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and its Urban Studies Programme. So, it's a special honour for us to be able to hold this event, inspired by Dr Hee Limin's recently published book, [Constructing Singapore's Public Space](#).

May I ask before we begin that you all switch off your mobile devices and turn them off to silent mode. Thank you.

It is my pleasure to begin the proceedings by introducing Mr Dinesh Naidu, former Deputy Director for the Centre for Liveable Cities, co-author of [Our Modern Past: A Visual Survey of Singapore Architecture 1920s to 1970s](#), and currently a student with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy [LKYSPP]. Mr Naidu. (Applause)

[Mr Dinesh Naidu](#)
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It's wonderful to see several distinguished guests here in the audience tonight—CLC's Chairman, Dr Liu Thai Ker; and Chancellor of the newly renamed Singapore University of Social Sciences [SUSS], Professor Aline Wong. It's always a pleasure for me to return to Kent Ridge, which is a place that I think holds special memories for many of us. But for those of us involved in the shaping or thinking about public spaces, colleges are also very powerful examples of public spaces; and it's apt that we hold our conversations tonight in this beautiful Yale-NUS campus. So, on behalf of CLC, thank you to Professor Jane Jacobs and Yale-NUS for your partnership and hospitality.

I've been asked to just introduce CLC a little bit before the session begins. So, CLC was set up in 2008 by Singapore's Ministry of National Development and Ministry of Environment and Water Resources [MEWR] to distill, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities. This event is part of our CLC Lecture series, which is a platform for leading thinkers and practitioners to exchange ideas on how to make cities better.

Another platform, and one that I worked on, is our Urban Solutions Magazine, which is on display outside and available online free. And this...the last issue that I worked on focused on public spaces, which is

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the reason [why] I have been roped in to do this little introduction. So, in addition to getting a copy of Limin's book, I would encourage all of you to try to look out for that magazine and read it, because our other two speakers are also featured inside: an interesting interview with Professor Peter Rowe who had several forthright things to say about several controversial aspects of public space, as well as an excellent essay by Michael Koh.

Now moving on to our speakers. Our first speaker is my erstwhile colleague and former office neighbour, Dr Limin Hee. She is the author of the new book that has inspired tonight's event, Constructing Singapore's Public Space. She is also Director of Research at CLC where she focuses on research strategies, international collaboration and content development. Limin's own research focuses on urban liveability and sustainability and the agenda for architecture urbanism and public space. She is also a poster girl, as many of you know, for active mobility and is famous for coming to many events on all manner of personal mobility devices—but maybe not tonight, looking at what she's wearing.

Our second speaker is CLC Fellow, Mr Michael Koh. He has 25 years of experience in the public service, including seven years as CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the National Heritage Board [NHB], and four concurrently as CEO of the National Art Gallery. As a former Director of Urban Planning and Design at URA [Urban Redevelopment Authority], 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 the creation of an arts and entertainment district at Bras Basah-Bugis [BBB]. He's also all over the issue of Urban Solutions—so, you can read about Bras Basah-Bugis, Singapore Night Festivals and other interesting things that he has worked on in that issue.

Our third speaker is the distinguished Raymond Garbe, Professor of Architecture and Urban Design at Harvard University, Professor Peter Rowe. He's also the former Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design

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from 1992 to 2004, where one of his students was none other than Limin. Professor Rowe is a leading critic and lecturer in the field of architecture and urban design, and the author of Civic Realism, a book about public space which is one of his many publications. As a CLC visiting fellow, he is also involved in research collaborations with the CLC.

Now, a little bit about CLC. Over the last six years, CLC's research has focused increasingly on public space because it lies at the intersection of a lot of the challenges that cities are facing—from climate change to social cleavages to urban mobility issues and affordability in housing. So, CLC's work in this area has expressed itself in several projects, that our panellists have worked on—Limin, Michael and even Peter Rowe; including active mobility, building a city with nature, re-imagining Tampines, Orchard Road and the western industrial area. These are areas that CLC is interested in exploring more, and I hope that...I think we all look forward to hearing what the panellists have to say later on.

Okay, with that, let me hand over to Professor Jane Jacobs. Tonight's event will start with presentations. Sorry, I hand over to Limin. Tonight's event will start with a presentation by Limin and the other speakers, followed by [a] Q&A [question and answer] session moderated by Dr Jane Jacobs. Professor Jacobs is an inaugural Member of Faculty at Yale-NUS, and Founding Head of its Urban Studies Programme. She has written widely on urban heritage, post-colonial cities and architecture and society, including here in Singapore. Her most recent co-authored book is Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View Of Architecture with MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] Press.

And with that, let me now invite Dr Hee to begin her presentation. Limin. (Applause).

Dr Limin Hee
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First off, I'll just briefly introduce the book. I would like to thank my boss first, Mr Khoo [Teng Chye]—I think he's still stuck in traffic somewhere—but he was the one who encouraged me to put the book in print and

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believed in the importance of doing so; and Professor Peter Rowe for his mentorship and unwavering support as the book began as part of my thesis work at Harvard, and has been updated over the last ten years. And of course, Professor Jane Jacobs, for her support and collaboration on this book launch; and Michael Koh, our fellow at CLC for joining us today and giving us his comments.

So, we'll start with a quick introduction before the panel discussion which will be the main event for this evening. I'm not really going to reiterate the ideas of my book because first of all, I would like to tantalise you to read the book for yourself, if you find more questions than answers in my presentation. So, my premise here is that there's no unified theory of public space, so to speak, but broadly I've summarised the theories falling under an ethics discourse and an aesthetics discourse, as I come from my point of view as a trained architect.

I won't be discussing too much theory tonight, but would like to say that in this book, there is no assumption that Singapore public space fits well with any of the established theories. So, the need to construct a model of public space in this context [is] based on the idea of spaces being shaped and given meaning through recurrent spatial practices, and this book tries to understand public space not so much as a finished product, but as a work in progress, always in the making with great potentials for transformation.

The ideas and methodologies of the book are in fact so well summarised in Peter Rowe's foreword that I'm just going to quote him in the slide. I won't read it out loud, but I promise you this is the most text you would see all evening, as the rest of my presentation will be quite visual. And enough to know by way of definition in this work that through the overlay of practical conditions and abstract concepts, public space is regarded as a multi-dimensional space of discourses and encounters.

History of Development: Today

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So, first off, it is important not just to study today's public space, but also to trace the history of its development. This goes hand-in-hand with the development of spatial culture, which both shapes space and is shaped by space. The book also captures evolving relationships between the state and its people, and how this is played out in space. More importantly, the book discusses how public space relate[s] to everyday life. The book argues that Singaporean public space and experience is unique as it would be unique for any other part of the world, particularly through its emergence as an independent meritocratic state from otherwise difficult and often appalling conditions in the history of space, alongside the development of a Singapore identity, despite racial divides early in colonial history. And in colonial Singapore, spaces like the Padang, Queen Elizabeth Walk and Empress Place served as the foreground and separation of the colonials from the immigrants who lived in crowded and unsanitary shophouses fronted by contested streets full of people and goods.

