Minkwan S.

Slide 1: We often characterize urban life as living every day in a bustling, vibrant place without any time to take a break. However, in that vibrant life, urban dwellers find a place of peace and healing in a place called city parks. Central Park in New York City, Bukit Timah Nature Preserve in Singapore, and Luxembourg Gardens in Paris are just few of the examples of urban parks.

Slide 2: Yangjae Stream and Han Riverside Park are the places of rest for those who live at the heart of South Korea, Seoul’s Gangnam District. Here, people are seen everyday riding bicycles and walking with their friends and families. But between these two parks, there lies an extremely problematic place called Tan Stream Public Parking Lot.

Slide 3: The region that shows vivid contrast in color compared to the grasslands next to it is the Tan Stream Public Parking Lot. Despite being next to a sports complex where 1988 Seoul Olympic games were held, the parking lot has been staying that way for decades. Put into simple words, it’s a “cement and asphalt park” next to a “green park.” By being located right between the two most successful urban parks in Korean history, Han Riverside Park and Yangjae Stream, there have been several complaints about this neglected place for decades now.

Slide 4: Han Riverside was a place where friends and families gathered in the 1970s, but in a different way than current times. It was a place where Seoul’s citizens washed their clothes, swam in water, and enjoyed beach tanning. All of these are now impossible to do. For decades, Han River went under massive development project as part of the plan in expanding South Korea’s capital city southward. More than 20 bridges were built and the land that was once a beach got filled up with cement.

Slide 5: Part of the massive development was the vivid changes in Jamsil area in eastern Seoul. Two islands and two bodies of water disappeared through land reclamation.

Slide 6: However, the Han River Renaissance Project that followed in the 2000s brought great parks for the Seoul’s citizens to enjoy.

Slide 7: Jamsil Han Riverside Park is located at the heart of high-rise apartment complexes. Thus, it’s possible to see many people coming with their families for a picnic. The vast grassland gives plenty of room for the kids to play around.

Slide 8: In Gwangnaru Han Riverside Park, one can enjoy walking through the beautiful flowers with vibrant colors. Gwangnaru Han Riverside Park is also a place where most of the students’ bicycle trip that started from Yangjae Stream ends.

Slide 9: We have gone through what Han River, which is marked blue, went through in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, Yangjae Stream, marked orange, went through
massive changes, a change that completely transformed the southern part of Gangnam district from a place full of stench to a place blossoming with nature’s odor.

Slide 10: Southern part of Gangnam district is an area filled with densely packed apartment complexes. All the wastewater from households gathered in Yangjae Stream before the change began.

Slide 11: The restoration project brought Yangjae Stream back to its natural state and gave a chance for the people to experience the nature in the most densely populated area in South Korea.

Slide 12: Yangjae stream is a place where students and cyclists start their bicycle trip to Han River. Also, it’s a place where families gather to have a relaxing talk while walking in the nature.

Slide 13: While cycling or walking towards Han River, we go pass through the Hangnyeoul Marshland. Two streams meet here, forming this vast marshland: Yangjae Stream and Tan Stream. Most of the times, it’s possible to see groups of birds resting in this heart of the nature.

Slide 14: After Yangjae Stream and Tan Stream gather as Tan Stream after passing through Hangnyeoul Marshland, we are faced with Tan Stream Public Parking Lot. It’s the place where cyclists try to pass through quickly and also a place where walkers and joggers aren’t seen that much.

Slide 15: Here’s a cyclists view. Who would like to ride a bicycle in this barren space? There’s a highway passing by above you, and no trace of liveliness can be seen. The Tan Stream Public Parking Lot area has been neglected, crammed between the development projects of Yangjae Stream and Han River.

Slide 16: A bird’s eye view of the Tan Stream Parking Lot region shows the seriousness of the problem. Due to this small region compared to the length of Yangjae Stream and Han River, people are stopped from continuing to either side of the bodies of water. The high-rise highways surrounding this region block sunlight. It’s a place one would not want to go through but have to go through to get to the place one wants.

Slide 17: The Tan Stream Public Parking Lot area becomes more problematic when monsoon season arrives. Since cements cannot absorb water as well as soils and trees do, this specific area gets the most damage when a massive flood arrives. Especially with the cars parked here, if the owners aren’t notified at the right time, the damage gets even greater.

Slide 18: Seoul Metropolitan Government has finally brought out a development project for the region that includes the Tan Stream Public Parking Lot. Gathered with the
renovation of Jamsil Olympic Complex and new business complex going up in the place of Korea Electric Corporation Headquarters, Seoul is planning to replace the cement filled parking lot with green space for the urban dwellers to enjoy. Also, the plan to relocate the highways underground is in consideration.

Slide 19: Seoul calls all these plans together, Jamsil MICE District Development Plan. The main purpose is to use the Tan Stream Parking Lot area as a connection bridge between Jamsil Olympic Complex on the eastern side and the international business complexes on the western side.

Slide 20: In a near future, we would be able to see the dark, gloomy area transformed into a lively and dynamic park with thousands of people enjoying a place of peace in the bustling urban life. Taking in the Tan Stream Public Parking Lot as the lesson, we should focus more on transforming the regions neglected from development over trying to find completely new places to develop.