City Networks as Tools of City Diplomacy – the Case of Seoul

Tomasz Kamiński and Natalia Matiaszczyk

Abstract: Confronting global challenges and wanting to make profits out of globalization, cities are becoming more active in global politics. They conduct city diplomacy, establishing bilateral connections with "sister cities" or through transnational city networks. In this context, the behavior of so-called global cities is fascinating because they have enough resources to be very influential on the world stage. The capital city of South Korea is one of these global cities. Seoul positions itself as a global player that is actively involved in many regions around the world. The Seoul Metropolitan Government aims to enhance its status in the international community as a global city by engaging in city networks, hosting its headquarters, and trying to influence other members of organizations. The phenomenon of using a city network as an instrument in the city public diplomacy toolbox has never been described within literature.

This paper's main aim is to conceptualize the instrumental use of a city network by a global city to promote its interests. We will analyze the case of Seoul, a member of 25 different city networks. Two of them, CityNet and World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO), have headquarters in the South Korean capital city and are used as tools in Seoul's public diplomacy. Based on interviews with city officials and networks officers, we will try to reconstruct the model of dependencies between the city and the networks it hosts. It will lead to answering the question of how the global city can use the network as a tool of its diplomacy. This paper will contribute to the academic discussion on city diplomacy instruments and help understand the internal policy-making process inside city networks that determine their actions in international relations.

Keywords: Seoul, city networks, CityNet, WeGO, city diplomacy
JEL: F50, F59, R11, R50, Q01

1. Introduction

City diplomacy is a term used to describe the diplomatic initiatives and efforts undertaken by cities, either individually or in collaboration with other cities, to enhance their international relations and reputation (see e.g., Acuto, 2013; Curtis and Acuto, 2018; Grandi, 2020; Leffel, 2021). Cities participate in international organizations and forums, host international events and conferences, establish sister-city partnerships, promote cultural exchange programs, and engage in different forms of collaboration with other cities worldwide.

Cities conduct city diplomacy to foster cooperation with other cities, support the city's economic growth and competitiveness and improve a city's image and reputation on the global stage. Many cities participate in transnational cities networks (TCNs), cooperating with other cities, sharing knowledge, and even trying to influence global governance in areas such as global climate policy (Kamiński, 2023). By participating in international networks, cities can showcase their achievements and innovations, share their experiences and best practices with other cities, and build their global reputation. In other words, they can conduct public diplomacy, defined as "the act of communication that expands an organization with international or global political interests, to further the understanding of external audiences about the values and principles which inspire and influence the direction of its objectives" (La Porte, 2013, p. 86).

In this chapter, we wish to explore the link between city diplomacy and public diplomacy, showing how cities may instrumentally use TCNs to promote their interests. This phenomenon has been understudied in the literature. We will analyze the case of Seoul, which is one of the global (Sassen, 1995) or "superstars" cities (Koelemaij, Taveirne and Derudder, 2023). It is a member of 25 different city networks, and two of them, CityNet and World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO), have their headquarters in Seoul. Based on desk research and two interviews[1] with networks officers, we will reconstruct the model of dependencies between the city and the networks it hosts. We conducted talks with representatives of the networks to obtain direct information about the city networks' activities, the role which the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) plays in them, and the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration between the TCNs and the Seoul authorities.

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1 The first was conducted online, in the form of semi-structured interview. The second had structured, written form. Both took place in January 2023.

This chapter will lead to answering the question of how the global city can use networks as tools of its public diplomacy. This paper will contribute to the academic discussion about city diplomacy instruments and help understand the internal policy-making process inside city networks that determine their actions in international relations. The chapter is organized as follows. In the first part, we will explain the link between city diplomacy, public diplomacy and TCNs. In the second part, we will present Seoul city diplomacy and the role of city networks within it. In the next section, we will show case studies of the CityNet and WeGO as networks used by Seoul to enhance its reputation by collaborating and sharing resources with other cities worldwide.

