

# A Comparative Study of <the Blue Ribbon Network> and <the Han River Renaissance>

## 1. Introduction

### (1) Objectives and Motivation of the study

Recent Cheonggyecheon restoration project gained much popularity from the public, which opened the space to discuss the social/cultural/ecological values of urban water space. Following the example of Cheonggyecheon, other cities and provinces started the project to restore urban rivers that once was covered by ever-expanding road. Such decisions, of course, are influenced by the case of the previous mayor Lee whose approval rating had risen radically. Nevertheless, the fact that urban water spaces could be public and ecological place also gained some attention. Most of urban rivers work as ecological pathway that connects the origin of streams with city. The wildlife animals come down from mountains to city, following the flow of the river. In the addition, urban river can reduce the temperature of downtown by providing the cooling water and airwaves, making city function as a ventilating opening and providing city with public water space. These characteristics are much needed in Seoul, given the fact that it has the lowest park space per person among major cities of the world. Especially the place-marketing, which focuses on developing specialty of city by relating the water space to cultural aspects,

makes rivers not only the place to cover and build road but the key element which affects the landscape of city.

On the other side, Beatriz Colomina, a feminist architect and theorist, deals with the case of the Princeton University allowing gay and lesbian partners to live in the dormitory in March 1991. Given the case, she argues that this is the first **recognition** of the sexuality which officially excluded from public debate, and she also stresses the fact that space is a form of representation, much like picture, photo, movie and television.<sup>1</sup> But what if we deal with this case not in the view of sexuality politics, but in the view of urban design? We cannot take it for granted that the space we live in is desexualized, abstract, Cartesian space. Therefore it is also important to recognize that urban design actually function in the 'real' world ruled by political and economic concerns. At the same time, we have to transform the problem of space into the problem of participation, not charity. The case of Princeton would not have been possible, were it not for endless struggle of minorities. With the influence of growing democracy, many new actors have come to influence urban design process. We need to focus on the communication between these actors. The policy process itself is being enriched with diversity. The reason why we focus not on a product but on a process is that the errors occurred in past urban design were originated

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<sup>1</sup> Colomina, 2005

from the lack of participation in the process. We need to develop the view to think design as a process of communication, instead of examining the last product and complain.

## (2) Scope and method of the study

This study compares the case of London and Seoul to reach deeper understanding process of urban water space design. Its final aim is to analyze how the different decision making process produces the different results. The two cases are London's <the Blue Ribbon Network> and Seoul's <the Han River Renaissance>. The differences between these two are obvious; they happened at different time, and the Thames River does differ from the Han River in its function. At the sametime, two cities have many things in common. These cities are capitals of country, for example, which means that economical and cultural potential of a country are concentrated in these cities. Also, both the Blue Ribbon Network and the Han River Renaissance are not the physical settings like buildings but urban design itself

The Blue Ribbon Network is included in *the London Plan* which the mayor Ken Livingstone published to promote the spatial development strategy for Greater London, in 2004. The Blue Ribbon Network considers water as an opportunity for enhancing the public realm, promoting the use of water space.

The Han River Renaissance is one of the Core Promotion Project presented by the mayor

Oh Sehun in 17 Oct, 2006. It aims at making the Han River the place to generate economic values, to give people opportunities for becoming familiar with water.

The comparative analysis between these planning is based on the documents of websites, or website itself. So, there should be shortcomings.

## 2. Urban design framework

Urban design is treated as a design process in which, as in any such process, there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers – there are only 'better' and 'worse' ones. It is necessary, therefore, to have a continually questioning and inquisitive approach to the subject, rather than a dogmatic view.<sup>2</sup> This study refers to Carmona's <*Public Places Urban Spaces*>(Oxford, 2003), adopting the idea about dimensions of urban design from the book. According to the book, there are six dimensions of urban design – morphological, perceptual, social, visual, functional and temporal. Due to focusing on water space, however, only some dimensions are chosen and a new dimension which is not mentioned on the book is added. The order of framework is arbitrary, as following.

