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URBAN SOLUTIONS

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Michael Koh & Elgin Toh

City Focus

Shanghai

Case Study

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Public Spaces



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Set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) has as its mission “to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities”. CLC’s work spans four main areas— Research, Capability Development, Knowledge Platforms, and Advisory. Through these activities, CLC hopes to provide urban leaders and practitioners with the knowledge and support needed to make our cities better. www.clc.gov.sg



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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

More Ambitious Public Spaces

Cities often neglect public space; we see this in congested downtowns and desolate suburbs. Does it matter? One of my early tasks as a civil engineer in public service involved improving pavements. Singapore wasn't wealthy and faced many challenges in the 1970s, but we still did this in order to reduce pedestrian deaths and injuries. It mattered.

In this issue, *Urban Solutions* explores the value of public space in our interviews, research and case studies. We see that public space takes many forms, performs many roles and can even transform cities.

Beyond its psychological value—Peter Rowe says it aids self-actualisation—public space can help address pressing challenges like climate change, urban regeneration, safety, social segregation and equity. We can exploit public space in much more ambitious and strategic ways to support cities' economic, environmental and social agendas. Jan Gehl suggests one way, with his dream of Singapore as the world's first car-free city.

Where can we start? Traffic is often the biggest challenge to good public spaces. As our case studies and analysis of before-and-after Google Street Views show, cities are now reclaiming space from cars in interesting ways. Developing public space also involves programming and place management. This can involve planning activity-generating functions along streets to make them more walkable, or supporting ground-up events that are meaningful to the community.

Public space is an increasingly exciting and contested topic. When we asked experts

about gated communities, privately-owned public spaces or placemaking festivals, we didn't expect such divergent views! In the absence of clear consensus, how do we move forward? Some ideas recurred across our articles: research, experimentation, collaboration and leadership.

Gehl's data-gathering methodology, and our own study of Singapore's Little India, suggest the value of evidence-based approaches to developing public space. Examples from Seoul's Yonsei-ro to Shanghai and the EcoMobility World Festival demonstrate how experiments can support enduring improvements. Ng Lang advocates collaboration, just as our articles show how places are co-created by mayors, activists, planners, entrepreneurs, judges, designers, researchers, policemen and artists. We also see how leadership drives change and enables risk-taking, as when mayors helped make Chicago's 606 and New York City's Hudson Yards a reality.

When deployed with intelligence, care and courage, public spaces can make cities more liveable, sustainable, prosperous and inclusive. We hope this issue helps to equip and inspire you to chart a more ambitious and transformative agenda for your city's public spaces.

Khoo Teng Chye

Executive Director

Centre for Liveable Cities



Jan Gehl is a
founding partner of
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INTERVIEW

Jan Gehl

Singapore as the World's First Car-Free City

World-renowned urban designer and CLC Visiting Fellow **Jan Gehl** has studied public spaces for 50 years, and advised cities globally for the last 20. He tells Dinesh Naidu about threats facing public spaces, how cities can create people-centric places, and his dream of Singapore as the world's first car-free city.

Why should today's city leaders care about public space?

It is very important for social inclusion and democracy that people in neighbourhoods and townships meet face to face regularly. So that you realise that you are a part of this society, and that these people are your fellow citizens. I think that is very important.

With the enormous growth in digital communications, one can get the idea that all this cyberspace can make public space redundant. But there is no evidence at all. On the contrary, I think indirect contact, like social media, inspires people to see other people in real life.

We can do a thought experiment. If everybody were given an iPhone, spread out in the Sahara and asked to make a living, they would go crazy right away because man is a social animal. We need contact with other people. Throughout history, contact with other people in public spaces has been a very important part of the way we live as human beings, and it still is. If anything, with longer life spans, smaller families, and more leisure time, there is a strong tendency that we will use good quality public spaces more intensively.

“... after the year 2000, we can see a change in attitude. Now, more and more cities are working on securing good conditions for public life.”

Has interest from cities in public spaces grown over time, and if so, why?

Definitely. I see 1960 as a turning point, when cities all over the world started to expand. It was also when motorcars started to invade cities and became very plentiful. And for a period of time, most cities didn't think of this as a challenge.

Then there came a counter movement, of which my career is a good example. I saw, worldwide, the realisation that public life was becoming endangered. From the 70s to 90s, more and more city governments realised that motorcars were pushing out the life of the city. But especially after the year 2000, we can see a change in attitude. Now, more and more cities are working on securing good conditions for public life.

A very good example is Moscow, which was completely invaded by motorcars. Cars were all over the place and it was so awful with fumes and pollution. As a result, there was less and less life in the city. But since 2012, they have made great efforts to make better conditions for people to walk, and to enjoy the parks and the squares to uphold the city as a meeting place.

I've been consulting for Perth for 25 years and I think that they have one of the most remarkable changes I've ever seen in the world. One of the things they did was that they turned all their one-way streets into two-way streets with wider sidewalks and trees. They've completely changed the character of the whole city in just the last 10 years. I am so impressed with how they turned that completely silly city into a rather lovely city.

01



02

01 & 02 The Krymskaya embankment in Moscow before and after interventions.

03 The new Elizabeth Quay in Perth, Australia.

04 Researchers from Gehl Architects making observations in the field.



03



04

What advice would you give to cities trying to reclaim space from cars?

My advice would be that these changes should be made based on documentation and information. That means that the first thing that you should do is record how people are using the city today. Based on this, you could make an overview of where improvements could be made, where it would be most efficient or give the best results. So my advice really is to have the data. Do not just start blindly doing projects here and there.

Are gated communities and privately-owned public spaces obstacles to the democratic role of public spaces?

We can talk about two models. One is the open society, where you have access to the various parts of society. To me, “open” and “democratic” go together. In this open society, rich and poor, and various cultural or religious groups have access to the same spaces, can meet and realise that this society is

made up of all these different types of people; and together, we are a nation.

At the other extreme is a totally gated society, where everybody lives in fortresses, and all communication is made by television, emails or whatever. This is totally different from the open society. I’m strongly against the gated community because I think that it is so much more valuable if we can make a wonderful city where everybody can enjoy.

Public spaces which are privately-owned, like airports and shopping malls, can perform some functions of being a meeting place for people. But generally, there are much stricter rules for what you can do, and they also keep out people who are seen as strange or too poor. Publicly-owned spaces have a much wider range of activities because they are governed by the police and the government who put down rules on what is and is not allowed in this society. They are not governed by what is good or not good for business.



01

Besides cars or gated communities, are there other threats to public spaces?

Terrorism is influencing a number of cities in Germany, France and around the world—the fear is that terrorists would attack the places where many people love to go. I see that as a very serious threat—if we start to be afraid of going into the city, instead of enjoying to go into the city.

I don't know what we can do to tackle this. But I think it's very important to stick to the open society idea so that we don't gradually lock ourselves in privatised worlds with guards and gates surrounding us, living in little fortresses in fear of the world. We have to fight these threats and insist on our public and our humane traditions—that it is a human right to be able to meet your fellow citizens.

What makes a successful public space?

From my research, I have put down 12 criteria for a good public space. Piazza del Campo in Siena, Italy, is one of the best examples. All 12 criteria are very convincingly addressed there. That's why it's so well-functioning after 700 years, and is world-famous. On the other hand, I know a number of places that are



02

deserted, and if people do visit, they run out as quickly as they can. You'll realise in some of these places they have overlooked all 12 criteria.

So there is a very close correlation between the quality offered and the popularity and the well-functioning of a public space. You have to be very careful with these criteria to create a wonderful space. You can spot a successful space if people spend more time there, or seek out this place from far away.

How do you find Singapore's public spaces, and what more would you like to see here?

Boat Quay, Chinatown and Little India are some very interesting areas in Singapore. What I feel is that they are not linked in any convincing way. You can easily go to Singapore and overlook quite a few of these. So I suggest that an active policy be made to link these places in a better way—maybe a light rail going through the city.

The idea of having more pedestrian traffic underground is not very good. You are protected from heat and rain, but after 10, 20 or 30 years, these passages tend to be very uninteresting. There's so much more

01 Mourners remembering victims at a site of the 2015 Paris terror attack.

02 Pedestrians need to use overhead bridges to traverse multi-lane roads in Singapore.



fun and enjoyment moving at the surface of the earth. If you go to Orchard Road in Singapore, you see that you have much better temperature at the sidewalks when you have ample tree coverage. You can easily walk in the daytime in Singapore if you are careful with the vegetation. So don't push people underground, like moles, or even to the second level. They have done quite a bit of this in Canada and northern USA, which they regret bitterly now. Because it's very difficult to get the surface working again as a public space.

Do you think sky gardens work as public spaces?

I think we need research on this, so that it's not speculation and we can base it on real facts. Gardens in the sky provide fresh air and relief for those living or working in high-rise buildings. I suspect that they function as public spaces to a certain degree, but also that a good park at the ground level—easily accessible for all in the community, not just those who live in this high-rise—would be in most cases a much better solution.

Are cycling and walking viable mobility options in a tropical city like Singapore?

In my dream, I see Singapore as the first city in the world to be car-free.

It's really stupid to drive cars on an island that is 50 by 25 kilometres, and where people live so densely. If you are to expand from five million to seven or eight million people, you cannot rely on technology from Detroit in the United States in 1905, which has given everybody four rubber wheels to secure individual mobility. That was a good strategy a hundred years ago, but it's certainly not a good one for 21st century cities, and especially not for Singapore, which is so confined and so condensed.