2. City Diplomacy as a Way to Build the International Reputation of Cities

City diplomacy refers to the diplomatic relations and activities between cities rather than states. It is part of the much larger phenomenon of paradiplomacy (Tavares, 2016; Cornago, 2018; Pietrasiak et al., 2018), understood as international relations conducted by subnational governments independently to promote their interests. City diplomacy has its roots in medieval times when cities were often autonomous entities with their governance structures, economies, and cultural identities. During this period, cities frequently engaged in diplomatic exchanges and treaties with other cities and states to promote trade, secure alliances, and resolve conflicts. These early forms of city diplomacy laid the foundation for the development of modern city diplomacy and the recognition of cities as essential actors in international relations. This impact is reflected in the current discussion about "neo-medievalism" (Spalińska, 2022), showing city diplomacy as one of the manifestations of this "simultaneous processes of fragmentation and integration associated with globalization" (Duran, 2019). The development of modern city diplomacy can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries when cities started to expand beyond their national borders through trade and cultural exchanges. With globalization, interdependence, and urbanization in the late 20th century, city diplomacy gained more prominence as cities saw the need to address global challenges such as climate change, migration or organized crime (Grandi, 2020). This has led to the creation of international networks of cities, which allow cities to exchange ideas, experiences and best practices, and collaborate on global issues (Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Lee and Jung, 2018). There are currently a few hundred networks, but it is difficult to determine the exact number of TCNs worldwide as new networks are continually being formed, and some may no longer be active. Nevertheless, there are many well-established international

networks of cities, such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) or C40. In addition to these more extensive networks, numerous regional and thematic networks bring together cities from specific regions or with a common interest (Kamiński, 2023). Based on a hierarchical analysis of 256 cities in 118 countries, Lee (2012) suggested that the degree of cities' globalization is positively associated with the cities' membership in the global networks. In other words, so-called "global cities" are particularly set to participate in the networks. These cities are characterized by their economic importance and centrality, political influence, cultural diversity and international appeal and are centers of connectivity, advanced infrastructure and technological innovation (Sassen, 1995; How megacities are changing the map of the world, 2016; Bertelli, 2021). Seoul is considered a global city or "superstar city" (Koelemaij, Taveirne and Derudder, 2023) because it meets all key characteristics of these terms. It is a significant economic hub for East Asia, with a strong presence in the technology, finance, and tourism industries. Moreover, Seoul is the capital of South Korea and a key player in regional and international diplomacy, with a rich cultural heritage and serving as the region's transportation hub. Moreover, it is known for its modern and technologically advanced infrastructure (see e.g., Shin and Timberlake, 2020). The city is also an actor in Korean public diplomacy, which uses various cultural, educational, and informational activities to communicate with foreign audiences and gain support for a nation's policies, values, and culture. Although this term is ambiguous in Korean academic discourse (Ayhan, 2020), the current official definition stresses the importance of cooperation with local governments: "diplomatic activities through which the State promotes foreign nationals' understanding of and enhance confidence in the Republic of Korea directly or in cooperation with local governments or the private sector based on culture, knowledge, policies, etc." ('Public Diplomacy Act', 2016).

The role of cities as public diplomacy actors has not yet been fully conceptualized in academic literature. However, it is of little controversy to argue that cities which have a great potential to contribute to a country's public diplomacy goals also advance their specific interests (Amiri and Grandi, 2021, p. 156). Cities can engage in public diplomacy in various ways to promote themselves and foster relationships with the foreign public. Firstly, they can organize big sports or cultural events to promote the city brand and attract public attention. Secondly, they can develop sister city relationships, including cultural, educational, and commercial exchanges that foster people-to-people exchanges. Thirdly, cities can conduct digital diplomacy. Using digital tools, such as social media campaigns, they can

engage with other cities and promote globally. Finally, they can participate in international events, forums, and networks, such as TCNs, to exchange ideas and best practices with other cities and promote their city on the global stage.

All these methods enumerated above aim at improving the city's image and reputation in the eyes of the foreign public. In the rest of the chapter, we will focus on TCNs used by cities to conduct public diplomacy. Analyzing the case of Seoul and two networks that the SMG hosts, we will show how the global city can use networks to enhance its reputation by collaborating and sharing resources with other cities worldwide.

3. Seoul City Diplomacy and the Role of City Networks

In the 1960s, Seoul initiated its first activities in the field of city diplomacy—the South Korean capital established a sister relationship with Taipei. Nonetheless, until the beginning of the 1990s and the democratization process in the Republic of Korea (ROK), Seoul's international activity was severely limited. The reason was the internal situation within South Korea. The authoritarian government imposed a centralized system, strengthened the presidency, and limited the autonomy of local governments (Cho, 2015, pp. 210–211). In this situation, sisterhood ties and international exchanges in Seoul could only be realized to the extent permitted by the state. The collapse of the Cold War regime also opened up new opportunities for city diplomacy. South Korean cities began to expand exchanges with cities in countries that were considered earlier as hostiles (Kim, 2020, p. 6). Seoul began establishing new relationships with cities around the world. SMG also joined several transnational city networks; prior to democratization, it was only a member of one of them, Metropolis (SMG, 2023).

