

5. Why does the FAR Game Matter?

From the outside, the FAR Game might appear to be nothing more than an unavoidable consequence, especially within the borders of hyper-dense urban centers, of the insatiable desire for wealth on the part of land owners and developers. This exhibit's examination of the FAR Game in Korea, however, especially of the ways that it changed after the global economic crisis of 2008, leads to important points of further exploration on several levels.

The Impact of Architecture on Society

The FAR Game is a powerful lens into the current frontiers of Korean society as expressed by the scale of buildings in the cities and the urban fabric. It reveals a form of embedded physical DNA that reflects the psyche of contemporary Koreans. Where we see the desire for space as an expression of freedom, both from external oppression and internal confusion, we find what is great about Korean culture: resiliency, fervor and diligence. When we see the desire for space simply as a way to accumulate greater wealth, we find greed and duplicity still present. If cultural identity and the lived environment have an iterative influence on each other, then it is not impossible to say that the architect and the architecture they design wields the power to slowly transform a nation's self-image. It is thus encouraging that a new generation of architects in Korea have discovered a niche in the market that will allow them to play the game with greater emphasis on quality of life and emerging cultural values for the urban middle class.

Innovative Design Tactics Inside and Out

The FAR Game gives rise to a host of design tactics that are truly out of the box, by necessity, and impose themselves on the organization of fundamental elements of a building—plan, volume, and section. This exhibit highlights attempts by architects to creatively absorb hyper-density by crossing over from quantity to quality, and to turn the motivation of short-term individual profit into the realization of long term public benefits. While the FAR Game in Korea used to imply maximizing a building's rentable space without regard for the lived experience of occupants or the building's relationship to the urban fabric, architects today are employing tactics that are convincing landowners of the value not only of creating a better living environment for inhabitants, but also of stimulating more activity between private and public space, and between the building and its urban environment.

An Alternative Model for Urban Regeneration

The FAR Game in Korea has gone through changes with the decline of large-scale demolition and reconstruction projects. With the city of Seoul turning its attention and efforts to piecemeal transformation, an opportunity has opened for budding development agencies and young architects. While this may not draw the attention of massive star-studded

construction projects, the process does foster a slow but resilient form of urban regeneration on a smaller scale within sub-blocks. At this more personal level of development, a new economic and social dynamic is cultivated. From the supplier side, small and medium-sized business is stimulated, leading to a nimbler and better trained army of laborers, workers, builders, and contractors; subsequently, the relationship between supplier and consumer improves, as suppliers have a more attuned ear to changing consumer demands. Following this example, economic stagnation and a city's inability to implement wholesale reconstruction of vast sections of the city can turn out to be a blessing in disguise. The efforts highlighted in this exhibit become instructive for large cities that have lost touch with the goals and values of their citizens.