

**The Map
of the Roads
Continues:
Transition from
Metropolitan Areas
to the Local**

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This article is a reflection of <2018 Public Arts Project: Ring Ring Belt>¹, which deals with urban culture in the metropolitan area, among my projects that have been carried out on the fringes of urban space and public art. It contains a feeling of locality in and out of the centralized world and the cultural movement that has passed through it. By examining the path of transformation that the project which questioned urban networks in metropolitan areas has experienced from the locals, going back and forth between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, settlement and migration, and culture and daily life, this article attempts to approach the implications of local cultural practice in contemporary culture.

Travel around the Metropolitan Areas and Meet the Local

“Is it because of the way capitalism works, in which the local and global scales have become dialectically tied together, making it unprecedentedly obscure, or both? What map should I draw now? Perhaps 20 years after the emergence of regional-specific art projects in Korea, their continuation seems to have to go through these questions.”—Shin Jeong-hoon, 2018²

In the publication of <Ring Ring Belt>, art historian Shin Jeong-Hoon pointed out the relationship between regional-specific art projects and the impact of “problematic urbanization in Korea” while discussing the Gyeonggi-do area. Through <Seongnam Project>¹⁹⁹⁸⁻¹⁹⁹⁹³, the first

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<2018 Public Arts Project: Ring Ring Belt> (hosted/hosted by Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation) Were with the participation of Hyewon Kwon, Nam-hoon Kim, Seunggu Kim, Jieun Kim, Taeheon Kim, Rice Brewing Sisters Club, Mujin Brothers, Mix Rice, Seongseok Ahn, Upset Press, Minseon Hae Hae, Seokjun Jang, , Jeongyeop Jeong, Julien Kowane, Daegwang Cheon, Part-Time Suite, Chulgi Hong, Cultural Space Seomjari, Yeosu Duji, Open Space Blocks, C&G Artpartment (Hong Kong), Drawing Architecture Studio (Beijing), and OCAC (Taipei).

2
Jeonghoon Shin, Rereading ‘Seongnam Project’ (1998-1999): Region-Specific Art and Gyeonggi-do, 『Ring Ring Belt』, Moving Book, 2019, p.10.

3
<Seongnam Project> (1998-1999), which artist Taeheon Kim promoted with fellow artists in Seongnam, was a pioneering work that urged the practical intervention of art in the city and influenced several city-based activities that emerged in the 2000s. A related publication is 『The Destruction and Creation of Space/Between Seongnam and Bundang』 (Moonhwagwahak, 1998).

urbanism project that appeared in 1990, he analyzed a critical public opinion on urbanization, resistance to institutional public art, and a view that values resident art as a new transition to the urbanized project of that period. In the 2000s, after the national economic crisis resulting in the IMF intervention, the neoliberal order became the dominant system in society, and the relationship between the binary and antagonistic terms before that was also transformed. As various values that were not incorporated into the economic order were recognized as alternative models of capital, the 'social' in our culture could no longer remain only at the level of opposition. Culture became a means for regional marketing; various community art, public art, and cultural regeneration activities were reorganized to be performance-oriented and result-centered. Changes in life due to globalization and the frenzy of capital-intensive urban development will have also affected visual language after 2000. "Suddenly playing grounds, piled-up and underlying objects, apartment complexes with no end in sight, buildings that are out of fashion before they are completed, and poor juxtaposition of nature and man-mades, etc."⁴ staged this ambiguous landscape as Jung-Hoon Shin describes, which was detected from works of urbanism since the 2000s and was emerged as a landscape of absence that is difficult to comprehend, unlike the scene in which the bisected world confronted in the 1990s. This can be approached as a psycho-geographic symptom of communities and individuals who are facing helplessness and uncertainty from the violence of capital.

This analysis was developed in parallel with <Subtopia>₂₀₁₇,⁵ an urban research that I dealt with in Yongin before I started planning <Ring Ring Belt> in earnest. This research, exhibited at the public housing sales office on the border between Yongin and Suwon, tells the story of the reorganization of a suburban city by geopolitical power and the story of a place

⁴ Shin Jeong-hoon, *ibid.*

⁵ <Subtopia>, which was planned as part of <2017 Public Arts> (hosted/organized by Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation), is a project in which seven artists (Kim Nam-Hoon, Kim Tae-Heon, Jang Seok-Jun, Lee HaeMinSeon, Julien Kowane, Ahn Seong-seok, and Hong Chul-gi) conducted research on suburban space with Yongin as its primary site. A follow-up research publication on this is 『Subtopia』 (Moving Book, 2017) with the same title.

that has been dislocated from the space-time compression. 〈Ring Ring Belt〉, which was planned the following year in order to understand the topography of such a metropolitan urban space regarding cultural practice, is a public art project that was operated for a year as a seminar, workshop, field trip, regional study, forum, and exhibition. The project started with 23 participating artists (team), not by visiting the exhibition site, but by taking an express bus and touring the local sites that exist beyond the open land. There were two axes in the journey to enter the region beyond the illusion of the metropolitan area along the ring highway. One was to use the local culture, which was being erased from the logic of urban competition, as a new learning ground, and the other axis was a reflective approach to public art, which has grown in size as a result rather than an accumulation of processes. Using this project as an opportunity for self-criticism and self-reflection on institutional public art, I tried to reconsider the contemporary location and direction of art practice. To that end, it was essential to start with a dialogue that dealt with the gaps and contact points between art and cities, individuals and communities, local and metropolitan areas, and private and public spheres.

