Urban Commons as a Haven for the Excluded: An Experience of Creating a Commons in Seoul, South Korea

In Kwon Park, Jiyon Shin and Jin Eon Kim
Seoul National University, KR
Corresponding author: In Kwon Park (parkik@snu.ac.kr)

The recent emergence of the “urban commons” is associated with the “exclusion” problems of modern cities, which are enmeshed in the mechanism that spatially excludes those who are incapable of paying the market prices. Cities are also tightly regulated by various government regulations that control people’s actions, and creative practices are often stifled. The excluded not only resist commercialization, privatization, and state laws but also crave and pursue their own space and lifestyle. This study argues that the urban commons is a “haven” where the excluded are protected, existing as an alternative that outreaches the state and market ambits.

We examine a Korean case to see how urban commons are created to embrace the excluded, focusing on the settings and process. The results show that (1) social exclusion and a power rift between the market and state during the urban process constitute the settings in which communities of the excluded create urban commons as a haven; (2) the creation and maintenance process should not only meet Ostrom’s design principles but also requires urban commoners to practice commoning as an alternative lifestyle; and (3) the urban settings pose threats to meeting the process requirements, so appropriate strategies should be employed to bridge the gaps.

Keywords: urban commons; haven; social exclusion; commoning; urban process

Introduction
In the modern market economy, cities are tightly packed with market mechanisms and state regulations, permeating almost every part of our daily lives. It is not easy to find a space therein that is not privatized, commodified, or regulated by the state. Thus, it is challenging to imagine and realize an alternative order in modern capitalist cities.

Nonetheless, in cities around the world, alternative experiments are underway that envision an order different from the market-and-state-power-led one. Those excluded from the existing order or those inappropriately treated are making various attempts in the form of the so-called “urban commons” movement. They are carrying out unconventional activities while collectively using and managing common resources, experimenting with new housing in the form of community land trust, and testing alternative production through P2P (peer-to-peer) methods. They are conducting unique experiments in diverse forms and areas such as housing, energy, mobility, education, culture, commercial activity, and manufacturing, while promoting “commoning”—that is, the practices of sharing tangible and intangible resources.1

The recent emergence of urban commons is associated with the “exclusion” problems of the contemporary city—a space dominated by global capitalism and enmeshed in an exclusive mechanism, such as rent laws and the urban process, that spatially excludes those who cannot pay the market price (Park, 2017). At the same time, the city is also tightly regulated by the government through land use controls, building codes, and codes of conduct. People’s behavior is controlled through various laws and institutions, often stifling creativity.

1 This new stream of the commons movement is distinct from traditional commons in many ways, and can be regarded as an extension or “reinvention” of commons that “deserves its own study” (Berge & McKean, 2015: 482).
The excluded not only resist commercialization, privatization, and state laws vigorously but also crave their own space where their lifestyle can be protected (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011). They sometimes go beyond destructive resistance to the existing order and create a new space for their inclusion. Urban commons are the product of such practices to make resources common to the user community, going against the market order in modern capitalist cities where exclusionary mechanisms of resource allocation by market principles operate.

Urban commons can be a haven for the excluded, whether it be those actually excluded or those seeking an alternative way of living. It can provide them shelter and a place for experimenting. It is an active place to deliver and reproduce social and economic stability as a third space to overcome market and government control; it is also a symbolic social movement represented by space (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014).

However, urban commons are threatened by investors and entrepreneurs eyeing capitalist development, to be reinvented as a utopia for consumers (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011). Unlike the settings of traditional commons such as forests, pastures, or fisheries, cities are an intricate mesh of capitalist markets, government regulations, and anonymous members, which makes it challenging to realize a commons (Huron, 2015). The city includes many strangers who do not belong to a traditional community and is a highly fluid society whose members are constantly changing. In such a situation, urban commons are not given by nature but should be created and operated under circumstances different from traditional commons.

A wealth of research on urban commons has been published, from which Huron’s (2015) work particularly stands out. Huron focused on the commons’ essential urban characteristic in which they are saturated with development interests, and shared and used by strangers, thus making the creation process both challenging and powerful. A similar housing-related study staged in Seoul by Han and Imamasa (2015) described “how” a commons appeared and extended its life through the community members. There also exists research on co-working or cultural spaces as commons, such as that by Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) on the collective efforts, challenges, and limitations of operating affordable rented cultural shared spaces in Dublin, called “independent spaces.” In another study on cultural shared spaces, through squatting, Di Feliciantonio (2017) analyzed the process of creating urban commons in Italy—Communia—led by the young and highly educated precariat and migrants challenging neoliberalism and claiming more uncapitalized space for people.

Many preceding studies have focused on commons’ challenges and limitations, while unraveling the process through descriptive phenomenological methods, and less on the structural settings of their advent and operational process in clearly defined categories. Di Feliciantonio’s research (2017) goes beyond and illustrates commons’ background from a macro political-economic perspective. However, other than capitalist forces inducing gentrification, weakened social welfare, and strenuous lives, little attention is given to the specific urban development process that expelled people from their original livelihood, and operational details of the commons’ community for their sustenance.

This study examines how an urban commons is created as a haven to embrace the excluded. We particularly aim to identify the settings and process of this creation along the three dimensions of community, institutions, and resources, following the commons literature as recalled by De Angelis (An Architektur, 2010) and Kip et al. (2015). We will see that while social exclusion triggers the emergence of urban commons as a haven, the settings of the urban commons movement conflict with Ostrom’s (1990) design principles for the commons. For this purpose, we analyze the creation process of Gyeongui Railway Commons (GRC) in Seoul, South Korea, in which civic groups and the socially underprivileged are squatting on public land as part of the urban commons movement for railroads left idle due to a project for undergrounding a railway line. This is a compelling case of an urban commons’ creation and management in a metropolitan city of a developed country.

The subsequent sections are organized as follows: We first explain the concept of urban commons as a haven for the excluded who want to overcome the commercialization and privatization of urban space and create an alternative order, in Urban Commons as a Haven. Then, in Creating an Urban Commons, based on the existing literature, we explain the macro and micro settings shaping urban commons and delve into its creation, providing our analytical framework. After explaining the data collection method in Study Area and Methodology, we present our case analysis. Next, we discuss our findings, and finally, give our concluding remarks.

