

# Urban Agriculture Governance Assemblage in Seoul: A Formative Phase in the Early 2010s\*

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## 서울의 도시농업 거버넌스 이상블라주: 2010년대 초반 형성기를 중심으로\*

이재열\*\*

**Abstract :** This article is concerned with a governance configuration that enabled the resurgence of urban agriculture in Seoul during the early 2000s. For the purpose of tracing and unveiling the formation process of urban agriculture governance, the idea of ‘assemblage’ is utilized to resist structuralist imperatives on the one hand, and understand on the other how particular humans, nonhuman actors, organizations and institutions, knowledges, events, and geographies co-produce governing actions and functions in the city. It is found in this study that urban agriculture governance assemblage effective to Seoul consists of such heterogenous but symbiotic elements as distant knowledge and practices in motion, knowledgeable civil society and its active involvement in social networking, leadership visions, and adaptive bureaucracy. The presence of relational governance assemblage suggests that non-territorial flows and connections are as much influential as territorially defined institutions and politics. That said, more analytical attentiveness to topological relationalities may help enrich our understanding of urban governance and policy formation in more general.

Key Words : Urban agriculture, Governance, Assemblage, Civil society, Seoul

**요약 :** 지난 10여 년간 서울에서는 도시농업이 빠르게 성장하였고, 이것을 가능하게 했던 도시 거버넌스의 모습을 본 논문에서 드러내 보여주고자 한다. 도시농업 거버넌스의 형성 과정을 추적하기 위한 전략으로 ‘이상블라주’ 개념을 활용하였고, 도시 거버넌스의 작용과 기능에서 인간, 비인간 행위자, 조직과 제도, 지식, 사건, 지리 등이 주는 영향에 주목하였다. 이러한 탐구 전략은 도시 거버넌스 분석에서 만연한 ‘스케일’ 정치 중심의 구조주의적 의무에서 탈피하기 위한 것이다. 경험적 연구의 결과로 서울에서 영향력을 행사하는 도시농업 거버넌스 이상블라주는 이동성을 가진 원거리의 지식과 실천, 박식한 시민사회와 거기에서 벌어지는 사회적 네트워크, 리더십 비전, 적응력 있는 관료사회 등 이질적이면서도 공생관계에 있는 요소들의 관계로 구성된다는 사실을 발견하였다. 즉, 스케일, 영토, 영역 등으로 정의되는 제도와 정치라기보다 비영토적 흐름과 연결망 속에서 관계적으로 형성되는 거버넌스 이상블라주의 존재를 확인하였고, 이를 바탕으로 보다 일반적인 수준에서 위상학적 관계에 주목하여 도시 거버넌스와 정책 형성에 대한 이해를 증진시킬 수 있다는 점을 강조하였다.

주요어 : 도시농업, 거버넌스, 이상블라주, 시민사회, 서울

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## I. Introduction

"It was 1995. [After returning from the United Kingdom] I made a presentation about my doctoral dissertation [at a conference meeting] ... Responses were extremely cold and frustrating. Professors there didn't seem to consider the topic [about Seoul's urban agriculture] as a deserving doctoral dissertation research. Pathetic? They seemed to feel that way ... At this Institute, I proposed another urban agriculture research probably in 1997 or 1998. ... When I went to the City Hall to seek an approval [for the research], a city official said, 'it's a trivial matter and bigger topics are out there', and the proposal was just ignored. Then, I lost interest in this stuff at all ... until 2005."

(Dr. AAA)

Dr. AAA is one of rare urban agriculture (UA) researchers, who takes a position at public policy research organization, and his recent prolific UA research including domestic policy analyses and case studies, international benchmarking reports, and translation of foreign books and laws plays an important role in the progress of UA in Seoul and Korea. Policymakers including government officials and UA activists consult Dr. AAA and his research to design local policy, and the research is increasingly influential to ordinary UA participants who are thirsty of foreign UA knowledge and new urban farming techniques. At the same time, he is also an 'action' researcher who maintains a close connection with civil society UA organizations. Citing his contributions, Mr. BBB who is considered as "the godfather of UA movement" in Korea described Dr. AAA a "field-oriented scholar" able to "support theoretical weakness of our [UA activists'] ideas and practices."

Nonetheless, as the interview excerpt above suggests, Dr. AAA had a considerable amount of difficulties in making UA relevant to the Korean society, especially to the field of urban planning, even though his plan to pursue doctoral degree in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s was a socially responsible scholarly decision to shed a new light on "sustainable development", an

important policy issue on the rise at the time. While studying agriculture education and urban planning for undergraduate major and master degree, respectively, AAA "kept being exposed to both urban and rural problems" and began to "see UA as a solution to address the problems simultaneously." With this in mind, he left the country to pursue his doctoral study at an UK university and completed a pioneering research about Seoul's UA, but only cold reception waited for him in home country, in which "a binary understanding of the urban vs. the rural... and a negative perception on agricultural and rural areas" were prevalent, such that "the introduction of agriculture in the city was considered as a retreat from development" according to his own assessment of the time. It was not until 2005 then the society started to appreciate Dr. AAA's doctoral dissertation research and he could re-ignite his research passion for UA after years' of digression to other "big" urban environmental issues such as climate change and energy strategy. His re-enrollment to the world of UA was possible owing to the recent resurgence of UA in Seoul (Section II).

The growth of UA in the city and its enabling governance configuration are the primary concern in this article. To trace and unveil the governance configuration, the idea of 'assemblage' is utilized as a way to resist hegemonic structuralist imperative that analyzes, understands, and explains emergent urban governance as an effect of the generalizable state restructuring process taking place at the global scale (Allen, 2004; Allen and Cochrane, 2007; 2010; c.f., Brenner, 2004). By contrast, as Olds and Thrift (2005: 271) note, assemblages are distinct from any structuralist reasoning in that they are thought to:

"consist of *sympiotic elements* which may be quite unlike (but have *agreements of convenience*) and coevolve with other assemblages, mutating into something else, which both parties have built. They do not, therefore, function according to a strict cause-and-effect model ... Assemblages will function quite differently, according to

local circumstance, not because they are an overarching structure adapting its rules to the particular situation, but because these manifestations are what the assemblage consists of.” (emphasis added)

In this regard, governance is seen in this article as a sum of actions and functions that particular humans, nonhumans, organizations, knowledges, events, and geographies involve and co-produce (Allen and Cochrane, 2007; 2010), rather than an outcome of such totalizing regulatory changes as the transition from the government to the governance, the shift from the managerial city to the entrepreneurial city, and the state rescaling (Brenner, 2004).