Seoul's city diplomacy evolution after South Korea's democratization can be divided into three stages. The first, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, can be described as a period of building the foundation for city diplomacy. At that time, the emphasis was on establishing new international relations through sister-city agreements, and business exchanges with overseas cities were promoted. During the second stage, from the mid-2000s to the late 2000s, SMG focused on strengthening urban competitiveness and capabilities to improve the investment environment of foreign companies, as well as making efforts overseas to promote the image of Seoul (Ko, 2017, pp. 33–34).

Since the early 2010s, the intensive development and promotion of Seoul's city diplomacy have begun. New units subordinated to the SMG were established. In 2012, the City Diplomacy Research Center (CDRC) was created at the Seoul Institute[2]. In addition, the SMG established Global Urban Partnership Division in 2014 to export its policy solutions to cities in other countries (Yi and Song, 2019). In the third stage, Seoul has been striving to create and influence transnational city networks and international organizations as a global city and has been actively promoting policy exchange projects for the joint development of global cities (Ko, 2017, p. 34).

Moreover, at the same time, the potential of city diplomacy was recognized at the national level in South Korea. In December 2013, South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the SMG signed a cooperation memorandum to promote city and public diplomacy. The aim was to strengthen cooperation and assistance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) covenanted to support city authorities in promoting Seoul's policies and best practices, and SMG, in turn, in attracting foreign investments to South Korea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 2013). As the capital city, Seoul is officially recognized as a Special Metropolitan City, giving it considerable scope for autonomous politics and organization. At the same time, under South Korean law, Seoul "shall be under the direct control of the government" (Local Autonomy Act, 2021). The law, therefore, necessitates close collaboration between the government and SMG. It is different from many other global cities that are also national capitals.

Sharing knowledge and experience has been one of Seoul's priorities for many years. For over a dozen years, SMG has been running a special program—Seoul Policy Sharing Initiative, related to sharing knowledge, experience and innovations, ranging from urban planning, environmental protection, to developing e-government. Since 2006, Seoul has implemented almost 100 projects in 65 cities in 38 countries—in sister cities, friendship cities, and cities which are members of city networks where Seoul plays a leading role. Most have been conducted under the Seoul Policy Sharing Initiative (Seoul Solution, 2020). SMG does not do it selflessly. South Korean companies are involved in projects in overseas cities, which means benefits through public-private partnerships (PPP). Successful invest-

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2 The Seoul Institute (SI), formerly known as Seoul Development Institute, is an urban institution established by SMG to conduct research for the city's administration on a variety of policy issues and support the policy-making processes.

ments strengthen Seoul's position and provide, among others, an opportunity to strengthen relations and future joint projects.

Importantly, Seoul is authentic in its policy-sharing strategy and can be considered a role model for cities in developing countries. It is a direct result of the history of the capital of South Korea itself. After the Korean War (1950–1953), Seoul was a dilapidated and underdeveloped city. Then, the decades of intensive development began, establishing Seoul in the 21st century as a developed, globalized city that introduces smart and sustainable solutions. Nevertheless, Seoul faced many urban problems and challenges during its development, such as environmental pollution, traffic congestion, the formation of illegal settlement areas, and housing shortages due to the extensive population inflow (Seoul Solution, 2015). By promoting its history and experiences, Seoul becomes a reliable partner, especially for cities from developing countries.

In 2021, the Seoul authorities adopted a new city development and activities strategy. "Seoul Vision 2030" presents ambitious plans in many different areas, including city diplomacy and Seoul's position in the world. The position of a global city has been recognized as insufficient. Seoul is set to be among the top five cities in the Global Cities Index (GCI), a comprehensive ranking of the leading global cities published annually by Kearney). The strategy recognized that goal as one of the most important priorities (SMG, 2021, p. 6). In 2021, Seoul was ranked 17th in GCI, which means that SMG's goal is to advance by at least 12 positions in 9 years. One year later, Seoul took a step closer to achieving this goal—in 2022, it was ranked 13th (Kearney, 2022).