**Urban Commons as a Haven**

Huron (2015) suggested two approaches to commons: the first views it as a workable property regime and focuses on its management process at a local scale as in traditional research, such as that by Ostrom (1990); the second concerns its global significance and how to create one in the context of being associated with the alter-globalization movement and critique of capitalism. Huron argued that creating an urban
commons can bridge these two approaches, as an urban commons is a way of “experiencing collective work, among strangers, to govern non-commodified resources in spaces saturated with people, conflicting uses, and capitalist investment” (2015: 977). This means that an urban commons is not a commons only due to its location in the city; it is a representation of resistance against the capitalist order and spatial commodification. An urban commons exists “as a dynamic and collective resource—a variegated form of social wealth—governed by emergent custom and constant negotiating, rebuffing, and evading the fixity of law” (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011: 42).

Those who are excluded from the city’s market mechanism can secure their haven by creating a commons and organizing alternative actions—that is, commoning (Di Feliciantonio, 2017). This is made possible through urban commons’ three roles: community-building, affordable space provision, and opportunity for participation and self-governance. Urban commons first provide a basis for community-building because of the essential relationship between the two. “Commons need communities” (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011: 42), and communities cultivate “intangible common goods such as social relationships, empathy, mutual help, and the psychophysical well-being from experiencing nature” (Łapniewska, 2017: 56). There is “a dialectical relationship between commons formation and community formation” and “deep human bonds of caring and mutual aid are often forged in moments of crises among people who had previously been strangers” (Huron, 2015: 970). Urban commons also provide a space of residence and work for those who are excluded from the market mechanism—in other words, displaced tenants can find shelter in urban commons, while small merchants or street vendors shifted elsewhere can secure space for their business there. Finally, urban commons provide an opportunity for participation and self-control through the process of self-management. Residents are directly involved in deciding multiple affairs, large and small, and thus have substantial power. Gidwani and Baviskar (2011) further stated that commons vitalize communities and also teach democracy through the process of creating, governing, and defending collective resources.

Urban commons are mainly explained through three dimensions: community, institutions, and resources (Kip et al., 2015). “Community” indicates a group of people communally using and managing resources regardless of ownership. They participate in activities to sustain the commons by managing and controlling its use with rules and institutions. For a commons in an ever-changing fluid urban setting in particular, the community is not limited to a few permanent members but is open to the mobilization of diverse and constantly changing members. Next, “institutions” stands for the systems of rules and practices necessary to regulate urban commons’ self-organizing mechanism—this has been elaborated by Ostrom’s design principles, including rules for resources appropriation reflecting local settings, collective decision-making, monitoring and sanctioning measures, and a system for conflict resolution, all organized and managed autonomously by the community while receiving “minimal recognition” by governmental authorities. Last, “resources” indicate the assets or urban space shared by the users, where collective actions to use, extract from, maintain, or create urban commons, or “commoning,” take place.

Creating an Urban Commons
Urban commons are not static, being under the pressure of many competing uses and users. They can form, readjust, and even disappear, reflecting the changing demand of the public and private sectors in modern society. Jeong (2018) cited Polanyi’s (1957) theory of double movements to explain the dynamics involving two conflicting and continuous trails of processes affecting commons: one expands commons with diverse groups and communities by establishing common wealth, while the other privatizes or monopolizes the common wealth, thereby harming or even dissipating the commons. These two movements interact continuously, and the result is commons’ creation or dissolution, depending on the more dominant force at play. The settings and process in which urban commons are created can be elucidated through the three dimensions—community, institutions, and resources—as shown in Figure 1.

Settings for urban commons
As a product of the exclusive mechanism in a capital-driven urban environment, individuals who are vulnerable in social and economic sense increasingly lose their power and place in society. This strongly motivates them to search for resources, such as places where they can be less affected. Thus, the socially excluded become a core constituent of communities in urban commons’ creation. Commoners also emerge

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2 Institutions are variously defined in social sciences. Crawford & Ostrom (1995) reviewed and categorized them into three approaches such as institutions-as-equilibria, institutions-as-norms, and institutions-as-rules that constrain or determine actions or outcomes for actors. Despite the diverse definitions, institutions commonly refer to “systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interactions” (Hodgson, 2006: 13).
from the needs left unfulfilled by the current institutions, which could entail the pursuit of creativity and freedom unshackled by the existing system, thus urging them to create a place where their needs can be met (Łapniewska, 2017; Euler, 2018). They themselves may have experienced a kind of social exclusion, or a sense of longing for a “better place.” From the architectural perspective, the production of urban commons is “a form of production geared towards a more equitable distribution of power, knowledge and the means of production” (Bradley, 2015: 92). In this aspect, the scope of urban commoners can extend to include urban commons’ active producers to achieve some level of equity and justice in society.

However, it is not easy for commoners to create and maintain urban commons, as their associated settings are quite different from traditional commons. The more significant challenge is to maintain them after creation. Once they succeed in commons’ creation, members tend to individualize rapidly. In other words, they tend to return to the market mechanism and pursue profits, potentially leading to the commons’ destruction. Newcomers to the commons are unreliable partners compared to the existing network, and they may take the commons for granted. Therefore, to transform urban space into an urban commons and maintain it, considerable collective efforts must be put into its reorganization. Such collective action is a representation of shared goals and values to overcome the existing system’s problems (Melucci, 1996:15).

We suggest that the problem that induces such collective actions is mainly the institutions of social exclusion that causes place-seeking behavior for an alternative order. The experiences of gentrification and displacement during urban developments are the most prominent examples of such social exclusion. The exclusion of these urban spaces further jeopardizes the lives of the weak and necessitates a struggle to secure a common place as a quality space (Standing, 2011, 2012, 2014). The process of exclusion in the spatial dimension can be summarized as a mechanism of spatial commodification where people carry out activities for profits (Lefebvre, 1996). Spatial commodification is linked to the general accumulation logic of capital on the one hand and the specific situation of the neoliberal age on the other. As the state’s functions and finances reduce under neoliberalism, many urban public spaces also diminish due to privatization and commodification (Harvey, 2003, 2004, 2007). When space becomes a commodity, only those who can afford it can use it, and the rest are excluded. The urban process, in which the commercialization of space is most evident in the city, is development or redevelopment. This raises rent, segregates residential areas, and reduces public space, thereby destabilizing the lives of the weak. These factors constitute the core dimension of spatial exclusion (Park, 2017).