In the '60s and '70s, urban renewal of the city centre and the decanting of the population to public housing in new towns around the fringe of the city, created new spatial paradigms. The separation of live and work through Singapore's decentralisation and zoning, moved away from street life and street-based urbanism with streets widened to ensure smooth traffic flow, were the hallmarks of planning that have defined many of the spaces we see today.

So, the 1976 Central Area Open Space Plan embodied many of the ideas of a new social order and of a clean and green Singapore, as well as the vision of a garden city. The Civic and Cultural District Masterplan of 1988 envisioned a lively city full of gathering spaces, setting the stage for Singapore to become a global city in the 1990s. In 2003, URA produced the first Public Space and Urban Waterfront Masterplan, which envisioned many of the new public spaces we see in Marina Bay and in

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the southern ridges. The 2006 Active, Beautiful and Clean [ABC] Waters Programme by our National Water Agency and the 2013 City-in-a-Garden vision by our National Parks Board [NParks] marked the integration of blue and green infrastructure in Singapore's planning and public spaces.

Case Studies: Multiple Perspectives of Space

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So, before I talk about the case studies, I would like to say that the book experiments with multiple techniques of collecting information about public space, in order to construct Singapore's public space and its itineraries from the ground up. In part, it draws from the technique of thick description, to draw multiple subject perspectives of space. The materials drawn from include visual documentation of space, photographs—historical and current, commentaries, news articles, interviews, stories, film[s], blog[s], poems, events and activities. In other words, the methods are synthetic, rather than analytical; and montages are created to frame narratives of space, and public space is constructed through this framing.

Three case studies are [*sic* were] selected for the study that is featured in the book. The first is Orchard Road, very much the great street and public space of the city; the second, Little India, a space of identity and exchange; and finally, public space in public housing, our own paradigm of lived space.

Orchard Road: Public Space of the City

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So, let's take a look at some of the montages that formed the case studies. Here you see an example of the montages that are created as part of the visual documentation. On the top right, identifying various micro-districts that make up Orchard Road; and on the bottom left, an example of an ethno-scape, where groups of people tend to gravitate to certain places at certain times. And here, on the top right, a recognition

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of several spatial typologies that are characteristic of Orchard Road: big city rooms, non-places, purchase for people-watching; and on the bottom left, a documentation of various spatial practices, such as youth hangouts, bright spots and rendezvous places.

And here, as very special, on the top right, a very special time on Orchard Road—Christmas at Orchard, which imports images of a winter wonderland to Orchard Road once a year. The Christmas Light-up after 20 years has become a new tradition on Orchard Road. And on the bottom left, events and mass activities on Orchard Road, such as Pedestrian Night, the Great Singapore Sale events which turned Orchard Road into a fashion catwalk.

To many Singaporeans, Orchard Road is a place where you might meet someone quite different from yourself. It is also the place of work for many, where the street is their workplace. The dynamic negotiations of space on Orchard Road make this a space of friction, where ideas of self and others are constantly evolving.

Little India: Public Space of Identity

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And then we move onto Little India. It is known as a place where several ethnic groups inhabit, and where spatial practices that allow for the production and reproduction of identity. Tamil-Muslims, Tamil-Hindus, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis and Chinese variously own businesses and shops, or worship, live or celebrate in Little India at various times. On the bottom left, Sunday markets and makeshift flea markets occupy whatever spaces that can be found in the microeconomy of second-hand goods and useful everyday objects.

And the top right in this slide shows Little India, both as a favourite tourist spot in Singapore, as well as a locale where people work and live. So, it is at once a space of insiders and outsiders. Insiders include not only Indian residents, business people and workers, but also [the] largely ethnic Chinese population who live in the public housing blocks in the

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district. Add to that the regular clientele who patronise the businesses or worship in the temples and mosques there. And on the bottom left, the subversive spaces, such as the red-light district in the back lanes of Desker Road, and gendered spaces where women shop for fabrics and saris or peddle garlands and religious artefacts.

Little India is also a place where you find temporal space. [Take for example] the Sunday enclave which takes over dramatically like clockwork every Sunday, and so one will find zones which are thresholds or boundaries with visible or invisible boundaries and barriers. Little India is also very much a negotiated space, especially on Sunday afternoons and evenings, when most migrant workers visit the space on their day off, creating a situation of bound time and space. Police presence at this time is a feature, as are the temporary barricades and cordons. Not only the police are at work, but many NGOs [non-governmental organisations] like the Transient Workers Count Too [TWCT] [are working as well], helping to create a network of relations among migrant workers and helping to give voice or even simply translating languages and representation for their needs.

Singapore's Heartland: Public Housing Spaces

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So, we move on to public housing spaces in Singapore, which are indeed the spaces of the Singapore heartland. These spaces are part of the experience of everyday life of many Singaporeans—as eight out of ten Singaporeans live in public housing. As illustrated here, the spaces of public housing have shifted in function from pragmatic spacing between buildings to become a focus of community building and tangible images of liveability.

So [shifting] from spaces to networks, and the transformation of spaces in the design of new towns is most impactful at the level of the small residential public space, which has also changed through the decades. And void decks have been an enduring form of public space. Its very emptiness making [*sic* makes] it a canvas for everyday life, becoming a

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space for casual gathering, play, life rituals like weddings and funerals. There's even poems written about it.

However, void decks were being phased out in favour of precinct pavilions, a shared stand-alone space within a HDB cluster which is not a space en route to other spaces and seem[s] less familiar—a less favoured spot for gathering unless it is for an organised event. The purpose-built precinct pavilion may sometimes seem more empty [*sic* emptier] than the surprising void decks, the bottom left showing a street cobbler in a void-deck-turned-community-art-gallery.

So, drawing a diagram of simulated routes of residents on everyday errands shows that one moves outwards towards expanding spatial systems further away from the home, but one is more likely to run into a neighbour in places nearer the home. Such spaces include the void decks, footpaths, neighbourhood coffeeshops, et cetera; and spaces are carved out of new towns by recurring spatial practices invoking new social spaces and linkages.

By revisiting the mapping of daily routes, it is possible to draw out temporal zones of the day, [to find out] when the greatest likelihood of meeting in public spaces take[s] place and consider these public time[s]. Such instances help to build new town spatial culture and social systems that may sometimes surprise the town planner.

Defiant spatial practices are instances where rules of spatial use are transgressed—ranging from innocuous occupation of public space with private belongings, creating lines of desire by taking shortcuts on foot, and also more anti-social behaviour such as killer litter, to defying barriers and gravity in practicing parkour, in which perpetrators of the activity move quickly and fluidly through space without pause.

From the various case studies, I've established several identifiable themes in public space such as ethno-scapes, historical ethnic space,

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Sunday enclaves, youth-scapes, non-places; and these recurring spatial practices that take place in public have become the basis of change, rather than singular transient events.

Public Spaces and the Singaporean Identity

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And here, I've created four quadrants based on two axes: one of degrees of preservation and change, and another mapping degrees of control of expression of freewill. And these four quadrants represent different concepts of spatial practices that have impact on public space. So, I have four quadrants: traditional, transferred, transgressed and transformed. I won't be going into too much of a discussion of these quadrants, but I'd like to share the observation that there is a diagonal trending [*sic* trend] or shift towards change and transformation. There are offshoots of practices in the realm of transferred practices, where the traditional spatial practice take[s] place in a new context; and of transgressed space where deviation from spatial norms occur. And these are instances that I have identified as coping behaviour in spatial practices as public space is being transformed.

