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Seoul,
South Korea

Park

Won-Soon

SOCIAL EQUITY THROUGH SHARING

Elected in October 2011, **Park Won-Soon** is the 35th Mayor of Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. In this interview with **URBAN SOLUTIONS** on 1 December, the winner of the 2006 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service explains how Seoul has pioneered sharing as a low-cost, environmentally friendly solution that can improve social equity, create economic opportunities and “recover the communities and the relationships between people that we lose when we live in a city.”

Population
10,442,426

Land Area
605.41 square
kilometres

● **Seoul is becoming known for its “Sharing City” concept – can you give our readers a brief overview of what it is about?**

The city is now full to overflowing. Too many people are living here, too many cars are running, too many houses are built and too much space is consumed.

In this trend, the city will reach a critical point. But now we can maintain the city, not by possessing more, going higher or moving faster, but by sharing with more people. We started the “Sharing City, Seoul” project with this critical mindset, in order to enhance the city’s sustainability.

So far, the city has built an infrastructure for primary sharing. Roads, parks, libraries and subways, which all citizens use, are typical examples of primary sharing.

The age of secondary sharing has come. We are sharing information and knowledge, as well as goods and space. Urban policies should also adopt secondary sharing. For example, if a metropolitan city has serious parking problems, we need to create a social system that allows one parking lot to be shared between two or more users, rather than building more parking lots. We also need an urban policy that provides software through which many people can share these resources.

When it comes to cars, it is the same. All cars are not running 24/7. Many Seoulites are enjoying the “Sharing Car” system, by which many people can use a car at the time they want.

“Sharing City, Seoul” promotes social values through sharing and making better use of the city’s and individuals’ various resources. Through sharing, public institutions can enrich citizens’ lives at a low cost. They will also be able to



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⁰¹ A participant at the “Sharing City, Seoul” EXPO and Conference in August 2013, which drew 8,500 citizens.

overcome environmental issues caused by excessive production and consumption in the market economy, and create new economic opportunities for the future. Furthermore, as the sharing culture spreads, we are sure that we will be able to recover the communities and the relationships between people that we lose when we live in a city.

● **What was the impetus for “Sharing City, Seoul”?**

There is a saying that necessity is the mother of success. Seoul is undergoing fast social changes. Single- or two-person households account for up to 50% of the total households in the city. We are already an ageing society and the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation is a serious problem. Seoul has various social issues to tackle, such as higher household debt, high youth unemployment and the collapse of communities. The “Sharing City, Seoul” policy is the only reliable alternative solution to these social problems through civic participation with minimum financial input.

The administrative agencies should now work together with the citizens. It is time for the citizens to also participate in the sharing activities to create the necessary services on their own, rather than just consuming available urban services. Seoul City supports citizens’ voluntary sharing activities and aims to implement various public-private cooperative projects through communication and cooperation.

● **What gives Seoul an advantage in becoming a sharing city?**

Sharing goods or using cars together incurs trading expenses and someone is needed to connect the people who want to take part in the sharing. In all of these processes, costs are incurred and if the added value of sharing is lower than the costs, it is difficult to boost sharing. What significantly lowers the costs of sharing is the IT environment, represented by the Internet and mobile services.

South Korea has been ranked first in the world for high-speed wireless Internet penetration rate, as almost all Koreans have Internet access. It is nearly two times higher than 54.3%, which is OECD member countries’ average Internet penetration rate. In addition, South Korea also has the highest smartphone penetration rate in the world, significantly higher than those of the major advanced countries such as the US, UK and Australia. Most sharing activities and sharing economy-related businesses are based on the Internet or mobile services. Seoul has highly advantageous circumstances as a sharing city in terms of IT infrastructure so we can lead the other cities in the world in this.

● **Tell us briefly about the policies of “Sharing City, Seoul”.**

“Sharing City, Seoul” policies can be largely divided into two. First, the city supports spontaneous sharing activities in the private sector and creates an ecosystem for



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sharing, as a key player in the establishment of a foundation for sharing. Second, the city opens its resources to the citizens and, in providing a model for sharing, acts as a participant in the sharing.

In order to lay the foundation for “Sharing City, Seoul”, the city enacted the Seoul Metropolitan City Sharing Promotion Ordinance, and has organised and managed the Seoul Metropolitan City Sharing Promotion Committee – comprising members from the city council and various experts from the academia, economic circles, civil groups, IT, CSR (corporate social responsibility), press and legal circles – as part of public-private governance. We opened a Web portal named “Sharing Hub”, which provides information about sharing and sharing platforms, on 26 June 2013, in cooperation with Creative Commons Korea Co., Ltd., a company that has been working to spread sharing in South Korea.

Seoul City also shares 736 public offices (33 offices in the city, 703 offices in 25 boroughs) with citizens to let them use the offices for meetings, education and conferences.

We have also opened to the public our useful 96 public data systems and 1,099 datasets for free so that private companies can use them for their marketing, schools can use them in their research and programmers can use them to develop new applications. Furthermore, the documents approved by Seoul City are automatically made available to the public on the “Online information communication plaza” open for more proactive sharing of information with citizens.

