

**Dreaming of
an Alternative Local
Ecological Community
that Goes Beyond the Logic
and Desire of Urban
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To the field! To the Baedari Village!

Space Beam was opened in Guwol-dong, a new town, and center of Incheon, in early 2002 to secure a new identity of local culture through independent activities in a centralized cultural and artistic structure. Since then, under the motto of local and public values, it has been trying to lead open encounters and generative communication by intervening in the production, distribution, and consumption systems of local art, culture, and art discourse in various ways.

With Space Beam, I have come across many long-standing customs and practices within the institutionalized realm of art and tried to find alternatives of and critiques on the other characteristics of power behind them, while blurring the boundaries and taking a break, to actively approach and intervene in them as concrete living spaces or 'sites' in search of an artistic role. Among them in early 2007, I witnessed in person how Baedari Village, located in the original downtown of Incheon, was torn apart due to the construction of an industrial road 'passing' through it.

Baedari Village is a historic location that is said to be "the birthplace of Incheon's history and culture," and is also a place where residents lead an ordinary daily life. This was dug up to make a straight road that will connect the Songdo district in the south and the Cheongna district in the north faster, for the success of the Free Economic Zone (FEZ) project promoted as a national project by the ROK central government and the city of Incheon at the time. It seemed to be

a symbolic site where the prevailing logic of temporality that “‘speed’ is ‘efficiency’” was applied directly as it is. The miserable appearance of the village made me look back on the activities of contemporary art, including Space Beam and realized that there were limits to art that cannot be integrated with concrete reality.

So, I decided to block this road and do ‘substantial’ activities to build the city we want from here. And for this, it seemed natural to move the space of Space Beam here. In the meantime, there was a brewery building in this village that had been left out of operation for a long time, which we turned to a new nestle after confirming that it was possible to rent it and going through extensive repair work on it.

An Urban Space of Greed Blinded by Development Profits

After entering Baedari Village, we started a full-fledged fight with the residents against the construction of the industrial road, but that was not all. Although the aforementioned Incheon FEZ project was promoted in the form of a triangle of roads that connect the Songdo and Cheongna districts covering the three axes including Yeongjong Island to the west, it is not a project limited to those three locations only. It was an urban commodification strategy to reorganize the entire city of Incheon into a speculative arena to maximize investment gains from the capital. In addition, at that time, a total of 212 public and private redevelopment and reconstruction projects and 6 large-scale urban renewal acceleration districts so-called ‘new towns’ were designated. 〈Urban Renewal Acceleration Project Near Dongincheon Station〉 is one of the latter, and Baedari Village was also included in its spatial scope. And if this project materializes, the area will inevitably be completely demolished, and disappear into history forever, and the residents who have lived here for a long time will also be doomed to be deprived of their homes and displaced.

However, the head of Incheon City, who takes the lead, does not explicitly reveal its greed and violence. Rather, it misleads them with plausible slogans. Mayor Ahn Sang-soo of the 4th local election put forward the municipal brand name “Construction of Incheon as a World-Class City with Quality,” and pushes it under the pretext of “balanced development of the new and the old central districts.” The 〈Global Fair & Festival 2009 Incheon〉 held in 2009 was the pinnacle of fraudulent techniques to wrap and anesthetize the eyes of citizens toward a rosy future.

Incheon City, a metropolitan government, as well as the district administration, a basic unit of local government, were not so different. Since the local self-government system was introduced in earnest in 1995, each of them has attracted companies and held various festivals and art events under the guise of 'urban competitiveness', and has been focusing on the tourism industry. It took the lead in utilizing the historical heritage of the post-port opening in 1883 (which has already been largely demolished) in Jung-gu, situated across from Baedari village as a cultural asset to attract tourists. However, rather than mediating and preserving important historical sites with facts from the past, they took the method of hastily installing or covering up with fake eye-catching facilities only to attract visitors. As with concession sites of the Qing Dynasty and Japan, Songwol-dong's Fairy Tale Village showed the climax of enveloping the walls and houses of all alleyways with strange images that had nothing to do with the village. And the area outside of that was removed from public attention and care, and many other historical, cultural, industrial, and living heritages disappeared and most of them were turned into parking lots.

Most of the projects in Dong-gu, designated as urban refurbishing sites due to their old age, were sluggish and turned

to tourism. Just as in the case of Jung-gu which was not oriented to the direction of protecting the existing assets and values, on the one side the precious heritage was destroyed while on the other side the structure with the same value that has already gone was forcibly created. This does not mean, however, that the redevelopment project has been abandoned. The city gives strength to the voice saying that redevelopment is the only solution to stop the declining population and increase it again and that sluggish business shall be advanced.