Interestingly, when the GCI ranking was first published in 2012, Seoul was ranked eighth. However, in the following years, it fell in the ranking. There are some reasons because the GCI is based on a specific methodology. The ranking is created by calculating values within five components: business activity, human capital, information exchange, cultural experience, and political engagement. Seoul scores excellently on most components, although it struggles in "human capital" due to its small foreign-born population and the low number of international schools (Kearney, 2014, p. 6). The South Korean capital also performs poorly in the "political engagement" component, which is based, among others, on the number of embassies, headquarters and branches of international organizations and local institutions with a global reach.

The strategy's specific objectives include turning South Korea's capital into an Asian economic hub (SMG, 2021, pp. 13–14). To implement this plan, active participation in city networks is essential. The Seoul "ambassador of international relations", Paik Ji-ah, emphasized this essence, pointing to the role of CityNet and WeGO (Bahk, 2021). Not only involvement, but also being the host of TCNs and international organizations will bring Seoul closer to being among the top 5 cities in Global Cities Index by strengthening its capabilities in the "political engagement" component. Seoul must compete with other cities for its global position, including attracting investment and international market share, in order to become one of the world's most important cities. The greater the city's integration into global networks, the more opportunities and benefits it gains. Thus, the global city strengthens its position in this competition through integration and cooperation.

Seoul is a global city, which requires establishing bilateral partnerships or sister relationships with other cities and engaging in international initiatives associating local governments and other entities worldwide. Through city networks, SMG can share its innovative policies, strengthen global networks, and export urban solutions to other cities (Yi and Song, 2019). It is a more effective way than sharing policy and practices in bilateral relations. It also requires less financial and time outlays (e.g., organizing a summit with the participation of representatives of the city network members instead of organizing several dozen separate bilateral meetings). Moreover, as Acuto and Leffel (2021, p. 1762) point out, city networks are not just connections but actual producers of a wide variety of policy outputs and knowledge mobilization mechanisms. Furthermore, for global cities (such as Seoul), being active in or sometimes even leading city networks is an opportunity to strengthen their position in the world and benefit from it.

As of January 2023, Seoul was a member of 25 transnational city networks or international organizations. These were networks and organizations of various types, ranging from health care, culture and tourism, environmental and climate protection, to urban policies. The table below shows the list of institutions to which Seoul belongs and the South Korean capital city's role in them.

Table 1. Seoul in city networks and organizations

City network or organization	Year of the establishment	Year of Seoul's membership	The role of Seoul
Alliance for Healthy Cities (AFHC)	2003	2004	Member
Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)	1987	2017	Member
C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group	2005	2006	Member
CityNet	1987	1989	President, Secretariat
Council for Promotion of Tourism in Asia (CPTA)	2000	2006	Member
Crisis Management Center (CMC)	2002	2003	Member
Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GcoM)	2014	2014	Member
Global Resilient City Network (GRCN)	2013	2016	Member
Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF)	2014	2014	Member
Global Urban Air Pollution Observatory (GUAPO)	2017	2018	Director
ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability	1990	1999	Executive Committee Member
International Association of Public Transport (UITP)	1885	2005	Member
International Council of Museums (ICOM)	1946	2019	Member
International Ombudsman Institute (IOI)	1978	2020	Member
Lighting Urban Community International (LUCI)	2002	2007	Vice President
Metropolis	1985	1987	Regional Vice-president
Open Government Partnership (OGP)	2011	2016	Member
Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)	1951	1970	Member
UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)	2004	2010	Member
Union of International Associations (UIA)	1907	2012	Member
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)	1913[3]	1998	Executive Committee Member
World Cities Culture Forum (WCCF)	2012	2013	Member
World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO)	2010	2010	Founder, President, Secretariat
World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF)	2012	2012	Vice Chairman
World Union of Olympic Cities (WUOC)	2002	2019	Member

Source: own research based on the information from the SMG website; compiled by the authors.

Moreover, Seoul seeks to strengthen its diplomacy and status in the international community as a global city by hosting local offices of city networks and various international organizations. There are 22 of them in total. The first was Metropolis Women International Network Seoul Office, which opened in 2009. Seoul hosts the regional offices of UN agencies—UNHCR, UNICEF, FAO, and the WHO Asia-Pacific Center for Environment and Health (ACE). The South Korean

3 UCLG's origins go back to 1913, when the UIV (Union Internationale des Villes) was established.

capital city is also home to the local offices of several city networks, including, as previously mentioned, Metropolis (SMG, 2023). The most important, however, is hosting the secretariats of two city networks: CityNet and WeGO. In both networks, Seoul has a presidential status. Additionally, both organizations are headquartered in the same building—Seoul Global Center.

