



INTERVIEW

IN CONVERSATION WITH

OH SE-HOON

Inclusivity and City Diplomacy

Oh Se-Hoon, Mayor of Seoul, South Korea, shares about Seoul's new vision and highlights the links between inclusivity, competitiveness and international cooperation.



| *Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government*

Having a comprehensive definition of who the socially neglected are has enabled the Seoul Metropolitan Government to take a proactive approach in rectifying the social welfare gaps.

The slogan *Seoul, Going Together with the Socially Neglected, and Striving to Become a Globally Attractive City* is known as Seoul's new vision. Could you share more about the first part of the vision on *Going Together with the Socially Neglected*?

Seoul became the first city in the Republic of South Korea to pass the Seoul Metropolitan Government's (SMG) Ordinance on spreading and revitalising the value of *Going Together with the Socially Neglected*. Enforced on 27 April 2023, this official ordinance recognises the importance of addressing the needs of the socially neglected and establishes the institutional framework for related policy initiatives.

The "socially neglected" encompasses individuals and groups who face limited access to fair opportunities due to factors such as financial, physical, mental, social, economic, or technological constraints. In addition to economically disadvantaged individuals, people with disabilities, pregnant women, and the elderly who clearly require social assistance, it also covers the elderly who struggle with digital devices like kiosks and smartphones, individuals at risk of domestic violence and being stalked, socially isolated and reclusive youth, and people who require support to manage social, economic, and technological changes.

Having a comprehensive definition of who the socially neglected are has enabled the SMG to take a proactive approach in rectifying the social welfare gaps. SMG's aim is to ensure that disadvantaged groups have equal access to fundamental services vital to quality of life, such as earning a livelihood, housing, education, healthcare, and safety. We are currently focused on four key projects in the areas of livelihood, housing, education, and healthcare.



The new Seoul City Hall is an eco-friendly building—its design is based on the eaves of traditional Korean houses. The old City Hall building in front of it is now the Seoul Metropolitan Library. Public spaces make up 38% of the area.
Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government

8

The Seoul Safety Income Project (SSIP) is a pilot initiative that provides comprehensive support to low-income households. Eligible households, earning 85% or less of the standard median income, receive monthly assistance to reach 85% of this median. The SSIP aims to transform the welfare support model by addressing the wealth gap and underserved areas.

The Seoul-style High-Quality Rental Housing initiative aims to improve residential stability through policies that promote desirable and high-quality rental housing. These include the use of better construction materials and regular maintenance of older complexes to eradicate negative perceptions associated with rental housing.

The Seoul Learn programme aims to provide fair access to educational opportunities and resources to students from low-income households and vulnerable youth who face socio-economic challenges.

Finally, the Seoul-style Public Healthcare Service Expansion aims to expand Seoul's public healthcare infrastructure to provide the medically vulnerable with improved medical care.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government's recent win in the city category at the Smart City Expo World Congress 2022 recognises its Smart City strategies for the underprivileged. Why is digital inclusion important to Seoul and what are some of its key strategies?

The world has witnessed rapid digital transformation resulting from the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the COVID-19 pandemic. These have widened the digital divide, particularly in urban areas. To bridge the digital gap, Seoul aims to promote smart inclusion, which involves providing customised digital education programmes to empower vulnerable groups with the necessary digital skills and knowledge.

Seoul's digital inclusion policies are thus aligned with the vision of *Going Together with the Socially Neglected*. By fostering a virtuous cycle of education and job linkage, Seoul strives to create opportunities for individuals to utilise their digital skills and gain employment. The goal is to ensure that no one is left behind in the digital age and we create an inclusive society where the benefits of technology are accessible to all, regardless of their level of digital literacy.

Five basic digital rights—communication, mobility, education, safety, and technology utilisation—underpin Seoul's digital inclusion policies. For example, the right of "mobility" recognises that all citizens should be guaranteed the freedom to move. The SMG facilitates this by operating autonomous vehicles for the disabled, providing parking spaces equipped with Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and surveillance cameras to assist disabled individuals, and offering virtual sightseeing services using the metaverse.