Singapore could be served by fantastic neighbourhoods where you walk and cycle short distances without getting too sweaty, with a very efficient public transportation system that links these neighbourhoods. You don't need cars at all in Singapore, in my opinion.

It would be really lovely if you start to analyse what would be a smart mobility strategy for an island city like Singapore. You could have much better neighbourhoods than the ones you have today, where school children have to climb up and down silly bridges to get to their schools. People would walk, bicycle, and use public transportation, and cars are only used for emergency services, people with disabilities and deliveries.

The promotion of walking and bicycling is more obvious in certain countries than others.



The Piazza del Campo from Siena, Italy is Gehl's model public space.



Gehl's 12 Criteria for Good Public Spaces

Protection – against

- traffic / accidents
- crime / violence
- unpleasant sensory experiences

Comfort – opportunities to

- walk
- stand / stay
- sit
- see
- talk / listen
- play / exercise

Delight – through

- human-scale urban design
- chances to enjoy good climate
- positive sensory experiences

“In my dream, I see Singapore as the first city in the world to be car-free.”





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In Copenhagen, we do a lot of bicycle commuting because that keeps us warm, but that's not your problem. In Singapore, I see bicycling as something for small trips, to the train station or supermarket, and not to commute for half an hour in the heat. Bicycling can be used very differently in different climates.


What do you think of placemaking events to enliven public spaces?

Promoting activities and festivals for communities is a very valuable activity. But you cannot use placemaking as a sort of acupuncture, where you go in and do a little bit here and a little bit there. What is needed are strategies for the whole city, as part of a people-oriented policy. Cities like Perth, Copenhagen, New York and Moscow have city-wide strategies to improve the situation.

Then you can go into individual places, streets, squares or parks and have some further programmes to promote that place and organise events. But I think there is a tendency for some cities to do a number of little placemaking things and they skip the overall question of a general strategy for mobility, health and sustainability. Smaller placemaking interventions are great, but they are not the answer.

How can citizen inputs be usefully incorporated into creating public spaces? Are there limits to this?

No, I would not say there are limits. It's very interesting that there is such an enormous interest among the general population about public spaces. Whenever you have a public meeting with public spaces on the agenda, people come in great numbers and they have lots of ideas and suggestions. That shows that these things are close to people's hearts.

We should value and use this public interest as a resource. But we must also be professional and study the subjects very carefully before we go to the public meetings, so that we have something to offer to the people. We should tell them, "This is what the problems are, and this is what has been done in other places and cities" so people can get an overview of possible solutions, and then discuss on a more informed level. We have an enormous obligation to inform the people as part of a public process, because you can never ask for something you've never heard about. We have to tell them about other successful neighbourhoods and say, "Are there some of these things you like to see happening in your community?" 

01 Shade trees at Orchard Road in Singapore show how tropical cities can be walkable.

02 Singapore is developing walking- and cycling-friendly towns, beginning with Ang Mo Kio.



Ng Lang,
CEO of the Urban
Redevelopment
Authority, Singapore



INTERVIEW

Ng Lang

Creating Special Bonds with Public Spaces

Since **Ng Lang** became CEO of Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), the agency has introduced many initiatives to activate public spaces. He tells Dinesh Naidu why the city can't live on the steroids of spectacular events, and describes how URA uses experiments and community collaborations to cultivate special places where people bond.

Since you became CEO in 2010, URA has focused more on quality public spaces. Why are public spaces so important to you?

When you look at great cities around the world, you often find that they are not only defined by good urban plans and architecture, but also by the vibrancy of their public spaces. Attaching importance to this area is just a logical extension of the mission of the URA, which is to make Singapore a great city to live, work and play.

Here in Singapore, the importance of public spaces is even more pertinent because of the cosmopolitan and multiracial nature of our society. At our playgrounds, you will see young children coming to play together, regardless of race, language and religion. Public places are where people come together to interact, to build trust and to build comfort level, and this is, I think, something that is very key in our effort to build a harmonious society and in achieving the objective of our nation building.

“Because it involves people ... you are never always certain about the outcome. So every project for us is an experimentation.”

Which are your proudest or favourite projects so far, and what more do you plan to do?

The Kranji Marshes that we completed early last year is a very special project because of the collaborative approach that we took in engaging the Nature Society of Singapore and the National Parks Board (NParks) from the start. Because of the success of the partnership, we ended up with one of the best wetland nature parks we have built in recent years, in terms of aesthetics and quality of the biodiversity.

Something else we have enjoyed a lot is Car-Free Sunday. When we started, we were uncertain how Singaporeans would react to such a project. It has really succeeded beyond our expectation, not only in terms of attracting a huge number of people to enjoy the place, but as a platform to attract people to come together to do things. So at every edition of Car-Free Sunday, we see community and interest groups coming together to

organise activities with us. They are there to enjoy the place, but also because they like the message behind Car-Free Sunday and are there to show their support.

Personally, what's most enjoyable about Car-Free Sunday is just the fact that it is a happy event—there is a certain ambience of community bonding, of cheerfulness, of camaraderie that I think makes that event very special.

And if that's the kind of emotions that people experience in a car-free precinct, then there's hope that, over time, it can persuade people to change their lifestyle to support our long-term goal of a “car-lite” society in Singapore.

This is what makes collaborative public space projects interesting. But because it involves people, and often a large number of people, you are never always certain about the outcome. So every project for us is an experimentation. There's always something to learn to make the next project better.

01 Nature Society volunteers cleared overgrown vegetation in 2008, allowing birdlife to thrive. URA and NParks then co-developed the area as Kranji Marshes Nature Park in 2014.

02 Ng Lang (second from left) with National Development Minister Lawrence Wong (middle) at a Car-Free Sunday, when the city centre becomes a pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly precinct.





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- 01 The well-loved Singapore Botanic Gardens is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- 02 Streets for People helped stakeholders close Maju Avenue to cars for a music and arts festival.
- 03 NParks' Community in Bloom programme helps residents start gardens in underutilised spaces.

What to you is a successful public space?

I think a kind of universal quality that defines public spaces is how they connect with people. In Singapore, I think a very good example of a very iconic and enduring public space is the Botanic Gardens. This is a place where all of us have fond memories of. I know of many who celebrate special life occasions there including the taking of their wedding pictures. And when we look at a place like that, I suppose then you start asking, if you want to create or rejuvenate spaces elsewhere in the city, how do we replicate that special emotional bond and connection between the places and the people?

And if you look at some of the initiatives that we've started like Streets for People, you will see that they are about encouraging community partners to join us in collaboration to create that bond between them and the spaces that we are trying to create.

So the approach is to ask, "Is there a space around your neighbourhood that you think can be made special? Tell us how you'd like to make it special, and we'll facilitate that." With people involved in helping us create the space, we can hopefully create the special

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emotional attachment. This is the kind of effort that we are embarking on now.

Something that's quite special in Singapore are the community gardens. Right now, we have about a thousand of them, and if you visit each one, you realise that they're more than just community gardens. There is actually a special community of people. Besides gardening, there's often a good story of friendship, of people coming together to enjoy good times, and to help one another through hard times. This builds the bond between people and space, and this is what we want to encourage in our current placemaking effort.

“The city cannot be living on steroids—you can't be having an event like that every few weeks. At best, maybe once or twice a year.”



Why has URA's place management strategy evolved from organising large-scale events to encouraging smaller, ground-up initiatives?

There's always a place for big events. The URA organises the annual countdown at Marina Bay every New Year's Eve. I always feel there's something special about an event that brings a community of three to four hundred thousand people together to collectively express hopes for the New Year. An event like that is great for community-building, but we know the city cannot be living on steroids—you can't be having an event like that every few weeks. At best, maybe once or twice a year.

For the rest of the time, the experience of a city is defined by your daily encounters at the more human level, and this is what we are trying to do in our placemaking efforts. It's really to try to improve the quality of the daily encounter that you have. As I explained earlier, we thought the best approach in doing this is not about us doing this ourselves, but getting the community, as a partner, to do it together.

Something that we often hear is: "Your rules are too restrictive, it's very hard to do this and that in your public spaces because there are too many rules." But when you sit down and look at the rules together, we know that the rules are there for a purpose. An example would be the use of the void deck in the public housing estate. Kicking a ball in the void deck is not often welcome. Why? Because it ends up creating noise



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for the guys living above. When you start to understand why the rules are there, the next question you can ask is whether there are ways to work together—either to mitigate the noise or to conduct activities at times when people are at work and would not be disturbed.

When you examine questions like that, then things that were not possible could become possible. Work like that requires us to create a platform for parties to come together to have dialogues, to understand one another's concern, and in the process make something possible. I think this is really what placemaking is all about.

I think it has been very gratifying, that we are seeing an increasing number of people coming forward to collaborate with us in creating and celebrating public spaces. We would like to encourage more to be involved in this area of community work. And my promise is that there's a great reward waiting for you, and the reward is seeing people enjoying the spaces that you've helped to create.

01 Huge crowds gather to enjoy the fireworks at the Marina Bay Singapore Countdown.

02 A typical void deck below a Singapore public housing apartment block.

“The experience of a city is defined by your daily encounters at the more human level.”

Some say privately-owned public spaces are less open to the public, and restrict spontaneity. Is this an issue in Singapore?