CityNet was founded in 1987 at the Nagoya Congress (N'LAP) in Japan with the support of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN-HABITAT, Nagoya city, and the first 27 member cities. In 1992, the network established its secretariat in Yokohama (Japan) (Niederhafner, 2013, p. 388). In 2013, the secretariat of the network was moved to Seoul. As of January 2023, CityNet has over 150 members—municipalities, NGOs, private companies, and research centers. The network aims to "connect actors, exchange knowledge and build commitment to establish more sustainable and resilient cities" (CityNet, 2023).

The history of WeGo started in July 2008, when the Seoul Metropolitan Government held the World e-Government Market Forum with mayors and representatives of 35 cities. At that time, the first steps were taken to establish a new network of cities. A year later, during the World Cities CIO Forum, representatives of 42 cities agreed to hold the inaugural meeting in 2010 in Seoul and open a headquarters in the South Korean capital city (SMG, 2022)[4]. WeGO was founded by 50 cities in 2010 as the World e-Governments Organization. At first, the network focused on cooperation between cities to promote e-government exchanges. However, as the smart city concept continued to evolve, during the 4th General Assembly in 2017, WeGO expanded its mandate and changed its name to the World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO, 2023a). The network began to attract new members—not only cities but also private entities. In 2017, it already had 116 member cities from 53 countries. In 2020, there were 161 such cities. Within a dozen or so years, the number of members of WeGO has more than tripled. It proves a particular success of Seoul—it built and has been gradually expanding a network of cities, to which newer and newer cities from all over the world are joining.

4 An independent WeGO secretariat in Seoul was opened in 2014. Previously it was under the SMG.

4. The Instrumentalization of CityNet and WeGO by Seoul

Participating in TCNs can be a powerful tool for advancing a global city's diplomacy efforts (Acuto and Leffel, 2021). By sharing expertise and knowledge, cities can raise their profiles and visibility on the world stage, showcasing their achievements and innovations to a global audience. They can build relationships and partnerships with other cities and international organizations. Working together through city networks, global cities can advocate for shared interests more efficiently.

This effect is evident when a city directly influences the network. We will show it in the case of Seoul, focusing on four mechanisms of instrumental use of TCNs by a network leader: a) controlling and directing city networks; b) establishing new relationships through networks; c) creating new spaces that serve as a platform for self-promotion; d) using the city networks to implement its own development assistance.

Controlling and directing city networks

There is a "special relationship" between Seoul and CityNet because SMG sets some policy directions along with CityNet's Executive Committee, and Seoul has been supporting the network financially (CityNet Secretariat Official, personal communication, January 25, 2023). Financial support issues are internal to the CityNet Secretariat and Seoul, and the total sum allocated by SMG to CityNet is unknown. However, the interviewed officer said that SMG is "subsidizing most of our operations cost" (CityNet Secretariat Official, personal communication, January 25, 2023). The authorities of the capital of South Korea also delegate employees to the CityNet Secretariat, which means that they support the network in terms of human resources. Seoul sends two secondment staff yearly (CityNet Operation Officer, personal communication, January 26, 2023). It might be perceived as a way to maintain constant influence on CityNet and control its activities.

As President, the SMG manages the overall financial activities of the WeGO Secretariat. The network's budget is financed partly by membership fees, ranging from US$400 to US$10,000, depending on the city's population and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. SMG also supports the budget. Annually, Seoul spends about 1,000,000,000 Korean won (US$817,000), although, in 2018, it was 1,123,000,000 Korean won (US$917,000) (Lee and Song, 2018, p. 58). Interestingly, the Seoul Institute explicitly states that WeGO is collaborating with

the Seoul Human Resources Development Institute to engage and support officials in the network's member cities who will have a favorable opinion of Seoul and thus can become "ambassadors" for the South Korean capital. It may lay the groundwork for the overseas expansion of the Seoul e-government model (Lee and Song, 2018, p. 59).