With aim to unveil and describe the UA governance assemblage in Seoul during its formative phase of the early 2000s, Section II introduces the recent resurgent of UA in the city and its key characteristics, outlines local policy measures and governance configuration, and traces the associated process of national institutionalization process. Then, following Section III pays close attention to the role of civil society actors. In so doing, knowledge power is emphasized as a main reason for the civil society’s involvement in policymaking and governance. The relational process among knowledgeable civil society actors in the governance of UA is also explicated. These empirical findings based on statistics, available surveys and research, meeting minutes, government documents, and gleaned qualitative data (including interview data and ethnographic notes) are summarized in Section IV.<sup>1)</sup> In this concluding part, the benefits of the assemblage idea in the examination of urban governance are also discussed in relation to the limitations of the hierarchically stratified and territorially bounded conception of urban governance.

## II. The Resurgence of Urban Agriculture in Seoul

### 1. Evidence and Key Characteristics

Seoul is far from an agricultural city by any conventional

standard. In 2010, primary sector including agriculture accounts only 0.15% of gross regional income and 0.16% of local employees. Land use data also shows the agricultural sector’s long history of marginalization in the city. In 1976, cultivation land (including rice paddy and dry paddy) covered 11.2% of Seoul’s territory (67.8km<sup>2</sup> out of 607.3km<sup>2</sup>), but its share dropped to 1% (6.3km<sup>2</sup> out of 605.2km<sup>2</sup>) as of 2013 (Lee, 2015; Fig. 1). The decline was most palpable between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, during which state-led urban development on agricultural landscape took place most intensively.

Despite the continued decline of agricultural landscape, statistical evidence suggests two contrasting stories about Seoul’s UA. Commercial UA is in decline for a long time, but UA operating beyond capitalist system is noticeably growing (Lee, 2016). While commercial farming households in Seoul decreased from 10,572 in 1970 to 2,826 in 2013 (Fig. 2), a closer examination of it reveals three more important characteristics of Seoul’s commercial UA. First, Seoul has witnessed several short periods of sudden commercial UA growth for last half century. Such periods emerged during major economic recessions including two oil crises in the 1970s, 1997-1998 East Asian financial crisis, and 2008 American subprime mortgage crisis. This consistency suggests that UA should play a role in alleviating the effect of economic crisis. Second, as shown in Fig. 2, a resurgence that started to happen in the mid-2000s is a relatively

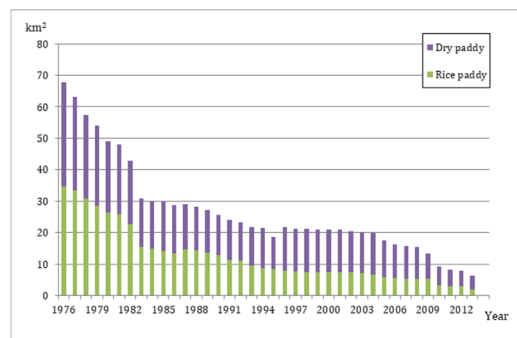
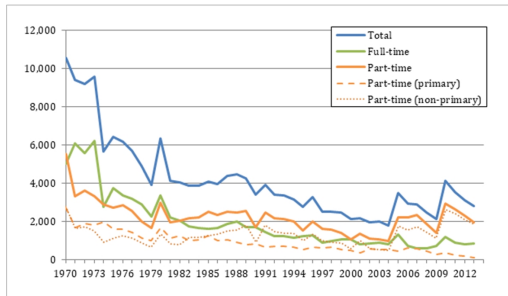


Fig 1. Size of Cultivation Area in Seoul (1976 – 2013)

Source : Korean Statistical Information Service.



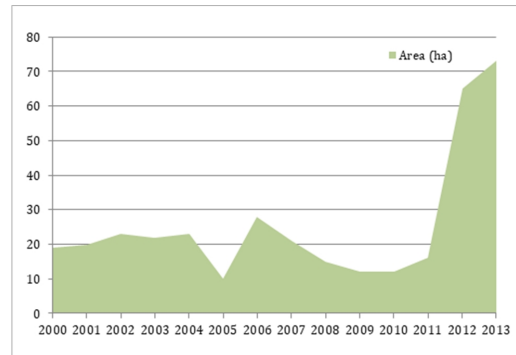
**Fig. 2.** The Number of Commercial Farming Households (1970 – 2013)

Source : Korean Statistical Information Service.

enduring phenomenon, in comparison to the 1970s' and the late-1990s' short-term sharp increases.

Third, commercial agriculture in Seoul is becoming an economic sector of part-time job. Until the early 1980s, full-time commercial farming households outnumbered their part-time counterparts, such that the former and the latter amounted to 3,365 (53%) and 2,978 (47%) in 1980, respectively (also see Lee, 2016). Among the part-time farming households in 1980, 1,660 earned more than half household income from agriculture while the remaining 1,318 families' income dependence on agriculture was less than 50 percent. In contrast, the part-time share in commercial farming households has invariably been larger than that of full time since 1983, and the commercial UA's resurgence in the mid-2000s is largely explained by a growth of part-time farming families whose agricultural income share is smaller than 50 percent. In 2013, for instance, 2,826 commercial farming households were reported in Seoul, and they were composed of 855 full-time, 101 primarily agricultural part-time, and 1,867 non-primarily agricultural part-time families. This sector-wide shift suggests that commercial UA is becoming an unreliable source of income to farming households in Seoul.

In the meantime, a growing number of Seoul citizens are participating in much smaller-size UA activities including vacant lot cultivation, community gardens, and box and rooftop produce growing (Lee, 2016). These forms of UA are mostly, if not exclusively, non-



**Fig. 3.** Total Area of Community Gardens in Seoul (2000 – 2013)

Source : Agro City Seoul, 2013a.

commercial, mainly operating beyond capitalist production system. It is found in recent studies that only 0.8% of community garden produce is traded for commercial purpose in the city, while the remaining is consumed exclusively at home or given to family, relatives, and community members (SMG, 2013; Lee, 2016). As Fig. 3 shows, the total size of land for such UA activities in Seoul quadrupled between 2011 (29.1ha) and 2013 (108.3ha).

