

Disasters Avoided

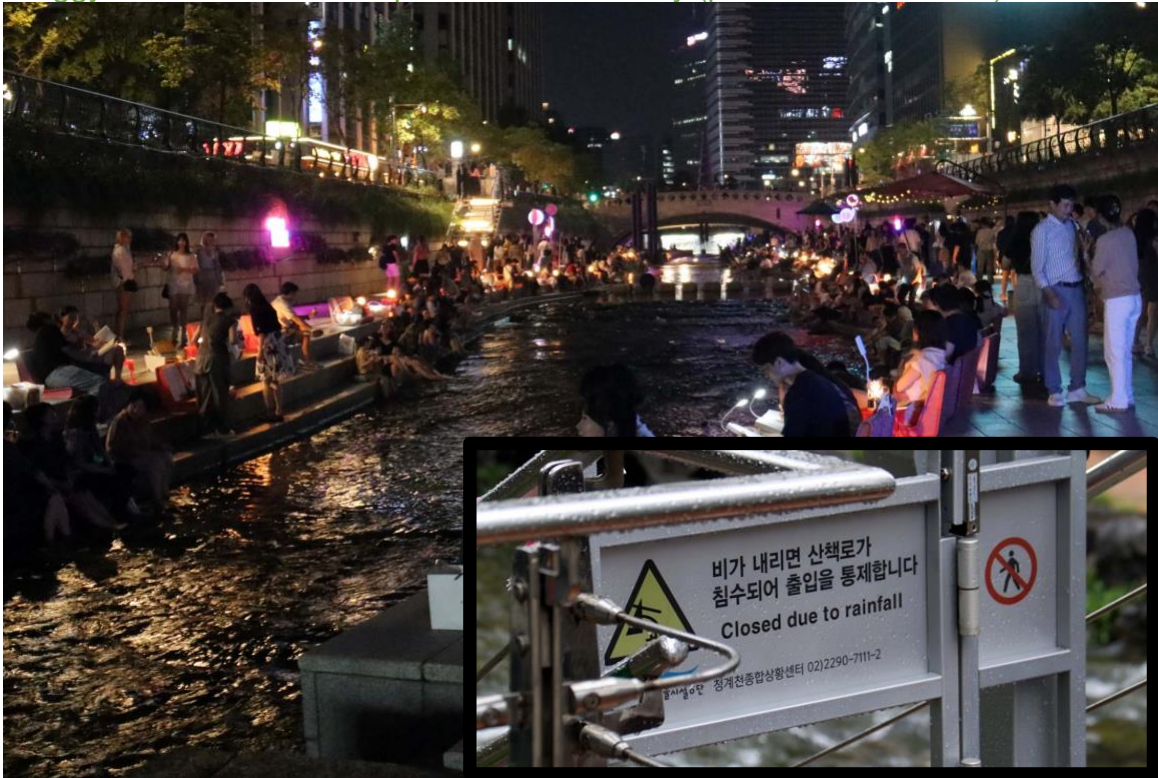
FROM ROAD TO RIVER

Cheonggyecheon, Seoul, Korea helps avoid flood disasters

- An elevated expressway was turned into the Cheonggyecheon stream.
- Riverside paths are closed in heavy rain and are social spaces at other times.
- Air quality improved and traffic reduced, but the project remains controversial.

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Cheonggyecheon as a social space and a floodway (photos: Ilan Kelman).



In Seoul, Korea, an elevated expressway through the centre of the city was torn down between 2003 and 2005 to restore / engineer the Cheonggyecheon stream. It is now a floodway for rainfall run-off and an important urban social space, with pedestrian paths, relaxation areas, events and green spaces. Air quality improved, traffic reduced and risks from pluvial (rainwater-related) flooding and the urban heat island declined. During heavy rainfall such as from typhoons, Cheonggyecheon's paths are closed to keep people safe as water overflows. Despite these and other positive results, its legacy remains controversial. It requires continuous maintenance, with suggestions that the project was pursued more for political posturing than for long-term sustainability.

Sources:

- Kim, H. and Y. Jung. 2019. Is Cheonggyecheon sustainable? A systematic literature review of a stream restoration in Seoul, South Korea. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 45, 59-69.
- Lee, J.Y. and C.D. Anderson. 2013. The Restored Cheonggyecheon and the Quality of Life in Seoul. *Journal of Urban Technology*, 20, 4, 3-22.