

# City Diplomacy in South Korea: Trends and Characteristics

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## Abstract

This research aims to analyze the external activities of local governments in South Korea from the perspective of the developing trends in city diplomacy, contrary to the conventional and narrow concept regarding local government's international exchange and cooperation as a public diplomacy. In detail, this research intends to illustrate the following: first, to differentiate South Korean local governments' growing commitment to international affairs from public diplomacy; second, to highlight the integration of public diplomacy with other forms of diplomacy within the framework of city diplomacy. This research argues that city diplomacy in South Korea has gradually shown the following three trends and characteristics. First, South Korean local governments have recognized the importance of participating in multilateral diplomacy via city networks to find compelling solutions to non-traditional and transnational security threats. They perceive this external activity as an opportunity for policy sharing and problem-solving with foreign partners. Second, local governments in South Korea have been fostering various ways to institutionalize their involvement in foreign affairs and organizations, such as amendments to related laws and the launching of task forces, to pursue so-called sustainable and systematic international exchange and cooperation. Lastly, South Korean local governments have constructed multiple channels and multilevel governance in the form of public-private partnerships to enhance policy expertise and cope with diverse agendas.

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**Keywords**

City Diplomacy, Globalization, City Networks, Multilevel Governance, Transnational Security Threats

## I . Introduction

Departing from traditional diplomatic approaches, currently, the global engagement of local governments is being recognized as a new and separate form of diplomacy that redefines local governments as independent diplomatic actors (See Grandi, 2020). Specifically, in South Korea, local government public diplomacy has been evolving into a form of city diplomacy. Traditionally, subnational public diplomacy has been considered a part of the traditional diplomacy of the South Korean central government and the Ministry of International Affairs. This new perception of South Korean local governments in terms of international engagement is an inevitable consequence of globalization and urbanization (Lee, 2019, pp.8-10). Although Cold War-style diplomacy remains pervasive among the country's policymakers and experts owing to the division in Korea, South Korean diplomacy is gradually embracing this new concept of diplomacy.

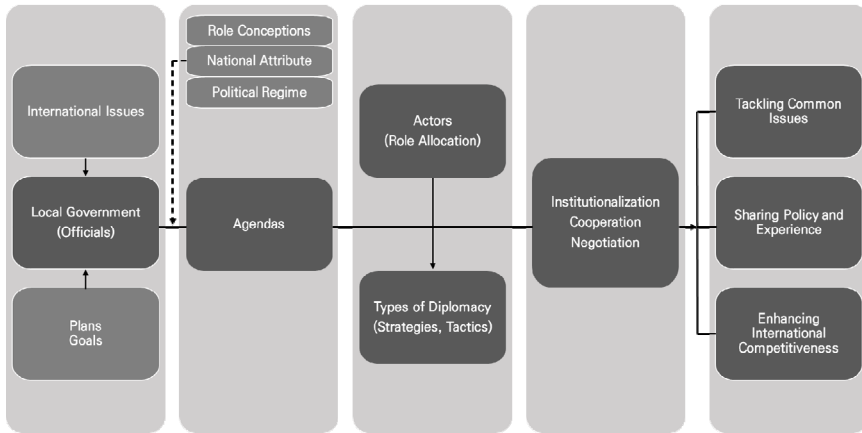
Table 1. New Diplomacy in the Era of Globalization

Categories	Characteristics
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multi-levels: diversity</li><li>• Multiple departments: professionalization</li></ul>
Agendas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No boundaries between military and non-military threats</li><li>• No boundaries between domestic and foreign affairs</li><li>• No boundaries between high and low politics</li></ul>
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Absolute (common) interests</li><li>• Long-term goals</li><li>• Relationship-oriented behaviors</li></ul>

Source: Constantinou&Sharp (2016), pp.13-24; Cooper et al. (2015), p.23.

As presented in Table 1, this new diplomacy reflects recent changes in terms of the actors, agendas, and platforms in diplomacy due to the growing interdependence and interconnectedness among people and societies in the era of globalization. The new diplomacy concept has emerged as a consequence of three waves of globalization, as well as a means to cope with reactionary movements—often called anti-globalization or “deglobalization”—that the world has encountered in the past century. The paradox of globalization refers to three unanticipated changes it has created in terms of international relations and international security. First, whereas growing interdependence among nations has decreased the likelihood of interstate military conflicts and wars, it has also contributed to the emergence and intensification of non-traditional security issues such as climate change, resource depletion, epidemic diseases, illegal immigration, food shortages, and international crime (Rothschild, 1995, p.55; Tarry, 1999, pp.1-13). Second, emerging issues in international relations and security have blurred the boundaries between domestic and international affairs (Kuznetsov, 2015, pp.60-61). Third, the internationalization of domestic affairs and the domestication of international affairs have encouraged subnational actors, such as local governments, interest groups, and even individual citizens, to become involved in global issues. In other words, this new diplomacy makes the diversification of actors, the intermestication of issues, and the establishment of global governance—the main characteristics of it—to solve new problems and overcome the reactionary waves towards globalization (Lee, 2020, pp.8-31).