Although the government provides a legal and financial institution to protect the weak in the process of development, there are limits to how much it can protect while not compromising growth. Thus, the protection becomes a less urgent agenda for the government, pushing people to “take matters into their own hands” (Kratzwald, 2015: 32) as well as seek a place elsewhere where their needs can be met (Łapniewska, 2017; Euler, 2018). In Bresnihan and Byrne’s research (2015), the commodification and financialization in Dublin made people feel like “outsiders,” causing social exclusion and reduction in activities in the city. In response, those excluded created urban commons for performances, exhibitions, workspaces, film screenings, and more through collective efforts.

This study sheds light on the government’s passive stance due to some conflicts of interests and a resultant power “rift between the market and state.” Market forces aim to maximize their profits by seeking

![Figure 1: Research Framework.](image)
high-density development of urban land, while the state regulates it to protect the residents’ quality of life while assuring capital accumulation. The central government may collide with the local governments in this duty when each side has a different attitude toward the market. Such a conflict leads to there being no sole dominant power regarding the use of resources, creating an opening civil society can push through to acquire the resources, as depicted on the left in Figure 1.

Łapniewska (2017: 56) suggested that commons tend to emerge in situations of “regulatory slippage” defined by Foster (2011: 67) as “a marked decline in the enforcement of these standards and/or the increasing tolerance of noncompliance with these standards by users of a given public.” For instance, private owners and the local government may renounce management of a resource due to uncertainties arising from their conflicts regarding its use, and the resource may then lie idle. During this temporary absence of dominant power, civil society can create urban commons. With authorities not controlling resources, those marginalized needing access to more resources can take control of such “unclaimed” ones temporarily relieved of development pressure.

Process of creating a commons

The above settings generate both opportunities and threats for creating a commons. While social exclusion induces the emergence of urban commons as a haven, the settings of the urban commons movement may conflict with the principles for designing it, as illustrated in Figure 1. To successfully create an urban commons, urban commoners should bridge the gaps between the settings and principles through appropriate strategies. As Ostrom is the one who most systematically presented the design principles,3 we build on her ideas to discuss the process of creating a commons in urban settings.

Ostrom (1990) revealed how cooperative self-governance can be achieved by the community as a third way, rather than the two traditional forms of management—of the state or the individuals through commons’ privatization. She suggested eight principles for commons’ self-governing management: (1) Clear boundaries and membership: Resource boundaries and membership of resource-using communities must be clearly defined; (2) Congruent rules: The provision of resource use and provision must conform to local conditions; (3) Collective choice arrangements: User groups must be able to collectively select the rules or conditions required in a shared environment; (4) Monitoring: Users should properly monitor the rules they establish to ensure they are adequately observed; (5) Graduated sanctions: If users violate the rules, there must be sanctions corresponding to the degree of violation; (6) Conflict resolution mechanism: There should be a system for resolving conflicts that occur between internal users or between users and managers; (7) Recognized rights to organize: The right to autonomy must be recognized free of threats from authorities outside the community; and (8) Nested enterprises: All the above self-governing activities are organized in multiple layers that are consistent with each other. These eight principles can be reorganized along commons’ three dimensions as illustrated on the right side of Figure 1—the clear membership in the first principle is arranged along the community dimension, clear boundaries of resources are along the resource dimension, and the rest seven along the institutional dimension.

However, the settings in which urban commons are created may conflict with these principles. Those who are excluded from the market and state orders tend to feel isolated and lack a sense of community (Standing, 2011, 2012, 2014; Aalbers, 2010), rather than having clear membership. While commons require a well-established set of self-governing rules as detailed by Ostrom, urban settings have no such rules, and usually defy their establishment. The city is saturated with privatization by the market and controls by the state, which civil society resists. This resistance, which is, essentially, dreams of escaping from the existing order, sometimes manifests as rejection of rules or restrictions (Bresnihan & Byrne, 2015). Finally, the resources communally used and managed by the community are not clearly defined in the city, as these are heavily privatized or commodified. Given these gaps between commons’ urban settings and the design principles, the process of creating one involves the use of appropriate strategies.

Study Area and Methodology

For this research, we examined the case of GRC in Seoul, South Korea, where civic groups and the socially underprivileged are squatting on public land to create an urban commons on idle railroads. This case is interesting as it is a commons in a large capitalist city of a developed country, and is suitable for this study.

3 Through these principles, Ostrom tried to overcome the tragedy of the commons. On the other hand, some scholars define the “anticommons” as a conceptual symmetry of the commons and warns against the tragedy of the anticommons (Heller, 1998; Nguyen et al., 2017).
as it represents urban commons in that it has characteristics of both a social movement and commons. A brief history of GRC is as follows.

Korea Rail Network Authority (KRNA), the central government’s agency in charge of constructing and maintaining railways in Korea, completed the undergrounding of Gyeongui Line in Seoul in 2014. Since the underground section’s overground area was vacant, KRNA had to find alternative uses for it, and reached an agreement with the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) in 2010, prior to the project’s completion. Following the agreement, the Gyeongui Line Forest Park was built in 2016 at about 102,000 m², nearly 61% of the underground section’s overground area. Also, while overground areas of two major stations (Hongdae and Gongdeok) have been developed into commercial spaces, the other two, Sogang and Gongdeok stations’ neighborhoods (area including our study), are still under development (KRNA, 2019).

The study area, admeasuring 3,280 m², is surrounded by commercial and residential high-rises. According to the agreement with SMG, KRNA had to coordinate with the city for developing a park above the line, and SMG and Mapo-gu, the borough where GRC is located, had to coordinate for the licensing of KRNA’s development. KRNA had planned to develop the site and its adjacent parcel of 5,740 m² into a 20-story office and commercial building (KRNA, n.d.), for which it had selected E-Land World Co. Ltd. and established E-Land Gongdeok Co. Ltd. (EGCL), a special purpose corporation, in July 2012. Currently, EGCL is in the process of obtaining licenses from the local governments for changes in district-level planning. However, progress has been slow, and the site has been left unused for a long period (KRNA, 2019).

