

Final Comments on the 2012 KIID Space Design Award Contest  
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### **Alternative Inhabitation of Urban Vacancy**

It has been a great honor and pleasure to be invited as jury for the 2012 KIID Space Design Award Contest. In the year of the twentieth anniversary of the Korean Institute of Interior Design the subject of the competition was intended to focus on the core of the profession. Interior Design could be defined as: 'adapting a given spatial situation for human use'. In my experience this description bears qualities that are highly needed these days. In a building world where mainstream is to start structuring from scratch, working from a human perspective in a challenging given situation is a welcome alternative. The qualities of the interior approach can reach beyond the indoor. That is why I choose as theme; "Alternative Inhabitation for Urban Vacancy".

The theme implies to choose a location (site or building) in South Korea that is vacant at the moment (out of use or never used). Then the possibilities of use had to be researched from the perspective of a particular social group. And finally, to design the facilities that are needed to allow growth, methods of participation encouraged. As assessment criteria were given: Empathy for a social group, originality of site-analyses, resourcefulness of design, inventiveness in participation and consciousness of temporality and growth

It shows the courage, confidence and responsibility of the KIID to embrace the subject, and so give an impulse to a socially engaging profession. A competition indeed can be more than just an awarding event. It will stimulate students and professors to rethink the research and practice. In an education environment where many assignments are normally quite fictionally, the question to research a vacant site and alternative target group in real is provocative. The additional requirements to design bottom up with emphasis on gradual growth, completed the urge to explore a new attitude in design.

The theme and requirements as posed held a final quest. Since I am currently doing a research on the intersection of Research, Cooperation and Interior Design, I was aiming to take advantage, and learn from the methods used in the numerous entries.

Korean Design is famous for competitive skills. In many international design competitions we find Korean designers in high ranking. The combination of a clear analysis, a catchy concept and a smooth presentation do miraculously well. Yet this time the assignment was looking for other qualities. Sure, among the entries the typical approach was often found in tempting designs. Yet it is remarkable how many of the 215 proposals explored new ways to engage in research, cooperation and design. As I was told, this was the result of the immense effort that students made to meet the socially set goals. Many inspiring methods were deployed to analyze the site resulting in a variety of original approaches and graphic interpretations. On the matter of the target group, social institutions were counseled and interviews were taken. Students went out in the field and made themselves known. As I show in my research, already this active investigation is a successful engagement. Awareness is brought in society through the research process of design.

Key of cause was to find a good match, and yes, there often were surprising combinations of location and target group.

While I was assessing the 215 entries something unexpected happened.

The design projects brought me to many unforeseen places, as if I was undergoing a completely different sight-tour through the country. While reading the projects I met the most interesting kind of people. I went to historical sites, to luxurious apartments, to abandoned industry lots, to shantytowns and most of all underneath bridges. I met all kinds of people, entrepreneurs, disabled people, foreigners, artists, musicians, farmers, elderly, animals and many children.

With their work the design students introduced me to the needs of people and the possibilities of places. Their designs are stories of compassion, of hope and of courage. It is hard to properly express my immense gratefulness of witnessing it. This collection of projects is a precious portrait of the Korean ability to face and encounter the needs of people and places.

The attitude that these aspirant interior designers show holds a promise for the future. In the best projects economical, social and political solutions are offered in an original, creative and human way.

Isn't it curious that in these projects it is not the sense of competition but rather a smart way of cooperation that brings prosperity? Gain is sought, not only in a financial sense but as well in a social. A sharp eye for human qualities and the potential of space has created new opportunities thanks to the applied interior view. The projects deploy the creative play of reality and illusion; it is about visualizing possible futures while having reality compassionately at heart. To make that dream come through a strong appeal for participation is needed. Some projects initiate a social reveille. Designers can shift perspective, unveil data and add layers of information. Eventually they make the user in place embody that logic of interior. Interior design that started as a private matter was long considered not to be involved with the power and politics of the public. Yet today we learn how the interior approach has an alternative to offer. Instead of a power that dictates change, empathy from within can create politics that facilitate growth.

It brings me to the dazzling conclusion that interior design students proved more than being capable of envisioning alternative inhabitations. These Interior Design students are able to make their plans profitably work. They operate with an attitude that contagiously comes from the heart. They engage courageously with public affairs. The study of alternative inhabitation leads to alternative economics, humanized logics and sensitive politics. That is what Interior Designers can offer to society at large. This is what the KIID enabled to discover.

Normally the prize awarding ceremony is the conclusion of a competition. This time, on that occasion we could show the seed that was planted earlier that day. With the first prizewinners I visited their project site. In Gaepo Dong, Seoul, a group of people that suffered from political abuse hopes to find residence. It was impressive to see how Jahyun and Gunhee asked feedback on their design. The representative of the community appreciated their empathy and understanding. The lady told us she was tired of fighting the municipality and held the drawings gratefully at her heart. As Jahyun understood: 'whether this design is build or not, for now it is successful in supporting these people. Design is a process of research and cooperation, and it is every step that counts'.

To my best ability I have tried to engage in this event. It is thanks to the openness and vigor of the Korean students, professors and professional institution that it came to a success. May the merit be dedicated to a meaningful development of our profession. May the sensitive human approach of Interior Design become of value for society. May the example Korean Interior Design have set, spread over the globe.