

A City Reborn: The Transfiguration of Seoul into a Paragon Metropolis

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Abstract

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is a megacity with a population of 10 million people and an area of 605 square kilometers. It has a long history and cultural legacy, dating back over 600 years. Examining and understanding the urban morphology right from Joseon to the early 20th century. During the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, Seoul's identity and form were badly harmed. In 1970 the city swiftly recovered and thrived, focusing on relocating its key operations and people to the city's outskirts. This was due to the overcrowding in the city center. The city focused on its urban structures, which are made up of blocks, plots, and the street network, as well as its City Beautiful initiative. The 2030 Seoul blueprint is the highest legislative blueprint for urban expansion. Seoul recently created a 100-year urban planning framework. In order to promote resident involvement and solve specific community issues, neighborhood plans have been put into place. The city's urban planning initiatives aim to preserve its historic heritage while creating a sustainable and livable environment. The morphological development of Seoul is examined in this study from the Paleolithic era to the present urban proposal for urban improvement in the context of river rehabilitation, public transportation, and historical preservation.

Keywords: City, infrastructure, sustainable, technology, policies, solutions, strategies, development, urbanization, economy, city beautiful movement, street networks, blocks, neighborhood, sustainable environment

INTRODUCTION

Seoul is the capital city of South Korea. It is a megacity with a population of 10 million people and an area of 605 km². The Korean peninsula, Seoul has over 2000 years of history and culture. It has one of the world's most rapidly changing skylines. In just a few decades, the country has gone from being impoverished after the end of the Korean War to a sophisticated, rich economy.

The government's emphasis on upgrading the built environment has been a major driver of this transition. The government initiated the "City Beautiful Movement" in the 1970s to improve the quality of the built environment and make Seoul a more livable city.

One of the most essential parts of the campaign was the creation of a new street network. This was created to connect the city's blocks and neighborhoods and to create a more sustainable environment. The government's efforts were successful, and today Seoul is a thriving metropolis with a high quality of life. Seoul was a strategic area for residence, military and defenses, it is a systematically planned city built along

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THE HAN RIVER AND ITS GROWTH

The Han River and the four mountains are in all the corners. The Han River is one of South Korea's most important waterways. It runs through Seoul, the country's largest metropolis. The river is so vast that it gave shape to the city (Figure 1).

Seoul began as a tiny fishing town at the Han River's mouth. The settlement blossomed into a bustling city over time. The river provided a convenient means of transportation for products and people in the city. It also acted as a protective fortification against intruders.

The Han River is still an important element of Seoul today. The city has expanded to encompass both sides of the river. Along the Han River, millions of people live and work. It is a genuinely huge watercourse that has influenced Seoul.

Seoul is the capital of South Korea and one of the world's largest cities. It is also one of the most contemporary and cosmopolitan cities in the country, having a rich history that dates back to the Joseon Dynasty.

Seoul originated as a modest fishing town on the Han River's banks. It evolved into a lively city and Korea's economic and political center over time. Seoul's skyline has changed dramatically in recent years, with towering skyscrapers, world-class shopping districts, and cutting-edge architecture dominating the cityscape.

HISTORY OF SEOUL

Seoul, South Korea's capital city, has a rich and lively history dating back over 2,000 years. Here is a timeline of Seoul's history:

- *Early history:* The land around Seoul has been populated since prehistoric times. The region's first indication of human settlement dates back to the Neolithic period. During the Three Kingdoms period (1st century BC to 7th century AD), Seoul was a component of the Baekje Kingdom, one of ancient Korea's three major kingdoms.
- *Goryeo Dynasty:* Seoul became the capital of the Goryeo Dynasty in the 14th century. At the time, the city was known as Hanyang. Seoul grew as a political, economic, and cultural center under the Goryeo Dynasty. During this time, the construction of the Gyeongbokgung Palace, which later became the royal palace, began (Figure 2).
- *Joseon Dynasty:* It was established in 1392, and Seoul became the capital of the new dynasty. The town was called "Hanseong" and then "Hanyang." Seoul prospered as the center of political, economic, and cultural life under the Joseon Dynasty. The city grew, and notable landmarks, including Changdeokgung Palace and Jongmyo Shrine, were built.