So, the idea being developed here is [when] public space and practice [is] compared against the main discourses on democracy and public space, the question to ask is not if democracy is missing—but what form it has taken within the idea of public space in practice? The concept has a lot to do with bodies in space being the transformative subjects who are facilitated or constrained by space.

And unlike the communicative space of [Jürgen] Habermas, which is advanced by debate, we do not have a unified, articulate public or strong civil society. Instead public space in practice, in Singapore's context, is less about talk as a medium of communication than space as a medium of communication. So, public space is the medium through which negotiation takes place through recurrent everyday spatial practices. This not only defines people and state relations, but also people and people relations. In simple terms, Singaporean identity and Singaporean

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public space is developed not just by talking and sharing ideas, but [also] by doing things together in space. And in Singapore, public space is non-hierarchical and pluralistic in nature, and I call it public space-in-the-making.

And what constitutes the Singapore identity? It is not easy to construct a representative type for this notion, but what an ideal construct would be, would be an individual who is tough-minded, modern, cultivated, cosmopolitan, enterprising, competitive, yet able to relate to Asian roots and traditional values, communitarian and family-orientated. And this schism is implied in the set of characteristics that more or less represent[s] the transition of our public space, from the cosmopolitan urbane places of exchange in the city, to the communitarian places of public housing, and in an abrupt change of spatial environment.

And in contemporary Singapore, many new initiatives have come on stream that tap on people being the stakeholders in shaping public space; such as URA's publicity programmes including spaces of people where communities can take the initiative to close off streets and organise community events, and the devolvement of place-making initiatives to the private sector such as the Singapore River One initiative at the Singapore River, and at Marina Bay and Orchard Road.

The ABC Waters Programme and Communities in Nature Programme by the National Parks Board involve[d] communities in the caring for and shaping of blue and green spaces. And the Smart Nation initiative allows for more avenues for the government to engage people in shaping their communities as **new** technologies allow for **new** channels of communications to open up. The design of public space has moved away from undifferentiated, bland, homogeneous spaces, but develop[ed] new connectivities [*sic* connectivity] from one space to another, and create mosaics and network of spaces rather than seamless undefined space.

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There's a need to create more concentrated experiences [and] greater varieties in choice of spaces for Singapore's increasingly diverse population; and create new adjacencies for encounters between different groups. And importantly, we need to create new opportunities for new stakeholders in public space, so that the publicness of public space is preserved.

I've come to the end of my...I hope brief introduction and would like to hand over the session to Jane and to invite the panellists to join me on stage. Please, Jane, Peter and Michael. (Applause).

Panel and Q&A Segment

Dr Jane Jacobs
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Thank you so much, Limin, for a wonderful talk. It really helps us, I think, better understand the motivation for your writing, your book and its intended purpose. Over the last few days, I had the pleasure of reading, cover to cover, **Constructing Singapore Public Space**; and it's a really much-needed book and I'm delighted that you could be here today to celebrate its launch, and also for us to be able to engage in a public discussion about public space.

Prof Peter Rowe
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Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here actually. In the foreword to the book, I said I was taken aback—this was almost 20 years ago actually, Michael Koh was there, he can sort of vouch for me on this. When I was involved in a discussion of China Square here in Singapore, where I was brought in to provide some, quote, expert opinion about it. And I found out very quickly that the idea of a square or a plaza or something like that was considered to be totally inappropriate for Singapore!

You can imagine I had a certain kind of a befuddlement about this and it was clear to me that I probably needed to know a lot more about public space in Singapore before I open my mouth again. And in a certain way it was going well beyond my kind of Western experience, shall we say,

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of public space. What Li Min did in her dissertation, and also in the book that's come from that, of course, is to provide us with considerable guidance on this question and also to get me beyond my befuddlement—and she does this in a number of ways.

The Singapore Experience of Public Space: Plurality

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First of all, she describes, I think fairly clearly, the limitations of applying Western approaches to the interpretation of public space in Singapore. By contrast, she portrays the Singapore model as being grounded very much within their own specific context in history, of the place in which it finds itself in [in] a somewhat reflexive manner.

Secondly, as being adaptive, pluralistic and non-homogeneous. Thirdly, of being essentially, accommodating microcosmic assemblies of individual small groups and not large publics. Fourthly, of not being archetypal, but tied to events and practices and their ephemerality, if you like, and their kind of temporality. Fifthly, made up of a society that she describes as being meritocratic, emphasising as she puts it, one-upmanship and I guess, “kiasu” [Hokkien word for “being afraid to lose out”], right? The Hokkien term, versus being communitarian.

In short, it really is in a way, non-Western but possibly applicable, of course, to other places within East Asia. The ones that comes to mind very quickly are of course, China and... to me anyway, are China and Taiwan.

Now the centrepiece of the book as she's described is the case study material—in fact, that occupies about 50% of the book—and the three cases that she's described are Orchard Road, which represents the sort of, global circumstance here; then Little India which is very, very local in the way it's sort of treated and regarded; and then the Housing Development Board heartland which, for me anyway, is a sort of ubiquitous and ever-present part of Singapore.

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These have been chosen and indeed were, in a lot of discussions we had about it, for contrastive reasons. In other words, they are about essentially different kinds of spaces but collectively, they represent something of a representation of Singapore. I can think of probably other spaces, as you probably can, that could have been included but these three, I think, it was a pretty good start.

Each case is rather lengthy, well-documented and traced through with a very interesting commentary of snippets from poems, newspaper articles, people letting off steam and blogs. You got to imagine that this was a dissertation that was written before we had all the Twitter and what not that we have now—so it used a rather, I think, interesting sort of methodology to get across the idea of a variety of opinions about a single space, and its use and operation.

What follows is a diagnosis of public space drawing on the case study material, and in the manner of certain themes, like identity construction, for example, place versus non-place, scapes that come and go—a kind of category that, I think, she contributes, congested and compressed time, the space of everyday life, negotiated spaces of one kind or another, and space as a sort of flux if you like, rather than made up of something that's more static.

Limin then goes on to offer commentary regarding where to go next with regard[s] to the Singaporean model of public space, and I think does that *rather* well. Now, when I re-read the material, which I did before I came here, it seemed to me a lot of what Limin was saying could also apply to other places including those in the West.

I might not sound like it but I'm actually a New Yorker and to be sure we have Western spaces in New York, you know guys on pedestals on horses and stuff like that, but we also have public realms of the kind that you have or that Limin characterises in Singapore, especially with

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respect to places of exchange, ethnic space, non-place scapes, compressed places from a temporal point of view.

And then I began to think that Limin was about...the book was really about space in a kind of contemporary age if you like, in the kind of pluralistic circumstances all over the place. And I realised that was probably what the major contribution of the dissertation was, something like 15 years after it was written! I'm a bit dumb.

Then I asked myself the contrary question and I said, "Well okay, if that's the case, then is there something quite special about Singaporean public space? And space in East Asia more generally?" And again, I came to a kind of positive response and let me try to explain why.