Metaverse Seoul is one of SMG's recent key strategies to promote digital inclusivity and guarantee the five basic digital rights. The virtual public platform for social activities promotes inclusivity and a sense of community without discriminating against physical condition, occupation, age, and the like. This online communication channel emerged during the pandemic as an enabler for people with disabilities and the elderly to overcome limitations and engage in virtual interactions.

The SMG plans to integrate Metaverse Seoul into its administrative system to create a unique virtual public service that transcends space and time. The goal is to establish a user-friendly platform that is accessible to people of all ages without marginalisation. In 2023, the SMG plans to introduce an Easy Mode to enhance accessibility for the elderly who are unfamiliar with digital technology.



Five basic digital rights—communication, mobility, education, safety and technology utilisation—underpin Seoul's digital inclusion policies.





Virtual Seoul City Hall in Metaverse Seoul.
Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government



Virtual Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Metaverse Seoul.
Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government

Seoul aims to create a smart city growth model by fostering collaboration among cities worldwide based on innovative technologies.

As the world's first city-led metaverse platform, Metaverse Seoul was recognised as one of the "200 Best Inventions of 2022" by TIME magazine. By leveraging the metaverse and implementing digital inclusion policies, Seoul has established its position as a global leader in smart city initiatives, surpassing previous efforts with technologies such as high-speed networks, IoT, and artificial intelligence. We are delighted that Seoul's digital inclusion efforts earned international recognition as it received the Best City Award at the Smart City Expo World Congress 2022 in Barcelona.

Besides focusing on digital inclusion within Seoul, we are also keen to contribute to the international development of inclusive smart cities. As a leader in digital transformation, Seoul is a smart city with world-class smart infrastructure, advanced technology-based smart services, and smart citizens who actively embrace digital experiences.

Leveraging these capabilities, Seoul actively participates in the World Smart Sustainable Cities Organisation (WeGO) and serves as the Chair City. Together with WeGO, we also established the Seoul Smart City Award this year to further contribute to the development of smart cities worldwide by sharing excellent smart city policies that will bridge the digital divide between cities. The Seoul Smart City Award recognises inclusive and innovative projects that contribute to the realisation of an attractive smart city which prioritises the socially neglected.

Thus, Seoul aims to create a new smart city growth model by fostering collaboration among cities worldwide based on innovative technologies, reflecting Seoul's vision of *Seoul, Going Together with the Socially Neglected, and Striving to Become a Globally Attractive City*.

Seoul is focusing on three key areas: culture, economy and industry.

That is a great segue to the second half of Seoul's vision. Could you share more about the vision to make Seoul a *Globally Attractive City*?

The concept of attractiveness represents the competitiveness of a city. For Seoul to be a global leader, it is essential that the city is appealing to people everywhere, in terms of living, visiting, working, and investing.

Seoul, with its population of 10 million, offers captivating experiences with its rich history, beautiful natural surroundings, leading-edge science and technology, and trendy lifestyles. The city's cultural and lifestyle offerings, including Hallyu (Korean Wave) such as K-pop, dramas, movies, K-beauty and fashion, have become highly desirable and have gained attention and influence around the world. Seoul is a much sought-after destination, ranking 7th in the Global Power City Index.

To enhance its attractiveness and become the 5th most competitive city in the world, Seoul is focusing strategically on three key areas: culture, economy and industry.

With the post-pandemic reopening of tourist routes, the city plans to create a vibrant cultural scene throughout the year. Seoul Festa, the city's signature culture and tourism festival, has attracted a significant number of foreign visitors who want to experience the charm of Seoul through various events beyond K-pop.