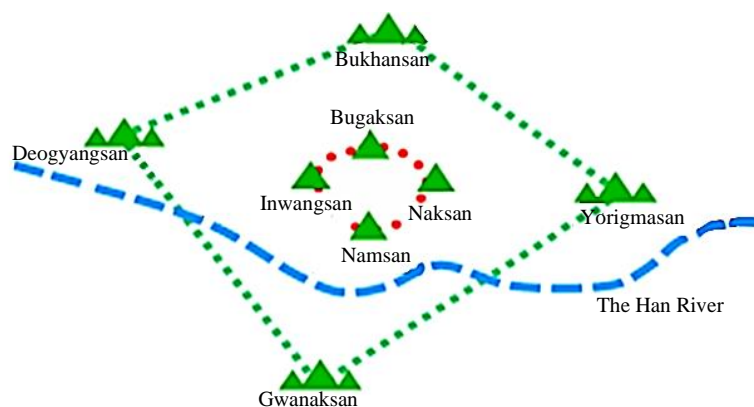
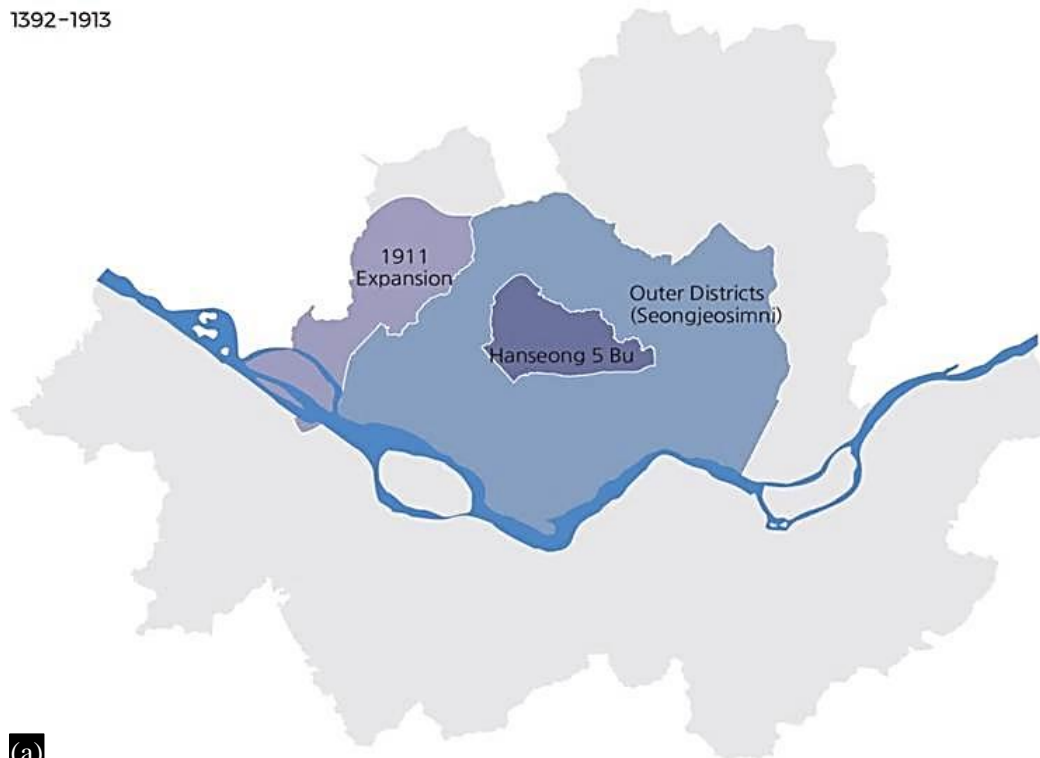


Figure 1. Han River and the four mountains.

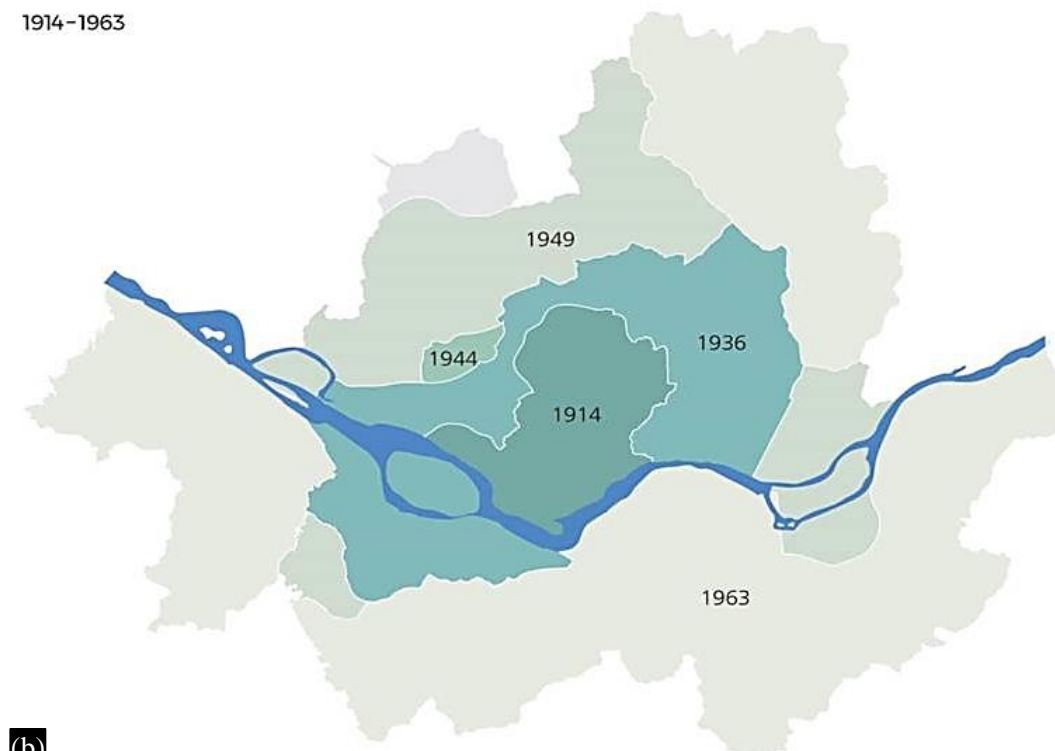
Source: [1]