I think space here, public space is about...the public spaces in between. And I am thinking essentially [about] the buildings and so forth, the kind of built fabric of the circumstances of various kinds, and enclaves and so forth in Singapore, while taking on different forms when populated by spatial practices of individuals, the small groups and people hanging out. It reminds me a little bit of a modern play, theatrical set in a way which gets lit and easily differently, characterised as you move through the play or the narrative where groups of actors and props at different times and occasions sort of shift the space around and it takes on completely different kinds of tones and tenors. Also, there is a sort of reflexivity about that with [sic when] the space that's created works on the actors and backwards and forwards. That after all is, you know, a fundamental part of modern drama.

Singapore is also about a plurality of spatial occasions that allows us to make of the space what we will, and move on. And in closing, I would say that this is in fact a very modern or contemporary idea! And one that, I think, is rather liberating, quite frankly. And one that I hope Singapore hangs on too.

Mr Michael Koh
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First, let me congratulate Limin on this amazing achievement. Congratulations. A round of applause for Limin, please. I think Limin has summarised her book and Peter has really aptly responded to the book—so I'm not going to really say anything more except for the fact that when I first looked at the book and when Mr. Khoo, our ED [executive director] looked at the book and we both said. "Oh, this is very 'cheem'." [Hokkien word for deep] Meaning "very deep", extremely academic!

But then upon further reading, actually it is a pretty good read, it is understandable. Actually, I like the racy bits. So obviously, Limin knows about the red light district in Little India. But based on that, a lot of encouragement and I think overall a worthy read. A great documentation of a lot of the experiences of public open space in Singapore, from the superimposition in the early days by the British onto the city, and developments along the way through Orchard Road, in Little India—a little bit more organic, and the planned spaces in our public housing estates. But let me get back to this.

But first, a response to Peter. When I first read a draft of the foreword, I said, "Oh my God! We've really made an indelible mark on Peter". Because he mentioned this case about China Square which was something that happened, I think, we had planned China Square in the late 90's and I think Peter and Rodolfo Machado, also a Harvard professor, were brought on board by a developer who won two of the parcels. And they had proposed a great covered, urban space for Singapore.

And looking at that space as planners and young architects, we loved that space. It was a great space. But on the other hand, we knew what the developer was trying to do. He was trying to knock down the shophouses in China Square to create that space. So that therein lies the argument. Do you superimpose a square of that nature onto a fine grain fabric of China Square?

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So that was the argument. So we brought it up to the Minister, Peter presented and Rodolfo presented, and I was there standing up against my former professors and, (laughs) you know, we had this argument. In the end, my position and URA's position was that, you know, this area is a fine grain area. The response of space should be a more fine grain space, smaller spaces, cosy areas rather than a big superimposition of a big town square. But mind you Peter, we loved that Square. And today, I still have that image of that Square in my mind.

So what did the Minister decide then? He said, "Alright, you, developer, want big square, you, URA, don't want big square, we'll have an in-between square." And hence, we had to actually, physically look at removing some of the shophouses and introducing a mid-sized square. To which, I must say, was a complete disaster.

It was a China Square, the developer built a square, he put a nice musical fountain around it, no trees, joyless, no...ends of putty walls facing the Square—so in the end, [it became] a useless space which has now fortunately become the site for the new Fraser Centrepoint development in China Square. So no more space, Peter, because it was not necessary, it was not a useable space.

What is a Useable or Lost Space in Singapore?

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But there lies the question, what is a useable space in the Singapore context? Is it a big square or the small square or the medium-sized square—or the pocket spaces? And I think that's critical because I think we have successful examples. The concept of [a] commercial square in Raffles Place, which was for all intents and purposes a great parking lot and a space for horse-drawn carriages. It has since become a very successful urban space, Raffles Place. And its level with buildings, people use it, weekdays and weekends as well—it's a bit quieter on Sundays. So, is that a proper-sized open space? Is that appropriate for Singapore?

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There again, I also call upon what Dr. Liu [Thai Ker] has done for Toa Payoh. I think, spaces, the mall, it is actually a superimposition of Courbusien after Le Corbusier] concepts and perhaps a bit of a Western ideal of a pedestrianised street and an urban square. But, our population did adapt to it in the early days. They were **very successful spaces**. So the question is then, is there a difference between Western and Eastern perception and use of space? Or is it because there is a space for people to gather? Are these spaces neutral platforms for social bonding, for community activities? And is it how we design the activities around the space?

Because there are many learning lessons and we have a lot of failed spaces in Singapore. Toa Payoh, the square—these are successful spaces, Raffles Place. But look at Takashimaya Square, Ngee Ann Plaza, that semi-circular space along Orchard Road that Limin made as a mention about. But to me, it's a formal space. We wanted it, as planners, to create a central focal space in Orchard Road. But [with] the way it was designed, the way it was conceptualised, it became a sloped, semi-circular space, joyless, no trees and of no use to anyone—except for days that we impose like, two days for public use and we put a big tent then it becomes useable. So the **real** space, if you ask me, in Orchard Road, is the underground space under that civic space at Ngee Ann City. The real **public** space is that big city square underneath the civic plaza where the fountain goes into.

So interesting, is it because we in Singapore like air-conditioned spaces? Because that's where the bazaars are, that's where the market place is and maybe that's something that we can investigate further. That conceptualisation of cover, shelter, air-con. What is the perception of space in our context? And [for] this, I would encourage further investigation on and further questions. Then again, we also have lost spaces, because for all intents and purposes in URA, as planners, we had encouraged urban design guidelines for say, sales sites. And for Novena Square, I don't know if some of you remember, we asked for a big plaza in front, we had a big fountain jet shooting up and that space got

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reclaimed for more shopping space. It got shrunk[en] and it became just a basketball court. Now what happened to that public space? I term it lost space.

In Bishan Junction 8, HDB created a public space **right** next to the MRT station and the shopping centre. It was a favourite square for line dancing. That space got reclaimed for the extension of Bishan Junction 8. And I think when Dr. Liu and Mr. Goh Hup Chor, at that point in time Deputy Chief Planner, they also approved the plans for Raffles City—I.M. Pei's great conception of the city room, and that was the central space, the central square that was covered in the heart of Raffles City. We have lost that space too because that became an elevated shopping space, and the space got elevated to the fourth storey. It's no longer a city room.

Pocket parks, another concept I think from the West, we looked at it. Paley Park, a very successful model in New York. We tried to apply this space, superimpose a Western concept of a pocket park into Singapore. Did it work? I can't think of any pocket park that worked in Singapore—which is a shame because for all intents and purposes, it is again, a cosy space, a relief for the people.

That one pocket park was also in China Square, in front, facing the Market Street car park. And that to me, again, is a **deadly** space. So, is it because we can't design spaces well? That's a question I'd like to ask. And actually I hope that these questions will encourage Limin to compete further with Thomas and write "Constructing Public Space Version Two". Because I'd like to push this agenda and push the investigation further. And also, [to] extend the investigation further into great public spaces, like I said in Toa Payoh and what is a totally constructed public space like Marina Bay.