The growth of urban agriculture in Seoul is also prominent in comparison to other cities in Korea. In 2014, 41.4% Korean urban cultivators (449,332 out of 1,083,941) were reported to reside in Seoul in a publication of Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (MOAFRA, 2015). This is a very distinctive phenomenon for a large city in Korea as well. Whereas about 4.6% Seoul citizens cultivate produce, other major cities lag far behind. Other five most populous cities including 3.4 million Busan, 2.6 million Incheon, 2.4 million Daegu, and 1.5 million Daejeon have only 22,289, 32,610, 43,033, and 51,798 urban cultivators, respectively. In these cities in order, urban cultivators account only 0.6%, 1.2%, 1.7%, and 3.4% of population.

This unique growth of non-commercial UA in Seoul is largely attributable to new supportive measures of Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG). The city started to provide public garden plots through its 'weekend

fam’ programs outside the city limit under the supervision of its Agricultural Technology Center in 1992, and its total service land size was only 7 ha in 1997 (Agro City Seoul, 2013a). Throughout the early 2000s, the city prepared 10 to 28 ha land for public cultivation plots, and then the size strikingly grew from the early 2010s (Agro City Seoul, 2013b). In 2013, the city offered a total of 73 ha community gardening plots, which accounted 67.4% of the year’s total non-commercial UA land 108.3 ha in 67 sites. In terms of geographical distribution, the vast majority of such cultivation sites are on the outskirts of the city, and only a small number of them are near the Han River (Agro City Seoul, 2013b; Lee, 2016).

In demand side, the rise of such a form of self-consumption and/or sharing UA in Seoul is also attributable to growing food security concerns, which were driven by the price instability of agriculture produce. Many of my interviewees including civic organization leaders and individual UA participants indicated a sharp price increase of Chinese cabbage in September 2010, or “the cabbage crisis” marked a critical point. As CCC who is leading a Seoul-based UA nonprofit after working for another in Incheon recalled,<sup>2)</sup>

“The price of Chinese cabbage was soaring in 2010. Harvest was really bad, then. The price was like 10,000 won to 20,000 won per head. So … a hot news topic was then a rapid increase of urban vegetable gardens and

self-sustaining urban farmers. In that way, urban farmers were more exposed to the media … Seoul already had weekend farms. They were popular and plots were fully filled, [After the price hike], much more applications were received and acceptance rate was like 1 to 40 or 1 to 50.”

(Mr. CCC)

In the meantime, it is also important to note that the popularization of urban cultivation also works through the stratified social structure of Seoul, such that middle-class households are more attentive to the places of UA than other groups of people in Seoul.<sup>3)</sup> Finally, as I suggest above, policymaking is closely related to the re-introduction of UA in Seoul. The instituting process of UA in Seoul will be the key analytical focus in the remaining of this section, and the analysis will be carried out through a detailed examination of how city-level UA policymaking takes place in relation to national law and plan, political leadership, grassroots UA movement, and transnational circulation of UA knowledge and practices (also see Section III).

## 2. Policy Measures and Governance Configuration

The election of Mayor Won-Soon Park in 2011 was crucial to the resurgence of UA and the expansion of related policy programs in Seoul (Table 1). While running for the mayorship in October 2011, Mayor Park

**Table 1.** Key Events in Urban Agriculture Policymaking in Seoul, 2010 – 2015

Year	Month	Events
2011	Oct.	Won-Soon Park becomes Seoul Mayor
2012	Feb.	SMG announces Nodeul Urban Agriculture Park (NUAP) project
	May	SMG declares the First Year of Urban Agriculture at NUAP
	Aug.	Mayor Park proposes the City Ordinance for Urban Agriculture Promotion and Support
	Sep.	SMG creates Urban Agriculture Team under Civil Economy Division
	Oct.	City Council passes the Urban Agriculture City Ordinance
	Nov.	Urban Agriculture Committee holds its first meeting on November 27
2013	Dec.	SMG completes a study for Seoul Urban Agriculture Master Plan
2014	Jun.	Mayor Park gets re-elected
	Oct.	SMG reorganizes Urban Agriculture Committee with an expansion
2015	Apr.	SMG announces Seoul Urban Agriculture 2.0 Master Plan

\* Author’s compilation from various sources.

(2011) promised to make Seoul a “sustainable and eco-friendly city”, and a renewed introduction of UA was proposed in order to make an Agro City Seoul. Mr. Park’s subsequent election was followed by Nodeul Urban Agriculture Park (NUAP) in February 2012 (Lee, 2016), and the First Year of Urban Agriculture in Seoul was declared. In the declaration, the city vowed its commitment to UA with a specification of ten policy goals.<sup>4)</sup> For the purpose, a set of UA governance mechanisms were also proposed. More specifically, city-level law and master plan were to be established for UA promotion, and non-government stakeholders in the civil society were also promised to take their role in the making of such government measures.

The first step was Mayor Park’s own proposal of City Ordinance for Urban Agriculture Promotion and Support in August 2012 (Seoul Mayor, 2012), but a proposed governance design centered on Urban Agriculture Committee (UAC) in the City Ordinance met a challenge from city employees. In the original proposal, UAC was designed as an organization of only civil society members with Civil Economy Division head’s obligation to be an assistant for the Committee. When the proposal was circulated at SMG in June 2012 for internal reviews, the only received opinion was about UAC and it came from Economic Policy Division, indicating that “UAC ... can be replaceable” with another preexisting committee on civil economy, the Economic Policy Division opposed to UAC’s establishment (Seoul Mayor, 2012: 5). In response to this internal opposition, Mayor Park provided three key justifications for holding fast to his original plan, including the necessity of professional advice, the growth of demand for participation from the civil society, and his election promise to build a participatory governance system for UA (see below). In that way, Mayor Park wore down the internal opposition at SMG with his personal will and Mayor’s authority.