Figure 1. Basic Structure of City Diplomacy



Source: Lee (2020), p.68.

On top of theoretical background, city diplomacy as a form of new diplomacy has developed mainly because the city has become a breeding ground for most non-traditional security issues (As to basic structure of city diplomacy, See Figure 1).<sup>1)</sup> Moreover, a growing number of cities worldwide are promoting favorable conditions for the development of

1) There are several similar concepts defining subnational governments' external activities in academia. Those include "constituent diplomacy," "regional diplomacy," "sub-state diplomacy," "micro diplomacy," "multilayered diplomacy," "catalytic diplomacy," "proto-diplomacy," "post-diplomacy" and so on. The problem is that researchers usually prefer to use those concepts depending on their research purposes and cases, as Kuznetsov mentioned. See Kuznetsov (2015), p.25. This research uses the concept of 'city diplomacy' that typically represents the characteristics of regional governments' performance in the international arena and has been widely adopted by researchers in recent years. According to Lee's research, "city diplomacy is a diplomatic activity that basically aims to tackle common issues, share policy and experience, and enhance international competitiveness based on regional officials' efforts to cooperate and forge ties with actors ranging from sub-national level to transnational level." See Lee (2020), p.81.

city diplomacy by finding other global cities to interact and cooperate with (Curtis&Acuto, 2018, p.8). In South Korea, rapid urbanization following the country's tremendous economic development in the past decades, so-called "the miracle on the Han River," has expanded the role of local municipalities in domestic and international affairs. Due to the country's democratization, political decentralization has reinforced local government capacity for agenda-setting and cooperation in the international community.<sup>2)</sup> Corresponding to the country's enhanced political and economic status in the international arena, South Korean local governments have realized it is crucial to pursue effective solutions to non-traditional and transnational security threats through international cooperation. Today, their commitment to international affairs and cooperation with foreign administrations is evolving from traditional and event-centered human, social, and cultural exchanges to systematic and institutionalized cooperation with international entities on diverse issues. In this way, subnational public diplomacy in South Korea is taking on a new form of city diplomacy in parallel with other forms of diplomacy.

This study analyzes the external activities of local governments in South Korea from the perspective of this new, developing trend in city diplomacy—multilateral diplomacy for problem-solving, regional and interregional cooperation, multilayered governance (Lee, 2020, pp.73-76). To minimize possible misunderstandings around this new type of diplomacy, the study aims to illustrate the following: first, to differentiate South Korean local governments' growing commitment to international affairs from conventional public diplomacy; second, to highlight the

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2) As to the relation between decentralization and city diplomacy, see Gutiérrez Camps (2013), pp.51-52; Mursitama&Lee (2018), pp.1-15; Leffel (2018), p.505.

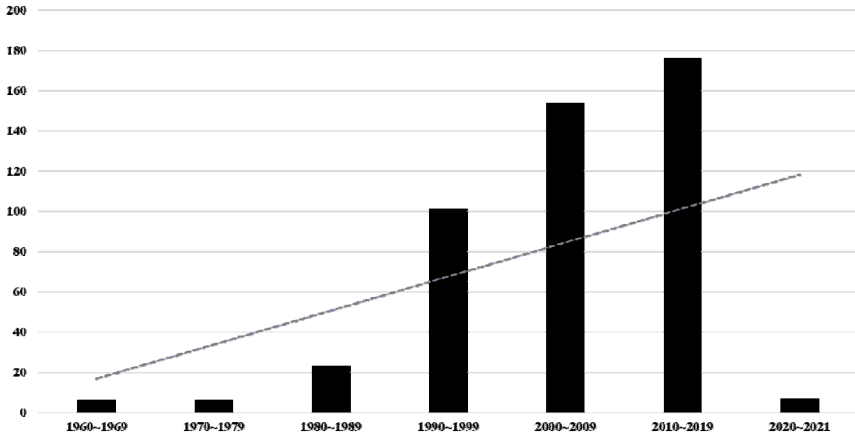
integration of public diplomacy with other forms of diplomacy within the framework of city diplomacy. This study is confined to 17 upper-level (regional level) local governments (6 metropolitan cities, 1 special city, 1 special self-governing city, and 9 provinces) across South Korea, emphasizing a few representative cases.