### (1) Functional dimension

This dimension is about how places work and how urban designers can make better

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<sup>2</sup> Carmona et al., *Public Places Urban Spaces*, Oxford, 2003, p.5

places. There are several elements in functional dimension – public space, mixed use/density, environmental design and capital web. Because of the characteristic of water space, only capital web is chosen to be studied. The capital web is made up of the ground elements of the city's infrastructure, mostly includes public open space, road/footpath design, parking/servicing and other infrastructure. Public open space is a place for recreational activity, wildlife habitats or special events, and also offers the opportunity for the city to breathe, staying 'green' or 'empty'. Road/footpath design is the example of the urban interests on 'walking', it shows coexistence of cars with pedestrians. Parking/servicing section admits the actual need for parking, but it stresses that there should be ultimate alternatives – there need to reduce the demand of cars, rather than to increase supply of parking facilities. Water supply networks, cable networks, electric grids, and underground transit systems are included in 'other infrastructure'.

## (2) Visual dimension

While the experiences on work of art like fine art, literature and music are selective, urban experience cannot afford such a choice. Thus, unlike visual arts need to appeal to a narrow audience who choose to visit a museum, city form and appearance must satisfy the broader public who regularly experience it. <sup>3</sup> Such a viewpoint is related to the one of

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<sup>3</sup> Carmona et al., *Public Places Urban Spaces*, Oxford, 2003, p.130

Adolf Loos who argued that house has nothing to do with art, and architecture is an art. That is, while a work of art is revolutionary and stay alive making people feel unpleasant, a house is conservative and have to satisfy the need of people. <sup>4</sup> Though there are other many sides in visual dimensions, it is considered to explain water space through street furniture, different characters and adjacent buildings. <sup>5</sup>

### (3) Social dimension

Since space and society are clearly related to each other, to understand urban design is to pay attention to the two-way relation of force between them. Design does not matter in every situation, it is natural that social diversity should be considered in a design process. As the definite difference urban design has against architecture, the consideration on the public realm is so important in social dimension. The public realm functions as a bridge between a person and a society. As the personal right of property is getting important, however, the public realm is privatized or declined. So urban water space is expected to function as the public realm in urban design, it has to satisfy the requirements like accessibility, social activity, management, safety and equity. <sup>6</sup>

### (4) Relational dimension

Since diverse players and their interests have played an important role in urban design,

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<sup>4</sup> Adolf Loos, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Carmona 외, 2003

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Carmona 외, 2003

there need to focus on which actors participate in. Both The Blue Ribbon Network and The Han River Renaissance form a part of the urban policies, the comparative analysis of the policy making structure is helpful to understand the differences between urban designs in two cities.

On the other hand, there should focus on the implications between plans, as well as the relation between players. So this study also discusses how each case is related to the other urban plans.

### 3. Case Study

#### (1) Status of Urban Rivers and History of Urban Water Space Plan

##### ① London

London's urban rivers include the Thames(365km long, 13,600km<sup>2</sup> area), the canal network(161km long, 2.70km<sup>2</sup> area), streams and the other tributaries – Ravesbourne River, Ingrebourne River,

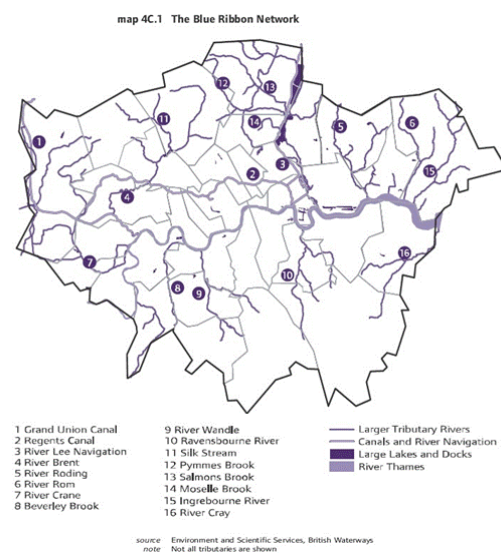


Figure 1. Urban Rivers in London (source : GLA)

