



Urban Agenda Platform

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# Seoul's People-Centric Urban Regeneration Project as a Model of Sustainable Urban Growth

Award Scheme

Guangzhou Award

Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

## Summary

Seoul City has followed this trend by formulating its own “urban regeneration” policy designed to encourage active and mature citizenship from the perspective that a city is not a place for “development” but for “harmonious coexistence” amid rapid sociocultural change.

## Background and Objective

Seoul, the capital of Korea changed the direction of its urban policy from “urban development” to “urban regeneration” in 2013. Seoul implemented an innovative “urban regeneration” policy designed to reshape the city for the people and by the people based on a mature sense of citizenship. Currently, Seoul City is undertaking 131 urban regeneration projects that are focused on improving the physical structure of the city and vitalizing community programs through public-private partnerships, ultimately contributing to the creation of positive community identities and sustainable urban growth. To give some examples, Seoul City held 615 meetings with local residents about transforming an old highway overpass into a 1.2-kilometer-long elevated park filled with 24,000 plants called “Seoullo 7017.” Also, Sewoon Shopping Center, located in front of Jongmyo, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site, was slated for demolition and reconstruction as a skyscraper. However, Seoul City spent seven years convincing the public sector and local residents to preserve the shopping center and protect the existing landscape of Jongmyo. As a result, it is now home to 26 startup companies and serves as an innovative hub for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Last but not least, the Changsin-Sungin district, a rundown area in Seoul’s urban center, has undergone environmental renovations and is now being economically and socially revitalized through the creation of a clean and safe community and growth of the local sewing industry. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION** Seoul City developed new policies geared toward stabilizing housing prices for low-income families and restoring communities and historic and cultural resources. It also announced the “Urban Regeneration Plan,” aiming to help Seoul achieve stable, sustainable, and people-centric growth, and established the legal foundation for the implementation of the plan. Aiming to achieve sustainable development and address global issues, Seoul City has drawn up its urban regeneration policy which will serve as a model of urban management in the future. **ORIGINS** Over the last 50 years, Seoul has achieved remarkable economic growth. However, the achievement was accompanied by various urban problems, such as the destruction of cultural and natural heritage sites dating back over 1,000 years, the ghettoization of urban centers, soaring housing prices and consequent housing shortage for low-income families, and the dismantlement of local communities. Seoul City’s urban regeneration plan aims to restore local identities and achieve sustainable urban growth through public-private partnership and citizen engagement. To that end, Seoul City named citizen leaders in various areas as honorary deputy mayors and had all relevant documents be subject to the review and approval of the honorary deputy mayors as well. Seoul City designated 13 regions as “bellwethers for the vitalization of urban regeneration” in 2015 and has undertaken 131 urban regeneration projects, spanning all areas of Seoul, over the last six years. Seoul City’s urban regeneration division consisting of 200 staff members works together with 53 divisions of Seoul City and 17 bureaus of the central government, including the Land Ministry. The Seoul Institute focuses on R&D activities and the monitoring of various urban regeneration projects, while the Seoul Housing Corporation is responsible for the implementation of Seoul City’s urban regeneration plans. The Urban Regeneration Support Center serves as a liaison between the public sector and local residents. Currently, the center has 23 offices throughout Seoul and employs 187 people. Also, 2,684 citizens are actively participating in various urban regeneration projects as members of 73 resident councils. Seoul City has put a great deal of effort into forming partnerships for its urban regeneration project as it benefits all citizens rather than specific groups, highlights the uniqueness of local areas, and ultimately contributes to enhancing the city’s urban competitiveness. Seoul City has allotted KRW 1.06 trillion for its urban regeneration projects designed to promote active citizenship and improve community infrastructure. Also, Seoul City attracts additional funding for its urban regeneration projects from 92 institutions, including colleges and businesses, by offering incentives and relaxing regulations.

## Outcomes and Impacts

Preservation and restoration of historic buildings: Seoul City’s urban regeneration project, which started in 2015, is beginning to produce tangible results in three of the 133 urban regeneration areas, which have been selected as bellwethers. In particular, Seoul spent KRW 54 billion on the pedestrian bridge construction project, which was undertaken to link existing shopping centers with bridges rather than redeveloping them as skyscrapers. With the