Seoul's urban landscape is characterised by a mix of heritage sites, such as *Deoksugung* (Palace of Virtue and Longevity), modern architecture and nature.
Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government

A rendering image of Yongsan International Business District
 Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government



Seoul's economy and industry will be further accelerated through the envisioning of the Han River region as the Global Innovation Core, to foster industries and sectors that will drive the future economy. The old city centre will be transformed into a high-density mixed-use business town, connecting Yongsan's international business functions with Yeouido's global financial functions. Yongsan International Business District will be developed into a smart city, leading in cutting-edge science and technology, and serving as a hub for industry, economy, and digital transformation.

The Han River region's economic development will also improve Seoul residents' quality of life. In 2023, we initiated the Great Han River Project—also known as the Han River Renaissance 2.0. To achieve its vision of a *Greater Han River That We Enjoy Together*, this project will pursue four core strategies: Han River that Coexists with Nature, Easily-Accessible Han River, Attractive Han River, and Invigorating Han River. The version 2.0 strategies build on the initial 2007 project principles of restoration and creation, to further address social changes, new opportunities and areas of improvement.

The focus of Han River that Coexists with Nature is on expanding ecological and scenic conservation areas, maintaining ecological parks, and implementing wildlife habitat protection projects. Easily-Accessible Han River will enable citizens to reach Han River parks within ten minutes from peripheral areas by enhancing travel and transportation connectivity via land, water, and air. Attractive Han River will create emotive experiences and landscapes, featuring the Seoul Ring ZERO ferris wheel, events like fireworks displays, a revitalisation of water sports through the Han River Sports Renaissance, and the like. Lastly, Invigorating Han River involves creating urban innovation zones and dynamic cityscapes in key locations along the river, such as the Yongsan International Business District, to transform monotonous areas.

What role does city diplomacy play in enhancing Seoul's global competitiveness?

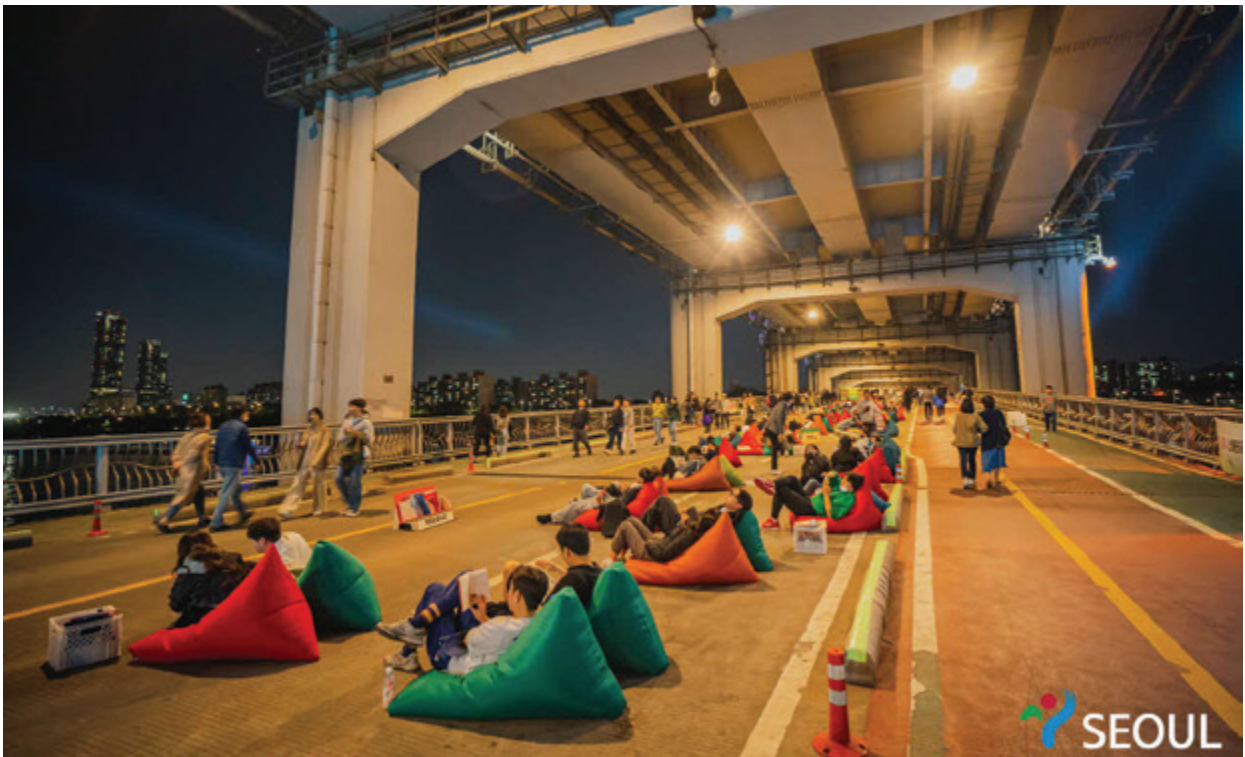
2023 will be an important year for the SMG's urban diplomacy and international cooperation especially as the world recovers from the COVID-19 disruptions. It is a significant year for showcasing Seoul's charms to foreign cities and working together to address common challenges.