Crane River, etc. Such water spaces occupy about 3% of London.<sup>7</sup> A diagram illustrating some of the main elements of the Blue Ribbon Network is shown in Figure 1. However *the London Plan* embodying the Blue Ribbon Network points out that the figure does not show every tributary or water body and argues that boroughs should include these when reviewing their UDPs (Unitary Development Plans<sup>8</sup>). Furthermore, the water space in the Blue Ribbon Network is taken to include that area where water is normally present or is within expected variations in levels, such as within banks or tidal ranges.<sup>9</sup>

The history of urban water space plan in London is in three major sections – to decontaminate the Thames ever polluted by the introduction of sewage, to restore waterfront destroyed by Germans in World War II, and to control floods in the Thames. Due not to the bad smell of sewage but to the use of the polluted water, cholera broke out in London in 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, lavatories were supplied in all the area of the Greater London, and the action was taken to let all the polluted water flow through the public sewerage to the Thames. However, all the sewage coming into the Thames without staying was piled up onto the river bottom, and exposed to the surface in the dry season. In addition to these, the waste oil of the factory, chemicals and dusts as well as the living sewage flew into the Thames, so there were no fishes in the 1920s. The pollution was

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<sup>7</sup> GLA, 2004

<sup>8</sup> UDPs : Statutory plans produced by each borough which integrate strategic and local planning responsibilities through policies and proposals for the development and use of land in their area. (GLA, 2004)

<sup>9</sup> GLA, 2004



getting so serious that the Congress had to call a recess, so the Greater London began to develop related technologies like ‘activated sludge process’ and construct wastewater treatment area to dispose the sewage coming into the Thames completely. Finally, the Thames was gradually restored and there were many fishes in the Thames in 1969.

On the other hand, the buildings and bridges on the Thames were mostly destroyed by the influence of modernism and by the air-raid of Germans in World War II. As the measures to tackle those situation, the London Plan in 1943 and the London Development Plan in 1969 help to pay public attention to the landscape of the Thames. In the addition, the professor Mondri in the King’s College predicted in 1967, that once the flood would occur, the damage would be pretty terrible. So the British Government established ‘the low about waterproof wall and flood prevention in the Thames’ in 1972 to construct the waterproof wall in the suburbs of the eastern London.<sup>10</sup>

② Seoul

According to the Han River Renaissance, the Han River of

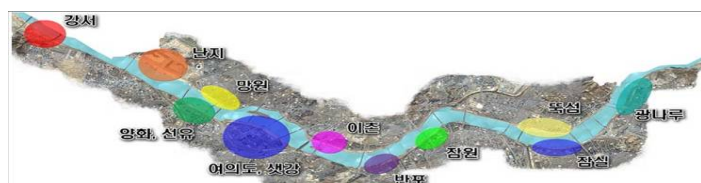


Figure 2. The extent of the Han River (source : Seoul City Hall)

Seoul extends from Kang-il dong,

Kang-dong gu to Gae-hwa dong, Kang-seo gu, 41.5km in length and 40km<sup>2</sup> in area. The

<sup>10</sup> The History Committee of Seoul, 1985

Han River is about 600~1,200 meters across. Its average coefficient of river regime is ratio of 1 to 393, this is relatively high in comparison with one of the Thames(1 to 8). Such a high coefficient of river regime of the Han River has restricted the installation of infrastructure for supporting water-related activity.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the obvious difference is here – while the Blue Ribbon Network takes a serious view of the networks among urban rivers, the Han River Renaissance focuses only on the Han River. This difference is also shown in the name of two.

The history of development on the Han River is summarized as the construction of the bridges, the reclamation work motivated by ‘the law about reclamation of public surface of the water’ in 1962, and the Yunjungje in Yeouido. Something common in these plans is, first of all, that past developments on the Han River were accomplished to make up for the lack of land by the way of filling the water body. Especially, most of the reclaimed lands were set by the prestigious building lands like Dongbu-ichon dong, Abgujeong dong, which led the waterfront of the river to be crowded with the apartments. In addition, ‘the Overall Development of the Han River’ in 1960s had destroyed the landscape and the ecosystem of the river, for example, the Bam Islet was blown up in order to construct the Yunjungje. Ironically, such a way of development was presented as the symbol for the

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<sup>11</sup> Official Blog of the Han River Renaissance Project

economic growth in Korea, once called 'the miracle of the Han River'.

