

# Successful Green Transformation Story in Suncheon City, Republic of Korea

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Suncheon Bay is widely recognized as a model of how environmental protection can spur economic growth. The ecological and economic potential of Suncheon Bay was discovered and maximized through the collective efforts of various actors, in particular, the city's government and civil society organizations. Civil society's concerns regarding environmental conservation

Figure 1 - Landscape of Suncheon Bay



Source: <http://www.suncheonbay.go.kr/?c=1/10/16/178>

were addressed with the city government's plans for business development, resulting in a viable foundation for ecotourism. The strategy applied in Suncheon Bay accommodates environmental, social, and economic considerations. Its incredible biodiversity and pristine landscape is protected and enhanced while simultaneously offering various social and economic benefits to the community including flood control, increased ground water quality and quantity, and prevention of marine disaster.

Suncheon Bay is one of the world's largest and most diverse coastal ecosystems in the world. It is located in the Southern coastal area and its significance as an ecological capital is attested by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat's designation of it as a Wetland of International Importance in 2006. Suncheon Bay's environment consists of wetlands, sandbars, phragmites communis, birds, and benthos. Suncheon Bay features unique and abundant flora and fauna. It has 22.4km<sup>2</sup> of tidal flats, 5.6km<sup>2</sup> of reed beds, 220 migratory birds, 120 salt plants, and 25 internationally rare birds. It features fish spawning grounds and habitats for shellfish, water birds and wild animals.

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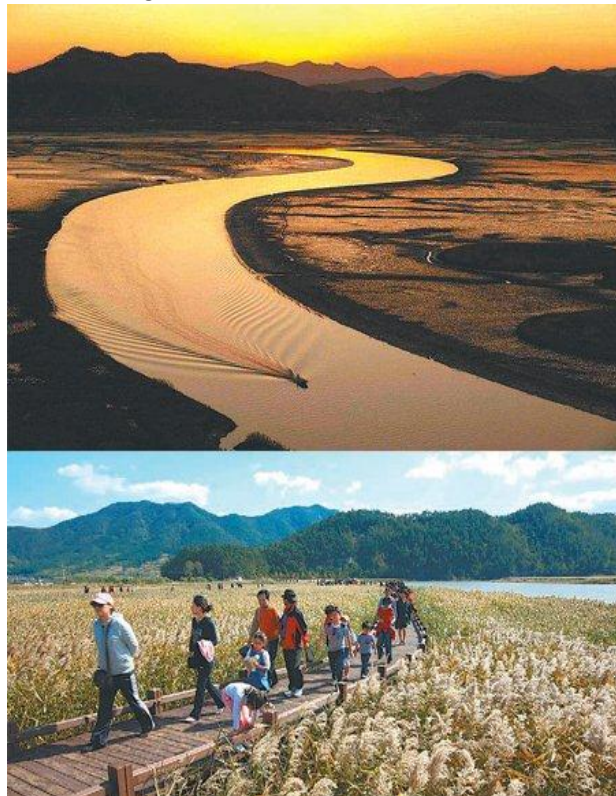
Suncheon Bay's conservation movement was first initiated in 1996 by civil society organizations that resisted the city government's conventional brown growth policy based on resource driven and pollution intensive development. Suncheon city's initial plans to reconstruct the river stream and extract natural resources for economic development spurred opposition from civil society, providing organizations such as Green Suncheon 21 an impetus to gain momentum to build its capacity and expand its network. In their efforts to protect Suncheon Bay, the civil society group emphasized not only its diverse ecosystem but also the social and economic benefits it offers. The city's governmental departments along with a diverse range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, institutionalized 'the Suncheon Bay Committee on Culture and Ecology' to make collective decisions on Suncheon Bay's future. The civil society and the Suncheon city government ultimately agreed on the necessity of preserving and investing in Suncheon Bay's unique ecological assets.

Ecotourism in Suncheon Bay was thus an initiative of the Suncheon city government, inspired by the expectation that business opportunities can be created through investments in natural capital and sustainable use of resources. This was the key concept for Suncheon Bay's success. The city's government anticipated that conserving the undeveloped tidal ecosystem would spur eco-tourism, which would in turn produce green jobs and environmental benefits. The city's government in cooperation with the local community worked to conserve and restore the city's tidal ecosystem in the late 1990s, making Suncheon a popular destination for eco-tourism. Their efforts created economic benefits while simultaneously

protecting the environment. The Suncheon Bay Eco Park was established in 2004 and recognized as a key tourist attraction in 2006. The number of tourists visiting Suncheon Bay Eco Park increased from approximately 1.5 million in 2005 to 2.5 million in 2013. As of 2010, Suncheon Bay conservation created 6,400 jobs and helped stimulate the regional economy up to USD 100 million per year while successfully preserving over USD 42.9 million worth of its ecological values.

Indeed, the Suncheon Bay case study highlights the importance of strong leadership and well-designed environmental policies and implementation. The Suncheon city government devised comprehensive land use plans to meet the needs of the community while protecting natural

Figure 2 - Sunset View and Ecotourism



Source: <http://news.donga.com/3/all/20130928/57882883/1>

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resources. The plan divided the ecological corridors into specific zones with the aim to prevent urban sprawl to areas that are protected for ecological recovery. Furthermore, the city government has endeavored to promote and maintain Suncheon Bay's brand name through various public relations campaigns. For example, it released mid and long-term plans, titled 'Hope of Suncheon 2020', to continue its commitment to ecological sustainability. It hosted the International Garden Exposition in 2013 in order to curb urban sprawl to the ecological preservation area, while simultaneously publicizing its brand and promoting eco-tourism.

The Suncheon Bay case successfully achieved both environmental protection with economic growth. It illustrates how ecological conservation and restoration can create business opportunities. The civil society organizations contributed to raising public awareness of the need to pursue green growth over brown growth, while the city government assumed a strong leadership role to implement policies and measures. Suncheon Bay is an exemplary story of green transformation through stakeholder cooperation and strengthening the synergies between environmental protection and growth.

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