## **II. Development of City Diplomacy in South Korea: Trends and Characteristics**

### **1. The transformation to multilateral diplomacy for problem-solving**

Beyond traditional bilateral diplomacy in the form of sister and friendship cities, local governments in South Korea have gradually recognized the importance of participating in multilateral diplomacy via city networks. They now acknowledge that it is indispensable to pursue international solidarity to find compelling solutions to urban issues and non-traditional security threats. In this sense, city diplomacy in South Korea has been developing from conventional interaction with foreign administrations over policy sharing into advanced cooperation that can achieve solutions to shared problems. This change is considered crucial for the integration of the three primary goals of South Korean city diplomacy—enhanced international competitiveness, policy sharing, and joint problem-solving—and is the manifestation of this new diplomacy in South Korean diplomacy overall (Lee, 2019, pp.36-37; Lee et al., 2021, pp.84-91).

Figure 2. Sister/Friendship City Agreements of 17 Local Governments in South Korea



Source: Governors Association of Korea, <https://www.gaok.or.kr/gaok/exchange/listTime.do?menuNo=200084> (Accessed: Dec 15 2022).

Table 2. 17 Local Governments' International Cooperation in South Korea

Field	Major Projects	Total
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchange of delegations</li> <li>• Exchange of administrative information</li> <li>• Joint ceremonies</li> </ul>	4250
Human Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officials/students exchange programs</li> </ul>	829
Culture/art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint festivals</li> <li>• Concerts</li> <li>• Exhibitions</li> </ul>	1067
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutual tourism marketing</li> <li>• Promotion of medical tourism</li> </ul>	285
Youth exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homestay</li> <li>• School excursions</li> <li>• Language training programs</li> <li>• International internships</li> </ul>	507

Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendly matches</li> <li>• International competitions</li> </ul>	359
Academia/technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic seminars/webinars/conferences</li> <li>• Agricultural and technological training programs</li> </ul>	796
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic cooperation agreements</li> <li>• Exchange of economic delegations</li> <li>• Investment sessions</li> <li>• Direct air links</li> <li>• Technology transfer</li> </ul>	716
Civic exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchange of business personnel/artists/doctors</li> </ul>	506
Symbol project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of parks</li> <li>• Naming of streets</li> <li>• Sister city exhibitions</li> <li>• Honorary citizenship</li> </ul>	146

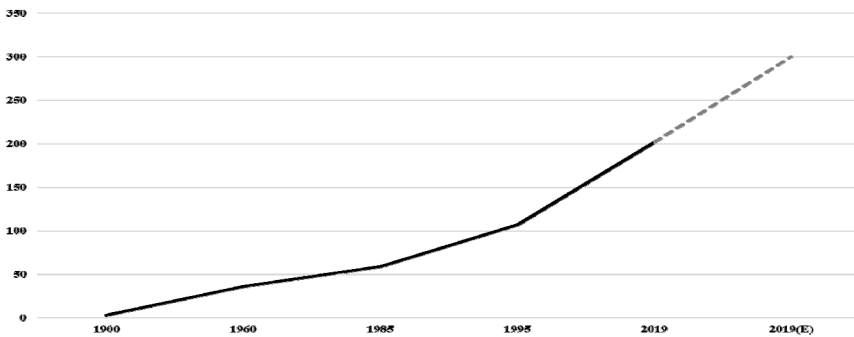
Source: Governors Association of Korea, <https://www.gaok.or.kr/gaok/exchange/listField.do?menuNo=200083> (Accessed: Dec 15 2022).

In this vein, sister and friendship cities have become the backbone of city diplomacy in South Korea. According to the Governors Association of Korea (GAOK), as of December 2021, 17 local governments in South Korea have signed 473 sister/friendship city agreements with 349 foreign cities in 72 countries (see Figure 2). The number of agreements has grown from 6 partnerships in the 1960s to 23 in the 1980s, and subsequently, to 176 in the 2010s. Of all the established agreements, Asian cities are the most favored partners, with 261 agreements, followed by European cities with 107 partnerships. Of the 17 local governments in South Korea, as of January 2023, Seoul leads the trend with 71 agreements (23 sister cities, 48 friendship cities), followed by Gyeonggi province with 41 partnerships (16 sister cities, 25 friendship cities).<sup>3)</sup>

According to the Governors Association of Korea, local governments

in South Korea are pursuing various exchange and cooperation projects with their sister and friendship cities, as detailed in Table 2. With a heavy emphasis on public diplomacy, excluding a few economic projects, the list indicates that 1) the concentration is on human exchange and cooperation in fields of society and culture and 2) a lack of professionalization in public diplomacy.

Figure 3. Numbers of City Networks, 1900–2019



Source: Acuto&Leffel (2021), p.1761.

