



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
Educating Cities

INTERVIEW ANDONG MAYOR

Mr. Gi-chang Kwon

First of all, we would like to know your thoughts and feelings about the 16th International Congress of Educating Cities having taken place in your city.

We experienced Andong City's capacity as a global tourist city after successfully hosting the 16th IAEC Congress, as the first international meeting since opening the Andong International Convention Centre this year. Above all, I was glad to introduce Andong's educational projects and sites, like the Dosan Seowon Cultural Training Centre, the Korean Studies Institute, the Andong Lifelong Learning Centre, and the Banolim Happy Learning Centre, along with the tourism and cultural assets of the city to the participants from the Educating cities from around the world at the Congress.

The Congress's title was "Shaping the future of Education: Innovation, Tradition and Inclusion" Why are these topics important for Andong?

The number-one concern for the local governments in Korea is the death of local towns because of population decrease. Andong City also faces issues due to continuous down-turn in population. Therefore, this Congress's theme is vital to the city to overcome this crisis through civil education. By "Shaping the future of education: innovation, tradition, and inclusion," we are trying to find solutions to stop the population decrease by establishing the city's identity through traditional and cultural education, allowing more citizens to benefit from education services through inclusive education initiatives, and creating jobs with innovative and future-oriented education policies.



How would you describe the city of Andong? Which are the City's strengths and weaknesses? And how do you plan to overcome the weaknesses.

I would describe Andong as a city with a great deal of cultural and patrimonial heritage. For instance, last 30th of November, Andong's Hahoe Mask Dance was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Rabat, Morocco. As a result, Andong now holds three major categories of UNESCO World Heritage, the World Cultural Heritage (Hahoe village, Bongjeong temple, Dosan Seowon, Byeongsan Seowon), the Memory of the World (Confucian Printing Woodblocks), and the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Hahoe Mask Dance). Moreover, Andong City has a number of examples of cultural heritage and, like an open air museum, the city attracts tourists from around the world through festivals and forums based on the city's cultural assets.

As I mentioned before, Andong City's weakness is its decreasing population, something that all Korean cities are experiencing. Therefore, Andong City is trying to make itself "a city where people want to travel to and live in" by pushing forward branding projects like "Tourism Hub City" based on its rich cultural heritage, and "Global Lifelong Learning City", following on from successfully hosting the 16th IAEC Congress for the population growth

When you talk about the "New Andong", what do you mean exactly? Which are the main projects, initiatives and policies that represent the "New Andong"?

I decided to use the city policy slogan, "Great Citizens, New Andong," in an attempt to turn around city issues, such as ageing and decreasing population, the downtown decline, and the lack of jobs for young people, and turn them into opportunities for a new future for Andong. Some new projects and initiatives are represented by the slogan. For example, the city aims to promote biotechnology and cannabis industries and attract vaccine companies to create jobs. We also plan to construct a new downtown bus terminal to revitalize the area. Furthermore, to implement policies innovatively and effectively, the city has reorganized City Hall human resources and is trying to consolidate the two administrative districts of Andong and Yecheon into a single city.