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completion of the project, Sewoon Shopping Center and its rooftop observatory, which was on the verge of demolition for redevelopment, have become a tourist attraction that offers a view of Jongmyo, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. Currently, Sewoon Shopping Center houses 26 “Makers Cubes” for young startups on the pedestrian bridge, serving as a hub of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that is integrated with the area’s existing parts manufacturing industry. The Sewoon Shopping Center project is expected to create 34,000 jobs as it generates significant ripple effects on the development of nearby areas by the public sector. Tourist attraction in Seoul: Since its opening, Seoullo 7017 has drawn over 10 million people (average of 30,000 people a day) and hosted 32 festivals, establishing itself as a local landmark and a place for relaxation in the urban center of Seoul. Improvement of living environment: In relation to the “Changsin-Sungin Region for the Promotion of and Support for Urban Regeneration” project, residents opted to preserve and improve the area rather than completely demolishing and rebuilding it. With this, Seoul City injected over KRW 20 billion of public funds into improving the living environment of the area, improving alleys, repairing old houses, and replacing sewer lines, among others. It also renovated the birth house of Nam June Paik, a world renowned media artist, to create Nam June Park Memorial House, which will serve as a historic and cultural resource of the area. This local landmark is now visited by over 7,000 people every month. Seoul City monitors the urban regeneration progress of the areas every two to three years by conducting interviews, field inspections, and surveys through the Urban Regeneration Support Center. After the completion of each five- to six-year public project, the Seoul Institute prepares a report on the outcome of the project for assessment by the advisory committee. Seoul City has created an interactive website to provide citizens with the opportunity to share their opinions on local issues and open up the entire decision-making process to them so that the various parties involved can learn from one another. For accurate assessments of urban regeneration, Seoul City analyzes communication-based data related to the floating population and sales growth. The city also collects data on the trends of citizens’ interest in public policy and analyzes it by conducting social media keyword searches. In addition, Seoul City is engaging in R&D activities with the aim of applying smart technologies to the entire process of forming, planning, and executing governance. Currently, over 13 million people have visited the 32 places that were created through Seoul City’s urban regeneration projects. There have been concerns over the negative effects of excessive gentrification. However, for the sake of mutual growth, property owners in nine areas willingly agreed not to increase rents. There are 99 cooperatives and social economic organizations in those areas as well.

## Innovative Initiative

Seoul City’s urban regeneration can be considered both evolutionary and revolutionary. In the past, the city followed the traditional top-down decision-making approach in formulating and implementing policies in virtually all areas, including urban regeneration. However, a paradigm shift is imperative for the adoption of bottom-up approaches that encourages citizen engagement for sustainable urban growth and regional development. Such bottom-up approaches can be viewed as evolutionary, rather than innovative. However, the creation of the Urban Regeneration Support Center to serve as a mediator between the public and private sectors in pursuing bottom-up approaches can be viewed as truly innovative. The Changsin-Sungin Regeneration Project serves as a representative top-down model. In 2013, the Changsin-Sungin district became the first to be excluded from the New Town project, upon the request of the area’s residents and after seven years of conflict between the proponents and opponents of the project. At the time, the area was on the verge of slumization due to dilapidated infrastructure. Furthermore, there was distrust in public administration and conflict among local residents. With the launch of the urban regeneration project in 2014, Seoul City created the Urban Regeneration Support Center consisting of a group of experts, Seoul City officials, and community activists and met with citizens 250 times to promote Seoul City’s urban regeneration project and listened to over 720 citizens before completing the urban regeneration project. Seoul City’s urban regeneration model can serve as a benchmark for the formulation of citizen-participatory policy designed to realize sustainable urban development. The city put a lot of time and effort to adopt bottom-up approaches in formulating its urban regeneration plans. By incorporating citizens’ voices into the planning and decision-making processes, Seoul City succeeded in minimizing citizens’ complaints while maximizing their satisfaction with the projects. Taking the Seoullo 7017 project as an example, there were mixed reactions as to whether the old highway overpass should be demolished or reused. Amid intense conflicts between the proponents and opponents of the project, Mayor Park Won-soon held 615 meetings with local residents. As of now, over 10 million people have visited the elevated park and local businesses are thriving as their sales grow.

## Conclusion

Seoul City’s outstanding urban regeneration policy has been benchmarked by local governments and prompted the central government to promote the Urban Regeneration New Deal project as a major national policy. An increasing number of public officials from other cities are visiting Seoul to learn about its successful urban regeneration models. Driven by this success, Seoul City published a whitepaper to share various urban regeneration examples and data with others, fulfilling its role as a leader in the area of urban regeneration policy. In May 2017, Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon visited the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam as an ASEAN envoy, where he introduced the Korean government’s policy vision. In addition, the University of Seoul launched a two-year program to provide public officials in Asian countries with the opportunity to study Seoul City’s urban policy in Korea. Also, a growing number of cities in various nations, including China, Japan, Russia, Thailand, and Singapore, have visited Seoul to learn more about the city’s urban regeneration project. RELEVANCE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements



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inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable Target 1: Access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums Target 2: Access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all Target 3: Participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management Target 4: Safeguard cultural and natural heritage Target 5: Reduce deaths and number of people affected by disasters with particular focus on the poor and people in vulnerable situations Target 6: Improve air quality and manage municipal and other wastes Target 7: Universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, in particular of women, children older persons and persons with disabilities Target 9: Improving resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters and implement holistic disaster risk management Target 10: Support least developed countries in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development