

Cities Drive the World – Tokyo’s Vision and Actions for the Future

Yoichi Masuzoe, Governor of Tokyo

Park Won-soon, Mayor of Seoul

After decades of disputes between the neighbor nations of Korea and Japan, Seoul Mayor Park Won-Soon and Tokyo Governor Yoichi Masuzoe were eager to put their friendship on display at the 2015 World Knowledge Forum’s event entitled Cities Drive the World – Tokyo’s Vision for the Future.

Governor Masuzoe opened the event by lamenting the lack of a historical relationship between Tokyo and Seoul. “It has been 18 years since a governor of Tokyo visited this great city,” he said. “That is too long.”

While the two acknowledged that both cities are competitive both on a global scale and with one another, they agreed that it was more important for them to work together through what they called “city diplomacy.”

“If we are dreaming the same dream, we are suffering the same pain,” said Mayor Park. “Seoul & Tokyo can pull together their wisdom and strength to resolve urban issues.”

“We can join together to tackle problems and we can be an example to the rest of the world,” agreed Governor Masuzoe.

He also took time to share what he believes makes cities great, and how Tokyo was planning to transform itself.

“The best cities,” he said, “are the ones where you can get around by foot, car, or public transportation with ease, safety, and the cleanest air possible.”

He touted Tokyo’s “pedestrian paradises,” which have many food vendors and shops along wide walking areas with no automotive traffic, as well as the city’s plan to set up 264 km of bike trails by 2020 for its bike sharing program. He was also particularly proud of his plan to make Tokyo the world’s first congestion-less city, sharing that the development of three ring roads around Tokyo had reduced his commute from the airport to his office by more than half.

Mayor Park agreed that public transportation and walkability were two key factors to making a great city, mentioning that Seoul plans to expand its extensive subway system with nine more lines.

He also took great pride in modernizing Seoul while still maintaining its cultural heritage.

“Many people ask me, what is the landmark of Seoul?” he said. “All the time I have given the same answer: we don’t need a landmark, because Seoul has numerous landmarks that are represented by its rich history, beautiful nature, and wonderful citizens.”

He also requested the support of Governor Masuzoe in registering the Seoul City Wall as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017, and requested that they walk the wall together so that, as a traditional saying goes, both their dreams would come true.

Both city representatives discussed recent updates to their tourism brands as well. Tokyo recently began to market its “& Tokyo” brand, and Seoul will announce its new brand on October 28.

In a moment that perhaps best represented the spirit of the event, Governor Masuzoe pinned an “& Tokyo” lapel pin onto Mayor Park’s jacket, joyfully exclaiming, “We are friends!”

But Mayor Park went on to say that they are more than simply friends. After joking that it was hard to tell which of the men was older, Mr. Park told the audience, “I will respect the Governor as my older brother.”

As the two city leaders pursue the same dreams for their cities, they reemphasized their eagerness to support one another, especially in international conferences, such as one coming soon in Paris.

“I want to stand next to the governor of Tokyo in Paris,” said Mayor Park, “to continue to push forward our visions together.”