In the meantime, the Mapo-gu Office had requested temporary use of the site during the period of acquiring various approvals from March 2013 to 2015. Accordingly, it had entered into an agreement with the Always-Market Cooperative (AMC), led by social enterprises and civic groups, and operated a “citizen market” named the Always Market (AM) in GRC. Various social entrepreneurs and activists had participated as providers of alternatively produced or traded goods and activities, and many citizens had visited the marketplace during those two years, making the site a local attraction.

After the temporary use agreement was terminated at the end of 2015, AMC changed its organization into Citizens’ Action for Gyeongui Railway Commons (CAGRC) and squatted at the site to continue its activities. Since then, it has become a place where people pushed out by state power and capital, such as street vendors, small merchants, and poor tenants, gather. The Mapo-gu Office has sent the demolition depot there several times to threaten the dismantling of all facilities at the site through a lawsuit.

Since its formation, CAGRC has carried out numerous citizen-led activities. It has initiated a variety of projects, from discussions on alternative housing and commons to organizing outdoor food parties, flea markets, sports events, urban film festivals, and more. It also publishes a quarterly newsletter and podcasts. It even rents spaces to citizens—people can host activities such as musical events, yoga, and meditation classes. GRC, proclaimed as the “26th borough of Seoul” in February 2016, provides a place for citizens as providers of alternatively produced or traded goods and activities, and many citizens had visited the marketplace during those two years, making the site a local attraction.

Thanks to the increasing spread of positive word of mouth, merchants, artists, and street vendors stranded due to rising rents have come to GRC after hearing about it. Hence, now, besides the CAGRC activists, the place has several restaurants, cafés, art-sharing workshops, and an exhibition hall, built by these artists. In addition, there is a GRC office, PR center for the disabled, an art gallery and event space, a shared studio, and a central community garden (Figure 2). As depicted in Figure 2, some are specified as shelters for the excluded, while some are common spaces. However, what complicates the matter is GRC’s location—in an especially bustling train station near a well-built park, surrounded by 20- to 30-story high-rise mixed-use developments due to huge urban projects (Picture 1): it is under immense capitalist pressure for development.

For data collection, we visited the site and observed the agents’ activities from September 2018 to October 2019 and conducted 27 formal semi-structured interviews (individual and group) from July to October 2019 at GRC, with two CAGRC activists, eight permanent place-keepers, and one temporary place-keeper. We found it critical to gain an in-depth insight into GRC by directly interviewing the activists in charge of organizing it and the actual place-keepers who operate there. Each interview was conducted once for each person or group, and the duration ranged from 40 to 120 minutes. Additionally, we briefly interviewed 16 temporary commoners (visitors to the commons) regarding their opinions on GRC and collected secondary data from published articles from the media and CAGRC website and newsletters. The in-depth interviews were voice-recorded, organized, and saved into electronic word files while any personal information that could reveal
the interviewees’ identity has been deleted. The entire research procedure, including the written consent for the interviewees, data collection and preservation methods were approved by the Seoul National University Institutional Review Board (SNUIRB).\(^5\) Table 1 gives details on the place-keepers and activists who were interviewed in depth.

![Figure 2: Map of GRC. Note: Originally published in the CAGRC newsletter and on its website, the map of GRC has been translated and updated by the authors.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Place-keeper</td>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Aug. 29, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Place-keeper</td>
<td>Shared space operator</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Sep. 25, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Place-keeper</td>
<td>Café operator</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Aug. 6, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>GRC manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Aug. 13, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>GRC manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Jul. 12, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Activist and place-keeper</td>
<td>Shared space operator</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Sep. 9, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Place-keeper</td>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Jul. 12, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Place-keeper</td>
<td>Resident/youth housing activist</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Aug. 29, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
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<td>Campaigner</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Aug. 6, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Place-keeper</td>
<td>Restaurant operator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Aug. 29, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Place-keeper</td>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Oct. 12, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) The interview data collected for this research has been submitted to the SNUIRB, and stored and protected by the authors. The data are available upon written request, provided that it will not be used for the purpose of being published, nor utilized for any other use or research without the permission of the authors and SNUIRB.
Settings for GRC Creation

A set of urban settings define the background of GRC creation. The social exclusion process in Seoul is at the bottom of the creation of GRC as a haven for the excluded. During the urban redevelopment process, tenants and the socially underprivileged who lost their space, artists, small-time entrepreneurs who could not find an affordable space for free creative activities, and social activists who wanted to carry out alternative social experiments have sought out GRC. Here, the opening secured during the rift between the market and local governments over the development of a public space has been an important basis for the creation of GRC. The following elaborates on the details along commons’ three dimensions.

Exclusionary urban development

Due to multiple urban redevelopment projects in the city (Cheonggyecheon urban stream in the old city center, and old residential areas including Haengdang-dong and Ahyeon-dong), merchants, renters, and residents were forced to move out of their establishments from the early 2000s to mid-2010s.

The Cheonggyecheon project was an ambitious one, and often quoted as Seoul city-led “successful urban redevelopment project” (2003–05), winning several prestigious awards for design and innovation (UN-HABITAT special citation award for sustainable development 2010 and Lighting Urban Community International Light Award 2008). Before the project, there were aging small manufacturing businesses and commercial stands—establishments that were neither competitive nor “aesthetically pleasing.” After its completion, existing businesses dispersed throughout the city; as of February 2019, only 330 out of the 60,000 merchants from Cheonggyecheon have moved into a new resettlement shopping mall, called Garden Five, built by the city (Bae, 2009; Lee, 2019; Yoo, 2019)—the mall’s location, being far from the city center and the original place, was considered undesirable, but more importantly, the expensive lease or purchase price was unaffordable for most merchants.

The Haengdang and Ahyeon redevelopments (2014–15) followed a similar pattern, where most renters were evicted due to the area’s residential and mixed-use redevelopment projects. These three different-yet-similar urban processes sought to increase land use efficiency or maximize profits without involving tenants, resulting in more people needing commons. Only a handful of them could gather at GRC with the help of social activists, who later formed CAGRC.