Establishing new relationships through networks

Since the CityNet Secretariat moved to Seoul, SMG has been participating in the overall activities of CityNet, strengthening its influence in the Asia-Pacific region and spreading Seoul's policies. According to the Seoul Institute, SMG has been actively leading knowledge-sharing activities and expanding bilateral cooperation and support projects with other cities within the CityNet network (Lee and Song, 2018, p. 50). One of Seoul's first activities after becoming CityNet's President was establishing new cooperation with cities in Asia that are network members. Sidoarjo in Indonesia and Colombo in Sri Lanka were the first full network members targeted by Seoul (Lee and Song, 2018, p. 52). Successful cooperation within CityNet resulted in Seoul and Colombo signing a friendship agreement in 2016.

In 2017, a pilot cooperation project between cities in the European Union (EU) and South Korea was launched as part of the World Cities Project (the initiative of the European Parliament). CityNet started the implementation of the project in South Korea. Four South Korean cities—Seoul, Suwon, Busan, and Gwangju were paired with four European cities—Eindhoven (Netherlands), the Scottish Cities Alliance (United Kingdom), Tampere (Finland) and Barcelona (Spain) respectively (CityNet, 2017). Prior to the start of the project, Seoul did not have any permanent partnership with Eindhoven. It was not the only case when CityNet initiated cooperation with Seoul. Thanks to the involvement of CityNet, recently Seoul Metropolitan Government participated in IURC, the EU-funded city-to-city partnership program, and worked with Dublin (Ireland) (CityNet Operation Officer, personal communication, January 26, 2023). As in Eindhoven's case, Seoul has no partnership agreement signed with Dublin. It shows that thanks to the city network, it can establish new cooperation with new cities.

Through WeGO, SMG has launched an innovative city pilot project promotion in a few cities-members of the network. Among these are the installation of smart streetlamps in Seberang Perai (Malaysia) and the installation of an intelligent waste management system in La Marsa (Tunisia) (Lee Ch., Moon, Lee M. and Song, 2019, p. 35). Between 2017 and 2019, WeGO conducted annual

e-government training for World Bank employees, during which Seoul's policies in this area were presented. A year later, through WeGO, SMG and the World Bank signed a memorandum of understanding and a convention for establishing e-government in developing countries and promoting digital gap mitigation projects (SMG, 2022). The network was first used to establish permanent contacts with an international institution, promote Seoul, and then through this, Seoul set up a partnership with the World Bank.

Creating new spaces that serve as a platform for self-promotion

An official from the CityNet Secretariat emphasized that the network "provides multiple opportunities for member cities to participate in international events and promote their policies to other cities" (CityNet Operation Officer, personal communication, January 26, 2023). When the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, Seoul, using CityNet, began efforts to create a new initiative. It was supposed to focus on sustainable urban development. In 2017, Seoul's authorities, jointly with CityNet and the UNESCAP, established the Urban SDG Knowledge Platform to promote and support knowledge sharing and city-to-city cooperation for sustainable urban development. The main goals of the platform are to provide a repository of policies, initiatives, and good practices at the city level by municipal governments and other stakeholders, as well as facilitate North-South, but also South-South, cooperation by linking cities that have developed specific solutions in terms of SDGs (Urban SDG Knowledge Platform, 2023a).

As of the beginning of 2023, 418 policies, projects, and best practices in sustainable development have been published on the Urban SDG Knowledge Platform website. The vast majority (80 percent) come from East and Southeast Asia regions. Notably, 153 of them come from Seoul alone, which means that over one-third of all initiatives come from the capital city of South Korea (Urban SDG Knowledge Platform, 2023b). It shows that a platform is primarily a place where SMG can easily and quickly promote its own experience and solutions which could lead to substantial inter-city exchanges and cooperation from which Seoul draws profits.

For several years, WeGO has extended its scope of activities to cooperation with regional city networks. In 2019, WeGO undertook a series of activities to support ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) cities through matchmaking with partners, consultants, and solution providers, through a workshop for knowledge

sharing, as well as organizing a conference of mayors with signing ceremonies for partnerships. It is another area where Seoul can play a role and promote its policies. However, Seoul's ambitions extend even further. WeGO's goal is to set up regional networks that would be subject to the Secretariat in Seoul. In 2020, WeGO embarked on a new initiative to establish a network of smart cities in Northeast Asia, including capitals and other major cities across China, Korea, Mongolia, and Russia. In the following year, WeGO initiated Africa Smart City Network (AFSCN) and Latin America Smart Cities Network (LASCN) (WeGO, 2022, pp. 10-11). There are also plans to create the China-Japan-South Korea (CJK) Network (WeGO, 2023c). New regional city networks would undoubtedly play an important role in pursuing SMG's strategy of becoming one of the most important global cities and would assist Seoul in doing so.