At the City Hall, the addition of Urban Agriculture Team to Civil Economy Division in September 2012 was another expression of the Mayor’s will. Prior to its

launch, the city had only three agriculture related organizations including two Teams at the City Hall (Farming Management Team and Agro-Fishery & Food Team) and an affiliated external office Agricultural Technology Center, and these organizations were primarily concerned with commercial UA affairs with an exception of the Technology Center’s minor involvement in ‘weekend farms’, which locate outside Seoul’s city limit (see above). The UA Team was the first organizational expansion that the city’s “marginalized and out-of-concern” agricultural specialists had seen, according to a former employee working for the Team (Mr. DDD), who introduced himself as “a living witness” of the organization’s history of downsizing and told once to Mr. CCC that the new Team was “a reward to the humiliating history” of agriculture.<sup>5)</sup> After its establishment, the UA Team has played a key role in the city’s UA Vitalization Project that includes planning, distributing the project’s budget, and monitoring district offices (Civil Economy Division, 2013), while acting as a liaison office between SMG and civil society organizations.<sup>6)</sup>

However, Mayor Park could not avoid another challenge at City Council. The City Ordinance proposal reviewer Nam-Joong Kim at the Council admitted the necessity of guaranteeing UAC’s autonomous operation, but indicated that “UAC’s policy review cannot be separable from the city’s operation” (Finance and Economy Committee, 2012a). In this line, City Council made an important revision about UAC before passing the Ordinance in October 2012 (Finance and Economy Committee, 2012b). Specifically, head of the Economic Planning Office is required to be a co-chair of UAC, and the other co-chair is to be elected among civic UA members. Other than the co-chairs, a city councilor and twelve civil society members are required to participate in the governance entity. Resultant UA governance configuration is shown in Fig. 4.

UAC is responsible for setting up long-term visions, establishing and revising implementation plans, developing public events, and proposing research and development plans. UA Team head is also involved as an assistant

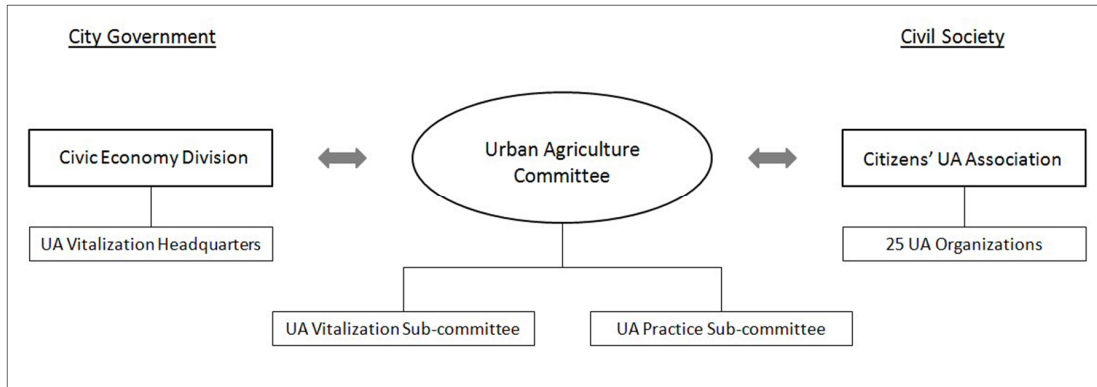


Fig. 4. Urban Agriculture Governance Configuration in Seoul

\* Adapted from Economic Planning Office (2015).

administrator. To this initial format of 2012, two six-member specialized sub-committees of UA Vitalization (on cultural/educational events and urban-rural exchange) and UA Practice (on site provision and survey) were added in order to support the operation of UAC in 2014. Working-level communications are made at the sub-committees to decide quarterly meeting agendas for UAC, and each sub-committee is composed of six urban agriculture practitioners.

It must be noted that Citizens' Urban Agriculture Association (CUAA) is the primary urban agriculture policymaking partner to SMG. CUAA is headquartered in Seoul, but it is a national organization. It was launched in March 2012 as a center of 25 urban agriculture organizations including farmers' associations, city-level and provincial networks of urban agriculture practitioners, environmental organizations, and social enterprises. Cheol-Hwan Ahn (2013), inaugurating president of CUAA described the national organization's launch as a "watershed event" for urban agriculture movement in the country, saying that "it helped form a collective" of previously decentralized movements. Similarly, another insider of CUAA Mr. EEE also told me that CUAA turned "guerilla-like point organizations towards a more coordinated effort." Because of the CUAA, UAC members are not limited to activists residing in Seoul. For example, Mrs. BBB and EEE are based in Gyeonggi Province, and Mr.

CCC leads a Seoul-based organization but previously worked for an Incheon NGO. Thus, UAC is not so much a territorial organization as a relational platform, through which activists from multiple geographical nodes 'lodge in' (Allen, 2004; Allen and Cochrane, 2007), exercise influences in Seoul, and renegotiate and partly displace national authority (Allen and Cochrane, 2010; see Section III below).

This can be seen through a "nuanced difference" of the City Ordinance from the National Act on Development and Support of Urban Agriculture (the National UA Act), according to Mr. CCC. Local governments are obliged in the National UA Act to "endeavor to secure land and spaces for urban agriculture and ... [to] establish and implement policies necessary for the vitalization of urban agriculture" (emphasis added), and civil society actors see that the City Ordinance highly responsive to civil society has more active expressions.<sup>7)</sup> For example, as Mr. CCC emphasized during an interview, there is "a hugely meaningful expression" that the City Ordinance makes different from the "just throw-out" National UA Act, which is filled with "something that can be done" instead of "something that should be done." Indeed, unlike the National Act that requires local authorities to "endeavor" to support UA, the City Ordinance states more clearly that UA promotion is the Mayor's responsibility. Its Clause 3, most noticeably, states that

“Seoul Mayor *ought to* ... establish and implement necessary policy measures for the vitalization of urban agriculture” (Seoul Mayor, 2012, emphasis added).

Given such differences that SMG make, it needs to examine how UA governance in Seoul is associated with the national policy measures. Therefore, the next section on heterogeneous actors and actions begins with a review on the process of UA institutionalization at the national government, particularly policy measures taken during the Myung-Bak Lee (MB) administration because they have helped to, though largely unexpectedly, move civil society efforts to an official policy arena.