Additionally, those who sought an alternative place and way of living that was “freeing” in the existing capitalist and “rigid” social structure (Habermas, 1987) also joined GRC to pursue their dreams that could not be realized elsewhere due to high prices, gentrification, or hierarchical and inflexible workplace culture. As shown in the second category of Table 1, those in this group tried to uphold their own values rather than pursue profits or mainstream cultures, including advocacy of the disabled, sharing culture, or just having fun. However, most of them were displaced because of their inability to pay high rents or adapt to the rigid workplace culture, as revealed during the interviews with A, B, C, and H.

Community of the excluded

CAGRC, upon forming a small community with the few socially excluded due to urban redevelopments, labeled the occupants “place-keepers (gong-gan-ji-gi in Korean)” and assigned spots for their stores in shipping containers installed around GRC’s boundaries. The commoners’ community expanded over time with additional place-keepers.

In the beginning, there were five permanent place-keepers—three small-time food vendors evicted from a residential reconstruction project in Ahyeon-dong⁶ and two retailers from the AM; later, one retailer moved out as business began to flourish. Then, another merchant (Interviewee A) evicted from the Cheonggyecheon restoration project came to sell dried goods. Over time, more artists gathered from elsewhere—one resident (Interviewee H) evicted from a residential redevelopment in Haengdang-dong, one homeless man who happened to discover the place, and one former member (Interviewee C) of the AM who used to be a company employee and had quit his job to open a boardgame café came and became GRC members.

Since its beginning, there have been some changes in members, and as of September 2019, the 12 main GRC place-keepers can be categorized into two groups: (1) the excluded due to physical circumstances impacted by the direct and immediate displacement and (2) the excluded due to non-physical urban circumstances, who were in need of an alternative lifestyle and place to experiment their creativity (see Table 2).

The former comprises those who were evicted from their houses and shops due to redevelopments—the three food vendors (Picture 2), one dried goods seller, and two residents who joined GRC right at the start.

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⁶ “Dong” refers to the smallest official neighborhood unit within the borough (Gu).
Table 2: List of permanent place-keepers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major activity</th>
<th>Narrative up to settlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The excluded due to physical urban circumstances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;Commercial&gt;</td>
<td>Giant Aunt’s (2016*)</td>
<td>Small-time casual restaurant manager</td>
<td>Forced evictees who operated their businesses together in Ahyeon-dong. In GRC, each of them opened their own store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gangta’s Aunt’s (2016)</td>
<td>After-hours pub (Picture 2-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Red Aunt’s (2016)</td>
<td>Small street vendor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cheonggyecheon Toad (2016)</td>
<td>Dried goods vendor</td>
<td>Forced evictee (Cheonggyecheon project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&lt;Residential&gt;</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resident 1 (2016)</td>
<td>Resident and activist for affordable housing; supports management</td>
<td>Forced evictee (Haengdang redevelopment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resident 2 (2018)</td>
<td>Resident; helps clean the area</td>
<td>While homeless, he stumbled upon a vacant spot in GRC and settled in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The excluded due to non-physical urban circumstances: seekers of an alternative lifestyle</strong></td>
<td>Gaonmaru (2017)</td>
<td>Campaigner of raising awareness for the disabled</td>
<td>Part of an NGO for the disabled who searched for a place for his cause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norangongbang (Yellow Studio, 2016)</td>
<td>Manager of a handicraft workshop</td>
<td>Priced out of the art district, moved to GRC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darakbang (The Attic, late 2016)</td>
<td>Boardgame café manager</td>
<td>Started as a vendor in the AM, quit his corporate job to pursue his dream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hobak (Pumpkin, 2019)</td>
<td>Bar manager and mixologist</td>
<td>Previously part of another urban commons for shared housing (Binzip).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gongza Live (2019)</td>
<td>Manager of an open library and DJ artist</td>
<td>Formerly a bookstore owner and DJ, was priced out of a gentrifying neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dakjang (Hen House, 2016)</td>
<td>Activist and operator of a shared studio</td>
<td>Formerly an installation artist, was in search of an affordable art studio.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Years within the parentheses indicate when the spaces were first established. Eight of the place-keepers in this table were available for an interview for this research and are included in Table 1.*

**Note:**

**Picture 2 (2-1 & 2-2):** GRC vendors (left, a casual food vendor with tables outside; right, a clothing vendor).
The dried goods seller was evicted from the Cheonggyecheon project and moved to the relocation shopping mall, Garden Five. However, she could not pay the rent due to lack of customers and ended up joining GRC, which gave her peace of mind (Interviewee A). Another evictee, the affordable housing activist introduces his journey and thoughts on GRC as follows:

“I was evicted from a residential development, and now, I am here, to live and work as an affordable housing activist for the youth... This is an alternative place where one can practice many creative ideas...

It can be used as a plaza for people, a temporary accommodation for the evicted, a youth entrepreneur incubator, an artist’s atelier, and so on. (Place-keeper, Interviewee H)

The latter group comprises those who came due to various non-physical urban circumstances, such as soaring rent in the city—non-conformists vis-à-vis the current social order seeking alternative places. This group has one advocate of the disabled and five seekers of an alternative place who were priced out and now found a place to display their artistic talents or pursue their dreams—a mixologist, café owner, shop owner selling artifacts, an artist operating a sharing library, and a shared art studio operator. The artist joined GRC as he wanted to be free from the pressure for revenue growth and to “run the library as a place to share with more people” (Interviewee B). The boardgame café manager introduces his story of joining GRC:

“After quitting my company job, I wanted a place where I could show and share my color, which is why I came here... For spaces, people have to go through several processes to “pay rent” or obtain a license from the city (for example, using the park); here, that process is much simpler. One can freely change the spatial layout for each use and use it without any restrictions.” (Place-keeper, Interviewee C)

Interviewees A and H were evicted from developments, directly affected by the physical exclusion, while interviewees B and C sought a place that was both affordable and different from other places under market pressure. They came to GRC for different reasons and found that it provides everyone a space sheltered from the outside world controlled by market and state order, recognizing its “free” and “creative” value.

