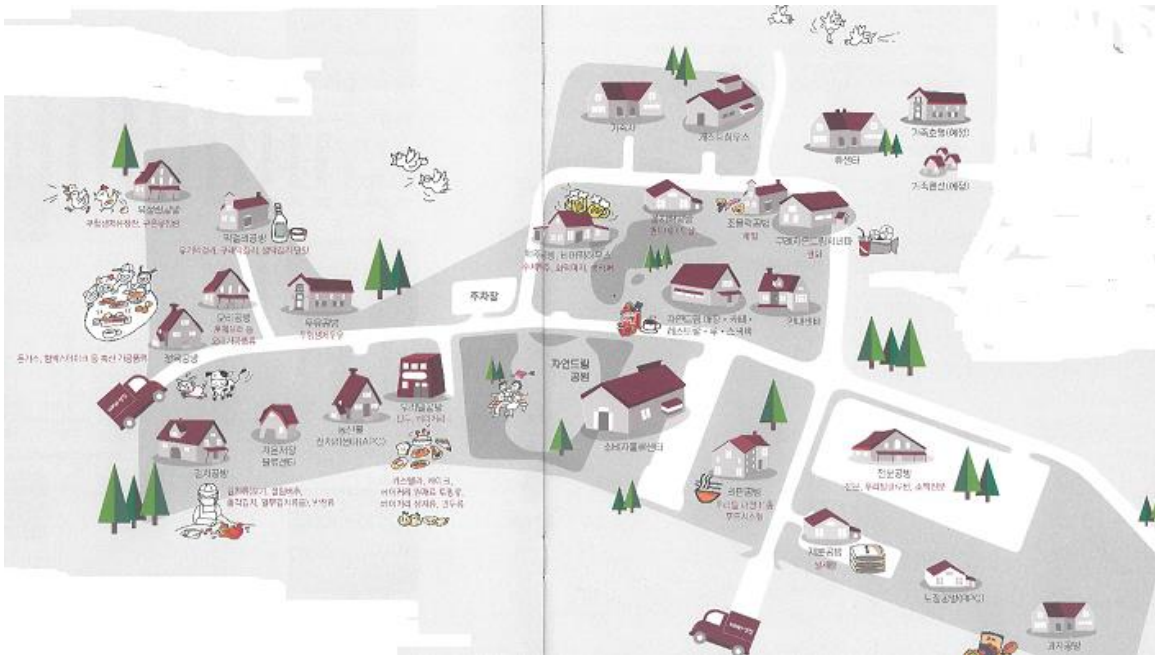
This is the way, *Gurye Natural Dream Park* became common property of iCOOP members.

"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.

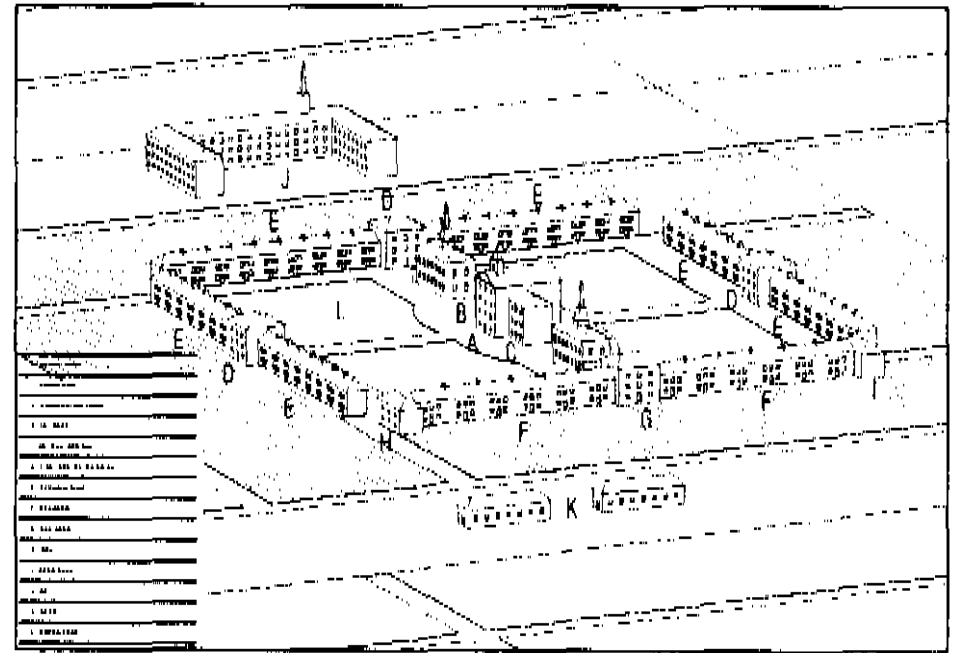


Map of Gurye Natural Dream Park

- a rectangular shape
- open, extrovert community

Restoration drawing of Owen's co-operative village

- quadrangle
- self-contained, closed community



Meaning of the space

- *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.