### III. Unveiling Heterogeneous Actors and Actions

#### 1. Green Growth and the National UA Act

Korea is a rare country where a ‘national’ law for UA promotion exists (Lee, 2018), and its legislation in 2011 has acted as a catalyst for the fast adoption of UA policy at local authorities such as SMG. Under the institutional context, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (the Agriculture Ministry) formulates a comprehensive UA plan every five year. One and a half years later after the legislation, the Agriculture Ministry put forward its First Five-Year Urban Agriculture Promotion Plan (2013-

2017) with a vision of ‘urban agriculture vitalization’, which is expected to promote urban-rural co-prosperity and improve quality of life (MOAFRA, 2013a).<sup>8)</sup> At the local scale, metropolitan mayors and provincial governors are also encouraged to set up their own implantation plan every year and make an annual progress report to the Agriculture Ministry.

To Korean activists, the nation-wide UA policy promotion came by surprise even though they started to consider UA as an alternative social movement from the mid-2000s for many differentiated reasons and in various ways. Mr. BBB is such a person. When he was invited to the Agriculture Ministry for a discussion about the UA Act’s draft in early 2011 (see below), he thought that “why is it now? It’s a little bit early.” For the same reason, Mr. CCC thought at the time that “UA grows, but civil society is little prepared. The [formal] institutionalization seems to go faster than we can follow”.

The highly unexpected three-year process from legislation to planning shows how the developmental state of South Korea operates through a highly ‘adaptive’ bureaucracy system (Table 2), which is responsive to the vision of political leadership.<sup>9)</sup> When MB took the President Office from 2008 to 2013, ‘Low Carbon, Green Growth’ was espoused as the primary agenda of the national government’s economic development policy. The Green Growth agenda was first declared in MB’s Independence Day speech on August 15 in 2008.<sup>10)</sup>

**Table 2.** National Urban Agriculture Policymaking in Korea (2008 – 2013)

Year	Month	Events
2008	Jan.	Myung-Bak Lee (MB) takes the President Office
	Aug.	MB declares ‘Low Carbon, Green Growth’ vision
2009	Jan.	MB Administration launches the Presidential Committee on Green Growth
	Feb.	Inter-Ministry Convention of Green Growth Report begins (21 meetings until September in 2012)
2010	Jan.	MB signs the Framework Act on Low Carbon, Green Growth
2011	Jun.	Agriculture Ministry proposes Urban Agriculture Vitalization Project at the eleventh meeting of the Inter-Ministry Convention of Green Growth Report
	Nov.	MB Administration enacts the National UA Act
2013	Jan.	MB leaves President Office
	Jun.	Agriculture Ministry announces the First Five-Year Urban Agriculture Promotion Plan (2013-2017)

\* Author’s compilation from various sources.



Subsequently, the Presidential Committee on Green Growth was organized in January 2009 as the flagship agency of the state-wide efforts for green growth. In January 2010, Mr. Lee signed the Framework Act on Low Carbon, Green Growth, which requires “the head of each central administrative agency ... to establish and implement an action plan ... so as to execute the national strategy for green growth efficiently and systemically.” The Framework Act requires central government agencies to report their plans and actions to the Presidential Committee. For the purpose, the Presidential Committee hosted 21 inter-ministry Conventions of Green Growth Report between February 2009 and September 2012.

In response to the MB administration’s call for green growth, the Korean bureaucracy highly adaptive to leadership vision operated in a way that all the Ministries created a new Department of Green Growth Future Strategy within their organization, and the Agriculture Ministry followed suit. The Ministry’s answer to the call for the bureaucratization of Green Growth was the Urban Agriculture Vitalization Project, and its Green Growth Strategy Officer led the flagship project, which was officially proposed at the 11th Convention of Green Growth Report on June 8, 2011 (PCGG, 2011). The proposal included (1) the construction of 8,000 urban cultivation sites across the country, (2) the establishment of an urban agriculture park in each local government, (3) the project of urban building greening; and, (4) the development of vegetable factory technology. In turn, the Urban Agriculture Vitalization was green-washed as a way to ‘spread green life culture across the country’ and make Korea a ‘green developed country’ (PCGG, 2011). In order to support these policy proposals, the Agriculture Ministry started to prepare for the legislation of the Urban Agriculture Act.

In short, the institutionalization of UA policy at the national government in the early 2010s was closely associated with a legacy of developmental state, which had been highly responsive to the presidential leadership vision. While the vision was founded upon green

growth, it worked as an institutional and also material actant that enabled the Agriculture Ministry to design and implement a series of UA policy measures. The developmental state’s institutional process and the visionary policy content of green growth created an opportunity for the civic participation, owing mainly to the existing a ‘knowledge gap’ between bureaucrats and activists as the following part of this section specifies.

## 2. Knowledge Gap and Civil Society Intervention

The national government’s UA Vitalization Project provided the civil society with an opportunity of intervention because as mentioned above the Korean bureaucracy system was highly responsive to its leader’s green growth vision, but lacking understanding of specifics. Grassroots UA movement was in a formative phase between the mid-2000s and the early 2010s, and activists were better equipped with practical knowledge and international trends than government employees. At the time, in other words, there was a knowledge gap between state bureaucrats and the knowledgeable civil society.

At SMG, for example, a city official did not bother to reveal a lower ‘level’ of UA knowledge among government employees, saying “nothing came out of our head” when he was asked about the reason for a public-private partnership governance on UA policy (see Section II). This statement caught my attention because he volunteered to have an interview after saying “I knew more than [recently transferred] team manager” when I tried to locate his manager in an office of City Hall. At the end of the little informative, but meaningful, 30 minutes’ encounter, he handed me a report entitled *Research for Seoul Urban Agriculture Master Plan* (Agro City Seoul, 2013a) which was written by a group of grassroots UA organizations and their colleague academic researchers, confirming a higher level of UA knowledge among civic activists. For he told me that “everything is here [in the report]. You came

to a wrong place. You should see NGOs.”