I think the trick is in finding the alignment of interest to make things work. In our experience, it does work in commercial buildings because there's every interest for commercial buildings to have spaces around them to be vibrant. It's good for business. A very good example would be the Cube at Asia Square. This is a sheltered plaza that is built below two very successful commercial buildings. With our climate, a chain of closely knit smaller spaces found in between buildings can provide the shade to help us escape from the tropical sun. If you are there today, you will see office workers coming down to the space to chill, to enjoy other people's company, to network, to gossip, maybe even do a bit of business transaction in the process. And there you see a very strong alignment of interest and that's why a space like that works.

It'll probably not work too well if you impose that on a private residential development where people want privacy. In situations like that, public spaces should be best left in public hands. ○



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01 URA's new *Design Guidelines and Good Practice Guide for Privately Owned Public Spaces* safeguard spaces like Asia Square for public use.



Peter G. Rowe is the Raymond Garbe Professor of Architecture and Urban Design at Harvard University, and is a former Dean of Harvard's Faculty of Design.



INTERVIEW

Peter G. Rowe

Finding Meaning in Public Spaces

CLC Visiting Fellow **Peter G. Rowe** is a Professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and the author of *Civic Realism*, a book about public space. He tells Dinesh Naidu and Tan Pei En how public spaces aid self-actualisation, and why concerns about privately-owned public spaces, gated communities and gentrification may be overblown.

Are urban public spaces important?

I think the public realm of cities is very important. It goes back to “What do I get out of public space”? I live in New York. When I walk down the street, I don't necessarily feel super safe, and I'm likely to run into people, some of whom I know, some of whom I don't, and have encounters. Tourists are constantly asking for directions. I like that because it's a kind of encounter that I otherwise don't have in life.

That's the civilising aspect of it. When you encounter somebody you've never seen before, or you encounter difference and

you're challenged by that difference and you think about yourself vis-à-vis that difference. Or you're a little apprehensive. It's character building.

I'm a professor: I go to my class, I've got 40 students looking at me. It's not public. In public, you walk differently, or you adopt a different body language—you're more aware. I am, because sometimes it's not that safe. I'm not going to walk around in my pyjamas.

Is it about a sense of community?

Yes! Makes me feel as though I'm part of the human race, not the rat race!

Is this what some call the democratic or egalitarian function of public space?

No, it may not be. It has to do with self-actualisation, self-identity. It helps me tell a story about myself. How do I find meaning about myself from amongst other people, not necessarily my peers. That's one of the most important functions of good public spaces. I don't think you can have democracy without a reasonable amount of self-actualisation actually.

What to you is a successful public space?

Public space varies from one culture to another. In the West, we have certain ideas about public spaces: piazzas, plazas and boulevards, which don't exist in East Asia particularly. So how you assess the quality of public space depends how you define it, and your cultural setting.

Within an American or European circumstance, I think successful public spaces are those that are quite specific. And by that I mean in the design of them, they are making expressive references to particular events, or memorialising certain events or people. The idea of generalised public spaces doesn't work at all.

East Asian circumstances have other forms of public space, often in the form of widened streets or landings from

bridges. In Japan, thinking about the public spaces of Edo, I think about a bridge like Nihonbashi. It's where the bridge hits the ground, where it widens out—that's the public space where you'd see the troupes of clowns and so on performing. This will be the area people would look to for the kind of interaction amongst themselves, which we'd normally associate with a public space.

Why don't "generalised" spaces work?

Specificity is something that varies probably, culturally. Any artefact in the city, unless it has a very specific orientation or alignment, ends up in a fashion that is inarticulate to anybody. In other words, if I tried to satisfy everybody's claims vis-à-vis a public space, and don't favour some over another, I end up with a bad public space.

If you take Rome's Piazza Navona, or any major plazas in the Western sense, they have a very specific form, and a very specific expressive content, which you either buy into or you don't. Times Square is highly specific. It's iconic actually. Everyone knows what Times Square is—it's big, it's bold, it's flash.

When we talk about generalised spaces, which we tried to create during the height of participatory planning processes in the 60s and the 70s, you end up with mush.





“ If I tried to satisfy everybody’s claims vis-à-vis a public space, and don’t favour some over another, I end up with a bad public space. ”

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What about the open spaces between Singapore's public housing blocks?

Yeah. They have no character at all. That's the trouble. Modernist space between buildings or modernist space in general doesn't do very well on this count. It has to be infused with programme, very specific programme.

Does this mean history is important in public spaces?

No, not necessarily. Adriaan Geuze did this crazy plaza [Schouwburgplein] in Rotterdam, where it is raised up, has got big lights and is extremely specific! And it's very modern. The narrative is about performance space. It's set up that way, used that way probably once in a blue moon, but nevertheless it has that sort of character. It's got nothing to do with history.

So is something like Singapore's Padang, which may not be used often, a good public space?

It's fine, very specific, and historically entrenched. Kind of the hallowed ground of the Republic, used to celebrate National Day, when they fly over it.

The Padang is exactly the same idea as the Maidan in Mumbai. It can be used for cricket, it can be used for all kinds of things, and it is very multipurpose. But its specific purpose was not necessarily for nice reasons. The Maidan was for shooting guns at people, ultimately. But it has been adopted, because of its special characteristics, for lots of things.

You can have a well-made public space that is for a specific function that then, secondarily, can be taken over by other people for other purposes that may have nothing to do with the original function, and that's okay too. That's a very good public space.

01 Schouwburgplein, an elevated plaza with massive lights, is specifically designed for performances.

02 Cricket on Mumbai's Maidan, like Singapore's Padang, belies a darker colonial purpose.

Are privately-owned public spaces problematic, as some argue, because they are too surveilled or exclude some people?

No. Do you know why? Because the public spaces are all so highly surveilled! Rome has wonderful public space. You know how many CCTV cameras there are? The *carabinieri* [Italian police] can find anything! Public space can be as equally surveilled as private space!

In New York, privately-owned public spaces were put in as bonuses for developers. Some of them are absolutely wonderful! Midtown Manhattan is full of these. They have these little alleyways, running water, you can sit there with a book, and eat a sandwich. It introduced an atmospheric condition into the city, and in a manner where there were enough of them built, and with enough care, beauty, material quality and so forth to provide an alternative experience that never existed before. Some close at night, for various reasons. They don't want it to be vandalised, and they only put the gates in after they found that they were likely to be vandalised, but otherwise they are publicly accessible. You don't know they are not public parks, and they are, as far as the cops are concerned.

What about shopping malls as public spaces?

In the United States, courts have ruled that they may be private but they are considered as public spaces. So that settled that, *de jure* [by law].

The other issue is that the number of malls is declining substantially. And indeed, we seem to be going back to market-like spaces. They're very popular these days, particularly in America and in a number of other countries. So we're going in a loop from the market to the malls and big boxes and back to markets again. I think the big box and the mall were so narrowly prescribed towards consumption, as distinct from performance in public spaces whilst shopping. We're going back towards the market, but it's a market of a different kind where there are events. Spaces are arranged, devised and operated to allow events to occur. In most of the good markets, like at the Chelsea Market in New York, you go to buy stuff and eat there, but it also aligns itself for certain kinds of promotions, events and stuff like that.



01 Developer-provided seating and water features create a welcoming environment in Midtown Manhattan.

02 Events held at Chelsea Market include *Chelsea Nights*, a monthly concert series.



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“Gentrification probably exists ... but are we going to stand in front of all change? I don't think so.”

Are gated communities a problem for cities?

Gated communities get a bad reputation in circumstances where you're dealing with severe exclusion of one segment of the population by another. I don't think it's a problem in Singapore because you are fairly egalitarian. You have a lot of rich people, but they are over in houses somewhere. Eighty-five per cent of people live in public housing, which is all built more or less the same. Singapore may have one of the highest Gini indexes among developed countries, but it doesn't necessarily mean that every place on the higher Gini index registers itself spatially in the same way.

I just finished a book last fall titled *China's Urban Communities*. I did 100 or so interviews in cities with mainly middle class families in gated, fenced off homes. When you think about it historically, when you go through the *baojia* [stockaded village], and even the closed streets systems in Beijing, the Chinese have always lived with guarding walls around them. It's a cultural thing in the Sinic world. So they don't even think about it as problematic.

They think about it being problematic only because of the big blocks, and the fact that circulation is cut off. That's an issue, because it produces traffic patterns which are hyper congested: the block's too big and you can't move through them, and there isn't access for someone walking from here to here in the city. In other words, the circularity of the city is compromised.

Some criticise public space rejuvenation projects like the High Line for excluding lower-income groups, and causing gentrification. Is this a problem?

Well, gentrification probably exists. From a lot of empirical studies in the USA and in New York, it's exaggerated in terms of its exclusionary effect. So yes, it does happen but are we going to stand in front of all change? We're not going to reutilise old buildings that may merit being reused and brought back into service because it may cause some sort of disruption to the social-economic circumstances of places? I don't think so. I mean, change is change.

The High Line is a toy. It has received a lot of very clever, good publicity. But is it unique? These sorts of elevated railway



spaces exist elsewhere; Promenade Plantée in Paris is huge. Is it the best of its kind? No. Is it of the same sort of service to New Yorkers as, let's say, the West Side [Henry Hudson] Parkway? No! Not even close. But I don't think the High Line is problematic. It's just over exaggerated in terms of its value.

How do you think Singapore's public spaces fare? Do you have any advice for us?

Singapore is Singapore. It probably reaches its own conclusions about its public spaces and what defines public space.