The number of GRC place-keepers continues to rise through addition of society’s excluded—those who have been evicted from a place and those who wish to operate a shared space can send in an application to the CAGRC activists, subject to availability of space. In 2019, the Nationwide Professors’ Association for Democracy, which shares the same values as the urban commons movement, was scheduled to move to GRC to build an experimental “researchers’ house” to serve as an anchor for independent research and a haven for part-time professors and researchers, to resist the trend of universities becoming similar to businesses.

**Absence of a dominant power**

In GRC’s case, there has been a temporary absence of dominant power and control. Although KRNA’s land ownership and intention to develop exists, licensing processes, and technical, financial, and bureaucratic problems have made the developer (EGCL) internally change the business plan both in scale and use from offices to a hotel and parking garage. Despite following the city’s urban land use change process of sending in the draft for the site’s review, while waiting for the city’s urban planning commission’s review, the developer technically re-assessed the site’s foundation to reconfirm its safety measures and found their 20-story building plan technically infeasible owing to its heaviness on the already weakened surface due to the subway’s undergrounding (Kim, 2016). However, the land rent fees for the developer’s use of public land for 30 years still apply, regardless of the inevitable reduction in building mass, thereby harming profitability. What normally would have taken two to three years, with changes in their initial plan due to technical and profitability problems, has been postponed indefinitely due to change in the city administration from a development-friendly mayor to a more preservation-centered one. Furthermore, future stumbling blocks are expected when acquiring additional government approvals because of changes in their initial plan, as they need to re-apply for the urban planning commission reviews.

The city government’s friendly attitude toward the urban commons movement in GRC also has caused a rift between it and the developer since a former civic activist, Won-soon Park, was elected mayor through the by-election in 2011, when the former conservative mayor abruptly resigned. While the city government’s

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7 Not included as the major place-keepers, there are temporary ones as well, who sell clothes or accessories occasionally (Picture 2).

8 The mayor was later elected twice in 2014 and 2018 and remained in office until 2020 when he died. Therefore, the entire process of GRC covered in this paper was carried out during his administration.
official stance is to avoid direct budgetary support for GRC’s operation, it has offered monthly stipends to the activists through a separate city program, which is for encouraging youth employment and regeneration of dwindling areas—in other words, passive support. Unlike the Mapo-gu Office that is adamantly against GRC to carry out the 2013 agreement with KRNA, the city authorities are neither actively supporting nor aggressively opposing GRC’s operation.

In sum, while the market—that is, the developer EGCL—has been slow in taking action to develop the site, the government has also been stalling with its regulatory procedures, causing a breakdown in the cooperation between the government and market, leaving the site vacant for years. This setting, in which there is no dominant power exerting control on the site, has paved the way for civil society to penetrate and claim the space. Some activists proposed to the Mapo-gu Office to temporarily use the site as a year-round flea market—the AM. Eventually, the activists decided to squat on the site with the excluded as it contained all the equipment for people to gather and work—shipping containers for shops and meeting spaces. Thus, an urban commons with a diverse commoners’ network was born.

**Process of GRC Creation and Maintenance**

The GRC settings we have seen so far clash with the design principles for efficient management of common resources proposed by Ostrom. The excluded, including those who were evicted during the urban redevelopment process, may be the community’s initial members, but it is not clear who should be included in it in the future. The rules for managing GRC’s common resources have not been embraced because they likely limit someone’s rights. These resources have constantly faced a threat from EGCL and KRNA. The following elaborates on the conflicts between the settings and principles, the process of overcoming these problems, and how GRC has been partially successful.

**Community-building and outreach**

In the community dimension, the process of creating urban commons can be summarized as “community-building and outreach.” While various subjects with different motives should be able to collaborate initially, the vulnerable individuals are scattered across diverse fields and spaces, not as visible as the mainstream population, making the process of congregating for a unified voice ever more challenging. Once there is collective realization of the excluded as a group, the boundaries of commons’ users and producers can be drawn, initially with those who need such space. Here, these communities should remain open to other potential commoners as long as they provide care work for commons’ “existence and sustainability” (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014: 102). Subsequently, community-building efforts must be made to consolidate the bonds, build trust, and eventually confirm that existing and new members continue to share the same values regarding commons. Urban commons are obligated to expand “their networks of collaboration” to survive (Kip, 2015: 44–55). Such community-building efforts must not stop within the established social circle and should have a clear objective to broaden the network and actively engage other potential commoners.

In GRC’s case, various events have been hosted at common meeting places to provide participants with opportunities for social networking. Weekly or bi-weekly place-keeper meetings with activists, dinner discussions, and team-building activities have been organized to set rules and straighten out matters for the commons’ operation. Along with the central community garden, there are two shared studios for artists that are open for use, one temporary structure made of plastic and wood—Giraffe Castle—to hold seminars and meetings, three art exhibition spaces, and a gallery. The activists’ office also serves as a meeting place. These small open spaces serve as the ground for communal interaction and outreach.

To gain a broader base, diverse and creative outreach methods are used. CAGRC uses its website and podcasts to communicate with the public, advocate its existence, share news, and advertise events. Offline, it utilizes the commons’ spaces. Occasionally, community flea markets, and yoga, flower-decoration, and soap-making classes are held. GRC is also used as a base camp for local marathon clubs’ running activities. Public art exhibitions, talent shows, family events involving food and pop-up pools, food truck and barbecue parties, forums and public lectures with journalists and celebrities, and seminars related to GRC or urban commons are organized. The community garden is used by any neighborhood resident or temporary commoner who has signed up to grow plants.

In 2017, public forums or workshops on urban commons were held twice, sponsored by the city of Seoul governed by the progressive Mayor Won-soon Park; various academic events utilizing the Commons Network, a network of believers and practitioners of commons in Korea, were held. In January 2019, however, the Mapo-gu Office blocked the plan to build the “researchers’ house” in GRC’s southern corner. The plan was
part of an outreach effort to draw the support and cooperation of educators and researchers. Through such efforts, using both aggressive and gentle cultural ways of building support and mutual understanding, the network has continued to expand.