At the national level, some knowledgeable civic UA activists also played an important role in the design on its UA Vitalization Project at the Agriculture Ministry. Most noticeably, the Ministry’s proposal of urban agriculture park was informed by an Incheon-based civic community garden initiative, through which Mr. CCC started to reflect the limitations of his hard-liner activism at National Farmers’ Federation and turned to a soft-liner UA activist in 2007. According to him, the largely unnoticed Incheon program became exposed to the society through frequent media reports as public interest in UA grew especially after the cabbage crisis (see Section II), and his organization took an advisory role when the Agriculture Ministry was endeavoring to design its flagship project.<sup>11)</sup>

Policymaking practice of filling a knowledge level gap through the civil society’s participation was referred to as a way to meet “the needs of this era” by city employee Mr. DDD. He also emphasized the necessity of “autonomous” civic organizations, saying that “rigid” government-led policy practice tends to “clampen vitality” and “lower diversity.” Agreeing the vitality that civic participations can provide, Mr. BBB provided me with a different interpretation of what DDD called this era’s need:

“The government …, whether it’s of MB or Geun-Hye Park, cannot exclude the civil society any more. In my view, they will try to take more advantage of us. We are a little bit noisy! (laugh) … So we can spread fast. The civil society will become an important engine for moving this society. Only business people, government officials, professors, and politicians did that before. But, we [from the civil society] will be a part of them. In this field of urban agriculture, local governments are very responsive to NGOs, and the door to the central government is also opening. … [But,] Advocacy groups would not survive in the long run. Critical collaboration … is what we need to do with them.”

As such, ‘criticality’, as well as advocacy, is thought as an important element of policymaking involvement of the civil society. Like Mr. BBB who often identifies himself as an “eco-leftist”, social entrepreneur UA advocate Ms. FFF described her engagements in the UA policy-making as “a governance of competition and collaboration with the government.” Criticality is necessary from the civil society perspective because the aforementioned knowledge gap is not only a matter of level but also of a thing of different ‘perspective’. The presence of this type of knowledge gap tends to turn the civic society’s participation into a campaign of contestation, and such a form of civic participation influenced the formal institutionalization of UA at the national level, even though it started through the Agriculture Ministry’s adaptation to the MB Administration’s green growth vision.

Among what I heard of, the story of expurgating ‘vegetable factory’ from the original UA Vitalization Project and the UA Act is most illustrative. When the UA Act was discussed in early 2011, the Agriculture Ministry saw vegetable factory development as a key element of UA policy. The Ministry thus tried to make appeal to the MB Administration’s ‘Low Carbon, Green Growth’ agenda, and attempted to include it in the UA Act. The Ministry introduced vegetable factory technology development as a key R&D strategy of climate change response to the Presidential Committee on Green Growth (PCGG, 2011). The rationale was that climate change effects could be avoidable with a year-around agricultural production system which is equipped with a precise control technology of artificial light, temperature, water and moisture, and nutrients (MOAFRA, 2013b). At the same time, vegetable factory was espoused as a ‘new green growth engine for the future agricultural economy’ at the Agriculture Ministry (MOAFRA, 2013b).<sup>12)</sup>

On the other hand, many environment activists and farmers challenged the Agriculture Ministry’s attempt to define vegetable factory as a UA type. For the technology was found to be inconsistent with the policy goals, which it was supposed to achieve – i.e., low

carbon, green, growth. Environmentalists characterized vegetable factory as a facility of environmental pollution, UA activists in that line opposed to the Ministry's intention to include vegetable factory in the legal realm of UA. Mr. BBB was one of the most serious agitators opposing the plan. This is a "behind story" of how his 'critical collaboration' was practiced against the plan when he was "reluctantly" invited for a discussion:

"The Agriculture Ministry hosted a workshop to prepare for the UA Act. It was a convention of 80 government officials. They reluctantly invited me [representing the Back To the Rural Movement Headquarter] just to assort the colors of participant. So, I went there alone. A professor was only the other non-government discussant. ... While hearing what they said, I recognized that the Act was a law for vegetable factory. They wanted to use the factory as a material of low carbon, green growth. ... The plan was set up in that way. They passed me microphone at the end, and I fiercely criticized the plan. Then, [the Ministry's] Green Growth Strategy Officer disregarded my opinion, calling it just criticism for criticism. ... 2 or 3 months later a national lawmaker wanted me to see him and share my thoughts on the law. So, I went there, and bumped into an official from the Agriculture Ministry. He seemed to know me, but his face wasn't pleasant to see me. Strangely, vegetable factory wasn't in the draft anymore. ... The Green Growth Strategy Officer didn't show up ... because the circumstance changed. I thought, 'it's great!'"

(Mr. BBB)

As such, knowledgeable civil society played a key role in the forming and the directing of UA policy and governance, and its knowledge base superior to, and also different from, state bureaucrats allowed critical engagement beyond simple advocacy. In this context, the next part of this section traces the beginning of civil society movement in the mid-2000s, with attention to its material constitution, as well as human actors, and their relational effects on UA governance in Seoul.

### 3. The Material Constitution of Knowledgeable Civil Society

UA started as a civil society movement around 2005, and its origin was influenced by a Japanese book entitled *The Birth of Ecological City Havana*, which was authored by Yoshida Taro in 2002. Then it was introduced in Korea two years later in 2004 (Fig. 5). Cheol-Hwan Ahn, inaugurating president of CUAA, translated the book while he was working for a publishing company. He started cultivating a 3.3m<sup>2</sup> small size plot in a 'weekend farm' as a lay cultivator from 2000, but the translation was not a deliberate action but an "accident" event. After several failed attempts to find an adequate translator, he decided to do the work by himself. The translation was not simply a job of changing language, but it was also a process of generating a knowledgeable actor and an important condition for the civil society movement. The book's detailed report of self-sustaining and organic Cuban UA received a sensational public response and it quickly rose to a must-read to both rural and urban farmers in the country.<sup>13)</sup>

The book also animated Mr. Ahn, who was inspired



Fig. 5. The Cover of *The Birth of Ecological City Havana*

to think, “this is the urban agriculture!” with a dream of “the second Havana” in Korea. With this inspiration, the lay cultivator went to the Back To the Rural Movement Headquarter (BRMH) and made a proposal of Small Garden Spread Center. At the BRMH, the Cuban experiences were enticing because eco-friendly farming and self-sustaining life style in Cuba were considered to coincide with its operational goals. BRMH was launched in 1996 with aim to revitalize agriculture and rural areas by attracting ecologically conscious urbanites, especially young adults, in order to challenge various rural crises including excessive population outflows and aging, natural environment degradation, and globalizing agro-food market. Under this organizational principle, training programs centered on eco-friendly farming and self-sustaining rural life had been offered to urbanites through the BRMH’s national network of 10 Back to the Rural Schools. Owing to the presence of common goals, Mr. Ahn’s proposal based on Cuban urban experiences of a Japanese interpretation was allowed to enroll into the rural activism. As such, BRMH was the principal in the association, but it soon became a more fluid and flexible organization because of successful urban agriculture movement. Most crucially, a city-centered approach was able to broaden the movement’s public base, as Mr. Ahn told me:

“In the beginning, Small Garden Spread Center was criticized internally. Some people said, ‘it misleads urbanites and gives them an eclectic illusion of urban agriculture’ ... We don’t have this fundamentalist criticism anymore. We have come to an agreement. This [UA] can diversify rural return paths and lower entry barrier ... I once said, the rural return is much more difficult than overseas migration ... because of neighborhood conflicts, economic problem, kids’ education, etc. ... Wife’s opposition is the biggest hurdle. But, a short UA experience can change women because farming is more suitable for them and it deals with life ... And, our [Back to the Rural] Schools had only 1,000 students around the country, but Urban Farmer School attracts several

thousands because diversified programs are possible like kid farmers, senior farmers, compost training, and the like. The organizational ideal of rural return is now changing through UA.”