There are also situations where CityNet and WeGO are used by Seoul and simultaneously cooperate with SMG. In order to promote and share Seoul's urban policies, the Seoul Human Resources Development Center (SHRDC) of SMG has been conducting international training programs. SHRDC conducts workshops within CityNet and WeGO for members of both networks. Representatives of the secretariats of both networks are also involved in running the courses. Programs include lectures and policy presentations on global urban development and specific topics: smart cities, sustainable mobility, and climate change. From 2008 to 2021, the center trained at least 112 people from CityNet member cities, and since 2010 at least 155 people from WeGO member cities (Seoul Solution, 2023a).
All the examples mentioned above show that Seoul wants to create, develop, and maintain an image of a smart, modern, and green city in its city diplomacy. Urban imaginaries (Dunn, 2018) have been formulated throughout history, but their importance is increasing as globalization and urbanization intensify. City networks are helpful places to promote them (Kamiński, 2023). As the case of Seoul shows, they are places to present and share cities' knowledge, experiences and solutions that help build their image abroad.

Using the city networks to implement own development assistance

Seoul Metropolitan Government provides development assistance to cities in developing countries focusing on six areas: education, information and communication technology (ICT), transport infrastructure, administrative system, healthcare and medical treatment, and environment. The city authorities act in that area within and with the support of city networks. As part of development assistance, Seoul in 2012 allocated 50,000,000 Korean won (approximately US$40,000) for

feasibility studies of the three WeGO member cities. In Ulaanbataar (Mongolia)—the construction of an underground spatial data infrastructure (SDI). In Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)—construction of an interdepartmental document control system. And in San Antonio de Areco/Buenos Aires (Argentina)—construction of a smart card-operated public service hub (Seoul Solution, 2023). It is also known that Seoul carried out project feasibility evaluations, in the field of e-government, in five other cities that are members of WeGO: Kathmandu (Nepal), Maputo (Mozambique), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Hanoi (Vietnam), San Fernando (Philippines) (Lee Ch. et al., 2019, p. 34). However, the financial value of these projects is unknown.

In 2015, SMG conducted an eight-day training for officials from Seoul's partner cities from CityNet and WeGO. Eleven sessions of six courses were conducted, including e-government, urban transportation, and urban planning. The Seoul authorities allocated more than 476,000,000 Korean won (nearly US$390,000) for this project. The main purpose of that training was to lay the groundwork for sharing the excellent policies of the SMG with other cities and strengthening the human resources network. It should be emphasized that the training sessions were conducted in cooperation with CityNet, WeGO, and UCLG-ASPAC. The training was attended by 253 officials from 54 cities in 23 countries (Seoul Solution, 2023b). It was another example of using city networks in Seoul's diplomacy.

5. Conclusions

This chapter shows that city networks may serve as a valuable tool for global cities in advancing their diplomacy efforts. By leading these networks, global cities can build their reputation and visibility on the global stage. In other words—they can conduct public diplomacy.

Cities can instrumentally use city networks in a variety of ways. By hosting the city network secretariats, city authorities can substantially influence the direction of TCN's activities. Through city networks, they can establish new relationships with foreign cities. TCNs can also be used as platforms for promoting city policies and solutions. Finally, city networks can serve as vehicles for the city's development aid.

This phenomenon of using networks as public diplomacy tools is very well visible in Seoul. The Korean capital is consequently raising its image by actively

participating in numerous networks and leading two. Hosting the CityNet and WeGO, Seoul creates an image of an innovative, modern, green city. The model it wants to export shares best practices and promotes its vision of an urban future. Rising Seoul's profile ultimately attracts tourists and foreign investors, enhances people-to-people contacts and creates new development opportunities for the city.

We touched on a phenomenon that has not been well-described in the literature. Thus, this paper will contribute to the academic discussion about city diplomacy instruments and help understand the internal policy-making process inside city networks that determine their actions in international relations. However, the four networks' instrumentalization methods listed and described in the chapter might not make a complete list. Therefore, this chapter may serve as a basis for further research, as the topic of using TCNs by cities in their city diplomacy is undoubtedly essential, as demonstrated by the case of Seoul analyzed in this paper.

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