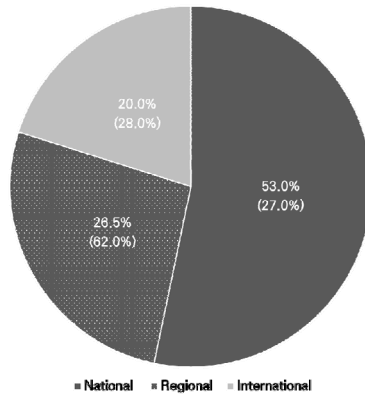
However, recently, South Korean local governments have enhanced their commitment to multilateral diplomacy by initiating new city networks or joining existing ones (see Figure 3). As of November 2020, 17 local governments in South Korea have become members of approximately 77 city networks globally, 61.0% are international and 39.0% are regional. Given that international city networks comprise 53.0% of all existing networks, South Korean local governments appear

3) See Governors Association of Korea, <https://www.gaok.or.kr/gaok/exchange/list.do?menuNo=200079> (Accessed: Dec 15 2022).

to prefer international networks over regional ones (see Figure 4) (Lee, 2021, pp.99-100).

Specifically, the South Korean local governments are involved in the city networks as follows. In terms of the numbers, six city networks include more than five South Korean local governments, and four include ten or more South Korean local governments. The Association of Northeast Asia Governments (NEAR) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) are the two most popular city networks for South Korean local governments, followed by Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and the Tourism Promotion Organization for Asia Pacific Cities (TPO). In addition, local governments participate in Metropolis, a metropolitan section of the UCLG committed to diverse urban issues such as economic development, sustainability, social cohesion, and gender equality (Lee et al., 2021, p.100).

Figure 4. Geographical Scope of City Networks, World(n=202)

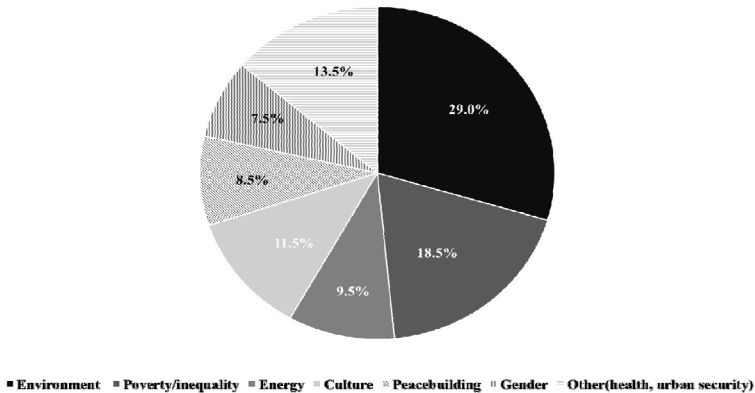


Note: the numbers in parentheses indicate city networks created since 2001.

Source: Acuto&Leffel (2021), p.1762.

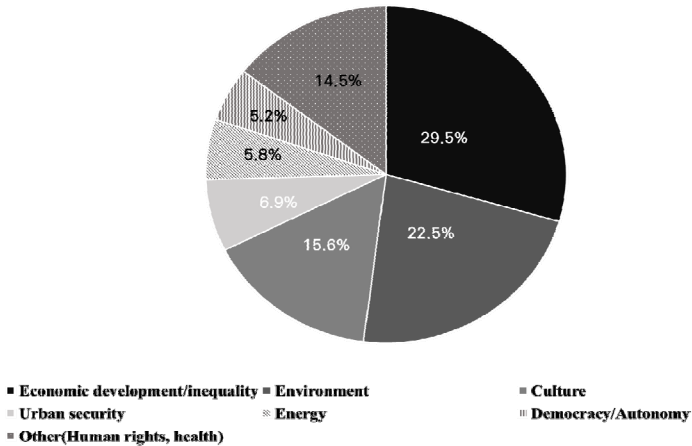
Based on these memberships, it seems that the South Korean local governments are currently more involved in city networks specializing in non-traditional security issues and urban problems, such as economic inequality, environment, culture, urban safety, and energy. It implies that their international engagement is no longer focused largely on the establishment of human networks or social/cultural exchange. Since public diplomacy aims to promote a country’s soft power, the active involvement of South Korean local governments in global agendas and effective problem-solving make them “attractive” and competitive international partners.

Figure 5. Subject Focus of City Networks, World (n=202)



Source: Acuto&Leffel (2021), p.1762.

Figure 6. Subject Focus of City Networks, South Korea (n=77)



Source: Seventeen South Korean Local Governments' Internal Documents.

In contrast to the overall results from the global analysis of 202 city network agendas, the local governments in South Korea are placing greater importance on economic development and inequality (Acuto&Leffel, 2021, p.1762). Figures 5 and 6 indicate that South Korean local governments are more involved in city networks specializing in economic development and inequality than other local governments worldwide, according to the overall global trend. A similar pattern is observed in their relatively higher affiliation with city networks focused on culture and urban security.

