



# Becoming Smart in Korea

In South Korea, Incheon is best known as the location of Incheon International Airport and Incheon Port. But what kind of a city is it really? If Seoul is already a destination of choice for international associations, as the latest ICCA and UIA statistics reveal, Incheon is also a serious contender. As I discovered on the occasion of a trip organised by the Korea Tourism Organization to Seoul, PyeongChang... and Incheon, the latter has a very promising future, which is currently in progress. Thanks to all the incentives coming from the Incheon Free Economic Zone (IFEZ), the Songdo International Business District, constructed on a new embankment on the Incheon waterfront, is a purpose-built ‘smart city’, designed for efficiency and convenience.

*Words Rémi Dève*

Nowadays, cities are getting smart pretty fast. In just the past few years, mayors and other officials in cities across the globe have begun to draw on the reams of data at their disposal – about income, burglaries, traffic, fires, illnesses, parking citations and more – to tackle many of the problems of urban life. Whether it’s making it easier for residents to commute, safer for inhabitants in their own home or giving smoke alarms to the households that are most likely to suffer fatal fires, big-data technologies are beginning to transform the way cities work.

A smart city is usually being driven by emerging technologies and trends such as automation, machine learning and the internet of things (IoT). The push to create smart cities is also being spurred on by environmental concerns such as using energy efficiently and social concerns such as citizen safety.

## ‘U-CITY’: A SMART AND INTELLIGENT CITY

Theoretically, any area of city management can be incorporated into a smart city

initiative, including such things as water usage, infrastructure design, emergency response or the optimisation of public transport by making supply meet user demand. Overall, the overarching aim of a smart city is to enhance the quality of living for its citizens through smart technology.

Initiated in 2013, IFEZ – for Incheon Free Economic Zone – consists of three large-scale developments – Songdo (an international business district, with a focus on research, education, bio-tech, and conferencing), Yeongjong (an aviation and logistics hub, with a focus on tourism), and Cheongna (finance, component manufacturing, robotics, shopping and tourism), much of it built on reclaimed land.

When you study urban literature a bit, Songdo is best known as a model smart city, or what they have termed ‘U-City’, an intelligent city that utilizes ubiquitous computing to manage urban infrastructures and city services. As such, it’s part of a huge economic development initiative aimed to driving domestic growth and establishing South

Korea as a North East Asian hub for particular industries and thus consolidating its position as a key player in the global economy.

## SELF-SUFFICIENT CREATURE

My visit to Songdo has really been an eye-opener. First because it’s an obvious testament of the Korean move towards sustainable growth. If 40 percent of the city is dedicated to outdoor spaces, it offers its inhabitants green space for leisure, something they might have difficult access to in other parts of the country. The district has indeed been heavily promoting its 16 miles of bicycle lanes, its central park, modeled on the Central Park in New York, and its waterways. Songdo is completely geared towards protecting the environment; even the water pipes are designed to prevent clean water, suitable for human consumption, from being used in showers and toilets, while all of the embankment’s water goes through a sophisticated recycling system.

Songdo has also been the first district in Korea to receive the Leadership in Energy



and Environmental Design (LEED) accreditation, meaning the entire development adheres to the strictest environmental standards for energy consumption and waste. Overall, it's a self-sufficient eco-system, a living creature of its own. Sensors monitoring and regulating everything from temperature to energy consumption and traffic are part of the city's infrastructure, while residents can interact on a one-to-one basis, thanks to smart grids and meters.

And because the district was built from scratch, urban planners were able to invest heavily in technologies that have yet to debut in conventional cities. Take Songdo's smart rubbish disposal system for instance. You will never see any rubbish trucks roaming the streets, as all household and office waste is sucked through a network of underground tubes to vast sorting facilities. The aim is to eventually convert all this sorted and treated waste into energy for the community!

Seen from this perspective, the focus on creating a smart city is an implementation strategy designed to attract investment capital, anchor tenants, and global workers, with a

side benefit of creating a potential exportable model of development. As such, Songdo has attracted 4 international universities on the Songdo Global University Campus (State University of New York Korea, George Mason University Korea, Ghent University Global Campus, and the University of Utah Asia Campus) and 14 international organizations, including branches of the United Nations. The plan for IFAZ is that by 2030 the number of foreign invested companies will have reached 150, the number of international organizations 150, the number of international universities 10, and the population will have grown to 536,000, of which 60,000 will be international residents.

#### NEW CITIES SUMMIT

It makes sense for Songdo to have co-hosted The New Cities Summit in June with The New Cities Foundation. This non-profit organization established in 2010 cultivates global networks among cities and various groups in order to make cities more inclusive, connected, healthy and vibrant. Under the theme, "Thriving Cities - The Building

Blocks of Urban Wellbeing," the event is the leading global conference on the future of cities, bringing together 800 CEOs, policymakers and entrepreneurs from over 50 countries. It was held at Songdo ConvensiA, the premier conference venue of the city.

Lee Young-geun, the commissioner of IFEZ, said: « *Built by filling the wetlands, IFEZ represents the frontier spirit that made a new city out of nothing. Thus, it was a perfect place to host The New Cities Summit, which presented innovative city models and offered insight into policies and technologies. This event will establish a platform for various businesses to cooperate and lead the smart city market. As society enters the era of the fourth industrial revolution, we expect that information and communication technology will become a core part of our lives. This makes IFEZ a very promising project for future economic development.* »

More information on Korea as a convention destination: [www.koreaconvention.org](http://www.koreaconvention.org)



TRIBOWL CENTRAL PARK, SONGDO

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## Support from Korea to Associations

The Korean economy is driven by the manufacturing and exports including ships, automobiles, mobile phones, PCs, TVs, and other electronics to countries all around the world. Korea has enjoyed rapid economic growth thanks in large part to its export-focused strategy. The nation boasts today the 15<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. Recently, Korean dramas and movies are also widely exported thanks to the popularity of Korean pop culture. K-pop stars are also active on the world stage.

At the Korea MICE Expo (KME), the nation's leading business events trade show, which took place at Songo ConvensiA mid-June, I had the opportunity to discover the Korea MICE Bureau's expanded support program for meetings in 2017. All the more reasons for associations whose vision and mission are aligned to Korea's industries and knowledge to consider the destination for their next conference.

The range of support programs on offer falls into a range of categories, the eligibility for which is determined by an event's size and duration. For events running at least three days and with either more than 100 overseas attendees or 50 attendees

in total if organized by an international body, items include a complimentary banquet for delegates, cultural programs and tours, performances, and high-quality Korean souvenirs. More information about the expanded support is available at the Korea MICE Bureau's website [www.koreaconvention.org/eng/proposal](http://www.koreaconvention.org/eng/proposal)

Worth noting is also that Seoul offers subvention to support international conferences that meet certain criteria. These events are divided into three categories: the meetings organized or sponsored by international organizations, associations and societies that last at least 3 days in Seoul, with at least 300 participants with 30 percent of the participants from countries other than the host country and at least 5 nationalities represented; the meetings *not* organized or sponsored by international organizations, associations and societies that last at least 2 days in Seoul, with at least 150 participants from countries other than the host country. Meetings of at least 50 participants from countries other than the host country may also apply for support consideration that is subject to review and approval. More information on [www.miceseoul.com](http://www.miceseoul.com).