

ARTICLE

Cleaning up Beira Lake, Rejuvenating Colombo City

Learning from the transformation of the Singapore River.



Beira Lake, Colombo. Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

WRITTEN BY
Mina Zhan

By 2025, Beira Lake will be transformed from a polluted waterbody today into a scenic asset of Colombo City. This is the vision that the Sri Lankan Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development Colombo unveiled in November 2017 as part of a plan to develop the city's Central Business District.

This all began when several senior Sri Lankan government officials participated in the Temasek Foundation International Leaders in Urban Governance Programme (TFILUGP) between 2012 and 2014. Impressed by Singapore's successful urban transformation, the officials from the country's then Ministry of Defence and Urban Development were keen for more of its officers to benefit from this 5-day programme curated by the CLC and funded by the Temasek Foundation International (TFI).

The result is the Sri Lanka Urban Planning and Governance Programme, a tailor-made capability development engagement co-funded by TFI and the Government of Sri Lanka. As the knowledge partner and overall content curator, the CLC jointly delivered the programme with the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE). As part of this two-year partnership that concluded in November 2017, a series of deep-dive workshops were



Deep-dive workshop discussions and site visits in Colombo. Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

conducted for over 200 officials from Sri Lanka’s various ministries, agencies and municipal councils to enhance their capacities, particularly in the areas of Master Plan Review & Government Land Sales, Water Infrastructure & Greening, and Housing Design and Community Building.

Beira Lake Transformation Project

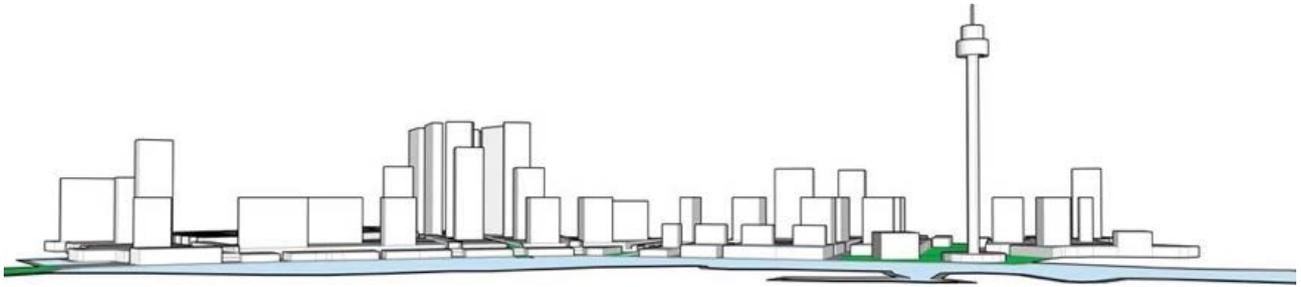
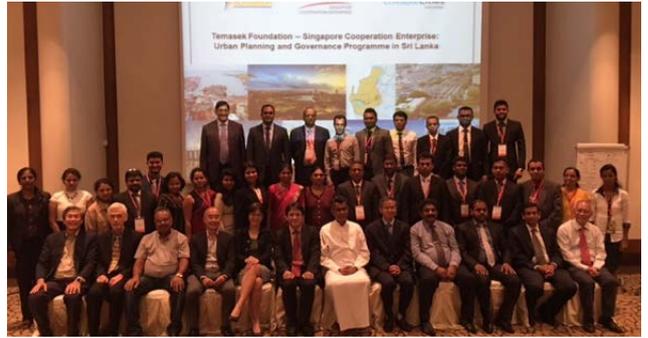
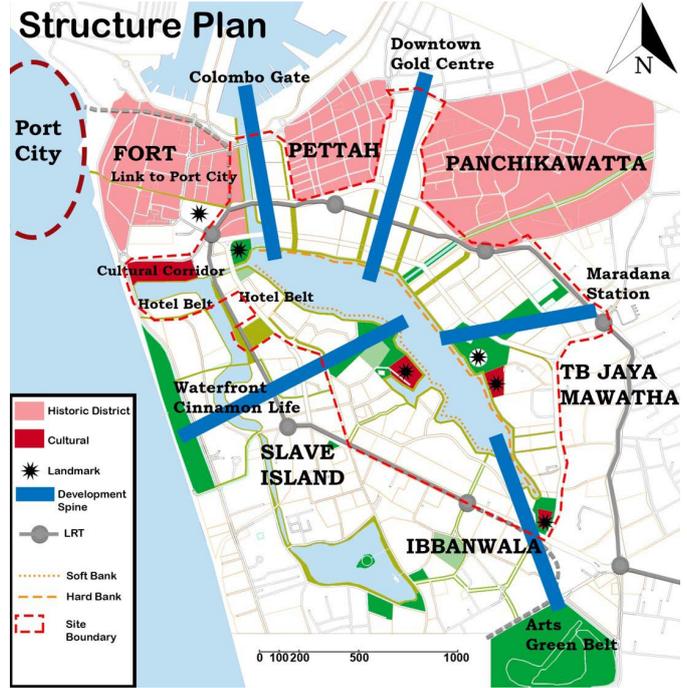
The opportunity to regenerate the prime area around Beira Lake in downtown Colombo came about during the programme as participants were encouraged to explore how key lessons learnt could be applied to address the actual urban challenges that they faced on ground. Similar to Beira Lake, the Singapore River used to be heavily polluted until the 1980s when it was transformed to a clean and beautiful waterway through a whole-of-government effort. The CLC team felt that Singapore’s experiences in successfully regenerating its river — once lined with squatters, street hawkers and small businesses that directly discharged their wastes into the river — could be useful to the Sri Lanka government in planning for an exciting new future for Beira Lake and its vicinity. This became a case study project for the programme after Sri Lankan Prime Minister Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe visited the Singapore River in July 2016 and supported the idea of sending a core team of Sri Lankan officials to Singapore for a workshop.