(Mr. Cheol-Hwan Ahn)

Thus, the Japanese book was not an “intermediary ... [that] transports meaning or force without transformation,” but a kind of “mediators [which] transform, translate, distort, and modify the meanings or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour, 2005: 39). The most illustrative example is Mr. Ahn’s invention of box garden, which he introduced me as a “parody of Cuba.” His box garden was built on an inspiration from Cuba’s *organopónicos*, which is a type of organic garden with a drip irrigation system in a raised container (Fig. 6; also see Lee, 2018). The Cuban UA practice was found to be useful in Mr. Ahn’s experiments because they prevent soil erosion and fertilizer drainage during rainy season. Based on the experiments, and also considering the dominant urban housing form, the high-rise apartments, Ahn reinterpreted *organopónicos* into an invention of box garden, which allowed indoor produce cultivation and in that way “challenged the stereotypical perception [on agriculture].”<sup>14)</sup>

In addition to apartment dwellers, box garden was also tempting to funding partners because no serious commitment such as land provisioning is required. So,



**Fig. 6.** Landscape of *Organopónicos* in Cuba

Source : Havana Live.

it was “irony” to Ahn that Korea Land Corporation, state-owned company specialized in land development was the fund provider of the ground-breaking box garden distribution project. Distributing box garden is also attractive to government agencies. An important reason is its easy deliverability and calculability because the number of distributed box gardens can be used to show organizational goal, commitment, and performance.<sup>15)</sup> Box garden’s popularity also helped generate inter-organizational collaborations in the civil society. Most noticeably, Seoul Green Trust whose primary operation had been centered on managing public parks in partnership with SMG joined Mr. Ahn’s campaign at BRMH in 2009. Later, these two organizations became key urban agriculture policy partners to SMG.

Ahn’s campaign also attracted attention from Seoul Mayor Won-Soon Park, who led The Hope Institute at the time. As a civil society activist, Mayor Park took ordinary people’s creativity seriously as an important driving force for social changes, and liked to study grassroots social innovations on the ground. Whenever he found workable creative policy ideas and practices from the bottom-up research, Mr. Park circulated them through The Hope Institute to urge government authorities to adopt them for innovative social engineering. With this view on social innovation, he thought that urban agriculture could be a creative idea for urban change from 2008 when Mr. Ahn rose to a public figure thanks to a wide circulation of his book translation and Cuba style UA experiments, as Ahn recalled in an interview with me:

“Mayor Won-Soon Park came to my farm in January 2008. It was around 8pm. Then, he was working at The Hope Institute. He saw urban agriculture in person for the first time here. He said, ‘it’s really good idea!’ He seemed to know urban agriculture conceptually, but it was his first real observation in Korea ... he was interested in everything here and looked into ecological toilet and indigenous seeds, but couldn’t see any vegetable because it was winter. Before leaving, he said here, urban

agriculture could be a good strategy for urban regeneration ... [After several meetings], then we met again in Gangdong District [of Seoul] in Spring 2011 when I was consulting the District Office’s UA programs from 2010. He visited the Office to have an interview with its head Hae-Sik Lee. After seeing me by accident, he told me ‘you are making a huge progress!’. (laugh) He looked confident about urban agriculture at the time, ... then ran for Seoul Mayor election in the Fall.”

(Mr. Cheol-Hwan Ahn)

When Won-Soon Park ran for Seoul Mayor, Mr. Ahn joined his camp as a policy advisor and proposed the slogan, Agro City Seoul. He is now one of the most influential figures in the world of UA in Seoul and Korea. This relational outcome suggests that social networks matter to the current UA governance configuration in Seoul. On the other hand, the governance configuration was possible owing to heterogenous actors in sense that nonhuman actors and resources (such as texts, techniques, material practices, etc.) were also conducive to the relational process of human actors and actions (e.g., policymaking and governance).

#### IV. Conclusion: Summary and Discussion

4.6% of Seoul residents have been reported to participate in a variety of UA activities, and the area of cultivation sites in the city is rapidly growing. They are effects of promotional UA policy programs, which started to proliferate after Mayor Park led the city in 2011. Knowledgeable leaders of several pioneering civic organizations have played a key role in the policymaking process. These organizations took various urban cultivation initiatives with different motivations and in different ways in a highly decentralized setting from the mid-2000s. Owing to their early initiatives including transnational learning and local adaptations/modifications, knowledgeable civil society actors are able to make a

politico-institutional intervention at both national and local governments.

At the national government, it began in early 2011 when the Agriculture Ministry started to develop the National UA Act in line with the MB Administration's vision of green growth. This national policymaking provided a fortuitous, largely unexpected opportunity to civic organizations because of a knowledge gap between relatively uninformed government bureaucrats and knowledgeable activists. In the process, the civil society exercised power to the policymaking and governance configuration through their advocate *and* critical policy engagement. At the local level, built on the national law and plan (and also under the leadership of proactive Mayor Park), SMG has devised support policy and local governance system for urban agriculture. Most importantly, the City Ordinance was introduced in Seoul in 2012, and then UAC has been organized for a partnership governance with CUAA that represents 25 civic organizations. UA policy programs in Seoul are currently made through the operation of UAC.