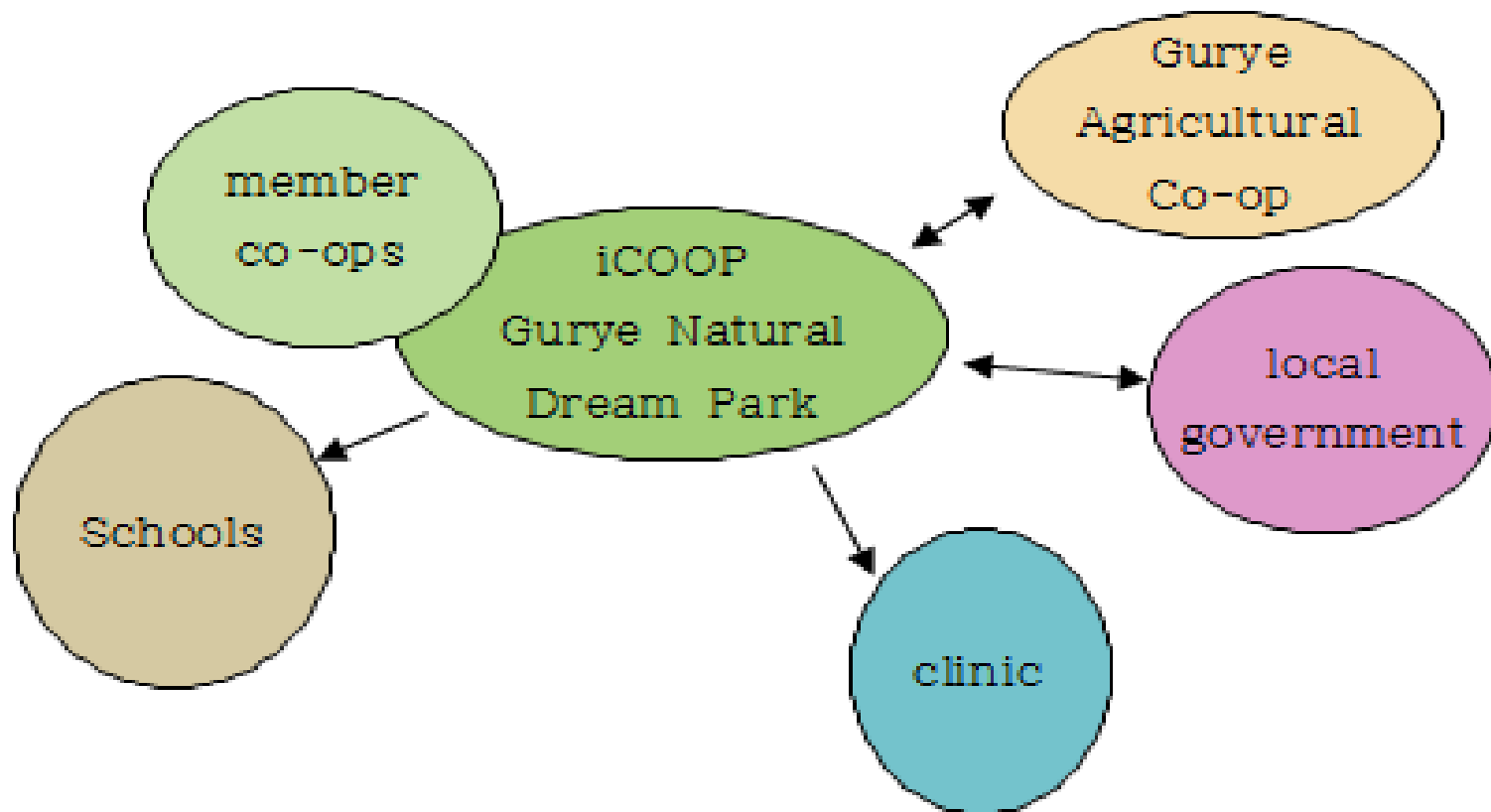


Beer-house, fountain, food shop, coffee-house, restaurant, etc.

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).

Conclusion

- 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.