The transition from the Local: Connecting the Incinerator and the Kiln site from the Yeogang Road

However, it was not easy to properly grasp the topography of grassroots culture taking place within each region from the limitations of being a planner of temporary cultural events. The Literary Promotion Team of the Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation, which was the host and organizer of the project, sympathized with this awareness and became a helper in identifying the Cultural Foundations run by the basic units of local governments to participate in the scattered public forum. After several contacts, the Cultural Foundations of Bucheon, Seongnam, and Yeosu cooperated,

and through each local cultural institution, I was able to meet various actors participating in local cultural activities across artists, cultural spaces, collectives, and civic groups.⁶ Recalling it again, the cooperation method at that time passed through a mutually cooperative structure created by voluntarily continuing dialogue between institutions, the private sector, and individuals. The structure of this connection is, in fact, a contingent network led by mediators, and it was able to lead to an open public forum thanks to the willingness of the local people to spread the local cultural resources and not reject the conversation of strangers. In a series of events held under the name of 〈Ring Ring Seminar〉, general participants were also recruited to prevent the discussion from being trapped in a closed circle of homogenized power, and the story of learning and exchange in the local field trips was published four times in the form of free magazine and was intended to be disseminated to other regions.

The theme of the seminar varied according to the context of each local culture and the relationship of practice, and Yeosu was particularly impressive among the four cities.⁷ This was because they were able to tell stories of the cultural scene created by themselves breaking away from being an outlet shopping mall for metropolitan city residents or the local agricultural context and the local marketing activities of Empress Myeongseong's birthplace promoted by the local government. The experience of cruising along the Namhan River on a yellow fabric sailboat, which seemed like a conventional tour, was later recalled in the public forum through the story of a civic group that took care of the damaged Yeosu Namhan River Road (Yeogang-gil). This threat to the ecosystem also overlapped with the sincere traces of listening to the elderly who remain in the village where Yeosu Duji, a living culture museum, is disappearing. While the story of the river road damaged by development reso-

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Seongnam Cultural Foundation, Yeosu Sejong Cultural Foundation, Bucheon Cultural Foundation, Open Space Blocks, Yeosu Duji, Noridan, and Arts and Urban Society Research Institute cooperated for the tour-type seminar 〈Ring Ring Seminar〉.

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The four meetings of 〈Ring Ring Seminar〉 proceeded as follows. 1st Seongnam 〈Topographic Map of Urbanity and Public Art: Public and Private Practice〉 (June 15, 2018, Seongnam Art Center), 2nd Yeosu 〈Contemporary Excavation of Cultural Resources: History, Locality, and Village〉 (August 25, 2018, Gamgodang, the birthplace of Empress Myeongseong, Yeosu Etc.), 3rd Bucheon 〈Cultural Regeneration of Abandoned Industrial Facilities〉 (October 11, 2018, Bucheon Art Bunker B39), and 4th Paju 〈New Topographical Map of Culture and Art in the Border Area 'DMZ as a Common Peace Land'〉 (November 2018) 18th, Paju Camp Greaves).

nates with the old village guarded by only a few elderly people, and leads to the story of public art in the old downtown Seongnam on a hill road that is endangered by the threat of urban capital, and moves back and forth of four regions, the project's gaze, which had stopped at circular move (borderline) of Ring Ring Belt, was turned into a 'map of roads' as if drawing a map inside the outline. The road was left in a place that did not intersect with the metropolitan ring highway that had been accelerated by a society grown out of developmentalism and ideology of progress. The winding road left unattended because it was slow and inefficient, which was itself the accumulated time and the compiled ways of life that made up the local culture. It was an opportunity to gain the power to overcome the illusion of a circular network through meeting with locals.

Just as the waterway of Yeogang flows into the Han River and circulates, the next seminar in Bucheon will show how to bridge the distant bridge between industrial facilities and residential spaces, garbage and culture, the incinerator (harmful facility) and the Kiln site (cultural site). and realized that the people who build the tangible and intangible bridges are cultural mediators as well as cultural producers. This is the reason why the discussion of locality cannot be limited to a place called a region. This is because, as one region and another are constantly intersecting as interconnected and overlapping flows, opportunities to think about a locality in a different way are created. The friendship created at the 'Jatiwangi Art Factory' in Indonesia, told by artist Jo Ji-eun formerly Mixrice, pays attention to the ecological commons value of the DMZ, the Mujin brothers who communicated through public art to overcome the limits of cultural barrenness in Paju, which was the next seminar. It also overlapped with the network of symbiosis and coexistence, as viewed by a researcher Kwon Beom-cheol Art and Urban Society Research Institute. What I experienced in this series of seminars

were concrete senses of life that are difficult to detect in the urban culture that is gradually being identified from the occupation of capital. A place of sharing and connection of a kind of sensible has arisen in which the cultural resources of the region are redistributed to others.