It's a space focused around the water. When we first started nobody was there. Then we programmed it, and this again is the importance, as

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Limin mentions in the book. Programming, be it on a street level, Orchard Road level wide, be it at Little India or community spaces—programming is one of the keys to successful open spaces.

So nobody went to Marina Bay. Then we organised the first fireworks event. We had about, New Year's Eve, 150,000 people turning up, without any television support because at that point in time when we first started, Channel 5 was being paid to cover the fireworks at the Cable Car. They were paid. We didn't pay. But we had 150,000 people because we wanted...and I think the planners at URA had always envisaged Marina Bay as a central celebratory space, national celebratory space of Singapore.

And to date now, for national events we practically have about 450,000 people gathering there on New Year's Eve. In fact, I think there may be even more. So how do we use the public space, how they are designed, how they are activated, where do we place them? I think these are all **key** issues that Limin has covered and dealt with and talked about and localised the context. But it still leaves many questions open and this is the discussion that I hope to take on. And what else could entail public space and a successful public space? So Limin, all the best with version two—part two rather.

Dr Limin Hee
00:45:04

Okay. First off, a quick response to Peter. I really appreciated his insight, which, you know, that he has shared that the whole book and discussion is actually about contemporary public space. And I am happy to have made a small contribution to this discourse on the contemporary public space, and I am also happy [that] after 15 years he's decided that I get to keep my Harvard degree. (Laughs).

And then to Michael, in many ways he had a hand in many of the urban public spaces we have in Singapore and in a way, I would say he has a lot of unfinished work to discuss and perhaps to think about and talk about.

00:46:14

And yes, I love the challenge of part two and you should be part of it! Because you are very much a part of the guilty party in shaping some of the public spaces that we have. And with that I kind of give the stage back to Jane for the discussion.

Dr Jane Jacobs
00:46:35

Limin, one of the things I really noticed and I think it really came out on the commentary was the rich detail of this book. There's been a lot of things said from a social theoretical point of view about public space. It's kind of exhausting reading that field of literature, and some of my students have had exactly that challenge of making sense of what's been said about public space or places in between or loose space—there's many different terms that are around nowadays.

And of the things I think you really managed to do, Limin, in the book was to very succinctly pull together that literature, in a way that was very clarifying. Not just...you know, it's very tempting to actually pull together literature and make it less clear at the end, but you actually did it in a very clarifying way. I think it's a very **useful** thing that you've done.

The next thing you do is, you give this lovely history which we glimpsed something of and I really do recommend that people look into the history of public space that Limin's book delivers into Singapore and Asian scholarship because I think it's a very useful and not-before-done history.

And then you give us these beautiful case studies which I will now present to my students when I'm teaching them about the kinds of things you can do with a place. You can think of it historically, spatially, anthropologically, temporally and you do **all** of those things. And I think it's again, quite a model for how you might—scholars and practitioners alike—might carefully approach space, including public space. So again, I think that's a real contribution that's been made by the book.

For me one of the, there were two, a couple of really interesting themes—and others might pick up on them but I want to just air them here.

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And one is the result, the role of the individual aspiration, their consumption desires, their desires to be cool, for example; and the collectivism, if you like, or the communalism that sits inside of the idea of the public.

And I think at times you really, very beautifully give us a sense of how inside of the public system, that is a strong state that is Singapore, something has been able to happen in public space that may not have been able to happen in other places.

I don't think that's done explicitly, but I think it sort of sits there as a tacit contribution within the work and I think it is something worth thinking about in phase two of your enquiry into public space. **What is it about communitarian spirit in Singapore that was inside of the public responsibility that the state saw, that has delivered something that might have not been possible elsewhere, where if you like, public spaces are more prone to individual personality, the market, vagaries of war and insecurity, et cetera.**

And then the other thing that I thought was really tantalising about the book is **where is the expert and the designer?** Because you know, **the key thesis about this book is that public spaces are constructed from the ground up. That we kind of all co-construct public space. But we know there is a strong state in Singapore and they have strong experts, well-trained experts. And I'm interested in the role of the designer and the planner, in relation to public spaces in Singapore. We've seen some beautiful public spaces that have been designed and planned already in the slides tonight, but it's not just what does a designer do? It's what does a designer not do? When do they stop doing things and what is that threshold of restraint or action that is required to produce a successful, a good...a properly public, public space.**

Prof Peter Rowe
00:51:28

This may sound strange coming from somebody who's, you know, in the design field. But I think you are absolutely right. You can overdo things. Going back to the discussion that I found myself in with this guy about

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20 years ago. The one space that was indicated by the Minister as being a very good public space was indeed the one in front of Takashimaya, which of course is over-designed beyond **belief**, it is now stuffed full of funny things. It doesn't work at all, all right.

And I think one of the lessons from that is you shouldn't try to do that. It seems to me that the sort of underplayed side of, shall we say, the public realm in Singapore is the thing that makes it workable and attractive! And I think that's, in urban design I think we ought to be fairly clear about the spaces as an event, right, rather than the space as a container or a building or a set of things like that. I think we need to shift the discussion of, shall we say, the space making into a realm that's probably a lot more performance-oriented [and] has a temporality to it in a manner that we are usually not trained to do, actually, as designers. We sort of sit and look at the world in a fairly static sort of way.

And that I think is a challenge that the successful space in Singapore offers to everybody. And as I say, I find that very modern and also very liberating, simply because I think it is the manner in which we should move forward—not just in Singapore, [but] everywhere, quite frankly.

And if I look at my own city in New York, more and more of it takes on that sort of feel to it, right. It's not...in the 19th century we did things one way, the early part of the 20th century we did things another way, the middle part another way. Now we are in a circumstance where a lot of that stuff is just got to be... to go away.

And we got to be a lot more relaxed about the public realm and of course, security and things like that have to be taken into account. But let it be, and people will make use of it.

Mr Michael Koh
00:53:42

Well, just to add in to that. I think it's...I mean I totally agree with the Takashimaya square example. How it was conceptualised was actually as a proper public square. When the developer came in and the architect made this proposal, well, there was a degree of formality and it was

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accepted. But I wish that we could have imposed issues [and] requirements like better tree planting, surrounded with outdoor cafes to activate the space, et cetera.

But I do want to go back to the space at Toa Payoh, because it was one of our first public spaces and I think it was beautifully conceptualised. It was a perfect square. There were civic buildings, it was at the end of a mall, there were shops around, there were activities and there was a fountain. And as an early public space, it was a **highly** popular space. And to date I think many people have memories of that space. Unfortunately, they have put a stage and a kind of a stage set and a cover there, which to me has kind of superimposed another element into that beautiful space. And I just wish that it could revert back to the original concept as, I think, envisaged by Dr. Liu and the early HDB planners.

But one of the...I guess it is also the issue of activities. What do you... that's **core** to a successful space, particularly in the urban area. One of the most beloved spaces to me was the sight of the last public toilet in Singapore. Do you know where that is? Anyone?

Prof Peter Rowe
00:55:22

Haven't a clue.

Mr Michael Koh
00:55:24

(Laughs) Well, it's in the area called Clarke Quay. It was at the cross roads of Clarke Quay. There was a public toilet right in the middle because the warehouses didn't have toilets, and that's where all the coolies went.