Such efforts to expand the network and create alliances while keeping the space open are important for urban commons' sustenance. Even if urban commons were first created with a few like-minded excluded individuals, they are not for their use alone and should be open to other potential users. The existence of an urban commons would not be justified, and it could be dismantled if restricted to a specific group of people, as the other urban citizens who are prohibited from using it would oppose its existence. This characteristic of urban commons sets it apart from traditional commons in that it necessitates relatively open boundaries in which more members are encouraged to join to use the commons to justify and sustain its existence as a commons. Therefore, Ostrom's first design principle, which highlights the importance of “clear boundaries and membership,” does not apply to urban commons. Urban commoners should make outreach efforts beyond clarifying community membership.

**Communal management and commoning**

In the institutions dimension, the process deals with not only communal management of the resources but also “commoning” as a practice to go beyond the dominant market order. For resource management, as elucidated by Ostrom (1990), the institutional strategy should establish an organizational structure for rule setting that is, to some extent, recognized by an official authority—the local or central government (Fennell, 2011). The rules are not set by an outside authority but established by commoners with the very purpose of creating commons as resources to be used against society’s institutions of social exclusion. The rules should stipulate an open membership mechanism, upholding of commons’ values, collective decision-making methods, and a conflict resolution system (Kratzwald, 2015: 37). Commoning as a social movement also provides an alternative way of living in a capitalist society that reproduces social exclusion (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014). As commoning is “a set of practices and performances that foster new relations and subjectivities,” it requires struggles to overcome the existing exercise of power and way of life (Nightingale, 2019: 21).

In GRC’s case, various efforts have been made to set rules for resource management and recognition by official authorities throughout CAGRC’s short history. Even GRC’s self-proclamation as the “26th borough of Seoul” is a loud symbolic gesture to establish itself as a self-governing body and get the government and people’s recognition. It even has an elected mayor and citizens who signed up and provide monthly donations. The community is led by the CAGRC activists, with whom the place-keepers work to maintain and make decisions regarding the commons. There are sub-groups, such as program- and event-based temporary groups and a conflict-managing body. These are not fixed entities, and form and dissipate organically with changing members depending on the issue that needs to be resolved.

GRC has its sets of rules that are modified occasionally. Although, as one of the activists mentioned in the interview, “the idea of the commons was attractive because it was a free place with no rules” (Activist, Interviewee D), the irony is that rules are needed for its sustainability. Reflecting GRC’s origins, the written rules are minimal, on sharing the understanding that (1) GRC must remain as a commons, and members must share their space with other commoners when not using it themselves; (2) the communal areas must be kept clean, not occupied by place-keepers; (3) the commoners must respect each other and peacefully resolve matters, including discussions to find ways to legalize their existence; and (4) maintenance fees are encouraged as much as one can afford. These rules are modified every three months through meetings with all the place-keepers and activists. In May 2019, they even set up a team to ensure the compliance of the rules (“Hyang-yak”), comprising two neutral and two conflict-related place-keepers, and one or two outside experts with mediating experience.

Despite these rules, however, they face multiple threats to achieving GRC’s goal. The attributes of the urban setting and commons generate inherent contradictions in urban commons (Park et al., 2019). With different people having distinct purposes regarding commons’ use, it is difficult to establish clear rules and sanctions within urban commons, because they require the consent of various people. To give an example, GRC established management rules but not detailed principles for monitoring and sanctions, because its members’ purposes and activities were different. The following interview with an activist indicates the limitations of the GRC’s institutions.

“Even if some place-keepers do not abide by the rules (and not share), it is difficult to tell them to leave... I wish all users would understand that just because one came here first does not guarantee one’s permanent right (and ownership) here.” (Activist, Interviewee D)
Furthermore, urban commons’ users are not fixed but flexible, because urban commons reflect the city in that various people from all walks of life come and go, as opposed to the traditional commons setting in which fixed members with a single-use purpose of a commons gather (closed boundaries). Temporary users or passers-by, too, can use the space. This makes its efficient management challenging, because users are many and resources limited, while the sense of responsibility is scattered.

Funding is also insufficient. Fees for place-keepers are voluntarily encouraged, causing the classic free-riding predicament. Due to their modest income, there has been a high turnover of activists, with only one from the first batch remaining. This leads to inefficiency as former experience is lost and newcomers need to be “retrained.” Such cracks in camaraderie may also demotivate existing members.

Furthermore, there exist internal challenges regarding keeping commons’ shared values intact. The sense of ownership of some place-keepers has grown to such an extent that they have begun to show signs of exclusivity among themselves, getting defensive over space-sharing possibilities when accepting new place-keepers or new ideas for the use of communal spaces. The following reveals the challenges of commoning in that the non-exclusive and shared values are constantly at risk and need to be continuously reminded.

“This place should not be exclusive but becomes so inevitably. Members came here because they were evicted, so it would be wrong to kick them out again.” (Place-keeper, Interviewee G)

“I believe that once we are able to stand on our own feet, we should move out and support those in need, who wish to move in... However, the territory of some of the vendors settled here, who were evicted from elsewhere, keeps expanding and is not shared with others. This place is ... for sharing, not monopolizing.” (Place-keeper, Interviewee A)

These conditions threaten GRC’s maintenance. Nevertheless, its members strive to collectively manage it effectively by constantly reminding themselves of urban commons’ core values (sharing and managing the place together). While CAGRC keeps pressurizing the government, and stabilizes the commons’ operation and justification, internally, the commons has begun to take the shape of an ecosystem with a self-organizing mechanism and joint decision-making function that provides an alternative way of living, or “holistic commoning,” in this capitalist society.

Resource appropriation

In the resource dimension, appropriation is necessary. Vis-à-vis urban commons, squatting can serve as a clear and effective strategy. According to Pickles (2006), squatting is not only the act of occupying a place but is also an active and inevitable response by the weak who oppose the “process of marginalization” in the real estate market. He further stated that the exclusion caused by the urban process forced people to fight against the tide collectively and creatively, engaging in squatting as a response to the unaffordable real estate bubble. Squatting is “to make a spatial commitment to producing a new set of affective and autonomous geographies of attachment, dwelling, and expression” (Vasudevan, 2011: 284–285).