1392-1913



(a)

1914-1963



(b)

Figure 2. Evolution of Seoul from 1393 to 1962.

Source: [2].

- *Japanese occupation:* Japan seized Korea in 1910, and Seoul came under Japanese control. During this time, the Japanese instituted programs aimed at the assimilation of Korean culture into Japanese culture. Many cultural assets in Korea were destroyed, and Japanese-style structures replaced traditional Korean architecture.

- *Korean War and the Modern Era:* After Japan’s defeat in World War II, Korea was freed in 1945. The Korean Peninsula, however, was divided into North and South Korea. The Korean War began in 1950, and Seoul suffered greatly as a result of the battle. Seoul began its journey of recovery and restoration after the war ended in 1953.

Seoul has witnessed significant economic expansion and urbanization since the end of the Korean War. It became South Korea’s capital and played a vital part in the country’s economic progress, earning it the moniker “Miracle on the Han River.” The city gained international fame after hosting the Summer Olympics in 1988 and the FIFA World Cup in 2002.

Seoul has thrived as a worldwide city in recent years, with a thriving economy, sophisticated infrastructure, and a dynamic cultural scene. It is well-known for its high-tech sectors, K-pop music, fashion, and delectable cuisine.

The architecture, historic sites, and cultural traditions of Seoul reflect its history. Visitors may see old palaces, temples, and traditional marketplaces while also making use of the city's modern conveniences and activities [3].

MORPHOLOGICAL GROWTH OF SEOUL

Seoul’s morphological growth refers to the city's physical expansion and development over time. Seoul's size, shape, and urban infrastructure have changed dramatically from its early days to the present day. Here’s a quick rundown of Seoul’s morphological development (Table 1):

- Seoul’s history may be traced back to the ancient period, but its formal founding as a capital city began in the 14th century during the Goryeo Dynasty. The city was quite small at the time, with the Gyeongbokgung Palace serving as the center of political power. The city was protected with walls and planned around the palace.
- Seoul had substantial expansion and development under the Joseon Dynasty, which spanned from the late 14th century until the late 19th century. The city grew beyond the palace walls, and numerous governmental, commercial, and residential districts sprang up. The arrangement of the city was hierarchical, with the royal palace at the center and government offices, markets, and residential sections organized concentrically around it. The Hanyangdoseong defensive walls encircled the city and covered a broader area than the preceding Goryeo fortifications (Table 2).

Table 1. Summary of the phases, timings, and significant events in Seoul’s morphological evolution.

Period	Timeline	Key Developments
Goryeo Dynasty	14th century	Seoul was established as the nation’s capital. Gyeongbokgung Palace was the center of governance. The city was laid out around the palace and surrounded by defenses.
Joseon Dynasty	Late 14th to Late 19th century	Significant growth and development. Expansion outside the walls of the palace. Districts for commerce, government, and housing were created.
Japanese Occupation	1910–1945	Growth morphologically interrupted. Traditional Korean neighborhoods have been replaced. Introduction of Western-style architecture with Japanese urban planning.
Korean War	1950–1953	Quick recovery and post-war growth. Rebuilding of areas devastated and construction of new urban areas.
Post-1960s	After 1960s	Creation of new districts as a result of population expansion. Modern transportation networks and infrastructure were created. Building skyscrapers and contemporary structures.
Present Day	Present	Seoul is expanding into a sizable city. Controlled urbanization is achieved by green spaces, transportation networks, and urban planning. Attempts to preserve and restore cultural treasures and historical sites. Continuous creation of new cities in response to shifting needs.

Table 2. Summary of the urban planning theories and methods that shaped Seoul’s development.