I don't find Singapore bereft of vitality, or bereft of vibrant street scenes. If I walked down the food street in Chinatown, it's bustling with people, people are interacting with one another, and don't necessarily know each other.

I think one of the problems here though, is that Singapore is always trying to be like

somewhere else. Every time I come here, somebody's aping something about New York. You always seem to want to be like somewhere else. I would say, be happy to be yourselves, which is fine!

Singapore ought to be a little bit more introspective about what Singapore wants to be and not try to benchmark themselves constantly or copy what's going on elsewhere, or be concerned about that particularly. ●

Watch the interview here:



<https://youtu.be/QbUNe3hySY4>



Libraries as Public Spaces

New Champions for Civic Spaces

Traditionally regarded as centres of information resources, public libraries have also always played an important role as trusted and inclusive community spaces. While information is increasingly accessible online, **Joanna Tan** shows us how modern public libraries are renewing their role as valued social spaces that not only anchor their communities but can also revitalise and transform them.



Open-Air Library, Magdeburg, Germany

An urban planning experiment to boost social networks in the Salbke district resulted in the creation of this community-led, sustainably built public library that fuses interior and exterior space. As the district's "green living room", the library is an important focal point for community activities that support social and cultural life.





The Pinch, Yunnan, China

Built after a series of devastating earthquakes, The Pinch is the Shuanghe Village's central community space as well as a memorial to the earthquake victims and the survivors' resilience. Villagers read and socialise at the library and adjacent plaza, while the curved roof of the building acts as a pedestrian ramp and play structure.

Biblioteca España, Medellín, Colombia

The Biblioteca España (Spain Library Park) is one of several public libraries built in the city's high-risk areas to combat violence and create more equitable socio-economic opportunities. Residents gather in this oasis for readings, screenings, concerts and discussions. The small windows encourage disconnection from the surrounding neighbourhood's poverty.





National Library Building, Singapore

Library visitorship is one of the world's highest in densely populated Singapore. Despite plentiful online resources, this internationally-acclaimed "green" building draws over a million people annually. Visitors vie for space in the reading rooms, study lounge and sky gardens, attend exhibitions, watch performances, and participate in community events at the public plaza.



Dokk1 Library and Citizens' Services, Aarhus, Denmark

Built on derelict industrial space, Dokk1 was converted into a "covered urban square" for community interaction, learning and knowledge sharing. The centre also offers flexible internal spaces for experimentation and innovation. Large staircases and open terraces provide access to the building from all sides, and are popular as meeting and resting spots.



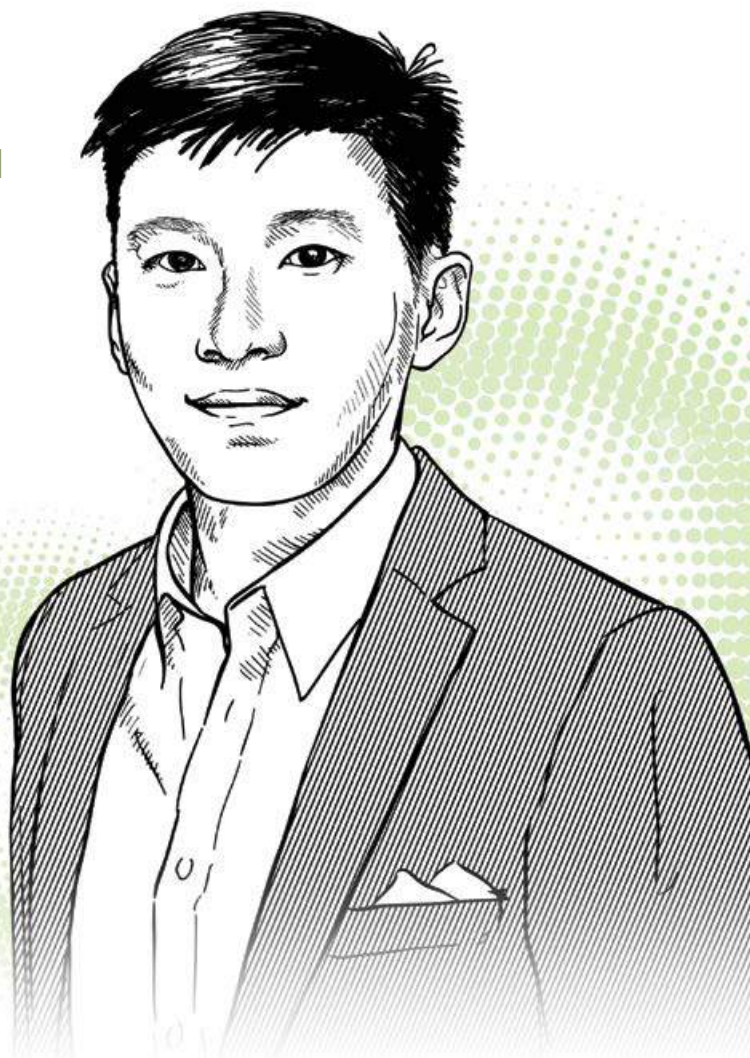
OPINION

Viewpoint: Kennie Ting

Festivals Bond People to Places Meaningfully



Festivals could reframe
the meaning of places and
make them relevant to a
wider audience.



When large festivals are authentic, collaborative and organised from the ground up, they create vibrant and well-loved public spaces, argues **Kennie Ting**, Group Director of Museums, who oversees major festivals run by Singapore's National Heritage Board, including the Singapore Night Festival, Singapore Heritage Festival and River Nights.

For two weeks each year, Bras Basah, a district in Singapore's city centre, is transformed into one mega public space by a phenomenon known as the Singapore Night Festival. The various plots of unused state land and private green space are activated with curated programmes and activities. Streets and sidewalks become linkages between these "outdoor stages", so to speak, rather than the barriers they usually are.

The Singapore Night Festival has, in its nine years of existence, grown to become Singapore's premier outdoor night spectacle. Its footfall has risen exponentially from 40,000 to a steady state of 600,000.

Seven in 10 festivalgoers come to the area *specifically* for the Festival, and the satisfaction rate amongst festivalgoers is 88%.

Large-scale festivals like the Night Festival are able to inject vibrancy into public spaces when the programming is authentic and ground-up.

The Festival, organised by the National Museum of Singapore, achieves this by programming on the principle of partnership—each of the major stakeholders in the area contributes their own programming (and therefore their own unique "voice" and identity) to the

Festival. The number of festival partners has grown from a mere six in 2008 to more than 70 in 2016, as the Festival grew in profile and significance. The stakeholders range from arts and community groups, an alternative arts space (The Substation), arts schools, religious institutions, the National Design Centre and the National Library.

The result is an eclectic programming mix, featuring elaborate street processions, big light installations, alongside somewhat more intimate performance art pieces, community-oriented variety shows, graffiti art and grungy, local alt-rock. This is an extensive range or repertoire that only a festival held on a mega scale could accommodate. The Night Festival is thus accessible and edgy, local and international, and appealing to everyone, be it young families with children, cosmopolitan art aficionados, or free-spirited youth.

The Night Festival's focus on local audience draws a footfall that is consistently more than 80% Singaporean citizens and permanent residents.

Its festival programming is first and foremost targeted at Singaporeans because of the

shared memories locals have of the area. This used to be a historic schools precinct, with the largest concentration of major schools once located here. A generation of Singaporeans grew up going to school here, and have fond memories of spending time here at their former school premises, many still existing as National Monuments and conserved buildings. They also remember the many landmarks that were once here, including the hugely-mourned former National Library and the former Bras Basah Park.

The heart of the festival always takes place in the green space between the National Museum of Singapore and the Singapore Management University—even though it is inconveniently bisected by a major thoroughfare, Stamford Road. The location of the heart of the festival here is strategic because this was where Bras Basah Park was located—before it was excised to build the university.

Large festivals create vibrant spaces when they highlight and enhance the distinctive character of the area, making any physical disadvantages (like busy street crossings) of the place irrelevant.

“Large-scale festivals like the Night Festival are able to inject vibrancy into public spaces when the programming is authentic and ground-up.”

The Night Festival, in particular, has evolved a hybrid, historic-contemporary, old-new outlook due to its specific locale. The Bras Basah area is perhaps the most historic precinct in Singapore, with the highest concentration of national monuments, conserved buildings and places of worship. These historic buildings are used as a set and backdrop to often startlingly contemporary or “street”-culture oriented light and outdoor installations, as if to say to visitors: *heritage is not dead in the least, but very much alive, dynamic and cutting-edge*. Hence festivals could reframe the meaning of places and make them relevant to a wider audience through such creative collaboration and programming.

The buzz of major festivals can extend from the physical realm to the virtual one: there

were more than 6.3 million impressions (i.e., views, likes, shares, comments and post clicks on the Festival website, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other social media channels) and a high online engagement rate of 12% (as opposed to an industry benchmark of 1%) for what is at its essence a festival promoting and celebrating a *heritage* precinct.