In GRC’s case, CAGRC has been developing a community and squatting to convey the need for a place for the excluded, suggest an alternative way of living, and create a haven protected from the forces of neoliberalism. This squatting is a form of protest. Its influence goes beyond its physical boundaries, throughout society, as it symbolizes an alternative force that can be necessary in a society that reproduces exclusion.

Similar to Pickles’ (2006) belief on squatting, the act is not a mere gesture of occupying an area, but could be “a way of creating a forgotten right in our society in which citizens can claim a society’s common property for everyone, so it does not become privatized... The commons can serve as a place to claim rights or practice democracy in a real sense” (interview with a temporary commoner, July 2019).

“Most problems in a capitalist city are caused because urban places produced from collective citizen efforts are privatized by a specific group, monopolizing the profits of such places. The commons movement is a universal practice to overcome such urban phenomena.” (Activist 3, February 2019, CAGRC Newsletter Issue 4, Winter)

In this interview, the activist supported the intention behind squatting by elaborating how it is not a simple act of occupying a space but a larger socioeconomic phenomenon pushing back the tide of privatization of urban spaces in a capitalist society.
Findings and Discussion

In modern cities, where capitalist market laws and the state’s regulatory logic prevail, it is difficult to form commons, but the urban commons movement has been active in recent years. This study has analyzed the reasons for its rise by examining the settings favorable to urban commons’ creation and strategies the actors use to take advantage of these conditions to create commons, along with commons’ three dimensions—community, institutions, and resources. To this end, we have established a framework to analyze urban commons’ creation process, and examined the case of GRC in Seoul, Korea—an example of urban commons acting as a haven. We have demonstrated that the urban commons movement is closely related to social exclusion in the city and that urban commons have emerged and developed as havens for the excluded or those seeking an alternative way of living.

This study shows the favorable settings under which urban commons are sought and created. First, in the community dimension, the existence of people excluded through the exclusionary urban process of development or redevelopment and the lifestyles excluded from the mainstream order trigger the emergence of urban commons as a haven. The excluded, such as poor tenants, the homeless, street vendors excluded from the urban process, and creative social experimenters who refuse to be subsumed into the mainstream order—that is, artists—need urban commons as havens. In the institutional dimension, the market and state’s social exclusion system, and the resultant place-seeking action in civil society for alternative orders can lead to the emergence of urban commons. If exclusionary mechanisms such as gentrification and displacement occur due to the commodification of urban space in the market, and the government’s legal and financial institutions to protect the socially underprivileged are weakened or malfunction, civil society emerges to create urban commons as a haven on their own. Finally, regarding resources, favorable settings under which civil society appropriates resources are created when occasional market-state conflicts and tensions result in a power balance, leading to the absence of a sole dominant power. Such conflicts occur occasionally as market forces seek high-density development to maximize profits, while the state and local governments practice regulation to protect residents’ quality of life.

These settings do not automatically lead to urban commons’ creation, as they clash with Ostrom’s design principles for common resources. Urban commons’ successful development requires a systematic process: since its subjects are usually strangers, strategies must be devised to build a community through multiple channels and opportunities. In GRC’s case, social networking and outreach strategies have been used, including events and meetings to mobilize not only those who have been driven out during the exclusionary urban process but also the potentially excluded and actors of civil society who sympathize with commoners. Regarding the institutions, commoning strategies that create alternative orders beyond the capitalist mainstream one, as well as the communal management of resources, must be used. In this case, efforts were made to set and implement rules for joint resource management and conflict resolution, and to acquire external authorities’ recognition of GRC’s self-governance. Finally, vis-à-vis resources, common ones are not simply given in cities having a private ownership order but should be created through non-market practices. In GRC’s case, the excluded and civil society activists acquired space by squatting on state-owned land and claiming their right to use it.

This study focuses on the settings and process of how an urban commons is created while overcoming the urban environment’s threats. However, it has some limitations in that it omits how the commons further sustains its operation after its creation. Although this study attempts to describe the challenges in its creation process, future studies may want to focus on its management process. Also, since the GRC’s urban commons is a new phenomenon, it is too early to discuss its success or failure; hence, we have deferred on its evaluation.

Concluding Remarks

GRC is a unique example in that it demonstrates how amidst the urban challenges, the excluded members of society with diverse backgrounds and purposes gathered and found the place on government property, struggled to form and expand its community, built an autonomous institution with limited resources, while taking advantage of the state-market rift which left the land vacant.

The GRC’s case also shows how Ostrom’s principles may or may not apply to the urban commons. The first design principle on “clear boundaries and membership” does not apply to the urban commons as it is,

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*While this paper was being reviewed, GRC voluntarily closed down in April 2020 after struggling against a long lawsuit filed by Mapo-gu Office against the GRC members. In spite of GRC eventually closing, it will have long-term impacts on the urban commons movement in Korea.*
since its boundaries and membership are semi-open in that more members are encouraged to join to use the commons in the long run. Yet, for the institutions of the urban commons, we found that Ostrom’s other principles still apply, such as ensuring a collective decision-making, self-monitoring, conflict-resolution mechanism with the community, and being recognized by an outside authority. The urban settings in which market privatization, state control, and civic resistance to rules are what makes such principles challenging to take shape, let alone for an urban commons to even form.

Our research findings have significant implications for the urban commons movement in modern cities. First, if the order of social exclusion continues, such as the urban process under neoliberalism, the need for urban commons will increase. The more people are excluded, the more experimental practices are banned in the mainstream order, and the weaker the state’s efforts to protect them, those excluded will try to find a haven on their own. Next, the conflict and rift between the state and market will open the space for civil society’s activities for urban commons’ creation and exploitation. The state is expected to not only play a role in facilitating the accumulation of capital but also continually perform the function of legitimization (O’Connor, 1973). In this process, there is always the possibility of a state-market rift, and its exploitation can lead to urban commons’ development. Finally, the city’s densely populated markets continuously challenge urban commons and the way they operate. The actors leading the urban commons movement must overcome these challenges and build a comprehensive and robust network of alliances, and struggle for the commons’ development and maintenance.

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Competing Interests
The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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