Letter of Recommendation

The sweeping rage of market fundamentalism, which has ruled the lives of citizens worldwide, has greatly subsided, and a era of new transition has dawned. Yet, there is a deem prospect of ushering in a democratic and ecological society with a viable economy where people can eat and live with dignity and ordinary people are better off side by side with one another.

We often hear about the “new normal,” but today’s vicious cycle of low growth, inequality, and insecure life is never a normal situation.

Social economy in Korea started as a government-led initiative to address various problems stemming from long-term economic recession, low growth, and financial crises in the 2000’s.

The Korean government enacted the Social Enterprise Promotion Act in 2007, under which it has led and promoted changes in social economy such, as certifying companies with the organizational structure as designated by law as social enterprises. The policy trend has a lot to do with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which should be implemented by each country.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government, in particular, has served as a critical rudder that steers the policy trend for social economy and creates many pioneering policy cases such as forming social investment funds, nurturing social enterprises, supplying and supporting social housing, and building integrated support infrastructure for social economy in metropolitan areas and autonomous districts. Backed by such supportive infrastructure, social and economic organizations are actively engaging in activities in numerous areas such as housing and care services. Citizen-led activities, similar to those observed in Europe, have been gradually increasing in cooperation with the Seoul Metropolitan Government.

The number of social enterprises in Seoul has increased four-fold over the last five years, standing at over 4,000 as of November 2018, and with combined sales of 2 trillion won and over 3 million service beneficiaries.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government (including autonomous districts and organizations funded by city government) is obliged to purchase from social enterprises as part of public procurement. Its purchases from social enterprises amounted to 115.7 billion won in 2017 alone; the city government is also promoting collaborative projects and transactions between social enterprises.

As such, in this megacity with its population of over 10 million, social economy has been taking firm root and becoming a success model that supplies needed goods and services.

Among the policies for social economy implemented by the Seoul City Government, the most impressive to me was the Social Economy Academy project, under which social economy textbooks were developed for elementary, middle, and high school students in cooperation with the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education in an effort to give opportunities for youth, future leaders of social economy, to learn about social economy. In addition, the project has supporting the moves of opening social economy courses in colleges. As a result, Ewha Women’s University, Hanyang University, SungKongHoe University are currently offering classes related to social economy.

There are cooperative associations, social economy academies and education sessions regularly open for youth, thereby producing future talents in social economy. So I believe that Seoul has a bright future with social economy.

In this regard, I express my gratitude to the officials and staff of the Seoul Metropolitan Government and social economy organizations in the city, and I hereby strongly recommend the Seoul Metropolitan Government’s endeavor for the UN Public Administration Awards.

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