On the other hand, this work is not only led by local government administrators and organization leaders. Of course, there are cases where residents are not free from the desire for development profits, and in severe cases, landed proprietors went out in groups to force their claims or collude with some politicians and blatantly reach out their hands.

Activities to counter the current logic of ruling and create alternatives

In the end, the fight against the construction of industrial roads was not an issue that could end with just one case, and it was not a fight that requires us to block just one road. Recognizing the problems and dangers of capitalist 'growth' and 'development' logic prevalent among urban space, and operations as a whole and among its members, I sought alternatives along with interventions and responses to the field where they were manifested in concrete forms to change the political flows and the mood. And the activities to do so had to be complex, multifaceted, and continuous.

However, the Space Beam was not properly prepared. Rather, we confronted a situation where we had to learn one by one. And the Space Beam could not do it all either. In this regard, we intervened in the urgent and tried to find a con-

nection in the rest of the areas in solidarity with other activists and organizations, within our consistent vision and direction for the city. (In fact, in addition to the Space Beam, there were many people who add their strength to our fight such as existing residents who met with this situation as well as people who moved here after hearing the news or lived outside but came in and out of here. Of course, there were people who left after a long period of participation for various reasons, and some who joined later.) For a while, I actively fought against the construction of the industrial road, and the urban renewal acceleration project that followed. This goes beyond simply blocking roads and demolition, and intends to replace the aforementioned logics of 'speed' and 'efficiency,' and 'development' and 'growth' with the value of 'history' and 'culture,' 'life' and 'ecology,' and 'community'. And this was not possible only by fighting on the battlefield(?).

Therefore, while respecting and continuing the long history and identity of the brewery space in which Space Beam resides, it was intended to be used as a base for discussions and experiments to materialize new values for the future. To this end, it was necessary to lower the threshold of the space and open the door more and turn it into a space for active communication. In other words, while promoting the transition to a horizontal and mutually reciprocal relationship beyond the dichotomized and hierarchical relationship between professional artists and ordinary citizens, the city and village communities we want can be concretely materialized in reality rather than artistic representation or virtual reality, which we hoped to make it ourselves. However, this did not exclude or ignore the uniqueness and expertise of professional artists. Rather, we let them try to reveal and share their unique characteristics by projecting their unique thoughts, attitudes, senses and gazes on a specific region, village, or place.

The industrial road site was expanded into the public arena through our activities, with the growing opposition to the construction plan for the industrial road which was suspended until an agreement was reached. It was a process of finding fundamental questions and answers to questions such as “who owns this land?” and “who should manage and design this space (when it comes back to the residents’ arms)?” Of course, in the long-standing customary perception that the owner of the site is Incheon City and that the management entity is Dong-gu, however, there was no place for the argument that “the owner of this land is the residents, and therefore the residents should exercise their rights that comes naturally by being the owners.”

Nevertheless, they did not conform to or agree with Dong-gu's unilateral and uniform management method, and wanted to have a sense of ownership while securing a space for autonomous use as a resident, while feeling the rewards and pleasures of the city. We tried to secure a consensus by letting people experience firsthand whether it is better to cultivate the ecological space or to secure the road on which so many cars pass back and forth generating noise and smoke. However, it was natural that the relationship with Dong-gu, which had not changed its position, was not smooth, and this resulted in considerable conflicts and clashes.

On the other hand, we could not stay on the pending issues or just the case of Baedari village. A wider, future-oriented urban discourse was needed. In response, 〈Baedari Urban School〉 was opened in 2012 to promote a system of cooperation between public, private, and academia, and to increase the capacity of citizens to increase their scope for taking a leading role. To this end, we have been conducting lectures, field trips, experiments, and practices for urban innovation, and regional research work; and recently, as a concrete alternative, we established the ‘Incheon

Eco-Museum Plan' and attempted a concrete application of the plan as well.

Nevertheless, the metropolitan government of Incheon City or the local government of Jung-gu and Dong-gu kept trying to monopolize, privatize, or commercialize the public goods (commons) that everyone should freely enjoy and made us think that we should not respond to them spontaneously whenever they attempt to do so. In early 2015, a loose solidarity organization was launched for constant monitoring, criticism, and alternative proposals, none other than the 〈Network for Urban Publicness of Incheon〉. Space Beam serves as the secretariat of this organization and is contributing to multifaceted activities to secure urban space and operational structure based on publicness, democracy, and historicity.

Failure Rather Than Achievement, Disappointment Rather Than Expectation—Finding Hope in Difficult Situations

In this way, Space Beam tried to change the logic, atmosphere and flow of a destructive and undemocratic city with various actors inside and outside the region, but the results are always disappointing. It was impossible from the beginning to overturn the existence of these elements, which were conceived in the dark history of our past, continued to be copied and regenerated, and occupied places here and there, with unfortunate circumstances and insufficient capabilities, or to replace them with new values.