South Korean local governments' larger affiliation with international networks rather than regional ones also contrasts with the growing commitment to regional city networks in the world (see Figure 4). Seoul's preference for international city networks (82.6%) reflects this

trend in South Korea. This lower affiliation with regional city networks is considered a consequence of the lower level of multilateral cooperation among countries in East Asia. Moreover, Seoul's relative disinterest in regional city networks can also be explained by its status as the capital of South Korea, which makes the city more vulnerable to changes in international relations (Lee, 2021, pp.86-101).

## **2. Establishment of Sustainable Cooperation Model through Institutionalization**

Local governments in South Korea have been fostering various ways to “institutionalize” their involvement in foreign affairs and organizations, such as amendments to related laws and the launching of task forces to pursue sustainable and systematic international exchange and cooperation. As a first step, local governments have reviewed and amended bills related to international cooperation to create a legal basis for their involvement in international affairs. As of December 2020, there were approximately 300 laws stipulating terms and regulations for international exchange and cooperation by local governments.<sup>4)</sup> Nevertheless, local governments in South Korea have normally found a legal basis for their involvement in foreign affairs in the Public Diplomacy Act, as Article 2 defines them as “collaboration partners” of the central government’s diplomacy. However, the Public Diplomacy Act, enacted in 2016, limits the role of local governments as cooperative partners of the central government and the range of businesses in which they might be involved

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4) See Korean Law Information Center, <https://www.law.go.kr/LSW/main.html> (Accessed: Jan 1 2021).

—which has become an issue. The recent amendment of the Local Autonomy Law in December 2020 resolved this by recognizing local governments as the lead actors in the pursuit of subnational diplomacy.

Figure 7. Operating Structure for Seoul Policy Sharing Initiative



Source: Seoul Solution, <https://seoulsolution.kr/en/seoularchive/cooperation> (Accessed: Nov 20 2022).

As a second step, local governments in South Korea have established and are operating foreign affairs teams for city diplomacy, considering their regional characteristics and needs. As of January 2023, 10 of the country's 17 local governments—Seoul, Busan, Daegu, Ulsan, Gyeonggi, Gangwon, Chungbuk, Chungnam, Gyeongbuk, and Gyeongnam—have placed their foreign affairs teams under economy-related departments. Particularly in Busan, Ulsan, Gyeonggi and Gyeongnam, these local

governments have decided to affiliate their foreign affairs teams with their economic departments, reflecting their industrialized urban structure with commercial ports. It also makes sense of the local governments' preference for city networks specializing in economic development and inequality. Three local governments (Incheon, Daejeon, and Sejong) have affiliated their foreign affairs teams with their planning and coordination departments, thereby giving them the responsibility of coordinating and controlling all city diplomacy projects.

In addition, South Korean local governments have launched new task forces or reset existing teams to pursue professional and effective city diplomacy. In this sense, local governments have reorganized and renamed their foreign affairs teams to keep pace with the central government's foreign diplomacy orientation and priorities.<sup>5)</sup> For example, Busan, Ulsan, and Chungnam launched a new team to collaborate with the Presidential Committee of Northern Economic Cooperation to echo the Moon administration's New Northern Policy.

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5) Trilateral local city exchange (South Korea-China-Japan local city exchange) is also another example related to keeping with the central government's foreign policy. According to a research report published by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), as of January 2022, 61 local governments in three countries(22 inter-cities exchange groups) run trilateral exchange programs, including Youth Exchange (10 groups), Cultural Exchange (10 groups), Go (3 groups), Sports Competition (3 Groups), Economic Exchange (2 groups), Museum (2 groups), Environment (2 groups), Library (1 group), Tourism (1 group), and Aging Society & Senior Welfare (1 group). See Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (2022).

**Table 3. Transformation of Seoul’s Urban Development Trajectory**

	Main Urban Development Plans
	Main Projects
Urban Foundation (1960~1980)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gangnam development plan (1970)</li> <li>• Yeouido development plan (1971)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheonggyecheon cover-up (1966)</li> <li>• Cheonggye Expressway construction (1967)</li> <li>• Han River bridges (Yanghwa: 1966, Hannam: 1969)</li> <li>• Waste disposal plant (1972)</li> <li>• Subway line 1 (1974)</li> </ul>
Growing City (1980~2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Han River comprehensive development projects (1982)</li> <li>• Development of apartment complexes</li> <li>• Han River sewage management (1987)</li> <li>• Construction of 180,000 residences (1989)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subway line 2, 3, 4 (1984~1985)</li> <li>• Separate garbage collection (1992)</li> <li>• Bus card (1996)</li> </ul>
Smart & Sustainable City (2000~Present)	-
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheonggyecheon restoration (2004)</li> <li>• Public transportation system reformation (2004)</li> <li>• Online civil service offer (2000)</li> <li>• Subway screen door (2006~present)</li> </ul>

Source: Seoul Urban Solutions Agency, <http://www.susa.or.kr/en/content/seouls-journey> (Accessed: Nov 11 2022).