What one can conclude from the case of Nightfest (as the public now calls the festival colloquially), is that big festivals are critical to creating vibrant, well-loved and well-used public spaces, insofar as the festival builds on the strengths of the public space in question—what makes this space distinctive and unique—in its programming and brand identity, and focuses on servicing and delighting the local community first. ○



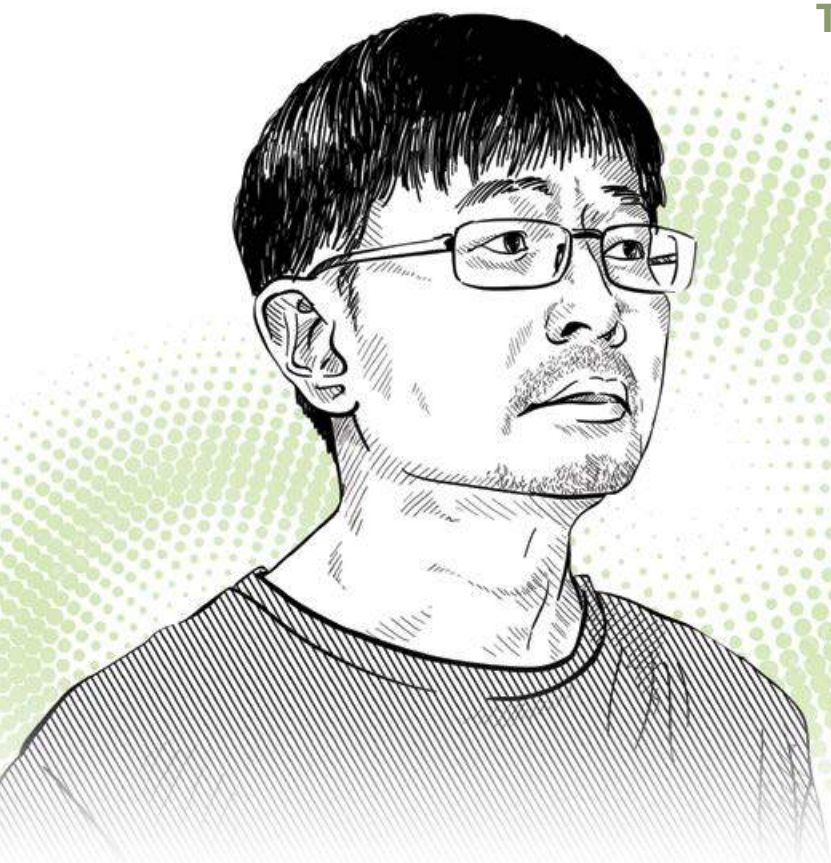
OPINION

Counterpoint: Tan Tarn How

The Festival Effect is Transient and Superficial



What happens after the tentage has been taken down, the buntings removed, the litter cleared and the roads re-opened? The area goes back to its old quiet self.



Vibrant spaces and places that evolved organically due to their historical, cultural, community and commercial roots continue to stay lively in the long term, in contrast to large-scale festivals that tend to spark short-lived vibrancy, argues **Tan Tarn How**, a Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore, and a playwright.

Large-scale festivals and events can no doubt inject unprecedented vibrancy into places.

Indeed, the list of such exciting happenings that enliven cities, towns and places within them is a long one. They include the Rio de Janeiro and other street carnivals, religious festivals like the Ati-Atihan parade in the Philippines, music mega-events such as the Montreux Jazz Festival, the Olympics, and New Year celebrations all over the world like the Songkran water festival of Thailand.

Singapore too has its own large-scale street events. They range from the traditional Thaipusam religious procession to the modern National Day Parade, and the more

recently-minted ones such as the Night Festival, and the Singapore River Festival. These events—which are big draws for locals and tourists—often meld spectacle, culture, art, drama, participation in one setting and over a certain period of time.

Some like Thaipusam or National Day Parade arose naturally out of, and are embedded in, a religious, cultural or political calendar. Others were specially created to bring buzz to otherwise moribund places and spaces such as the Night Festival and Singapore River Festival, which were aimed to spark vibrancy in the city centre.

The effect and the sustainability of the latter was the subject of the “Roundtable on Place Management and Placemaking in Singapore” jointly hosted by the Institute of Policy Studies and the Singapore Art Museum. The roundtable, from which I draw partly for this article, focused on the government’s strategy called “place management” that aims to bring “heart and soul” into the city.

In the decade or so since they began, the newly-minted festivals have gone from strength to strength. For example, the 2016 Night Festival pulled in a record 600,000 visits over its two weekends. The event turned Bras Basah—a historic, cultural and commercial district in the city—into a venue for a “midsummer’s celebration of sorts” when “art and culture spill onto the streets when dusk falls”, according to the organiser the National Museum.

From the narrow yardstick of whether the fun and revelry entranced the citizens, other residents and tourists who came, the Night Festival was a huge success. Streets that were normally deserted and buildings that were usually empty at night came alive.

But what happens after the tentage has been taken down, the buntings removed, the litter cleared and the roads re-opened? The area goes back to its old quiet self. The effect is

transient and (because of safe unchallenging programming) superficial. They create busy spaces for a time, but are not vibrant in the sense of a sustained or deeper connection of people in a place.

What are the reasons for this lack of vibrancy?

First, some of these areas are structurally not amenable for people to hang out in. They may be unfriendly to pedestrians, have no clear focal point such as a plaza, or be made up of disconnected parts not easily and intuitively accessible to one another. The success of the Night Festival, for instance, was only possible because roads had to be closed to allow free movement of people. Once the cars return, the same fluidity of movement becomes difficult.

Second, the activities and facilities on offer are not of wide enough interest for many people to frequent them.

Third, these spaces and places lack a special, usually local, flavour that gives a reason for people to visit them.

Fourth, the large-scale festivals are often organised from the top down rather than ground up—grafted by some higher or outside agency onto a community that might not buy fully into the idea or the same ideas

of enlivening their neighbourhood. Indeed sometimes the local community is left with as many problems as benefits from a big event, as some research on the Glastonbury Music Festival has shown.

Contrast this short-lived vibrancy with places in Singapore that are vibrant the whole year round and quite often round the clock as well. Among them are Little India, Arab Street, a resurgent Chinatown and even the Geylang red light district.

These hotspots of liveliness grew organically and spontaneously and not because of—some would say in spite of—government intervention or encouragement. One participant at the roundtable memorably called the bustling 24-hour giant shopping complex in Little India, Mustafa, “the Night Festival that Singapore has every day”.

The existence and vibrancy of these places are deeply connected to their cultural, historical, community and commercial roots. Each satisfies to a greater or lesser extent the four conditions for intrinsic vibrancy listed above.

Away from the city centre, non-government efforts have been made to add buzz to satellite towns in suburban Singapore. For instance, the theatre company Drama Box has organised exhibitions and forums, and staged plays in the Toa Payoh town square.

“One participant at the roundtable memorably called the bustling 24-hour giant shopping complex in Little India, Mustafa, ‘the Night Festival that Singapore has every day’.”

Its activities are deeply embedded in the locale, and encourage residents there to reflect on and discuss community and national issues. It is noteworthy that Toa Payoh is one of the few Singapore suburbs with a proper town square, a structural feature that makes such community-oriented activities like Drama Box’s even possible in the first place.

It remains to be seen whether the ground-up and grassroot efforts like Drama Box, together with other initiatives, will bring a long-term liveliness to these town centres. This is where government’s or the local authority’s role is needed—but as facilitators for what the community needs and wants, and not as a lead organiser of big events. ○



EcoMobility World Festivals

One Neighbourhood, One Month, No Cars

EcoMobility World Festivals are organised as month-long, playful urban reality labs to showcase the future of mobility, offer citizens the experience of alternative transport modes, and allow city planners to test new mobility solutions. **Konrad Otto-Zimmermann**, Creative Director of The Urban Idea and the man behind this concept, provides perspectives of the Festival in Suwon, South Korea in 2013 and Johannesburg, South Africa in 2015.

Cars occupy public space and impede social life in the streets. By reducing automobile dominance, cities can embark on a car-light journey towards greater liveability. How does a city begin to communicate this vision, introduce alternative modes of transport, and test-run solutions? To solve this problem, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, introduced the EcoMobility World Festival—a month-long, elaborate festival of road closures in a neighbourhood, with the motto “one neighbourhood, one month, no cars”. These playful “urban reality labs” allow people to experience an urban mobility future in real time and try out different clean transport options, while the city gets to experiment and evaluate its impacts.

The inaugural EcoMobility World Festival 2013 was held in Suwon, South Korea, and the second one in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2015. Both Suwon Mayor Yeom Tae-young and Johannesburg Mayor Parks Tau wanted to shape their cities into places free of cars, using a festival to raise awareness on urban transport issues and the need to change mobility choices. More importantly, both cities leveraged the festival to catalyse a series of urban transformations—in Suwon, it is the cautious renewal and revival of the Haenggung-dong neighbourhood in the old town centre; and in Johannesburg, the improvement of public transport infrastructure and services in and around the Sandton Central Business District.

Suwon 2013

Home to 4,300 residents and 1,500 cars, Haenggung-dong had been in decline and in need of urban renewal. For 20 months, city officials, civil society groups, residents and shop owners joined hands to prepare for the inaugural EcoMobility World Festival. Trained interviewers visited all households to explain the project, survey mobility patterns and transport needs, and seek opinions, while several public assemblies were held to further engage residents. The organising team even set up office in the neighbourhood centre and had their lunches at local restaurants daily to increase conversation opportunities with the community. Instead of a temporary redecoration of street space and reorganisation of traffic just for the festival, Mayor Yeom Tae-young sought to revive

Haenggung-dong with permanent upgrades to its two main streets.