The Baedari Industrial Road formed a public-private cooperative body after a long struggle and eventually reached an agreement on constructing the underground road, but an attempt to divide the residents behind the scene was revealed, resulting in an unpleasant aftertaste and they did

not keep their promises to the resident, which created more protest. In addition, Baedari Village, which carried out a strong conservation movement amid the variables of resident conflict and a decline in the real estate market, was eventually eliminated from the 〈Dongincheon Station Renovation Promotion Project〉, overcame the demolition crisis, and was equipped with the necessary facilities for the residents, giving activists hope for opportunities to move to the direction we wanted.

However, Dong-gu, which appeared late as the site of redevelopment, is unilaterally promoting the tourist site development project rather than creating a desirable village, displaying a twisted step for the city. Meanwhile, the 〈Residential Environment Improvement Project near Songnim Elementary School〉, which is adjacent to Baedari Village, was eventually carried out despite the objection of a considerable number of residents, and occupancy is currently underway after the completion of constructing the apartment complex of the up to 48 story buildings. In addition to this, redevelopment projects that have been sluggish in various places are gaining momentum and are accelerating. If this goes on, Baedari Village may become isolated being an island of the protest.

Looking at the outside Baedari Village as well, we responded to the issue of reclaiming one side of the cross-shaped waterway in Bukseong Dock, the only tidal flat remaining on the city coast, due to complaints about odors (actually to increase the land) and started a campaign to protect it by forming 〈Citizen's Meeting to Save Bukseong Dock〉, but in the end, it was unsuccessful. The Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, the owner of Incheon Inner Port Piers 1 and 8, which had caused noise and dust to the local residents for a long time, said that they would return them to the citizens, but all kinds of speculative forces were clinging

to each other and fighting for their own interests. The city has responded by creating 〈Public Regeneration Civic Action for Incheon Inner Port Piers 1 and 8 and Surrounding Areas〉, but the newly changed 8th popularly elected Incheon Metropolitan Government will purchase the site and designate it as a FEZ to attract large-scale investment. A few years ago, the building of Aekyungsa, which was a soap factory during the Japanese colonial period, faced great criticism as the District Office of Jung-gu forcibly tried to dismantle the building, which was eventually purchased to create a parking lot for visitors to nearby tourist spots, amid opposition from numerous citizens. A few years later, in Manseok-dong, Dong-gu, a seaside town, the blacksmith Shinil Ironworks, which made the nails necessary for building wooden ships, was demolished again as part of the Dong-gu Urban Renovation Project.

Last year, the ‘Urban Industry Mission’, which is said to be the cradle of the Incheon women's labor, human rights, and democratization movement, was located in the redevelopment project site that connects Hwasu-dong and Hwapyeong-dong in Dong-gu. Despite the activism by forming the Pan-Citizens Action Council and protesting with the relay hunger strike for several months to call for its preservation, the redevelopment association eventually persevered and had no choice but to reach an agreement to proceeding the structure relocation of the whole building. And in the face of the crisis of the 127-year-old Aegwan Theater being sold due to the recent financial difficulties, they formed ‘Aesamo’ a group of citizens who love Aegwan Theater and demanded that the city of Incheon purchase and utilize it for the public, but excessive caution and ignorance with superficial care creates uncertainty of the future fate of the building.

As such, Space Beam has been trying to communicate and create solidarity with various actors to build a desirable city and healthy living urban ecosystem by promoting its role in the local community and field beyond the institutionalized art realm, but it is struggling. However we cannot stop making any effort and go back to the way it used to be. Also, it would not be a desirable attitude to turn all causes to the outside. In times like these, I think we have no choice but to work harder while we are self-aware of our own shortcomings, and fill in and encourage each other. In a way, such a phase has always existed in history, not just in this period, in this city of Incheon, and with Space Beam, and is also being revealed everywhere. On the other hand, I am proud of having maintained this level of appearance because we have done it this way. We might have to find some comfort and hope in a difficult situation without being self-complacent.

Woon Gi Min

With a thought that the social and regional role of art is important, he organized Space Beam, an alternative cultural space that opened in 2002, and has been seeking various practices such as various exhibitions and publications of critics, and planning and conducting public art projects and educational programs. Currently, with Baedari Village in Dong-gu, Incheon as a base, he is trying to play the role of forming a network with various civic cultural and artistic groups and activists to create an 'Open Urban Community Incheon.' While unraveling artistic activities in specific situations and contexts rather than in the institutionalized domain, he is very interested in finding various ways and languages of activity, and in achieving smooth communication and practical changes.