Urban theory/ approach	Description
Modernist planning	After the Korean War, had an impact on Seoul's development. Focused on building high-rise structures, land use separation, and functional zoning. Caused contemporary areas with gridiron street patterns to emerge, such as Gangnam.
Cultural heritage protection	Urban planning uses the preservation of cultural assets as a guiding principle. Historic sites and traditional Korean architecture are preserved and renovated. preservation of Hanok (traditional Korean homes), palaces, and temples.
Transit- oriented development	Designed to ease traffic jams and encourage the growth of sustainable cities. Focuses on creating mixed-use complexes in the vicinity of significant transit hubs. Encourages small, walk able communities that are close to amenities, green spaces, and public transportation.
Green and sustainable design	Gives consideration to sustainable and green design ideas. Expands green area, improves the quality of the air and water, and encourages energy-efficient building. Two such projects are the Seoulo 7017 pedestrian flyover and the Cheonggyecheon Stream restoration project.
Urban regeneration	Undertaken to promote balanced growth and rejuvenate older districts. Brings in investment, builds infrastructure, and enhances living conditions. Two notable instances are the revitalization of Seoul Station and the reconstruction of Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

- *Japanese occupation and post-war reconstruction:* During the Japanese occupation, which began in 1910, Seoul's morphological growth was halted. Japanese urban planning plans aimed at modernizing the city resulted in the destruction of numerous ancient buildings and the displacement of traditional Korean neighborhoods. Large boulevards were built, and Western-style architecture supplanted traditional Korean architecture.
- Seoul experienced tremendous damage during the Korean War (1950–1953), with numerous neighborhoods and infrastructure devastated. Following the war, the city went through a period of fast rehabilitation and expansion. To meet the expanding population and economic needs, efforts were made to restore damaged areas and create new urban developments.
- Seoul has seen remarkable urban growth and transformation since the 1960s (Figure 3). The city’s boundaries grew as additional districts were established and the population grew. Initiatives in urban planning centered on contemporary infrastructure, increasing transit networks, and accommodating residential, commercial, and industrial needs. Seoul became a global city in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and its skyline changed with the construction of skyscrapers, modern architecture, and prominent landmarks. Gangnam and Yeouido evolved as important business and financial centers.
- Seoul is becoming a vast metropolis encompassing a large territory. The city is divided into neighborhoods, districts, and satellite towns. Rapid urbanization has resulted in a combination of traditional Korean architecture, modern high-rise structures, and different urban environments.
- Seoul has used urban planning measures, transport networks, and green areas to control the city’s expansion. Efforts are made to protect and repair historical landmarks and cultural assets, while new urban areas are constantly developed to meet the city’s changing demands. Overall, Seoul’s morphological evolution reflects historical, social, and economic changes, highlighting the city’s transformation from a modest capital to a dynamic and global metropolis.

City Beautiful Movement

The *City Beautiful* movement was a planning and architectural concept that arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its goal was to produce aesthetically pleasant, well-designed cities with a concentration on grand boulevards, massive structures, and magnificent public areas. While the *City Beautiful* movement was most identified with Western cities, its principles and conceptions affected urban planning and development all across the world, especially in Seoul. However, it is vital to remember that other variables and ideologies have also influenced Seoul’s urban development.

1973



(a)

2005



(b)

Figure 3. Evolution of Seoul from 1973 to 2005.

Source: [2]

Neighborhood Theory

Some urban theories and planning approaches that have affected Seoul's growth are as follows:

1. *Modernist planning*: Following the Korean War, Seoul was confronted with the dilemma of growing urbanization and the necessity for restoration. During the mid-twentieth century, modernist planning ideas strongly influenced the city's development. This strategy emphasized

functional zoning, land use separation, and the construction of high-rise buildings. As a result, modern neighborhoods such as Gangnam emerged, with gridiron street patterns and high-rise buildings.

2. *Cultural heritage protection:* Seoul has made cultural heritage protection a guiding concept in urban planning. Traditional Korean architecture and historic sites, including palaces, temples, and Hanok (traditional Korean dwellings), have been preserved and renovated. The preservation of these cultural assets not only adds to the city's aesthetic appeal but also acts as a reminder of Seoul's rich history.
3. *Transit-oriented development:* To solve traffic congestion and promote sustainable urban expansion, Seoul has implemented transit-oriented development ideas in recent years. The city has substantially invested in a comprehensive tube system and has focused on developing mixed-use projects around important transit stations. This strategy promotes compact, walkable neighborhoods with easy access to public transportation, amenities, and green areas.
4. *Green and sustainable design:* Seoul has prioritized green and sustainable design principles. The city has taken steps to enhance air and water quality, increase green space, and promote energy-efficient construction. The Cheonggyecheon Stream restoration project, which converted an elevated highway into a revitalized urban park, and the Seoulo 7017 pedestrian flyover, which was converted into an elevated linear park, are two notable instances [4].
5. *Urban regeneration:* In order to revitalize older districts and encourage balanced development, Seoul has also conducted urban regeneration programs. These initiatives are intended to improve living conditions, develop infrastructure, and attract investment. The redevelopment of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and the rehabilitation of the Seoul Station area are two examples.

