

Daylighting could breathe new life



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Last year while visiting Edmonton, I explored a nearby ravine with friends. They told me with excitement how their city is uncovering a long-buried stretch of their urban river in a process called daylighting. They told me why this is great for the river, the community, and their quality of life.

In the past, it was common practice around the world to bury creeks and rivers to make room for urban development. It was relatively cheap and easy to force streams into underground pipes if they were in the way of development. The practice was never really questioned — until now.

A recent documentary film (*Lost Rivers*, 2012) brought the idea of daylighting into the mainstream. It is now recognized as a way to breathe life back into cities.

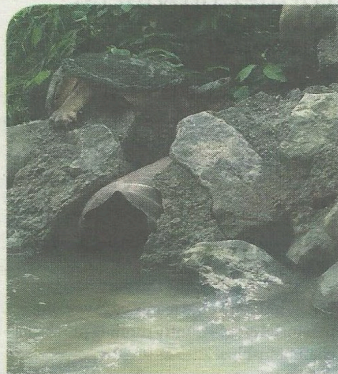
The city of Seoul in North Korea made a bold decision to remove a crumbling elevated roadway and restore 5.8 kilometres of a buried river. This produced a myriad of ecological, social, and economic benefits.

- Plant species increased from 62 to 308.
- Bird species increased six-fold. Aquatic species jumped from five to 53 species.
- Heat island effects were reduced. Temperatures near the stream were cooler by three to six degrees.
- Air pollution was reduced by 35 per cent.
- Traffic flow improved. Bus ridership in the area jumped 15 per cent.
- Property values within 50 metres of the river increased by 30 to 50 per cent.
- The number of businesses doubled, local employment increased.
- 64,000 daily visitors — including 1,400 tourists — generate \$2 million every year.

Daylighting projects do not have to be as grand as the one in Seoul (5.8 kilometres, \$367 million). Even small-scale daylighting projects (\$1 million to \$20 million) can produce huge benefits.

A \$19 million project in Yonkers, New York attracted \$3.1 billion of private investment for new housing, retail, and offices. It cost paled next to the tax revenue generated. A \$7.5 million project in Kalamazoo, Mich., attracted over \$200 million in private investment. Annual tax revenue increased from \$60,000 to \$400,000. Festivals at the site generate \$12 million in annual sales.

In Winnipeg, most of the small tributaries of the Red, Assiniboine, and Seine flow through underground pipes. Like many other cities, Winnipeg must separate storm



Supplied photo by Laura Taylor

The Seine River has dozens of stormwater outfalls. How many could be restored as creeks?

water from the sewer system. This will cost millions. Daylighting sections of the stormwater system as restored creeks, open canals, or swales could reap ecological, social, and economic benefits that would greatly outweigh these costs.

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