But look at it today. I mean, we have closed the streets down. It's a western concept, yes, and that space became a fantastic square. And today, if you go there in the day or night, it's abuzz because there are activities—there are bands playing, there are cafes, et cetera. So is it the activities that really create successful spaces? It's also the programming because as you go along, the bands start at this place, then they move on and the music goes on, so people go around that space.

00:56:06

Then at other times there's a musical fountain, and at other times there's a performance in this square. So activation of squares, programming of squares [is] totally crucial to me in response to what Jane is saying. But therein, again, there are other squares or spaces for the people which are community-based. I think the planners of URA had long planned Albert Street and Waterloo Street as pedestrian streets. Well, the URA closed these streets down, they built a beautiful pedestrian mall and no one was using it. And then we wondered *why* no one was using it because it was a natural path for people. And again, it was because there were no activities, it was just a closed street.

So once we let the community programme it with street fairs, street bazaars and we let the shopping centres take over the space, it became a **hugely** popular and very local area. So today if you go to this area, you'll find it abuzz and it's an extremely local area in the heart of the city—and it's also diverse.

And that's another point Jane, that I would like to add that public open spaces should be diverse and inclusive. Because along Waterloo Street there are two temples, the Sri Krishna temple, a Hindu temple and the Kuan Yin temple. And it's just amazing because Hindu's and the worshippers of Kuan Yin, they would go to each others' temples! And actually, they rub the God there or the Buddha and they will hope for good luck and so on. So it's not unusual to find worshippers from the Sri Krishna bowing with joss sticks in front of the Kuan Yin temple and vice versa. To me that's another point: diversity, inclusivity.

And the last point I would like to talk about is the relevance to people. And that goes back to that time when Peter said, "Where's the square in China Square?" And I said, "Where's the square in Harvard Square?" I don't remember a square in Harvard Square but that's the same term. And I said, "Where's the square in Central Square?" There's also no square in Central Square. So we had a good time. (Laughs). But these are stories. **But are they relevant to people?**

Prof Peter Rowe
00:58:20

[Off mic] Well, it is if you're British. [Inaudible phrase].

Mr Michael Koh
00:58:24

Yeah, yeah, sure. But again in the British term, I would also like to extend that context and respond to that. We had a place called Finlayson Green in Singapore. Do any of you know where it is? It's right in the heart of Raffles Place next to Asia Insurance. It was never green, but yet they called it Finlayson Green! (Laughs). So it's a naming nomenclature in the end. It's not necessarily...a square is not a square, a Green may not be a green. And that's the exception in Singapore, because...and it was British, right? It was the British naming typology. It wasn't done by anybody else. So, it's that relevance to people. Is that space relevant? If it's not relevant then what do we do with it?

There was a beautiful pocket park, which we created again along Orchard Road, which perhaps [was] not documented. It was between the Yen San building and the Heeren. We had devised a small space, a pocket park, closed the street down and there was a coffee place next to it. So they activated that space, but again was it relevant? Because it just became a commercialised space. It wasn't a pocket park. You had to **pay** to sit in that space.

Now that space is also gone, it's part of Robinsons. But the issue is the relevance and the continued lasting impression in people's minds. Do you still remember that space? Limin didn't, obviously. It's not in her book. Oh you did?

Dr Limin Hee
00:59:53

I remember.

Mr Michael Koh
00:59:54

You remember the space but it's not in your book, right? (Laughs) But she remembered the space. So there you go.

Dr Jane Jacobs
00:59:59

Limin?

Dr Limin Hee
01:00:01

I wanted to thank Jane first for the beautiful summary that she made and I thought it made many ideas clear in that book and I really

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appreciate that. And then you know, to kind of go back into your question about design, I would like to bring back the idea of the void deck. I was just having that conversation with Dr. Liu earlier this afternoon about the void deck.

A void deck is actually not that void in the sense that, you know, a few old men might bring some plastic chairs there and start gathering in that corner for a while. And then before you know it that space has been transformed [in]to what they call an “elders’ corner” with seats and nice tables and so on. And then it grows into a community space.

And I thought this you know, this kind of small space like the void deck, where it offers itself as a canvas for everyday life to shape the kind of recurrent practice that would occur in it, and then that actually further shapes the space as a kind of public space. I thought that is the kind of degree of design intervention that we can have. We design something that is not too bounded and then as a designer, I was thinking that. And then you observe and you study and you see what happens and then you do more where people like to gather and then you add more design elements to differentiate the space and so on.

And I find this idea also, it contributes to the idea of public space in practice that I was trying to talk about, that space and design of spaces should grow with the spatial cultures that develop around it. And this also goes back to Michael’s point about relevance to everyday life and use. I think that that is how designers perhaps should view the design of public space—that we provide something first, and then we see how it is being used and then we do more to it, in a way. So it should not be 100% finished in the first instance, but to [be] develop[ed] as it grows. So that would be my take on it.

Gabrielle
01:02:41

Hi, my name is Gabrielle, I’m a freshman here at this school. So, my first, I have a... this is a two-parter, my first question is **Singapore tends to be quite controlling about its public space, I would argue more so than other countries**, and say in a country like the US, they...prostitution is largely

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illegal, but they are quite lax with things like say, graffiti or flashmobs, whereas in Singapore it's the other way around. There are a few red light districts, but when someone wants to paint the stairs gold, the government is a bit like, "Er, you can't do that." **So how do you think the Singapore government decides to control it's public space?**

And the second question, I'm asking on behalf of a friend is, **is there need for there to be a physical space for it to be a public space?** Because we are moving, because Singapore wants to be a smart nation and we're moving into the realm of things like virtual spaces and all that. Yeah.

Prof Peter Rowe
01:03:49

I can't speak to that from a Singaporean perspective, I'll leave it to the other two. In other words, I don't want to put my foot in the mouth as to telling your government what to do or not do. I think it's an interesting contrast you give. Because it's perfectly true, prostitution is totally illegal in New York but you know we allow flash mobs and God knows what else, and you know, Wall Street riots and things of the sort.

These are looked upon as being kind of good. So it is a sort of rather contrary arrangement with respect to the use of space here. And quite frankly, I think, every city I know in East Asia as well as elsewhere, they tend to regulate and have notions about propriety of their spaces which belong to that culture and that time of that culture independently. So, I think there's really no real answer to that question.

Singapore may be over here at one end and us in New York might be over here—I'm not quite sure that that's quite true. But I mean the same thing would be said of Paris, the same thing I would say of Tokyo. You know, they are different with respect to that. So I think that's an interesting sort of way of thinking about regulation, but probably if you go from one place to another, it's going to be very different.

As far as this thing about virtual space and so forth, I think that's fair, you know. I think the best spaces that I know of, that are really truly public and that can entertain, shall we say, various interpretations over

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time are those that aren't very well-bounded. They are kind of loose and the movement from a physical space, like the one outside here for example, to a virtual realm, as long as it engages spectators and it's got an event associated with it, as far as I'm concerned, it's a public space.