In a nutshell, the UA initiatives in Seoul can be seen as a relational effect of heterogenous 'socio-material' networks in which Mayor Park is part of. His colleague civil society activists are brought to the city's urban agriculture policy governance for close collaboration with city employees. As many of influential actors do not reside in the city and their activism is rarely confined to the city, Seoul's UA governance configuration cannot be thought as a territorial product, but a spatially extensive arrangement and engagement in which expert activists from multiple locus, as well as institutional resources from the national government, are harboring and functioning for a shared interest. At the same time, material resources in motion (including trans-local knowledge, techniques, and practices) are also crucial to the formation of knowledgeable civil society actors. It is therefore possible to argue that a variety of humans and nonhumans including activists, local and national bureaucrats, ground-breaking events, knowledges, texts, institutions, and geographies are assembled and associated

to engender the functioning UA governance configuration in Seoul.

This relational governance assemblage suggests that non-territorial connections and flows are as much influential as territorially defined institutions and politics in the shaping of urban agriculture policy. That said, more analytical attentiveness to topological relationalities may help enrich our understanding of policymaking and governance in more general. Tracing such networks and flows matters because any governance conception based on hierarchically organized and territorially bounded institutions do not fully explain policymaking and governance. Hierarchy loses its explanatory power as distinction and stratum between local, national, and global actors are becoming vague, and a strict sense of territorial governance becomes less relevant as the inter-local and transnational movement of policy knowledge, actors, actions, practices are growing.

## Notes

- 1) When identification of informants is necessary, acronyms are given in this article to hide their identity. Key informants in this article include: (1) Dr. AAA, a senior researcher specialized in UA; (2) Mr. BBB, a national UA NGO leader; (3) Mr. CCC leading a Seoul-based UA network; (4) Mr. DDD, a city employee at SMG; (5) Mr. EEE, who leads a Gyeonggi-based UA network; and, (6) Ms. FFF, a social entrepreneur leading several UA organizations.
- 2) Dr. AAA also referred to "the cabbage crisis" as the root of "unusually excessive passion" for UA, which lasted until 2012 in his observation.
- 3) Agro City Seoul's (2013a) research provides some important indications that the resurgence of UA in Seoul can be seen as a middle-class phenomenon (also see Lee, 2016). The median monthly household income in Seoul was reported to be 3.8 million Won in 2013, and urban farming households earning 3 million Won or more per

- month account 58.8% of the study's sample population (18.3% of KRW 3 to 4 million, 15.7% of 4 to 5 million, 12.6% of 5 to 6 million, 3.6% of 6 to 7 million, and 12.1% of 7 million or more).
- 4) Ten policy goals are (1) expanding UA spaces to the level of 3.3m<sup>2</sup> per household, (2) encouraging eco-friendly UA; (3) generating UA's educational values; (4) benefiting socially disadvantaged people; (5) utilizing UA as a means to community regeneration; (6) expanding cultural exchanges between Seoul and rural areas; (7) designing a master plan to develop Seoul to a global capital of UA; (8) enacting a new city ordinance for UA; (9) making UA programs more accessible to ordinary citizens; and, (10) institutionalizing a system of private-public partnership.
  - 5) When Mr. DDD started to work for the city in 1984, there were about 100 agriculture specialist city employees, but they are now only 35. Agriculture was a division level city affair until the division was disbanded in 2005.
  - 6) Urban agriculture would be a city affair of two teams in January 2016 through an expanded division of Urban Agriculture Team to Urban Agriculture Support Team and Cultivation Site Creation Team, with a long-run consideration of launching Urban Agriculture Division. In the meantime, the city will also employ urban agriculture specialists to grow their pool from 35 in 2015 to 80 in 2018, and some of them are to be recruited from civic organizations (Civil Economy Division, 2015).
  - 7) For example, Seoul has a civil society partnered UAC, but the national government's counterpart is dominated by high-ranking central government bureaucrats.
  - 8) In the Five-Year Plan, five key strategies to grow urban agriculture are arranged: (1) improving institutional base (including revision of related laws and support of local ordinance enactments); (2) expanding urban cultivation sites; (3) developing a Korean-style urban garden model with support of related research and development; (4) providing urban farmer training and education programs; and, (5) enhancing nation-wide urban agriculture network by hosting urban agriculture events.
  - 9) In the process of designing these national measures, national laws of other states were extensively studied, such as British allotments, German *kleingarten*, and the Japanese Shimin Noen Promotion Act (Lee, 2018). It took 30 to 100 years for such national measures to take a form.
  - 10) In the speech, MB said that "green growth is a sustainable growth model that reduces the emission of greenhouse gas and environmental contamination", emphasizing it as a "new national development paradigm" that can "generate new growth engine and jobs with green technology and clean energy" (quoted in PCGG, 2009: 14).
  - 11) In an official document, the Ministry introduced Mr. CCC's program as a model (PCGG, 2011).
  - 12) In turn, the Ministry necessitated its policy support as "an active measure responding to an agricultural production paradigm shift of land → green house → vegetable factory" to "catch up" Japanese lead in the world, and as a way to help the private sector struggling with a large amount of initial investment. In other words, vegetable factory was considered as a technology contributable to national competitiveness. In this vein, the Agriculture Ministry introduced vegetable factory as a new type of UA, emphasizing its highly productive and pesticide-free technology that enables agricultural production in urbanized area (MOAFRA, 2013b). This plan was also backed by other government agencies including the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Energy, Korea Rural Economics Institute, and Rural Development Agency, and several lead corporations and plant/housing construction companies were also in support of the plan in private sector.
  - 13) According to an insider of the book's publishing

company, it has been printed eleven times until November 2014. Another indicator of the book's popularity is that it was one of ten most inspirational books to avid book reader former President Moo-Hyun Roh (holding of office in 2003-2008), who returned to his rural birthplace after his presidential term to initiate a new generation rural movement.

- 14) However, his idea of box garden had to deal with internal criticism at BRMH. According to him, some said, "it is not eco-friendly, just a fake", but he could persuade them by characterizing it as a "bait to lead [urbanites] to land". In 2006, subsequently, the box garden's first distribution event in Seoul and following nation-wide city tours "unexpectedly attracted a huge crowd" (Ahn, 2013).
- 15) For example, Urban Agriculture Team at SMG reported its distribution of 17,583 box gardens in 2013 exceeding the year's goal 10,000 as a major performance indicator (Civil Economy Division, 2014). It has set up a new goal of distributing 130,000 box gardens until 2018 in the Seoul Urban Agriculture Master Plan (Economic Planning Office, 2015).

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