

The FAR Game

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The FAR Game is the frontline of Korean architecture.

FAR (Floor Area Ratio) is the ratio of a building's total floor area to the size of the site. But it is the precondition which 99 percent of Korean architects must fight for and with. And every Korean hears about it and most know what it is.

The frontline of Korean architecture has been blurred amid of the confrontation between demolition vs regeneration, publicness vs privatization, or high-end architecture vs mediocre buildings. But at the bottom of them always lies the FAR Game. The everyday life of the urban and the rural, the rich and the poor, and the white-collar and the blue-collar are related to the FAR Game. It is the game of architecture in hyper-dense cities. It has been a driving force of Korea for the last 50 years.

Seoul is the capital of South Korea, but it is South Korea itself. It is the city of Triple Crown in density - the most populated, densest, and most concentrated. Half of the population of South Korea resides in the Greater Seoul Metropolitan Area, with about half of that, or over 10 million people, living in the capital city proper. It took only 45 years for Seoul's population to reach 10 million from 1 million, whereas it did 170 years for New York and 150 years for London to reach 8 million from 1 million. Seoul's land price grew over 1,176 times for this period.

The average FAR of the total 660,000 buildings in Seoul is only 124%. But 200% is expected as the bottom line for development. A great discrepancy between population and building density creates a tremendous pressure of development. The FAR Game fills in the gap. The FAR Game is played within the triangle of three variables - land, law, and building. The three players come in the game - consumers desiring for maximizing volumes, suppliers tempting it, and controllers restricting it.

Korean architects must figure out how to make the most of every square meter. A square meter equals to money. The game works on across the building types and scales from the super tall building and vast apartment complex to the super mini house. It is not a matter of choice but a prerequisite for the survival for architects. There are covert as well as overt ways to play the game. There are fair plays and foul plays.

The FAR Game is not just exogenous variables, but endogenous principles to architectural design. It imposes on height, number of floors, underground parking, building envelope, ceiling height, façade perforation, depth and ratios of plans, and vertical profiles of programs. They are volumetric, sectional, planimetric, and programmatic. So it affects the details of buildings and the collective urban landscape.

Then, is the goal of the FAR Game just to maximize rentable space for maximizing economic profits? What are the values in the expanded or encroached spaces by the game? Can we use the

game to make something for the larger public?

The FAR Game at the Korean Pavilion is an analytical, critical but imaginative exploration of Korean cities, Seoul as the core. It gathers mid-scale and mixed buildings, projects, and cases that turn short-term economic values into other social and cultural values. Many are illegal and many are at the informal sectors of the cities. We analyze and anatomize them, and search for clues for the changes.

Korean young architects began to go into the turf, which was never considered as '*architecture*'. They tried to see the constraints as creative forces in their designs, understanding the mechanism of capitalist cities, but not giving up the social functions of architecture. It is hard to say that there are collective theories or consistent movement behind these phenomena. Yet their attitudes and approaches are at least distinguished from the earlier generation of architects. They are fighting on and expanding the battlefield of the FAR Game.

The FAR Game is our game, but it was the 'past game' at some places, but it will be the 'far game' for many places across the world.