Seoul’s launch of the Global Urban Partnership Division in 2015, replacing the existing International Cooperation Agency, is another example of sharing the city’s experience in urban development and governance plans with foreign partners to support ongoing work more effectively (see Table 3 and Figure 7).<sup>6)</sup> Based on the organizational

6) Between 2021 and 2022, the Seoul metropolitan government reorganized its International Relations from a Planning and Administration Office to a Public Communications Bureau

system, Seoul has been actively implementing “policy-oriented public diplomacy” and achieving remarkable results. From 2006 to 2021, it received 57 international awards (77 times in total) for urban management and policy, including the UN Public Service Award (13), International Association of Public Transport International Award (8), Metropolis Awards (2), and Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize (1).<sup>7)</sup> It also held several international conferences to share the city’s experience in urban management policies with representatives of international organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and African Development Bank. On top of that, as of December 2021, Seoul successfully signed and launched 98 cooperative projects with foreign partners (38 countries) in the fields of public transportation (36), e-government (17), metro (22), water supply (5), urban planning (9), environment (5), disaster prevention (3), and housing (1) (See Lee&Park, 2018, pp.105-107).<sup>8)</sup>

Local governments in South Korea have also established, managed, and rebranded their foreign affairs teams to “institutionalize” their international exchange and cooperation and create sustainable models of city diplomacy. The Seoul-Beijing Joint Committee and the Conference on Cooperation with Chinese Local Governments are the most illustrative cases. Seoul and Beijing, commemorating the 20th anniversary of their sister city agreement in 2013, agreed to establish a sustainable model for bilateral cooperation. The Seoul-Beijing Joint Committee has been

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and again to an Economic Policy Office to strengthen its economic diplomacy function.

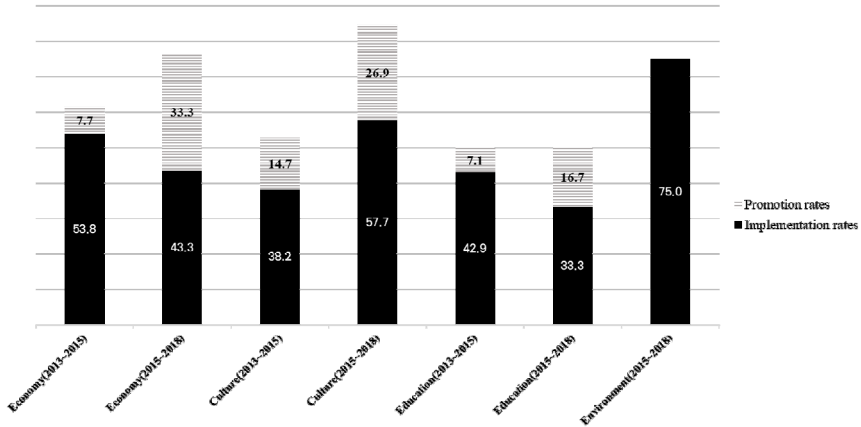
7) See Seoul metropolitan Government, <https://english.seoul.go.kr/policy/international-exchange/> (Accessed: Jan 1 2023).

8) For more details, see Seoul Urban Solution Agency, <http://www.susa.or.kr/en> (Accessed: Sep 20 2022).

conducting various projects in four areas, the economy, culture, education, and environment, with a view to 1) establishing a sustainable exchange platform, 2) planning and managing an agenda for the pursuit of absolute interests, and 3) building an expertise-based human resource network and system. Surviving various external threats, such as the escalation of the US-China rivalry and the North Korean nuclear problem, the Seoul-Beijing Joint Committee has contributed to the institutionalization of bilateral exchange and cooperation in the following ways. First, Seoul and Beijing have recognized the importance of “in-group identity” and expanded the Committee’s organization, holding biennial bilateral meetings and conferences.

Second, both sides have regulated “principles of conduct” by signing MOUs and collaborating under the Joint Committee’s norms, principles, and decision-making process. Their collaboration within the Joint Committee has resulted in a substantial increase in the implementation and promotion rates of their joint projects. Specifically, 77.3% of all projects both cities agreed on were promoted in the second period, which marked a significant 21.9% increase compared with the first period. In addition, around 50.0% of their planned projects were implemented in the second period, reflecting a 5.4% increase compared with the first period (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Promotion and Implementation Rates of Exchanges and Plans for Cooperation in the Seoul-Beijing Joint Committee



Source: Lee&Park (2020), p.62.

