

ARTICLE

Taking a Stroll Along Norzin Lam

Supporting efforts to pedestrianise the main thoroughfare of Bhutan's capital city.



Norzin Lam. Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

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Connecting the retail and hotel district to the financial district, and onwards to the civic district, Norzin Lam is the main thoroughfare of Bhutan's capital city, Thimphu. It is also one of its most congested roads. Dasho Thrompon (Mayor) Kinlay Dorjee and Executive Secretary Pasang Dorji selected this situation as their urban challenge case study when they participated in the Temasek Foundation International Leaders in Urban Governance Programme (TFILUGP) in 2014 and 2016. After this five-day practitioner-oriented mayoral workshop run by the CLC and funded by the Temasek Foundation International, the Thimphu Thromde (city government) officials invited the CLC to give further advice and to review the progress of their plans to pedestrianise Norzin Lam, a proposal in the Thimphu Structural Plan 2002-2027 to rejuvenate the city's urban core.

At a three-day workshop in Thimphu, attended by CLC Fellow Michael Koh and Professors Heng Chye Kiang and Fung John Chye from the National University of Singapore (NUS), the city's urban planners presented the challenges they faced in pedestrianising Norzin Lam, including the absence of a pedestrian-friendly footpath, steep slope gradient, under-utilised public spaces, depletion of traditional heritage buildings and the need for urban regeneration. Besides visiting sites to assess the strengths and opportunities of Norzin Lam, the CLC team shared best practice precedents from Singapore



Meeting with the Dasho Thrompon (Mayor) Kinlay Dorjee (centre).
Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities



Workshop discussion with the urban planners of the Thimphu Thromde.
Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

and the world on pedestrianisation, car-lite active mobility, walkability and urban design. The experts then huddled with Thimphu Thromde's Chief Urban Planner Thinley Norbu, Senior Urban Planner Ugyen Dorji, Chief Engineer Tashi Jamtsho and urban planners to brainstorm ideas. This resulted in a draft structure plan and a series of urban design recommendations.

Reinforcing a Sense of Place

As Norzin Lam is already a destination in the capital, the recommendations from the workshop built upon concepts that the urban planners already had in mind. This includes creating a pleasant walking environment through reclaiming the road and car park space for pedestrian malls and cycle paths, building kiosks for street and F&B activities as well as keeping cars to the parallel roads. To engage the public on these proposals, some trials have been conducted, including organising car free Sundays and festivals that draw people to its Clock Tower Square.

One opportunity identified at the workshop was reinforcing the sense of place and identity at Norzin Lam. This can be done through studying possible view corridors of the mountains and retaining the remaining heritage structures along the street. The permeability of Norzin Lam from the surroundings via a network of tight side streets and alleys is a



Clock Tower Square at Norzin Lam. Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities



Side streets off Norzin Lam.
Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities



Bustling activities along Haji Lane, Singapore.
Source: Singapore Tourism Board

key asset. Selected side streets could be enhanced to expand the critical mass of the activities along Norzin Lam and form walking loops for pedestrians. In addition, some of the charming courtyard spaces along the side streets can be upgraded into local gathering spaces for the public to enjoy. An example from Singapore is Haji Lane, a narrow street lined with activities that forms a pedestrian connector between the city blocks.

Another key opportunity is offering more convenient pedestrian access to the main river. This can be more direct and convenient from Norzin Lam, and could draw even more people to it. It can come in the form of covering over existing drains to form a park connector network that links the street to the river — similar to what has been done in Singapore's neighbourhood in Siglap.

Finally, integrating vehicular access points and public transport to the area was also raised as a possible strategy for further study. The existing bus terminal off Norzin Lam could be enhanced into an integrated development with bus bays, vehicular drop offs, parking and commercial developments to optimise land usage. Pedestrian and cycling routes to nearby areas could radiate from this hub. This is how the neighbourhood around Compass One in Sengkang has been developed in Singapore.



Another view of Norzin Lam. Source: Thimphu Thromde

The Dasho Thrompon and the Thimphu Thromde are fully committed towards pedestrianising Norzin Lam. Works are already underway to build two interceptor carpark stations at strategic points to replace the street side car parks and reduce traffic flow. The Thimphu Thromde are also proceeding with some of the recommendations arising from the workshop by drawing out a detailed landscape and urban design plan for Norzin Lam. This will open up possibilities for professionals from Singapore to contribute towards making Thimphu more liveable and attractive for the residents too.

About the Writers



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Boon Ping is a researcher involved in local master planning, active mobility and urban design studies. He graduated from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) School of Art, Design & Media (ADM) with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) in Visual Communication.



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Michael Koh has 25 years of experience in the public service including 7 years as CEO of the National Heritage Board and 4 years concurrently as CEO of the National Art Gallery. He was also the former Director of Urban Planning & Design at the Urban Redevelopment Authority where he spearheaded the planning and urban design of the new mixed use Downtown at Marina Bay, revitalisation of Orchard Road as a shopping street and creation of an arts and entertainment district at Bras Basah Bugis.

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>