Mr Michael Koh
01:05:46

I'd just like to respond to the point you made about Singapore being controlling over public space. I think all cities have their rules and regulations, so Singapore is not any different from that. In fact, if you go to Battery Park City in New York, it's a highly regulated space. There's a Battery Park Police regulating that space—but it's a great space, and it's a safe space but it's not under the city's jurisdiction.

I was once there and I asked someone and a young family who was playing in the playground and said, "Where are you from?" and she said, "Oh, we guys are from Harlem." And I asked, "Why did you journey all the way down from Harlem down to Battery Park City?" and she said, "It's because I feel safe here. I know I'll be protected," although she had to journey all the way down Manhattan.

Prof Peter Rowe
01:06:37

Well, it's only five subway stops, come on!

Mr Michael Koh
01:06:42

Well, it's not walkable.

Prof Peter Rowe
01:06:45

Well, I go up to Harlem and I live right on top of Battery Park.

Mr Michael Koh
01:06:47

Well, okay, good. But as a public space, I think I'm happy to report that in street closures for example, in Little India, the community has actually come up and volunteered to close the streets. I was very surprised that one of the streets is actually closed by a vegetable seller, who volunteered to use his boxes of vegetables and one or two dustbins to close off that street for pedestrianisation every Sunday.

And yes, it's allowed. He was allowed and I think it's a great pilot of a local guy who said I'll do it. Then again, I'd like to cite Club Street. I think it's closed every Friday night, Saturday night. I think when the URA first initiated this closure, nobody believed in it. But then it was such a

01:07:47

success. The community took over and they said we are closing the street now.

And they do it every weekend and it's a **great** success. So, I'm a bit puzzled about the fact that you said we're controlling over public space because these couple of examples actually illustrate how the ground-up community effort[s] are actually activating public spaces in Singapore now.

Dr Limin Hee
01:08:11

I'm not going to talk about controlled public space because in a way the book is all about that—I've said enough and I'm kind of tired about talking about it. But I want to deal with the question on virtual space. I think virtual space does not replace actual public space. It adds to the plethora of medium, right, where people can communicate.

But one thing about virtual spaces is that they tend to be very self-selecting, so they are kind of like communities of interests and they tend to reinforce certain ways of thinking because people in your social space are very likely to be people quite similar to yourself. And you think very similarly and you reinforce certain ideas within those communities. But good public space[s] as I imagine in my book, are those where you create adjacencies and places of friction where different groups are, you know, get the chance to bump into each other, either just seeing each other without having to interact and you know, it's the whole idea of the world of strangers is that you become richer for the experience and you build knowledge as well as transgressions in this space that develops and transforms space and also the identities of people in the end.

So, I don't think it can replace public space, but it adds to the kinds of medium [*sic* media] where you can interact with people.

Prof Peter Rowe
01:09:56

I'm going to say something more too about the question you raised, the contrast you raised between Singapore and let's say an American city. I live in a loft in New York on Green Street, which runs parallel with Broadway, which is this main drag that sort of goes all the way through Manhattan.

01:10:17

Back in the day, it was a red light district and it was legal. In fact, we live in a... was once a factory but the place next to us was this sort of funny little building that everyone thinks is unoccupied et cetera. which was one of the original brothels actually, from the time in which this was a legal area of prostitution.

The reason I'm raising [this]...and also this Harvard Square thing— Harvard Square was once a square. Yeah, once a square! And then they decided...you know, and the traffic engineer got in there, and did things that you do in the URA, you move around. Now give me a break! (Laughs). So you're wrong. It was a square. And it was square by the way, actually, it's slightly rectangular but more or less square. So you know, nonsense!

The reason [why] I'm bringing this up is because I think we need to keep in mind the kind of historical trajectory of these kinds of places we're talking about. And the idea of public space anyway. It's going to change over time. So I think the idea of this sort of more unbounded version of it that Limin mentioned a moment ago is a **very good idea** because it allows for that, shall we say transformation to occur, probably in a reasonably frictionless and undisturbing way, right?

And I can assure you, ten years from now, the way public space is used here will be very different. And who the hell knows, your government may have a very different attitude towards it.

And I think we need to bear in mind. Things don't freeze. It's not freeze-dried. New York if I look at the history of these places, like Battery Park, I run there, more or less every day. Well, yeah...sort of, it's alright. But it's regarded, it may not be de jure public entirely, but in a tacit way it's regarded as being public. And in fact, the NYPD's [New York Police Department] First Precinct guys are roaming around and they don't roam around and develop the space.

01:12:22

There are also other historical niceties, Paley Park for example, the reason for the best pocket parks of their kind, of which there are about 50 in Manhattan is a thing about real estate transaction. The developers get bonuses if they provide these parks! That's why they do it—that's also why they're successful! It doesn't have anything really to do necessarily with the provision of public space as such, which raises the other issue and that is, how many different actors and players have you got going making public space in cities? And I'd say, the more, the merrier, right?

In Singapore here, you have the URA, the URA and the URA. It seems to me right, there aren't a tremendous amount of players. Even the developers are sort of like... "Yeeeahhhh...." Emerarious in many ways. So I think you know, the number of really bona fide actors you've got making and playing and if it's done in a reasonably unbounded way, where it possibly can be, then it's going to be a success. But I mean history does count and Harvard Square was a square, I'm sorry. And I'm sure that green was a green at one point too.

Benjamin
01:13:39

Hi, I'm Benjamin. Essentially, I'm an exchange student here at Yale-NUS from Holland. Basically, I find quite interesting what Professor Jacobs originally brought up saying that basically how do you like create a relevant and usable and good public space?

The urban insider need to find...it's like a restraint. The threshold of restraint. But where does that lie, taking into account, for example in Western and Northern Europe, public participation and urbanisation processes are becoming much more popular in our trend. And also you, Professor Rowe stating that the more the merrier in public design is kind of a desirable feature and saying as well that basically there is now...you find yourselves in a circumstance that's more relaxed, that fixed spaces aren't so fixed anymore.

How do you envision the role of an urban designer in this process, in this case, mostly, predominantly Western cities?

Prof Peter Rowe
01:14:37

Well, fairly simply actually. I think it depends on...I mean if we think about, where did you say you were from? Holland, okay. We take the Netherlands, you know, Rotterdam, cities like that. In addition to the public space, the streets and so forth, there are also a lot of other bits to the city right? And they have to be designed, located, put into place. All I'm saying is that we need to have a more relaxed attitude towards... and not overdo the making of the public realm necessarily at the expense of the private developers et cetera. Et cetera.

So I don't think it obligates us for a responsibility entirely, it's not an either-or circumstance. I'm sort of saying we tend to go too far at times but it doesn't mean we shouldn't be doing something, right? We ought to be tempering that and thinking in more, kind of, longer term redundant ways, you know, of saying okay, if I'm going to make a space like this, let's say, I can use it for this, this and this; whereas I might want to use it for this, this, that and this, right? I think that's probably the way to go about it.

And just think of the conceptualisation of that space through the lens of events that are plausible, or occasions that are plausible. Not necessarily those that are, you know, festivals on the calendar, but also the kind of ad hoc extemporaneous use of the space, which by the way...I'm not an expert on Dutch cities but it seems to me they do rather well in that regard, you know, actually.