Last, the Joint Committee has helped both sides enhance “indivisibility and diffuse mutual reciprocity” by providing an institutional platform for joint projects. “Mutual” projects have accounted for more than 50.0% of all the bilateral exchange and cooperation projects, and their promotion rate increased from 59.4% in the first period to 78.0% in the second period, showing an upward trend. The rate of plan retention also increased from 62.1% in the second conference to 39.2% in the third conference, showing signs of a positive change (Lee&Park, 2020, pp.12-75).

Compared with the Seoul-Beijing Joint Committee, which institutionalized bilateral cooperation, the Conference on Cooperation with Chinese Local Governments represented the institutionalization of multilateral city diplomacy. Since the normalization of South

Korea-China relations after the THAAD dispute in 2018, Chungnam province has held annual conferences with its Chinese sister and friendship cities to develop multilateral relationships at the subnational level and discuss plans for further exchange and cooperation. These annual conferences have enabled the province to reinforce friendly ties with its Chinese partners and promote itself as the center of economic cooperation in the Pan-Yellow Sea region (Lee&Park, 2021, pp.68-69).

### **3. Enhancement of policy expertise and construction of multilevel governance through public-private cooperation**

As a means of addressing the multitude of international issues, local governments in South Korea have constructed multiple channels to cope with diverse agendas. As such, multilevel governance is considered vital in dividing roles among relevant actors and mediating interests among diverse stakeholders. Responding to the growing need for policy expertise and the diversification of actors for effective policy sharing, South Korean local governments are utilizing various ways to construct and enhance multilevel governance. First, local governments have set control towers within their administrations for the integrated management of city diplomacy projects. These control towers are aimed at managing and supervising local governments' international cooperation projects previously carried out by individual departments. In this sense, some local governments are promoting their foreign affairs teams to the rank of independent secretariats and granting them more rights to coordinate city diplomacy policies. Incheon, Daejeon, Sejong, and Jeonnam are prominent examples. In these cities, the director of the International Cooperation Division has been given the responsibility of supervising the

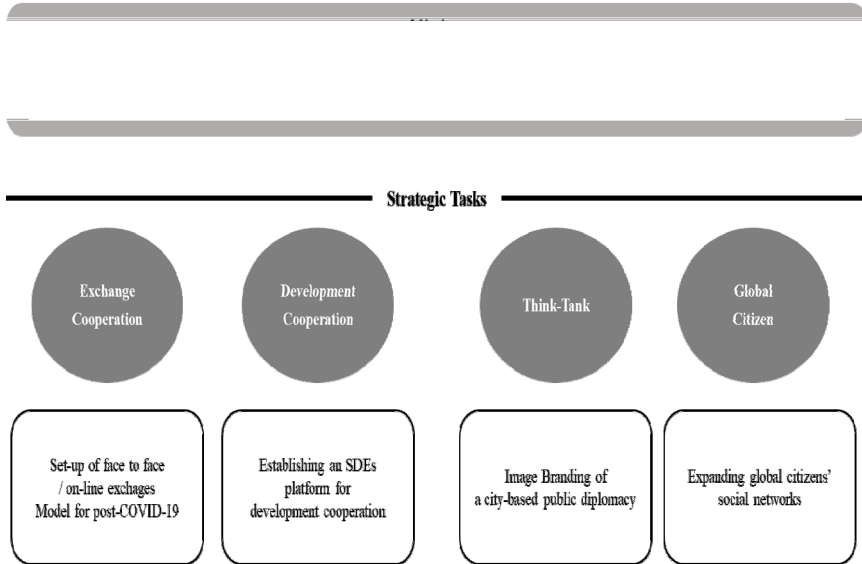
city's diplomatic activities and holding annual meetings among relevant departments to coordinate international cooperation projects and minimize potential "bureaucratic malaise."

Second, local governments have organized advisory groups and committees to enhance expertise in coping with two recent transformations of city diplomacy—the need to manage diversified agendas and the growing focus on multilateral problem-solving. Moreover, by incorporating civilian experts in their projects, transparency in the decision-making process has increased. As of December 2022, Gyeonggi province has established several committees with civilian experts, such as the Provincial Advisory Committee for Peace Policy, the Provincial Council of Foreign Investment Promotion, the Provincial Education Committee on Peaceful Reunification, and the Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation Committee.<sup>9)</sup>

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9) For more details, see Gyeonggi Province,  
<https://www.gg.go.kr/contents/contents.do?ciIdx=475&menuId=1841> (Accessed: Dec 20 2022).

Figure 9. Mission and Strategic Tasks of Busan Foundation for International Cooperation



Source: Busan Foundation for International Cooperation, [http://www.bfic.kr/new/english/contents/a2\\_1.asp](http://www.bfic.kr/new/english/contents/a2_1.asp) (Accessed: Jan 2 2023).