While the City Beautiful movement's influence is not as strong in Seoul as it is in other Western cities, components of its ideas, such as the development of beautiful public places and attention to aesthetics, may be seen in some regions. However, it is critical to recognize that Seoul's urban development has been shaped by a varied range of theories and techniques that reflect the city's own history, culture, and distinctive urban difficulties [5].

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND ACTION PLANS

Seoul Urban Planning Charter has 10 articles for providing timeless and consistent principles. The vision is to create a "Happy City of Citizens with Communication and Consideration." It has 17 Goals with 58 Implementation Strategies divided into 5 main categories namely:

1. Welfare, Education, Women
2. Industry, Job
3. History, Culture, Landscape
4. Environment, Energy, Safety
5. Space, Transit, Renewal

The Spatial Structure is also made into 5 parts conceptual plan largely divided by the 5 regions to foster new growth [6]. The Action Plan has 4 sectors ranging from (Figure 4) Strengthening Seoul's identity, to make a balanced development for the people by following initiatives.

The Historic City Centre is one of the projects that works on the mid-level plan for the Seoul 2030 Plan (Figure 5). The historic core has been the center of Korea, which serves as the main tourist attraction. In 2014 the historic city center master plan started, where 7 expert advisory meetings were conducted, A citizen forum was made, and workshops were held in each area. These 5 advisory meetings were conducted, which also included a citizen participation group forum, which in the end gave an output of relevant plans [7]. The vision of this project was "City Centre, where Citizen Lives and History Exists." The core issues were history, walkability, housing, safety, environment, and industry [8, 9].

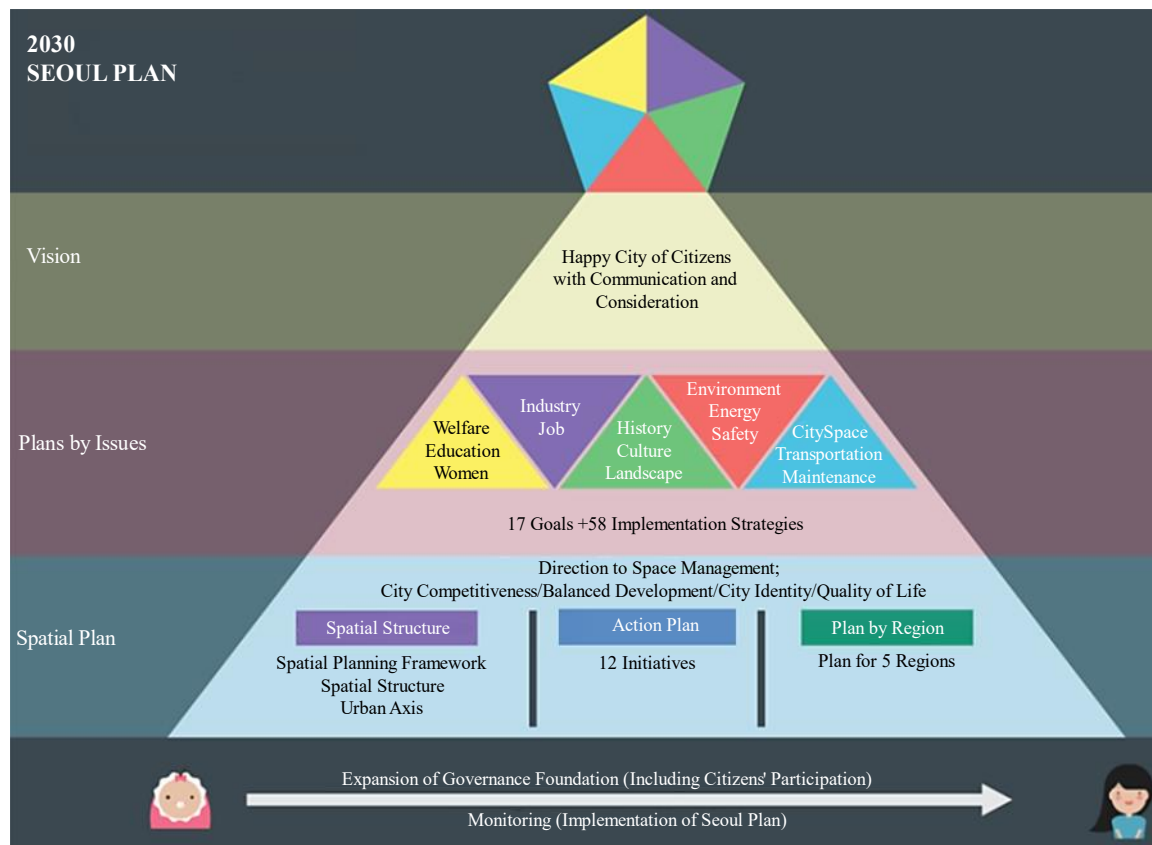


Figure 4. Seoul’s future vision Happy City of Citizens initiated by citizens themselves. Source: [1].