Subhash
01:16:22

Hi, my name is Subhash from the Yale-NUS Class of 2017. I had the privilege of researching and working with Dr. Hee on the text. So congratulations.

My question is, sorry in my opinion, public space should be determined by the public and from reading and working on the book, it seems very much so that public space in Singapore is largely antithetical to that notion. So, take the void deck to precinct pavilion transformation for example. **So how much is the state truly responding to the needs of people and facilitating public space rather than prescribing which spaces**

01:16:49

should be public and the social programmes around those spaces? And I'm asking as a concerned citizen, can you speak of the future of participatory planning in Singapore?

Rachel
01:17:03

I'm a current senior at Yale-NUS as well. When you were talking about spaces and event[s], I think that really resonated with my own experience in Singapore and I was thinking—or it brought to mind how space as an event has, in my observation and please do correct me if you have observed otherwise, but space as an event has largely been engaged especially with... especially by the urban youth.

So I was wondering whether it is in any way useful to think of the urban youth specifically in the construction of what you were talking about just now, contemporary urban public spaces, especially in the context of Singapore. Yeah, thank you.

Aimek
01:17:54

Hi, my name is Aimek [and] I work for Future Cities Lab. I understand the thesis here and I understand also it's more about the social construct of public space. But [what] I would like to hear actually from panellist about the influence of the morphology of the city, a little bit in [sic on] the larger scale. **And is there any reasoning behind for instance, why the public activity mentioned here as part of the thesis, is actually happening more in self-contained forms or a self-contained development rather than in a more natural or in a more fluid or connected manner?**

Because I personally think this is something related to the, I mean I come from an architectural background, so I tend to think in terms of composition. **And in Singapore one thing I see in the plans and the developments [is] sometimes they are a little bit too self-contained and not necessarily interconnected? They are planned next to each other but not necessarily together.**

Dr Limin Hee
01:19:19

The question about participatory planning. You worked with me on the book and yes, I think that in my last slide on some of the current initiatives especially taken on by URA in its public city programme, are very interesting in that they are initiatives where they let the

01:19:46

communities propose events and street closure, where the community is a stakeholder in that space and they are given a free reign to organise events and use that space within a certain boundary of time. But it transforms the space, and it also helps planners to think about sustained longer term transformation of those spaces.

So, if there's space for actually closing off a street permanently, these kind[s] of events let the stakeholders, first of all...and the businesses in that area, experience a state which is not the normal state, but something where it is a transformed state but within certain boundaries. This can lead to more sustained changes over time, if there is a lot of buy-in from that community and it is actually very good way to test-bed ideas for transformation of spaces.

And even in public housing, we are doing an experiment. We are working with grassroots communities. This is part of the research at CLC in Tampines where we conducted walking conversations with residents to hear ideas from them—what they would like to see, change or improve because **they** are the main stakeholders of that space and they understand that space socially [and] not just morphologically. So that, we felt that has helped us to think about how to improve the spaces. I will let the other panellists tackle the other questions.

Prof Peter Rowe
01:21:51

The question about...should it be about the youth and event space? Yes. But not exclusively. You know, I'm an old guy, right? I would like to have a piece of that action as well. So I don't think it comes down to a question of... I think it's probably not correct to say, "Well okay, this is going to be only for young people, this is going to be only for old, et cetera." which I'm not sure [was what] you meant.

But we do have to take into account events... a set of events that stretches across the age divide, if you like, and ethnic divides and things of this sort. That's I think, fairly clear. I'm not a big fan of participatory planning, to be honest. I think, for certain kinds of questions about

01:22:39

functionality and so forth, it makes perfect sense to ask people what they want and why they need it.

But in the end of the day, from a kind of like, if we talk about beauty, we should have beautiful spaces, I would leave them out of it. I mean, I think, that becomes a question for architects and urban designers and people who are trained to do. And it doesn't mean that they should be deaf. But I don't think...I'm old enough to be from the sort of old non-rust, bust, rip or tear school, where we went through all the sort of participatory stuff in the late-60's and so forth, and it was crap! It didn't work!

So I think you got to be very careful. I think when you do participatory planning, you need to be very, very conscious of why you are asking people questions, and whether or not they have more expertise about that than you do. And that doesn't cover the waterfront. I'm sorry mate, you know? It doesn't. I'm not sure whether you are a good designer or not, but you ought to be if you want to go full-blown into the participatory set of circumstances. So I mean like I said, I'm not a big fan. I'm a fan up to a point, but then beyond that not at all.

The morphology question. No, I think you are right, mate. I mean, one of the things that, I don't know about Singapore because I haven't sort of spent enough time kind of diagnosing that but I suspect you are. Because one of the things that drive me nutty about the HDB plans are these huge mega plots—which are ipso facto self-contained, right? There is no other way around it.

And I do a lot of work in China and that is a real problem, the mega-plot, because it does not foster any means of de-spatialisation over time, that make[s] some of the great cities truly great. There's no real capacity for market forces or even regulatory forces to work if it's all in this sort of mega-plot arrangement. That's got a lot to do with just simply where all the roads are and the adjacencies and so forth.

01:24:44

So I think you know, we should be making cities where the grain of the larger morphology, I mean take the Manhattan Grid, right? Some bunch of guys in 1811 probably got it right, you know? They decided, hell, we're going to make a grid all over the city. Which of course has become de-spatialised, so we talk about downtown, we talk about mid-town, we talk about the east side, the west side, blah, blah, blah... all of which are quite different but essentially, it's the same damned grid, right?

So I think that is, it's a big issue and I think the main problem in the contemporary scheme of things are these damn mega-plots! Because it's virtually impossible for that to foster de-spatialisation, which is the thing that gives great cities their kind of charm and their change, and everything else that we like about them.

Dr Jane Jacobs
01:25:37

I want to thank everyone for coming. It's been a pleasure to welcome you all to Yale-NUS College. It's been a pleasure for our Urban Studies Programme to join with the Centre for Liveable Cities to launch what I think is...just to have the prop here, to launch and discuss this book, which is a really, as I said at the beginning, a much-needed book which has both scholarship that addresses theory, but [*sic* and] also there's wonderfully animated case studies with some wonderfully provocative concepts at the end. So it's really, a book you can dip into and read and which I think will generate lots of discussion[s] and ideas for practitioners and scholars alike.

I think we're at the point, at the moment, I'm going to ask Dinesh back, we are going to do the civil thing of presentations. So once again, if I can thank Peter Rowe, Michael and Limin very much and you can join with me to thank them.

[Transcript ends at 01:26:52]

LECTURE INFORMATION

TITLE

Constructing Singapore Public Space

SPEAKER

Dr Limin Hee

Director, Centre for Liveable Cities; Author of "Constructing Singapore Public Space"

Mr Michael Koh

Fellow, Centre for Liveable Cities; Former Chief Executive Officer, National Heritage Board

Prof Peter Rowe

Raymond Garbe Professor of Architecture and Urban Design; Distinguished Service Professor, Harvard University

MODERATOR

Dr Jane M. Jacobs

Professor, Social Sciences (Urban Studies), Yale-NUS College

DATE

17 August 2017

LOCATION

Yale-NUS Performance Hall

DURATION

1 Hour 27 Minutes 01 Seconds

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