Third, local governments have established foundations and research centers specializing in international exchange and cooperation to ensure the effective and durable implementation of core projects. For example, the Seoul-affiliated City Diplomacy Research Center in the Seoul Institute was established to develop plans and strategies for the city's diplomacy and international cooperation projects in 2018.<sup>10)</sup> The Gyeonggi province launched the Gyeonggi International Peace Center to

10) In November 2022, the Seoul Institute abolished City Diplomacy Research Center to restructure the institute. See the Seoul Institute, <http://global.si.re.kr/content/organization> (Accessed: Dec 23 2022).

carry out the province's core projects, such as the official development assistance (ODA), international forestry cooperation, and public diplomacy for reunification.<sup>11)</sup> Through the Busan Foundation for International Cooperation, Busan has promoted international exchange among civilians, supported foreign residents in Busan, developed a citizen global mindset, pursued ODA, nurtured young global professionals, expedited new northern exchange and Busan gateway projects, and collaborated with sister/friendship cities (see Figure 9).<sup>12)</sup>

Finally, local governments are constructing and expanding their international networks by hosting international conferences and bestowing honorary citizenship. For example, Seoul hosted (36) or sponsored (5) 41 international conferences in 2019 either to promote academic discussion of the city's pending issues (approximately 44.0%) or to raise awareness of the city's ongoing urban policies (approximately 35.0%). It is also worth noting that Seoul co-hosted approximately 26.0% of all the conferences with international organizations. Other local governments have been hosting annual international forums to promote discussions of their policies and develop international networks. Jeju province's Jeju Forum (since 2001), Chungnam province's Pan-Yellow Sea Forum (since 2015), and Incheon's INCHINA Forum (since 2016) are other representative cases.

South Korean local governments have also bestowed honorary citizenship on foreign nationals, as another way of enhancing

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11) In 2022, Gyeonggi province decided to abolish the Gyeonggi International Peace Center. See Gyenggi Province, <https://www.gg.go.kr/org/orgChart.do?menuId=1808>. (Accessed: Dec 23 2022).

12) For more details, see Busan Foundation for International Cooperation, <http://www.bfic.kr/new/main/main.asp>.(Accessed: Dec 21 2022).

international networks, thereby contributing to their city diplomacy. For example, As of December 2021, of the 891 honorary citizens of Seoul, 177 are distinguished guests, such as foreign ambassadors to South Korea and foreign political leaders. Seoul continues to bestow honorary citizenship to encourage a strong attachment to the city.

### **III. Conclusion**

The international exchange and cooperative projects launched by local governments in South Korea are gradually evolving conventional public diplomacy and transforming it into a new form of city diplomacy. Today, subnational public diplomacy in South Korea is being designed and implemented in the form of city diplomacy with local governments as the main actors. As a result, public diplomacy as a form of city diplomacy is being carried out in conjunction with other forms of diplomacy specializing in peace, the economy, the environment, human rights, health, and culture (Lee, 2019, pp.38-45).

The new trends in city diplomacy in South Korea are inevitable consequences of changes in international relations and domestic politics. Worldwide, the rise of city diplomacy has stemmed from two aspects of globalization—the diversity of diplomatic actors and the horizontal extension of diplomatic agendas. In other words, it confirms Tarry’s (1999, pp.1-13) analysis that the concept of security has deepened and widened in recent years. Domestically, growing interest in city diplomacy in South Korea reflects the country’s rapid urbanization and

internationalization, which has encouraged local governments to consider international cooperation as an opportunity for policy sharing and problem-solving with foreign partners rather than a showcase of their international competitiveness.

In pursuing international exchange and cooperation, local governments in South Korea have striven to transform their foreign involvement into multilateral diplomacy for problem-solving, establish a sustainable cooperation model through institutionalization and enhance their policy expertise and construct multilevel governance in the form of public-private cooperation. While their concrete plans and strategies vary, depending on each local government's economic capacity and regional characteristics, they are following a global trend of city diplomacy.

However, this new approach to city diplomacy in South Korea also has limitations. First, local governments still favor sister and friendship cities, a legacy of Cold War-era diplomacy, as their primary platforms for international engagement. Although they have expanded their commitment to city networks in recent years, local governments are still hesitant to lead conferences or set agendas for discussion. Second, most local governments lack a task force or team that can plan and manage the overall process of city diplomacy. The lack of control towers, associated with the lack of a blueprint for city diplomacy, may undermine integrated and effective management of international exchange and cooperation, making the entire process more "bureaucratic." Last, local governments in South Korea tend to adhere to the conventional and narrow concept of diplomacy. In this sense, local governments still hesitate to recognize international exchange and cooperation projects as part of "diplomacy" when carried out by individuals and teams outside

their foreign affairs teams or divisions—those projects are considered “international business.” The misunderstanding of other types of city diplomacy results in inadvertent violations of international norms or diplomatic protocols.

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