Welfare, education, women	Industry, job	History, culture, landscape	Environment, energy, safety	Space, transit, renewal
Together without discrimination people-centered city	Global city with a strong job market	Vibrant cultural and historic city	Lively and safe city	Community-oriented city with stable housing and easy transport
5 goals 22 strategies	3 goals 10 strategies	3 goals 11 strategies	3 goals 11 strategies	3 goals 9 strategies
City where citizens’ Rights are innately secured	Where job opportunities Are available to anyone, and economic entities and areas develop together	Where one can find Seoulness in our everyday Lives	Where everyone can be safe and feel safe in life.	Where there is little concern over commute, and where there is an active community

Figure 5. The plan, with 5 core issues directly connected to the citizen’s with 17 goals and 58 initiatives. Source: [8].

The spatial management (Figure 6) plan looked into 3 main aspects that are spatial management direction by looking at the framework respecting the history, promoting regeneration for each area, and sustainable network.

The 2nd aspect is the Spatial Management Plan. This looks into managing the area character, height control, and managing the historical resources. The 3rd aspect is a guideline for areas that looks upon 7 areas and 18 sub-districts. From a planning point of view (Figure 7), they have 5 main goals, 40 initiatives that are planned to make a difference in the environment and people with sustainability incorporated [1].

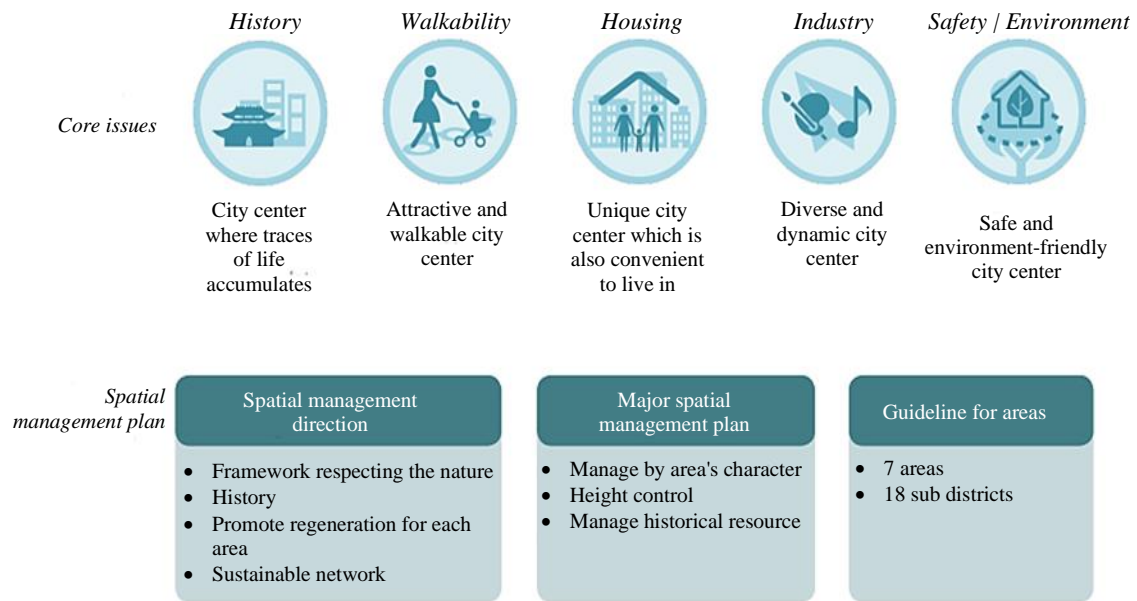


Figure 6. The master plan with five core issue-based plans and a spatial management plan.
 Source: [10].


History	Walkability	Housing	Industry	Safety environment
City center where traces of life accumulates	Attractive and walkable city center	Unique city center which is also convenient to live in	Diverse and dynamic city center	Safe and environment-friendly city center
Identify old roads and areas. Utilize historical assets for local area regeneration.	Pedestrian-oriented roads, 3 dimensional pedestrian roads.	Special management of residences at mountain sides, supporting villages near the Seoul City Wall	Create 3 major areas for specialized urban industries.	Reinforce disaster-preventive infrastructure in vulnerable areas
				

Figure 7. Plan with 5 goals, 15 strategies and 40 initiatives were planned to raise its effectiveness.
 Source: [11].