Reconstruction of Locality: Movement and Connection of People on the Borders

As the project reached the end of the one-year temporary period, 〈Ring Ring Belt〉 was finally exhibited at the Donuimun Museum Village near Gwanghwamun, Seoul in winter at the end of that year. After raising a buzz about the connection between the metropolitan area and the region, it left a disappointment that the link connecting the four cities could not be continued in a deeper form or an expanded network. In Korean society, which rapidly transitions to new projects, a year is a life cycle of many cultural events. In a system of culture and art that is as unstable as life in which it is expected to settle down and continue, it is the people who accompanied us along the way. The news that my colleagues are slowly moving locally and exploring alternative life models and practical journeys guides my gaze and movement to maps of unknown paths. Artist Ahn Seong-seok, a native of Suwon, became a member of a care community by participating in joint parenting that crosses regional boundaries and the Rice Brewing Sisters Club, which met migrant women in Ansan and brewed grain wine, is based on the ecological sense it has accumulated through farming, expanding ecological-based exchanges between Busan and Berlin. Artist Jo Ji-eun, who formed IkkibawiKrrr a few years ago, communicates closely with the Art Alliance of the global South against global post-colonialism, and continues to interact with Indonesia's grassroots collective as a local culture that resists global domination. Julien Kowane, who was investigating the transitional architectural

style of Korea in search of mosaic tiles used in houses in the 60s and 70s, continued local research despite the limitations of being an outsider. While the research continued, the old downtown areas where the artist found tiles in Yongsan and Sindaebang in Seoul have all disappeared due to redevelopment. According to the artist's research, the signs of style created by commoners are disappearing from the violent development of urban capital and can be found only in areas outside of Seoul (Daegu, Busan, Jeju, Incheon, etc.) as being neglected. The cultural traces erased from the metropolis still remain vivid as local resources. It is good news that more and more people continue to intervene locally in a world of growing anxiety about the future. The thematic exhibition of the ARKO Art Center *Local in the Making* is another opportunity to share and redistribute such local knowledge and experiences with people on the borders of our society and various social actors.

Geographer Lim Dong-geun, who emphasized in the publication of *Ring Ring Belt*,⁸ a map of the perception of “how our world, which is becoming more complex and diversified as new things continue to mix, is governed,” presented his views on the reconstruction of locality in a recent lecture. It was the opinion that the expectation of a community that has collapsed in a competition-oriented urban society can be explored in an area that is at risk of population extinction. As a scenario of reversal of the local extinction caused by mobility, he referred to “a community created by people who migrate based on friendship repeatedly visiting the region” as an alternative, and cited “seasonal migratory birds” as an example.⁹ Efforts to find alternative ways of life, pay attention to local culture, and communicate with the world around them without hesitation in movement and contact are also highlighted in the activities of participating artists in this *Local in the Making*. In recent local culture, interest in resources is diversifying away from monumental-

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Lim Dong-geun, interview *〈Spatial Relocation and Governance in the Metropolitan Area〉*, 『Ring Ring Belt』, Moving Book, 2019, p.18.

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Lim Dong-geun, *The Future of Cities in Korea 〈The Ways that Cities Work and Future Cities〉*, Suwon Public Arts Project 2022, Tap-dong Citizen's Farm Experimental Ranch, 2-4pm lecture on September 20, 2022.

ity, representativeness, and local marketing, and it is shifting to a movement that seeks to redefine in a different way from the relationship with the contemporary socio-cultural context rather than following the local definition. Above all, the biopolitical engine that promotes the sustainability of the ecological environment crisis and the extinction of cultural resources as an alternative form of practice plays a major role. Rather than being bound by the frame of the local by gender, class, ideology, tradition, and geopolitics, they are attempts to expand the normative locality from flexible thinking and practice, while unleashing the imagination of the local. The activities of cultural producers and mediators who mediate local resources with different imaginations perform locality in solidarity and confront the boundaries and limitations of the region. This local intervention and transformation will lead to an alternative community that resists the urban culture occupied and abstracted by capitalism, the uncertain future, and the landscape of absence, and will continue to weave the footsteps of family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and others.

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Somi Sim is an independent curator based in Seoul and Paris. She recreates the relationship between urban spaces and artist practices with curatorial discourses. Her main works include *Do You Miss the Future?*, *REAL-Real City*, and *2018 Public Art: Ringring Belt*, and some of her publications are *Curating the Pandemic* and *Drifting Nearby: Public Transition of Post-Pandemic Cities*.