## (2) Comparative Analysis of Urban Water Space Design

### ① Functional Dimension

The capital web of the Blue Ribbon Network can be summarized as 'Policy 4C.8 Sustainable drainage', 'Policy 4C.9 Rising groundwater', 'Policy 4C.13 Passenger and tourism uses on the Blue Ribbon Network', 'Policy 4C.14 Freight uses on the Blue Ribbon Network', 'Policy 4C.18 Support facilities and activities in the Blue Ribbon Network', and 'Policy 4C.19 Moorings facilities on the Blue Ribbon Network'. Each policy has several detailed regulations. In the case of 'Policy 4C.8 Sustainable drainage', for example, sustainable drainage techniques are emphasized to manage the flooding risk. And these techniques include permeable surfaces, storage on site, green roofs, infiltration techniques and even water butts. Moreover, the description is added to notice that further details will be provided in SPG(Supplementary Planning Guidance). While 'Policy 4C.8' and 'Policy 4C.9' are related to the sustainable environmental design of the capital web, the policies ranging from 'Policy 4C.13' to 'Policy 4C.19' are infrastructures related to road and footpath design, supporting sustainable growth in water transport, tourism, leisure and sport facilities. And safety provision to reduce deficiencies is supposed to be undertaken through the Thames Policy Area appraisals and through the UDP process.

The capital web of the Han River Renaissance is summarized as '1. transform Yeouido *Saetgang* 4.6km into an ecological park' and '3. access



easily to the Han River through public

**Figure 3. *Saetgang*** (source : Seoul City Hall)

transportation'. The main contents of 'Proposal 1' are to reduce or close the existing parking lots and playgrounds so that the places would be transformed into the space for citizens' ecological experiences. There is also a plan that makes the exploration of the ecology possible by enhancing the river width from 10 meters to 20 meters. To accomplish these plans, the 'action program' is listed on the Han River Renaissance documents. The program includes 'to formulate the optimum ecological design plan through consultations of the experts in natural rivers and utilization of water' and to assert the time of completion and the working expenses like the following phrase 'completion of construction by 2009, 40 billions as the working expenses'. While 'Proposal 1' deals with the environmental design of the capital web, 'Proposal 3' is about road and footpath design. The Han River Renaissance plans to introduce the free bicycle service system which the private manages and to enhance the footpath by reducing driveways on the bridges. The peculiarity in this plan is to present relatively detailed time schedule and illustrated designs.



Figure 4 . Exploration of the ecology of the Han River (source : Seoul City Hall)

## ② Visual Dimension

The visual dimension of the Blue Ribbon Network can be explained as ‘Policy 4C.20 Design – starting from the water’, ‘Policy 4C.21 Design statements’ and ‘Policy 4C.22 Structures over and into the Blue Ribbon Network’. ‘Policy 4C.20’ states that all development, including intensive or tall buildings, should reflect local character, meet principles of good urban design and improve the quality of the built environment. It expatiates, furthermore, the scale, materials, color and richness of detail. Supporting this, ‘Policy 4C.21’ argues that the next waterfront design should consider physical permeability, links with hinterland or public access, and the impacts on river prospects and any other locally designated views, as well. The singularity in this plan is not to present detailed design illustrations in any cases, while most of the Han River Renaissance documents are composed of detailed design illustrations.

The visual dimension of the Han River Renaissance is presented as ‘2. transform the

concreted wall of the terrace land on the Han River into green walls' and '5. the landscape of the waterfront gets more beautiful'. 'Proposal 2' is summarized as to reconstruct the existing concreted walls into the ecological places where seasonal wild flowers can live in colony. To accomplish this, the Han River Renaissance attempts 'presentation of panoramic landscape' by covering the surface of blocks with soils and planting flowering plants to make the colony of wild flowers. However the Han River Renaissance does not mention the possibility of creating environment where wild flowers live in colony just by covering the concreted walls with soils.