HAN RIVER FRONT MASTER PLAN: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HAN RIVER

The first master plan for the Han River, based on the “2030 Seoul Plan,” will serve as the highest plan and guideline for any Han Riverfront area developments. Just as Korea’s economic prosperity has been dubbed (Figure 8) “The Miracle of the Han River,” the Han River has served as a symbol of modernization and as Seoul’s largest and most valued urban open space. However, because of metropolitan express lanes on both sides and privately owned apartments, it is isolated and difficult to access.

They devised four areas and (Figure 9) 12 principles to make the Han River more citizen-centric even after a century. In addition, we divided the entire river into seven sections and twenty-seven sub-areas, offering specific rules if further developments arise [12].

MANAGEMENT FUNDAMENTALS FOR THE HAN RIVER REVIVAL

Taking a deeper look at the four sector aims:

1. The first is to restore the river’s ecosystem, improve water quality, and enable environmentally friendly uses (Figure 10).
2. Second, the riverside will be activated with various water-related leisure activities, as well as the restoration of historical cultural artifacts.

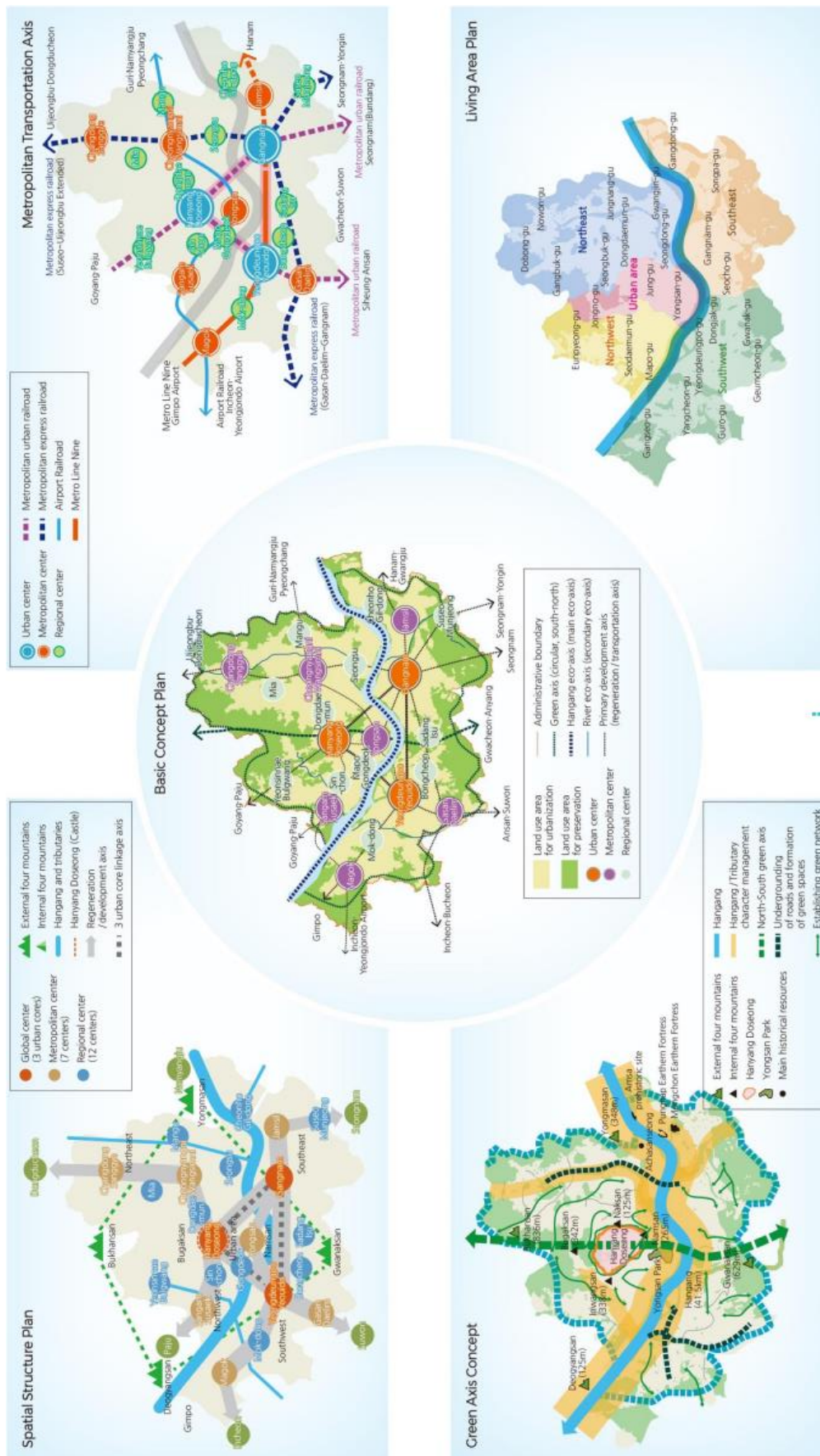


Figure 8. First master plan for the Han River, based on the "2030 Seoul Plan.