● **What is the key factor in the success of “Sharing City, Seoul”?**

The key to the policy’s success is citizens’ participation. That’s why Seoul City has concentrated its efforts on informing the residents of the benefits of sharing and lowering their mental barriers to sharing since September 2012.

The city minimised city-owned sharing projects and its intervention in citizens’ sharing activities, and has put emphasis on supporting the creation of a private sharing ecosystem in order to secure citizens’ participation. One of the core points of the “Sharing City, Seoul” policy is designating sharing organisations and enterprises. We have already selected 37 sharing enterprises this year. Youth business start-ups are increasing because of an extended period of economic recession and higher youth unemployment. The sharing economy is a new field where people can establish businesses with little capital if they have a good idea. Sharing economy-related new enterprises are increasing and citizens’ participation in and demands for new sharing services are also rising. We are gradually moving towards a sharing city, not by means of administrative agencies but with the help of citizens.



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● **What else did Seoul do to raise the profile of sharing?**

Of course, Seoul City also directly increased awareness of sharing among residents to attract their participation. We held the “Sharing City, Seoul” EXPO and Conference in August 2013. The exhibition, which attracted 8,500 citizens, introduced Seoul’s policies, the activities of the sharing enterprises and organisations designated by the city, and the current states of the world sharing economy. It also provided citizens with the opportunity to experience sharing activities in person. We also continue to promote the concepts and values of sharing through various city-owned promotional media such as subways and buses.

01 WOOZOO is a house-sharing enterprise that remodels old houses and lends them to people with the same interests.

● **What are some of the main positive outcomes that you have observed so far?**

The city has selected 37 private entities, which carry out sharing activities in various fields such as goods, space, talent, experience and information, as “sharing groups” or “sharing enterprises” in order to enhance citizens’ confidence in them and in sharing activities. Besides allowing them to use our “Sharing City, Seoul” brand identity and supporting their promotions, we also give them grants for working expenses.

The sharing enterprises designated by Seoul City include Open Closet, which receives business suit donations and lends them to young job seekers; WOOZOO, which runs house-sharing by remodelling old houses and lending them to people who share the same interests; and Church Plus, which connects local residents to churches in order to help them use the churches as a wedding hall or meeting room.



- 01 Mayor Park Won-Soon speaking in November at the Global Social Economy Forum 2013, held in Seoul.
- 02 Open Closet receives business suit donations and lends them to young job seekers.



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As mentioned, we also actively support the “Sharing Car” service – its number of members increased to 123,920 in eight months since it started.

The lives of Seoulites are changing as we promote Seoul e-Pumatyi (communal sharing of labour), which helps people share labour and goods with their neighbours using local currency; Sharing Bookshelves, where citizens can share books with neighbours; and the Inter-generation Sympathy under the Same Roof project, which links youths in need of a home with the elderly who have rooms and space in their houses.

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We have also selected 20 start-ups in the area of sharing economy and provided them with offices, consulting services and grants. Through the Sharing Economy Starting School Program, we support the commercialisation of citizens’ sharing ideas.

● This issue of **URBAN SOLUTIONS** has a special focus on social equity. What does social equity mean to you, and how would you define an equitable city?

Seoul is a dynamic city, having tradition and high-tech industry at the same time, while developing into one of the leading world cities after recovering from the ruins of the Korean War. However, we have suffered various social problems such as social and economic polarisation, weakened communities and high youth unemployment in the process of growth. To tackle these problems, the city is trying to pursue “growth for happiness of all” rather than growth of wealth.

After my inauguration as mayor, I decided to set up a vision of a cooperative association city and to establish a social economy centre in order to build a city for co-growth. We started to build village communities, formed a social investment fund and declared the start of “Sharing City, Seoul”.

Seoul is a fast-changing city where people can get access to various information in real time and actively communicate with each other with smartphones and tablet PCs. We try to minimise the information gap between generations and classes,



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remove the sense of alienation and prevent an information-deprived minority group by providing the elderly and the physically challenged with training programmes on smartphone utilisation.

● **How do you think the “Sharing City, Seoul” policy can contribute to making Seoul a more equitable city for its residents?**

In terms of economic activities, sharing provides opportunities for someone without much capital to earn an income by using resources that everybody has. For example, if you have a vacant room now, you can earn extra money by lending the room to foreign visitors; while in the past, this option was available only to hotel owners or guesthouse

hosts with much capital. In addition, as it is possible to connect people to idle resources with a small capital, anyone can start a business if they have a good idea, and the risk of failure is not high.

In terms of consumption, we can reduce unnecessary consumption through sharing. People don't need to purchase expensive commodities because they can borrow as many goods as they need at a reasonable price. For example, people who don't have their own cars can use a car for the period of time they need through the “Sharing Car” service.

Therefore, sharing helps both those who have resources and those who don't to contribute to building an equitable city in terms of both production and consumption.

01 Open Closet is a sharing enterprise designated by Seoul City.