Seoul actively engages with 75 cities worldwide to establish close ties. These partnerships play a crucial role in facilitating effective policy implementation, policy discussions, and the exchange of best practices. Recently, Seoul established friendly city relations with Miami, USA, and Dublin, Ireland, and plans to expand cooperative exchanges in areas like transportation, economy, and culture.

Seoul is expanding its leadership in multilateral diplomacy by joining 25 international organisations to focus on urban issues. It holds the Chair City position in city-focused international organisations like WeGO and CityNet. As a member of the C40 Steering Committee, Seoul actively cooperates with international cities to address the climate crisis, particularly in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. Seoul aims to promote policies that support vulnerable communities affected by climate change.

Leveraging its experience in overcoming challenges related to rapid urbanisation, population concentration, and infrastructure development, Seoul aims to assist cities worldwide facing similar issues.

14



The Great Han River Project envisages the Han River as a space loved by citizens.
Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government

Partnerships play a crucial role in facilitating effective policy implementation, policy discussions and the exchange of best practices.

Through city-to-city exchanges and engagement in international organisations, the SMG identifies policy needs of developing countries and supports the overseas expansion of Korean private companies with advanced technologies to those countries.

Acknowledging the heightened suffering of vulnerable populations globally due to factors such as COVID-19-induced polarisation, climate change, wars, and conflicts, Seoul implements various policies to support those in need beyond its borders. The city plans to deploy an Overseas Volunteer Corps - comprising Seoul's youth - to countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This initiative seeks to enhance the quality of life in developing nations and foster friendly relations with partner cities. Additionally, Seoul extends support to foreign citizens and governments affected by disasters through its Emergency Relief Fund, thus fulfilling its role as the capital of Korea and a responsible international city.

Seoul's global recognition in urban administration is evident through its notable achievements. In 2018, the city was honoured with the prestigious Lee Kuan Yew World Cities Prize, often hailed as the urban administration equivalent of the Nobel Prize. To further highlight its leadership in urban development, Seoul is set to host the World Cities Summit Mayors' Forum at the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) from 24 to 26 September. This influential gathering will convene mayors from prominent cities worldwide, along with senior officials from international organisations, to engage in comprehensive discussions aimed at fostering sustainable, resilient, and inclusive cities.

The DDP is known not only for its architectural significance but also its status as a global beauty industry hub and base for cooperative regional development. It offers a unique setting for a range of events for international leaders that go beyond traditional hotel-based conferences. From Seoul Beauty Week, which showcases the city's innovative technology and K-beauty essence, to the Seoul Smart City Award Ceremony, visitors can experience Seoul's fashion, beauty, and future firsthand through a rich array of attractions. 📍