Of course, not everyone was happy with the prospect of living without their cars for a full month. A very vocal group of opponents from the business sector put so much pressure on the city that a compromise had to be made—the four-lane Jongjo Street was closed for just 10 days instead of the entire month.

In the weeks following the festival, the city convened a roundtable where residents endorsed “ecomobility” as the new paradigm for Suwon’s future transport planning, lending support to the Mayor’s green urban development agenda, including the construction of a new tram line.



Suwon, South Korea, 2013

During the month of September 2013, the car-free streets of Haenggung-dong filled up with people strolling, cycling, riding small electric vehicles or enjoying a ride with a Velotaxi. Food stalls offered traditional Korean food, and restaurants placed tables and chairs in the streets. There were street concerts, dance performances and street theatre.



Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015

The new public space created from the road closure was activated with a colourful celebration of ecomobility.

Johannesburg 2015

Sandton Central Business District, with its banks and multi-national companies, hotels and malls, typically experienced an influx of 120,000 commuters and over 75,000 cars daily. “We want to show residents and visitors that a car-free city is possible and that public transport, walking and cycling can be accessible, safe, attractive and cool,” said Mayor Parks Tau when he announced the festival project.

The city closed West Street, the central axis through Sandton, and introduced Park and



Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015

Yesterday a busy, four-lane thoroughfare through the Sandton Central Business District, today the course of a water slide. The EcoMobility World Festival in Johannesburg gave citizens contrasting experiences of how public space can be used: streets for cars or for people?

Ride facilities, cycle lanes and new bus services. They ran a bold, multimedia campaign targeting 75,000 drivers to “Change the way you move”, offering alternative transport modes. Over 80 consultation meetings were held to engage citizens and stakeholders, and various partner events such as Freedom Ride and Discovery Duathlon took place as well.

The festival reduced the usage of private cars in Sandton by 22%, and saw five times more people walking along West Street. The introduced bus loop was well accepted,

and Gautrain, a light rail service, increased its ridership by 14%. The Park and Ride services resulted in 700 fewer cars entering the CBD every day. While these numbers suggest modest changes in travel behaviour, the festival fulfilled the Mayor’s goal to “create noise”—for the first time in South Africa, urban transport was subjected to a wide and intensive public debate. ●



ESSAY

Evidence-Based Approaches to Place Management

Finding Common Ground in Historic Ethnic Districts

How can cities manage multiple stakeholder demands and complex ground realities in historic ethnic districts? **Gurubaran Subramaniam** explains how researchers developed a mixed-methods, evidence-based approach in a study of Singapore's Little India to identify opportunities for positive interventions—an approach that could be relevant to similar districts elsewhere.

Globally, historic ethnic districts are often sources of both pride and frustration. Their rich heritage and street life bring a much-needed sense of authenticity and community to modern cities, and their vibrant public spaces boost cities' liveability, making them attractive also to tourists. For many, they are proud emblems of a communal as well as cosmopolitan identity. But such districts also tend to be densely built-up, with ageing infrastructure and limited space or scope for interventions due to conservation. With their polymorphous narratives, multitude of stakeholders and competing interests, these districts may also be flashpoints for social tensions, which can dominate the discourse over their planning and governance.

How can cities make sense of these complexities, address their challenges and build on their strengths? Researchers at the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) tackled these issues by developing a mixed-methods approach in a recent study focused on Singapore's Little India district. The study suggests some ways to understand such districts, to inform planning and governance interventions to develop a more inclusive, meaningful and vibrant space for all stakeholders.



Gurubaran Subramaniam is a researcher at the Centre for Liveable Cities.





Bustling street life, and a myriad of sights, sounds and scents compose Little India's peculiar allure.

Little India's Multifaceted Realities

Little India developed from the cattle trade that initially drew Indian immigrants to the area in the 1860s. After the abolition of the trade in the 1930s, commercial activities catering to Singapore's Indian community thrived, from goldsmiths and sari shops, to parrot astrologers and Ayurvedic medical shops. The introduction of public housing from the 1970s introduced a new, multi-ethnic residential population. Later on when Little India was gazetted a conservation area in 1989, many buildings were restored, but the area also became managed as a tourist space. Then from the 1990s, as Indian and Bangladeshi guest workers came to Singapore, Little India naturally became their favourite public space for gathering in the city. More recently, hotels, bars and co-working spaces catering to cosmopolitan locals and tourists have also started to sprout, drawn to the area's unique atmosphere.

Little India has thus served as the enduring centre of the country's minority Indian culture and heritage, and an icon of Singapore as a vibrant, multi-ethnic city. But following Singapore's first major riot in over 40 years in December 2013, public discourse about Little India grew increasingly dominated by a narrative of crowdedness, messiness and even volatility linked to South Asian guest workers who regularly gather there. In response to the riot and such perceptions of "disamenity" in Little India's public spaces, several measures were implemented, including heightened surveillance and crowd reduction. Much of Little India was also designated a "Liquor Control Zone"; with the sale and consumption of alcohol—deemed a factor in the riot—heavily restricted.

These measures received mixed reactions initially. For example, some merchants were unhappy about the impact on their business, while others welcomed the initiatives,

“CLC conducted a mixed-methods study to systematically unpack the interests of different stakeholders ... researchers also uncovered opportunities for improvements to public space.”

including some guest workers. As one Bangladeshi worker told CLC researchers, “It's good that people cannot drink here anymore ... Last time we always see people quarrelling, fighting and stealing things. Now, with no alcohol and more police, it is much safer. We never had problems with the police because we don't make any trouble.”

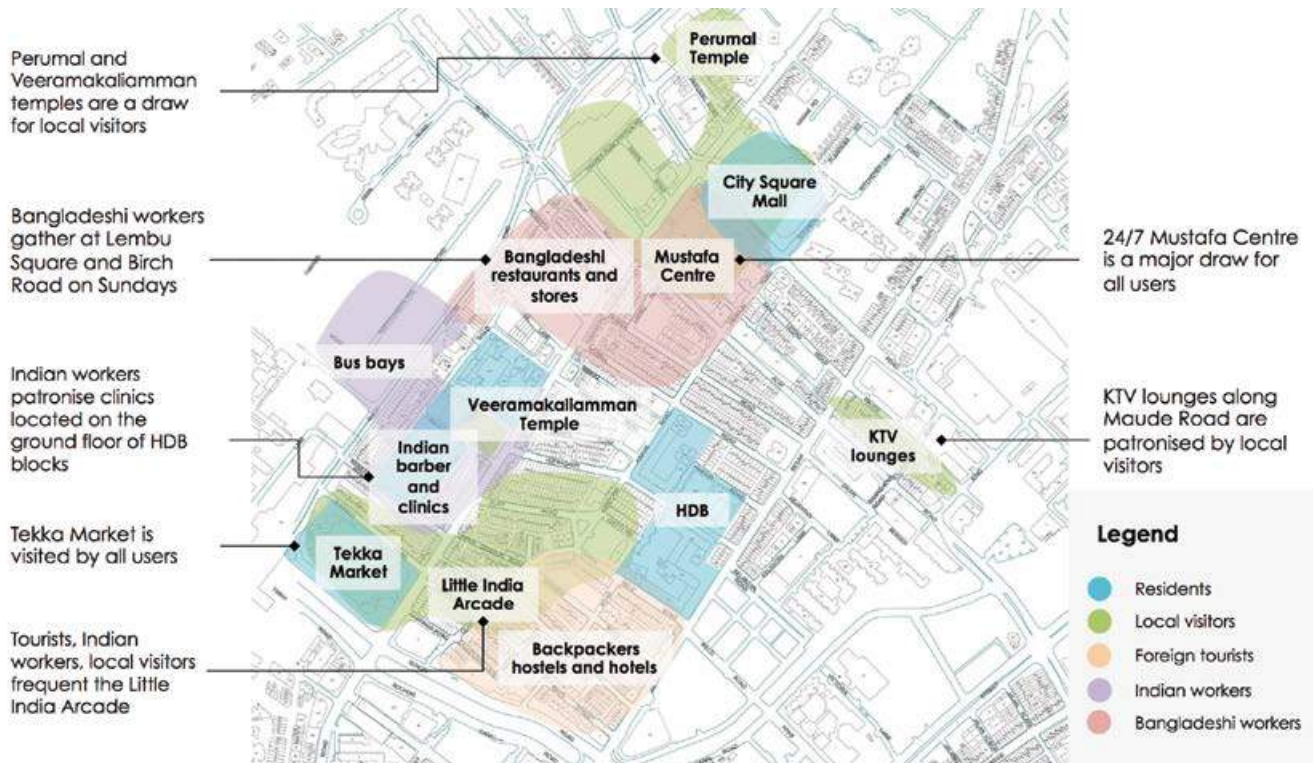
But recently, public debate was sparked again by a letter to the press in December 2016 suggesting Little India be further spruced up for tourists. Opponents contended that, to preserve Little India's unique charm as Singapore's most authentic historic district, its “organised chaos” is best left as it is without heavy-handed overhauls.

Developing a Mixed-Methods, Evidence-Based Approach

To formulate appropriate interventions in contested districts, planners and policymakers should eschew pre-conceived notions and instead try to holistically understand the complex ground realities. To do this in the case of Little India, CLC conducted a mixed-methods study to systematically



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- 01 Deepavali celebrations at Little India.
- 02 Tekka Market is popular with both nearby residents and visitors alike.
- 03 Interviews and ethnographic observations show how Little India is meaningful for diverse groups.