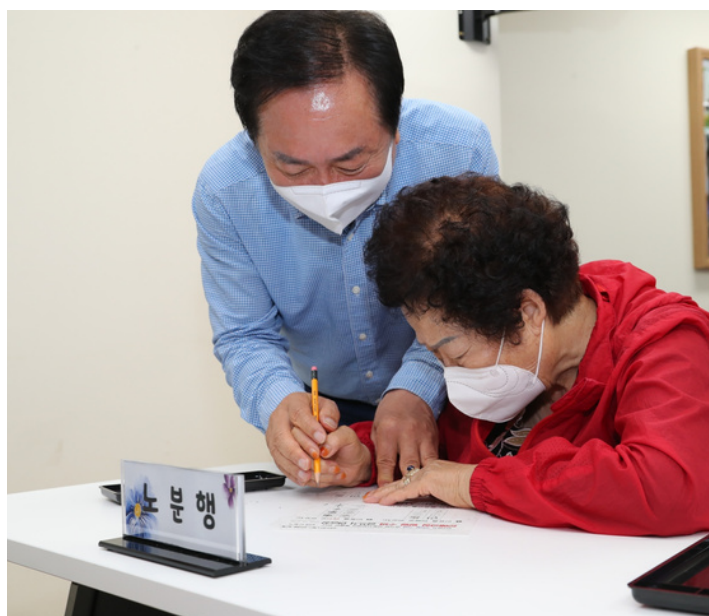




Andong is strongly committed to life-long learning, and to extend this as a right for all citizens. Can you share with us some of the outcomes of this investment and some of your initiatives for inclusive learning?

Lifelong education that can benefit all citizens is essential to build a sustainable city where individuals and society can grow together. Andong City has been investing in lifelong education for over two decades, and its outcomes have borne fruit in various fields. Above all, considering that the lifelong education participation rate of Andong citizens has dramatically increased in a decade from 11% in 2011 to 58% in 2021, public awareness of lifelong education has spread because of investment.

A specific example is the Korean Language Delivery Class, which offers literacy education to the elderly, from 60 to 80 year olds, residing in rural areas of Andong City since 2014. It is not easy for them to access educational services in downtown institutions because of mobility issues for the elderly as well as a poor public transportation network in rural areas. Therefore, the city sends literacy teachers to their villages and also offer them primary education. As a result of this initiative, the illiteracy rate in rural areas decreased from 8.1% in 2014 to 4.8% in 2019, and the incidence rate of dementia has also been meaningfully reduced. It proves that lifelong education policy is a means to improve the quality of life of all citizens.





Korea is a highly competitive and business oriented country, with a strong focus on entrepreneurship and production efficiency, these qualities have helped raise the country's standard of living, however, they may also foster individualism. If this is the case, what are Andong's efforts to counteract this trend?

Rapid economic development has seen the growth of individualism in Korea, and the social distancing policy of the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated it. To eliminate the prevalence of individualism, Andong City supports and nurtures projects led by local communities and private organizations to foster communication among citizens and raise a sense of community.

For instance, 'Street Class' and 'Citizen Lecturer 9 Grade', which are lifelong learning programs for local communities, make citizens become lecturers to provide lectures to their neighbours, strengthening social connections.

In addition, Andong City holds various seasonal and cultural festivals, like the Cherry Blossom Festival in spring, the International Andong Mask Dance Festival in autumn, and the Amsan Ice Festival in winter, providing chances to bring citizens close and spend time together.



What are you doing to promote the City's identity?

To improve the visibility of the cultural initiatives, Andong City registered a brand slogan, 'The Capital of Korean Spirit, Andong,' at the Korean Intellectual Property Office in 2006. Its aim is to promote Confucian culture, like patriotism, cooperation, and respect, based on the Confucian heritage that the city upholds. As a result, many leaders of countries worldwide, including Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, visited Andong, and as a result visits by international tourists have increased. Also, as a city which holds the three major categories of UNESCO World Heritage, Andong City applies the concepts of heritage to urban design, buildings, and festivals, showing visitors that Andong is 'the city of UNESCO World Heritage.'

Meanwhile, Andong City holds the 21st Century Human Values Forum every year to provide opportunities for debate and to find solutions based on humanistic values to redress social issues like meritocracy, polarization, inequality, and loss of humanity.



Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to share with us?

We will endeavour to support customized lifelong learning programs for all citizens and ages by arranging systematic education plans to fulfil the commitment of the Andong Declaration of the IAEC 16th International Congress. We also promise to create a lifelong learning and welfare city where no one is alienated, discriminated against and where everyone can enjoy always open access to education. These endeavours are only possible with exchange and cooperation between Educating Cities.

I look forward to Educating Cities' continuous support and cooperation for a better world through education.