Source: (Park, 2010) [10].

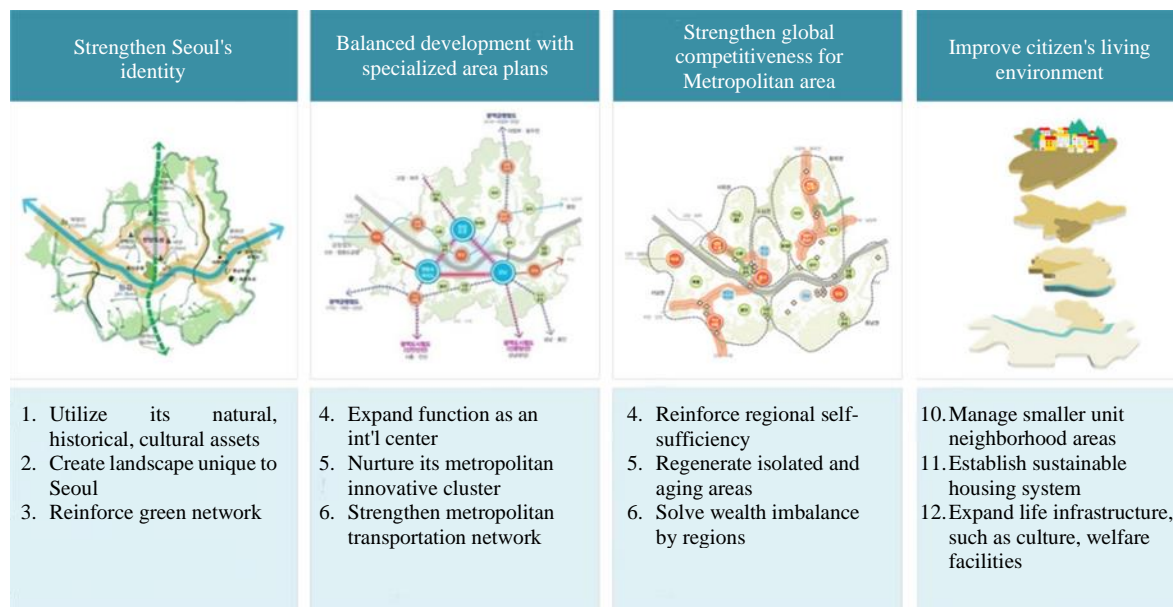


Figure 9. 12 Initiatives to enhance Seoul's identity in four sectors.
 Source: [1].



Figure 10. Han River's first master plan.
 Source: (Lee, 2017) [7].

3. Third, improve accessibility through green transit, pedestrian access, and improved green connectivity.
4. Fourth, increase possibilities to enjoy the river's landscape, create a dynamic and diverse skyline, and inspire magnificent architecture [11].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Seoul's transformation over the years has been shaped by various factors, including conflict, participatory dialogues, and sustainability initiatives. Seoul was completely destroyed in the wake of the Korean War, which led to tremendous efforts to reconstruct and renovate the city's infrastructure. The city thereafter went through a phase of intense urbanization to meet the demands of its expanding population and economy.

Public involvement and participatory discussions have become more crucial in determining Seoul's development in the past few years. In order to ensure that the evolution of the city is inclusive and

reflective of the needs and ambitions of its residents, the Seoul Metropolitan Government has aggressively sought out citizen participation in urban planning, infrastructure projects, and community development. A prime example of this collaborative method is the Cheonggyecheon Stream restoration project, whose design and execution were shaped by protracted public interaction and deliberation.

Furthermore, Seoul has made sustainability a top priority, putting in place a number of initiatives and rules to solve environmental issues and raise the standard of living for its people. The city has made several efforts to build a eco-friendlier and more livable urban environment, ranging from decreasing air pollution and boosting the use of renewable energy to improving waste management systems. Seoul's rebuilding and revitalization, as well as its emergence as a global leader in sustainable urban development, are the results of these efforts. Seoul has become a city that respects the environment for coming generations and puts citizens' involvement and well-being first by incorporating participatory governance and sustainability concepts into its urban fabric.

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