“Yes, it is inconvenient for awhile, but it’s their only day off and they need their space.”

– Local resident,
on Sunday guest worker crowds



unpack the interests of different stakeholders. In so doing, researchers also uncovered opportunities for improvements to public space and infrastructure.

CLC's research team collected and analysed a range of datasets from government agencies, and conducted interviews with over 300 respondents, including residents, local visitors, shopkeepers, business owners, tourists and migrant workers in Little India. The team also interviewed staff from the Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association (LISHA) and other non-government organisations operating in Little India, like Transient Workers Count Too.

Ethnographic site observations were also conducted over a span of three months to gain an in-depth and grounded qualitative understanding of the spatial experience and environment in Little India. A visual survey of the type and mix of businesses and pedestrian counts at locations known to have high pedestrian flows were also carried out to gain granular understanding of Little India's commercial landscape, and to obtain a comprehensive sense of crowd flows over a typical weekday and weekend, respectively.

Key Findings

More than Guest Workers: Little India's Diverse Stakeholders

Although the presence of South Asian workers often dominates contemporary discourse about Little India, CLC's interviews and ethnographic observations found that Little India is a meaningful

place for other major stakeholders, specifically residents, merchants, Singaporean visitors, foreign tourists, as well as government agencies and non-government actors operating there. Mustafa Centre, a 24-hour shopping mall, and Tekka Centre, which houses a market, food stalls and clothing stores, were frequently cited as places respondents could get anything they needed. Textile houses, thrift stores, religious paraphernalia shops, quirky cafes, bohemian bars and chic co-working spaces that now pepper Little India have further endeared it to Singaporeans and visitors. For example, a Chinese Singaporean respondent said: "This is a place where you can find everything you could possibly need. You can have lunch at Race Course Road, buy vegetables at Tekka Market, exchange money at Mustafa Centre, watch a movie at City Square, then go to a cafe at Jalan Besar."

In Perspective: The Six-Hour Crowding "Problem"

Despite Little India's reputation for human congestion at its public spaces, researchers observed this happening for only about six hours a week, from 4 pm to 10 pm on Sunday evenings. This occurs when guest workers visit the district on their weekly day off. Even then, in interviews, many business owners, shopkeepers, tourists and local visitors perceived these crowds of guest workers as injecting life into the area. Eighty-six per cent of the 220 residents interviewed were also largely tolerant or even sympathetic towards the crowds of workers. As a resident in the Rowell Court public housing estate said, "Yes, it is inconvenient for awhile, but it's their only day off and they need their space."



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Interviewees with negative perceptions of the crowds articulated their grievances mainly in terms of a lack of space, rather than security or safety concerns.

Other Challenges: Vanishing Trades, Declining Authenticity?

Researchers also found a decline of traditional trades in Little India. While such trades are an important part of the area's image, visual surveys found that only 6% of the businesses in Little India are considered "Special Trades and Services" in Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) Use Classes: trades that are unique to Little India, such as henna artists, Ayurvedic clinics, garland makers and sari stores. Researchers also observed the emergence of "non-traditional" businesses such as backpacker hostels and upscale restaurants. Meanwhile, smaller traditional trades such as spice mills are vanishing as increasing rent and changing consumer preferences render them commercially unviable. While the disappearance of these trades can be attributed to the hand of the market, there are concerns that Little India is succumbing to gentrification. As Little India's variegated commercial landscape has been instrumental in its attraction and relevance to a wide range of people, the vulnerability of the smaller traditional trades would be worth addressing

CLC's study suggests that addressing the multiple concerns of historic ethnic districts like Little India need not be a zero-sum game.

to preserve its authenticity and resonance with its diversity of visitors.

Opportunities for Improvement

Crowdedness on the streets could be addressed as part of a broader multi-pronged strategy to improve Little India for the benefit of all its stakeholders while also alleviating the issue of crowdedness on Sunday evenings.

Develop a Long-Term Vision and Blueprint

Since 2006, the URA has led a taskforce of various public agencies to work with other stakeholders on improvements to the public spaces in Little India for the benefit of pedestrians, motorists and businesses. New interventions could build upon this foundation. Given the complexity of managing Little India, enhanced coordination



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would be crucial in preserving its safety, vibrancy and attractiveness. This can be achieved by developing a long-term vision and blueprint for Little India, with support from all key stakeholders. Apart from the physical dimension, this could encompass other elements such as placemaking and programming strategies.

Improve Pedestrian Infrastructure

Chief among the taskforce's mandates was to make Little India more pedestrian-friendly. This was achieved through infrastructural upgrades, such as widening of walkways, paving over open drains and improving lighting in backlanes. Since 2014, several roads in Little India have been temporarily or permanently pedestrianised. Apart from giving crowds more space to spill into during peak periods on Sunday evenings, researchers found that these road closures created a more convivial and vibrant atmosphere, and a more comfortable walking experience for all groups, at all times. Conversations with stakeholders and site observations revealed that these

enhancements made walking more pleasant and safe.

The study also highlighted opportunities for similar upgrades in other areas. Replicating these infrastructure upgrades would markedly enhance the walkability of the district. The expansion of pedestrianisation efforts would also alleviate the risk of a traffic accident—the trigger event of the 2013 riot. Such changes could come under a broader “car-lite” vision for the area. For instance, backlanes could be upgraded into alternative capillary thoroughfares to the more congested arterial roads. Additionally, the creation of a central plaza, by amalgamating vacant or underused land, could alleviate crowdedness on Sunday evenings while also providing a civic focal point for the area. Finally, designated loading and unloading points for delivery vehicles, as well as the gradual removal of surface parking lots, especially along roads with high human traffic, could be explored.

01 Little India's traditional trades are declining, unlike those catering to guest workers.

02 A section of Campbell Lane was permanently pedestrianised in November 2014.

Promote Community-Led Placemaking

Programming and place management strategies have complemented infrastructural enhancements. These include the annual Deepavali and Pongal street light-up and festivities, dance performances organised by the Indian Heritage Centre, and Project Oasis, an initiative managed by LISHA and supported by the Singapore Tourism Board to bring art installations and cultural events to the area. While businesses and local visitors interviewed agreed these efforts contributed vibrancy, these initiatives had to be driven from the ground up for them to be sustainable. An innovative calendar of community-led events could augment existing placemaking efforts. Such events could take place during off-peak periods, from Mondays to Saturdays, to attract a more diverse audience that would also help dispel the perception of Little India as an area of “disamenity”. Examples include street carnivals similar to the wildly popular Urban Ventures and Keong Saik Road Carnival (both organised by business operators along Keong Saik Road), pop-up stores such as Temporium, which enjoyed considerable success at Little India’s own Dunlop Street in 2012, and regular flea markets.

Support Little India’s Unique Trades

Measures to retain a diverse commercial landscape may be worth considering, as the loss of traditional trades could significantly compromise Little India’s authenticity and its appeal to key stakeholders. These could include creating designated zones for such endangered trades or awarding grants to sustain or revive them.

Sustaining Vibrant and Inclusive Districts

CLC’s study suggests that addressing the multiple concerns of historic ethnic districts like Little India need not be a zero-sum game where conservation, vibrancy and security are traded off against each other. Instead, infrastructural interventions, place management strategies and heritage conservation efforts can be complementary to make these districts relevant and attractive to a larger diversity of stakeholders. Even as the disamenity of public spaces resulting from the hordes of guest workers is a legitimate concern, attempts to manage this six-hours-a-week issue must be balanced with other stakeholders’ needs. Hence, the study demonstrates the value of a mixed-methods research approach for holistically understanding the ground realities and perspectives of the various stakeholders. A balanced view of the situation reveals the right opportunities for intervention, which allows more comprehensive local planning and governance.

The case of Little India underscores that the architect’s pen, the engineer’s calculator, the artist’s paintbrush, the policeman’s baton and the citizen’s initiative—all useful instruments in their own right—by themselves are inadequate for managing complex and contested spaces. But when brought together, they constitute a powerful inventory that yields far-reaching dividends. ○

01 Mural along Buffalo Road, created as part of the Artwalk Little India Festival.

02 Regular events organised by the Indian Heritage Centre cater to different crowds.

03 Urban Ventures is an initiative that aims to reimagine the public space on Singapore’s streets.





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Development Above Rail Yards

City Planning's Last Frontier

The United States' largest-ever property development is being built over working rail yards in Midtown, Manhattan. **Michael Koh** and **Elgin Toh** explain how the public, private and people sectors overcame conflicts and daunting financial and bureaucratic challenges to unlock massive economic and social value at Hudson Yards.

Hudson Yards is a US\$20 billion mixed-use real estate project currently being constructed in the Midtown area of Manhattan, New York City. It occupies an area just over 24 acres (100,000 square metres). By value, it is the largest property development in the history of the United States, and it is being built at what was once considered the “last frontier” of Manhattan—an area untouched by development for a long time despite its proximity to the lofty property prices in the rest of Manhattan.

Developers had long seen the potential of the site but did not unlock its value largely due to the presence of two working rail yards, belonging to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). The yards are a depot for 30 surface trains that head east towards Pennsylvania Station daily to pick up passengers before taking them to Long Island.