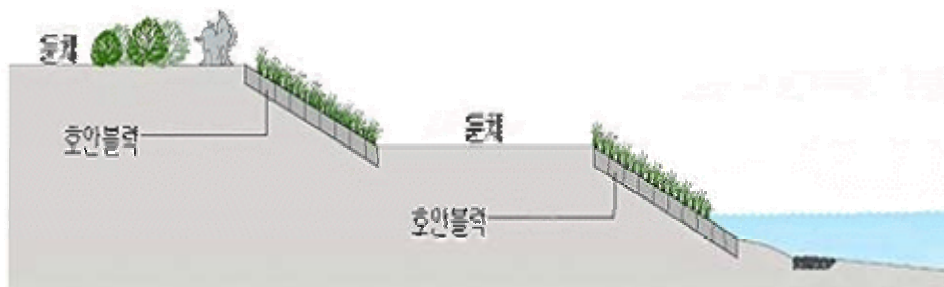


Figure 5. Green Wall (source : Seoul City Hall)

To accomplish 'Proposal 5', the Seoul City will make the guidelines about the formation of apartment complex around the Han River, in order to alternate the existing monotonous, folding screen-shaped landscape of the Han River. And also in case of creative design plan, regulation change is currently in process to reduce the height restrictions and floor space index of building.

### ③ Social Dimension

The characteristic as a public realm in the Blue Ribbon Networks is presented as 'Policy 4C.16 Increasing sport and leisure use on the Blue Ribbon Network', 'Policy 4C.17 Increasing access alongside and to the Blue Ribbon Network' and 'Policy 4C.23 Safety on and near to the Blue Ribbon Network'. 'Policy 4C.16' makes it clear that the Blue Ribbon Network as a public realm should not be used for development of individual interest and self-esteem in any case. Along with 'Policy 3D.5 Sports facilities' also included in *the London Plan*, this enable many people to enjoy water sports relatively close to their work and home. 'Policy 4C.17' claims that the new network area has to be designed for all citizens to access in London. 'Policy 4C.23' indicates that boroughs, the Port of London Authority, the Environment Agency, British Waterways and others should collaborate in maintaining the safety facilities of the Blue Ribbon Network.

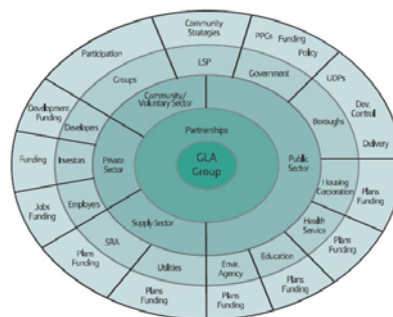
The Han River Renaissance claims its publicity at '4. Chamsugyo becomes exclusive for walking to be a place of citizen-gathering' and '6. From closed the Han River to the Yellow Sea, to the World'. The plan to reform Chamsugyo and to make "Gigantic and creative fountain never unexampled" and "Floating Garden" with private capital should be completed in the latter of 2007. For all that the construction of the fountain on Banpo Bridge will have cost over 100 millions won, the Han River Renaissance contains only the

design figure of the fountain, not the cost of building and maintaining it, never the ecological effect on the Han River. Furthermore, pedestrian-only plan never went through detailed traffic effect analysis and discussion of related offices, experts, and citizens. It is merely shown as a concept. The Han River Renaissance contains the public considerations in pedestrian-only plan and efforts to improve accessibilities through introducing the amphibious buses, but their reliability is never tested. The concern for social activity, maintenance, safety and equity are not to be found among the plans.

