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Construir juntos, beneficiarse juntos: el enfoque de Seúl para el desarrollo urbano



El enfoque de desarrollo urbano policéntrico de Seúl equilibró la población, la industria, el empleo y la vivienda. Crédito de la foto: K-Hub.

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Seúl ha logrado prosperidad, bajas emisiones de carbono y resiliencia ante desastres mediante la inversión en espacios verdes y el crecimiento del sector privado.

Introducción

Las ciudades son motores del crecimiento económico y generan más del 80% del producto interno bruto mundial. Como centros de innovación y desarrollo tecnológico, desempeñan un papel crucial en la creación de empleo, el impulso del comercio y la prestación de servicios sociales. Si bien la concentración de empresas e industrias en las zonas urbanas fomenta una mayor productividad, oportunidades de empleo y mayores ingresos, también plantea desafíos importantes, en particular en el contexto del cambio climático.

Seúl, la capital y la ciudad más grande de la República de Corea, es un modelo de cómo afrontar los desafíos de la urbanización y, al mismo tiempo, lograr prosperidad y resiliencia. La ciudad ha logrado una transición exitosa hacia un modelo de desarrollo con bajas emisiones de carbono.

Las experiencias **del Gobierno Metropolitano de Seúl** brindan información valiosa para otros países en desarrollo que buscan alcanzar el doble objetivo de crecimiento económico y reducción de emisiones de carbono, creando ciudades prósperas y habitables.

Enfoque de desarrollo urbano

La rápida urbanización genera escasez de viviendas y sobrecarga la infraestructura urbana, como carreteras, suministro de agua, sistemas de alcantarillado, así como las instalaciones educativas y sanitarias. Esto genera congestión, movilidad reducida, contaminación del aire y riesgos para la salud. **Las ciudades representan dos tercios del consumo energético mundial y generan más del 70% de las emisiones mundiales de dióxido de carbono (CO₂)**.

Seúl, que ha logrado prosperidad, bajas emisiones de carbono y resiliencia ante desastres, atribuye el éxito de la ciudad a su desarrollo urbano compacto, ecológico e inteligente y al crecimiento del sector privado. Las principales estrategias que implementó incluyen las siguientes:

Desarrollo policéntrico. Seúl siguió un enfoque policéntrico para lograr una distribución equilibrada de la población, la industria, los empleos y la vivienda. Formó tres distritos comerciales centrales y siete centros metropolitanos. También promovió el uso mixto del suelo que integraba comercio, vivienda, parques y servicios sociales, así como infraestructura multifuncional y centros de tránsito multipropósito.

Figura 1: Desarrollo compacto y policéntrico de Seúl



Nota: CBD – distrito comercial central.
Fuente: Gobierno Metropolitano de Seúl. [Seoul Solution](#) .

Inversión en espacios verdes. La ciudad reemplazó las vías arteriales por **arroyos** y jardines elevados y aumentó los espacios verdes per cápita de 5,73 metros cuadrados en 1975 a 18,74 metros cuadrados en 2023.

Public transport. Seoul maintained a public transport share of over 60% for more than 30 years, reducing road space to enhance walkability and **bike friendliness**.

Technological integration. The city leveraged cutting-age technologies, such as **big data**, internet of things, and digital twins to improve efficiency and effectiveness of governance, **urban planning**, and urban services (e.g., as mobility, sewage, and safety).

Support for private sector growth. Government support has been crucial in fostering the growth of private firms. Business incentives **include tax and tariff incentives and financial support for export development**.

Primary Drivers of Development

Seoul's development has led to the emergence of 82 Korean firms as internationally competitive conglomerates.

The private sector has become the primary driver for innovation and technological development and a source of development financing. In the 70s and 80s, public financing for research and development were at 60% to 70%. Private financing has overtaken this since the 1990s with a share of at least 60%.

Similarly, there has been a shift to private financing from public financing in the areas of housing supply and urban infrastructure development.

Seoul's economic success is also reflected in its high world rankings, including 7th (out of 48 cities) in the Composite

Urban Competitiveness Index by the Japanese Mori Foundation in 2023 and 16th (out of 141) in the prestigious Global Smart City Index of 2023.

It was also named as a model city for disaster reduction by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Seoul's CO2 emission per capita is less compared with Paris, London, and New York despite having a higher population density, according to the 2021 data of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Roles of Leadership, Planning, Stakeholder Engagement

Strong leadership, planning, and stakeholder participation are crucial to the success of Seoul's approach to its urban development.

Figure 2: Seoul's Approach to Urban Development



Note: SMG—Seoul Metropolitan Government; IoT—Internet of Things
Source: Created by author based on data from the Seoul Metropolitan Government.

Leadership. City leadership is vital in spearheading urban planning efforts and creating an environment conducive to private sector growth and citizen well-being. Strong political commitment is crucial for prioritizing urban planning and allocating resources. Political leaders should champion sustainable development goals, advocate necessary policy changes, and garner support for urban planning initiatives among various stakeholders.

Clear laws and regulations. Clear policies empower city governments to enforce planning standards, protect public interests, and guide private sector investments in alignment with city objectives. The Seoul Metropolitan Government developed policies and laws that incentivize sustainable development practices, encourage investment in critical sectors, and promote inclusivity and social equity. Robust enforcement mechanisms ensured compliance with urban planning measures and regulations.

Urban planning. A comprehensive urban plan, which strikes a balance among economic, social, and

environmental considerations, is paramount for creating vibrant, livable, sustainable, and resilient cities. A well-crafted urban plan: (i) fosters an environment conducive to business, which attracts investments, stimulates economic growth, and generates employment opportunities; (ii) ensures a high quality of life by providing access to green spaces, recreational facilities, efficient public transportation, and essential services (education, healthcare, water supply, sanitation); (iii) promotes healthy lifestyles through pedestrian-friendly streets and bike lanes; and (iv) enhances resilience to natural hazards through strategic land use, building codes that ensure structures can withstand floods and earthquakes, and effective emergency response plans.

Compact development. Zoning regulations should encourage mixed-land use and compact growth to optimize land use (e.g., setting a maximum limit on a building's footprint and floor area ratio promote compact neighborhoods and vertical growth while preventing oversized tower block development). Incentives, such as tax reduction and deregulation, encourage developers to build high-density areas or include a mix of residential, commercial, and retail spaces.

Stakeholder participation. Engaging stakeholders is necessary to ensure proper project design, support implementation, local resource mobilization, and sustainability of project achievements.

Smart use of public financing. Focus should be placed on essential urban infrastructure and services that support private sector activities and promote social equity and environmental sustainability. Public financing should also support innovation and technological development, where commercial payoffs may be uncertain or lengthy for private investors. Incentives and risk-sharing mechanisms (e.g., tax breaks, subsidies, preferential loans, matching funds) can attract private capital to city priorities.

Resources

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Ask the Experts



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Cai Li leads the work on setting up and
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Jung Hyun Han, a public policy specialist with a PhD in Public Policy from Seoul National University, focuses on climate policy and sustainable development. With experience consulting for the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and civil society organizations, she brings expertise in linking economic and environmental policies, as well as advancing development strategies. Her work supports innovation and policy advancement in climate resilience across Asia and beyond.



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Sara Lim focuses on sustainable development policy analysis in Asia and the Pacific. She joined the ADB-Korea Climate Technology Hub in 2023.



Asian Development Bank (ADB)

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