The five-day workshop resulted in detailed plans and strategies for three key action areas, namely cleaning, planning and execution, and these were presented as key outcomes to Sri Lanka's Minister of Megapolis and Western Development, Hon. Champika Ranawaka.



The Centre for Liveable Cities' Executive Director, Khoo Teng Chye (in pink), accompanied Sri Lankan Prime Minister Hon. Ranil Wickremesingh (in blue) on a Singapore River tour in July 2016. Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

Between 5 to 9 September 2016, over 30 Sri Lankan officials represented by key stakeholder agencies in the planning, transport, environment and housing sectors attended a leadership workshop guided by urban pioneers and experts from Singapore. They participated in an extensive visioning and planning exercise, which facilitated closer collaboration amongst representing agencies and introduced participants to planning and developing urban systems holistically when tackling complex and interdisciplinary challenges. The five-day workshop resulted in detailed plans and strategies for three key action areas, namely cleaning, planning



Workshops and site visits were conducted during the Sri Lanka Urban Planning and Governance Programme – Leadership Workshop in Singapore from 5 to 9 September 2016. Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

and execution, and these were presented as key outcomes to Sri Lanka’s Minister of Megapolis and Western Development, Hon. Champika Ranawaka. These plans and strategies were fine-tuned by the Sri Lankan project teams with the guidance of experts from the CLC over the following months as they prepared for the final launch of the development proposals.

The Beira Lake Intervention Area Development Plan was unveiled on 27 November 2017, in conjunction with the closing workshop of the Sri Lanka Urban Planning and Governance Programme in Colombo.



Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Hon. Champika Ranawaka officially launched the Beira Lake Intervention Area Development Plan on 27 November 2017. Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

The two-year capacity building programme has provided a platform for close cooperation between Singapore and Sri Lanka in supporting the latter in its sustainable urban development agenda.

“The Development Plan that we launch today represents a vital element of the master plan to develop the Central Business District of Colombo,” said Minister Ranawaka during the launch. “Nobody sees Beira Lake anymore as an urban backyard or a sink. Instead, everybody appreciates today the enormous potential that it offers in improving the quality of physical infrastructure, improving the natural environment, enhancing the economic value of the properties in the vicinity, and, in the meantime, opening more space for general public to enjoy vistas, relax and entertain.”

Much efforts have already made on ground. Almost 400 families living in the under-served area have been resettled. Additional investment is expected to go into the protection of the lake bank and the dredging of east lake. There is also plan to make more land available for development in 2018.

About the Writer



Mina Zhan

Researcher
Centre for Liveable Cities
Ministry of National Development

Mina Zhan is a researcher at the CLC. Her research works have focused on integrated land use and mobility development, master planning, urban governance and green infrastructure. She has also been actively involved in CLC's advisory works in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and India. An urban planner by training, she was with the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore before joining the CLC. Mina has a BSc in City and Regional Planning from Cardiff University and an MPhil in Planning, Growth and Regeneration from Cambridge University.

About the CLC

The Centre for Liveable Cities was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, based on a strategic blueprint developed by Singapore's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. Guided by its mission to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, the Centre's work spans four main areas - Research, Capability Development, Knowledge Platforms and Advisory. For more information, please visit us at <http://www.clc.gov.sg>

© 2018 Centre for Liveable Cities

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the Centre for Liveable Cities.