#### ④ Relational Dimension

'Annex 5. Implementation of the Blue Ribbon Network' shows the roadmap of the project, following the category of Action/Time/Resources/Partners. There are

figure 6A.2 Main stakeholders



source: GLA

Figure 6. Main Stakeholders (source : GLA)

many participants and stakeholders engaging in the project, as shown in Figure 6. These diverse participants are divided into public, supply, private and community/voluntary sector except for GLA group. The Public Sector is divided into Government, Boroughs, Housing Corporation and educational/environmental/medical groups. For example, each Borough carries out UDPs and development regulations. The Supply Sector consists of Strategic



Rail Authority and Utilities to participate in plans and funds. The Private Sector is divided into Developers, Investors and Employers. Literally they develop, employ and fund. Community/Volunteer works in community planning through citizens' groups and LSP(Local Strategic Partnership).

On the other side, the relevance among the plans of the Blue Ribbon Network or the one between the Blue Ribbon Network and *the London Plan* is a good indicator for relational dimension of the Blue Ribbon Network. For instance, 'Policy 4C.9 Rising groundwater' mentioned above should be linked directly to 'Policy 4A.11 Water supplies', 'Policy 4A.12 Water quality' and 'Policy 4A.13 Water and sewerage infrastructure' included in the section 'London's metabolism : using and managing natural resources' . Besides, the Blue Ribbon Network has close relationships with 'Policy 3C Connecting London – improving travel in London' and 'Policy 3D.4 Improving London's open environment'.

Even if we consider the condition that Blue Ribbon Network had some time to develop itself, the relational dimension of the Han River Renaissance is not at desirable state. Mayor Oh Se-Hun had built private-public-research corporation system, which consists of Seoul Han River Renaissance Team, Research Center for Seoul City Policy Formation and Citizen's Committee. However, considering the scale and scope of the project, this does not actually contain needed social relationships of project. The project was not based on

adequate research and survey; but in contrast, plan came out first and the research followed to support it. The results are that these plans might end up as a temporary event because of reliability problems. The specific contents of the Han River Renaissance are composed of various, unsorted ideas from the campaign, the bureaucrats in city hall and internet board of Seoul city. In other word, there is no responsible subject. The participants are not diverse, never to mention that the relationship between subject and plan is obscure. This is mainly caused by authoritarian tradition of Korean society. Sometimes this resulted in a positive manner, enabling the powerful policy actions such as Mayor Lee's projects. But it is worthwhile to mention that only the divine intelligence and wisdom can bring satisfying results to such a way of making policy decision.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Han River Renaissance, as well as Cheonggyecheon restoration project, gives us a lot to think and debate about. First of all, the social/economical/cultural/ecological values of urban water space are increasing. This has close links with the popularity of Cheonggyecheon project. The success of Cheonggyecheon project made all the regional government follows the example, this indicates the paradigm shift of urban design. In the

case of Seoul, the streams were used to be covered by ever-expanding roads in the past. But now the trend is opposite. Nevertheless, overwhelming popularity of Cheonggyecheon project has been an obstacle in developing civil discourses to criticize all the problems it had caused in the process. The regional governments are literally copying the every hazardous results of Cheonggyecheon project, instead of criticizing and fixing them. This leads to reproduction of same problems, now in a national level. This is exactly the situation which the Han River Renaissance Project is getting at. The project is still at beginning stage, but there are a lot of possibilities that current use-centered plan would ruin the existing ecological function. The objective of this study was to compare different urban water space designs which came from different origins and social backgrounds. This study aimed at finding the causes that resulted in policy differences. Probably the causes seem to rely on relationships among the actors participating in policy decision making process. In contrast to the Blue Ribbon Network has dense and hierarchal networks, the Han River Renaissance has much simpler networks among the actors. This results in the over-simplified urban design process, which needs more attentions and debates. And the most prominent difference between the two is relations with the other related urban designs. The Blue Ribbon Network tops over the Han River in this feature. The lack of the reliability among the urban designs is the common problem found in urban

design of Korea. However, the Blue Ribbon Network has its own drawbacks. As Tony Arbour et al.(2006) suggest, too much segmentations of the actors, diverse yet too different uses of a space, and the absence of responsibility to reconcile the conflict of interests are the problems for urban design types like the Blue Ribbon Network to overcome.

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