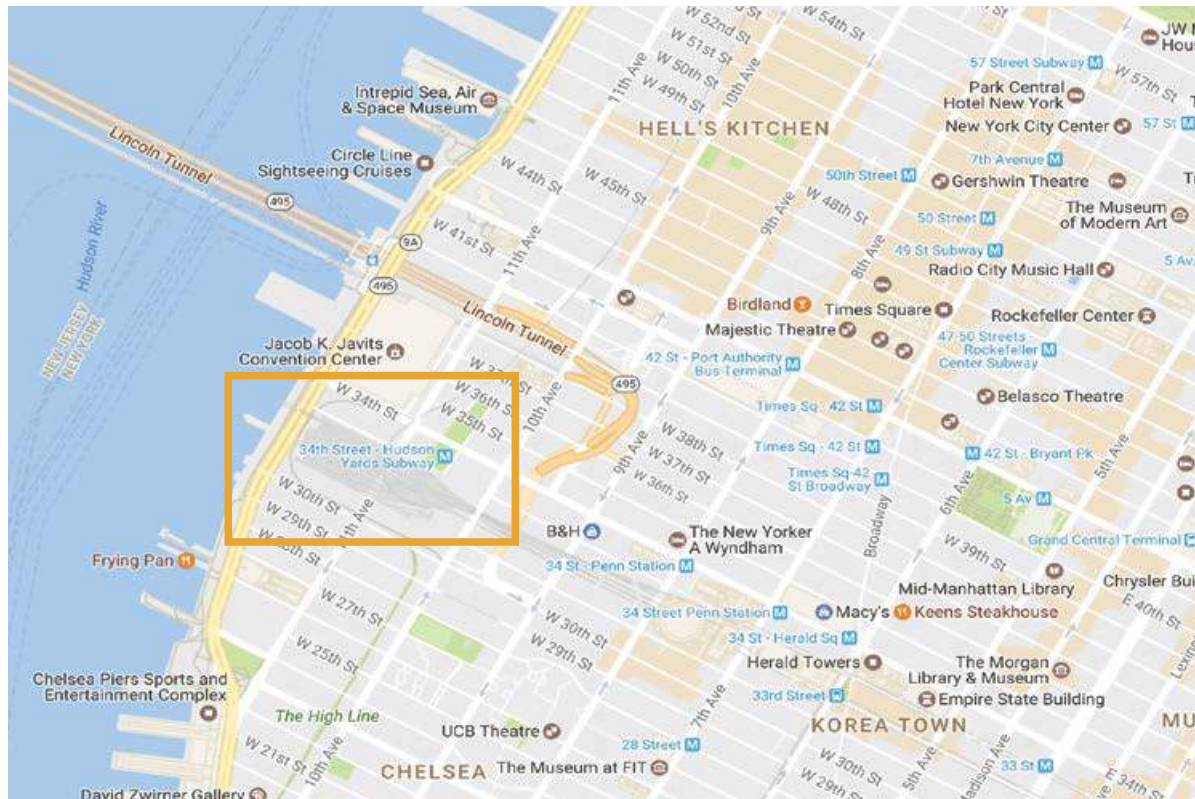
CLC Fellow **Michael Koh** (left) was previously Head of Projects and Design at SC Global, and the former CEO of the National Heritage Board and National Gallery.

Elgin Toh (right) is a researcher at the Centre for Liveable Cities and a former reporter for *The Straits Times*.





An artist's impression of the Hudson Yards development when completed.



“We could see the potential of this site for many years. The question was how to unlock it.”

– Stephen Ross, developer

For any development to occur on the site, large platforms would first have to be built over the live rail yards so that while high-rise construction took place above, trains could continue to run undisrupted beneath—an engineering feat of heroic proportions. This had been talked about in the New York real estate industry for many years, but there were a number of impediments that had to be overcome.

First, there was the costly price tag for such a construction method. Second, the

area would have to be rezoned, while better transport connections were needed to justify development. Furthermore, the site was in a depressed part of town. Other than the rail yards, the main activity used to be parking garages and automobile repair shops. The risks for any developer were significant.

The first impetus to develop the area came after Michael Bloomberg became Mayor in 2002. His plan was to build a new stadium at Hudson Yards as part of the city’s bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. Although the bid was unsuccessful, redevelopment efforts were not abandoned and were redirected into a new mixed-use plan.

The onset of the 2008 global financial crisis temporarily halted development but as economic growth picked up post-crisis, a joint venture by real estate developer Stephen Ross’s Related Companies and Oxford Properties secured the rights to develop the site.



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During and after the financial crisis, the High Line—a 2.3 kilometre disused elevated railroad-turned-park—was built. This iconic project, whose northern end terminated directly within the Hudson Yards site, proved wildly popular among New Yorkers and tourists, attracting five million visitors per year. It created a new vibrancy in the neighbourhood, bringing in billions of dollars in investments to surrounding areas. This gave investors confidence to develop Hudson Yards.

The first building in the development—10 Hudson Yards, an office building—opened in May 2016, beating market expectations with 96% of space leased out. Designer label Coach, the anchor tenant of the building, occupies a third of the building. Other big name firms that have signed up for current or future office space include L’Oreal, Time

Warner and CNN. By 2025, the completed project will have eight million square feet (743,224 square metres) of office space and a mega mall spanning one million square feet (92,903 square metres). “If you look at the companies that are coming here, they’re leaving ... places like Rockefeller Center. They’re leaving some of the most prestigious addresses in the city,” said Mr Ross in a 2016 interview.

Strategic Public Investments

Two major factors lie behind the success of Hudson Yards: public investments and sound local planning.

In recent years, US\$4 billion in public investments were made in Hudson Yards and its surrounding areas. The single most

01 Hudson Yards sits in west Midtown, Manhattan facing the Hudson River.

02 The High Line stimulated massive adjacent property investments, including Hudson Yards (background).

“The game-changing subway extension was funded through bonds ... paid using tax monies collected from urban renewal in the area ... a model that Mayor Bloomberg often used in public projects...”



important investment was the extension of the No. 7 Subway Line, from the original terminal station at Times Square to a new station in Hudson Yards. The US\$2.4 billion subway extension gave the area transit accessibility, without which Hudson Yards could not hope to achieve its projected aim of 125,000 people coming through it daily.

Subway extensions in New York are normally built by MTA, a state agency. However, MTA was unwilling to fund such an expensive project and stalled discussions. To push the project forward, Mayor Bloomberg decided that the city government would step in to pay for the extension. He later said: “We recognised that if the state wasn’t going to do it, the city should, because this is our economic future. And mass transit really does open up this part of the city.”

The game-changing subway extension was funded through bonds issued by the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation, an entity set up by the city government. These bonds are paid using tax monies collected from urban renewal in the area, sometimes referred to as Tax-Increment Financing (TIF)—a model that Mayor Bloomberg often used in public projects during his 12-year tenure.

In a way, the city has picked up the tab because the tax monies channelled towards bond payments would otherwise have gone to the city coffers. The key difference, however, is that bond holders are sharing in the risk of the development. If the urban renewal of Hudson Yards does not succeed as projected and the properties in the area

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do not generate enough tax revenues to fulfil the bond payments by the time the bonds mature, it is the bond holders who end up losing money from their investments, unless there is a government bailout.

Other than TIF, district improvement payments—payments made by a developer in order to obtain an increase in floor area ratio (within certain limits stipulated by the Hudson Yards rezoning plan)—were also used to finance the subway extension.

Other public investments include the makeover of an adjacent convention centre, the renovation of another subway station, and funding for parks connected to Hudson Yards. These have had a combined effect of injecting new life into Hudson Yards, completely turning around the hitherto cheerless area.

01 The yards, a depot for 30 surface trains, at the early stages of construction.

02 The new “34th Street-Hudson Yards” subway station was critical to the project’s success.





Sound Local Planning

The second success factor was sound local planning. First, vital rezoning happened in two waves, in 2005 and 2009. Before this, the area had been zoned as low-intensity manufacturing and commercial land in New York City’s landmark 1961 Zoning Resolution.

Rezoning proposals were initially mooted as part of the Olympics 2012 bid. After the bid failed, rezoning efforts continued as part of the new development plan for Hudson Yards. The two waves of rezoning allowed for high-rise construction as well as mixed-use development, including retail, office space and residential units.

Also passed as part of the rezoning plan were provisions for additional floor area ratio (FAR) available to various plots in the larger Hudson Yards area. These provisions were District Improvement Bonuses and Eastern Rail Yard Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs).

The Improvement Bonuses allowed additional FAR in exchange for payments into the district

improvement fund, which is used on public improvements, including the No. 7 subway extension as well as other public spaces, such as parks.

The TDRs allow the developer of the Eastern Rail Yards to sell unused FAR to neighbouring plots of land. Because high-rise construction can only take place on certain parts of the Eastern Rail Yard plot (which, in turn, is due to the difficulty of building on a platform), the developer of that plot is likely to end up with unused FAR. The TDRs are therefore important because they make it financially more attractive to develop the plot, while at the same time benefiting nearby plots that have less technical difficulty in building more intensely.

Second, community involvement ensured that the Hudson Yards plan took into account the best ideas that stakeholders had to offer. The Regional Plan Association (RPA), a respected NGO that researches on urban planning issues, had advocated as early as 1996 for a mixed-use plan in that neighbourhood. When the Olympics bid failed, the RPA plan

01 Affordable housing, an arts centre, public school and open spaces contribute to inclusivity.

02 A platform was built over the train depot to allow high-rise construction.

became the natural front runner. As RPA had invested time and effort researching and substantiating it, the RPA plan was well regarded. The eventual plan adopted by the city was not too different from RPAs plan, as RPA planners often point out.

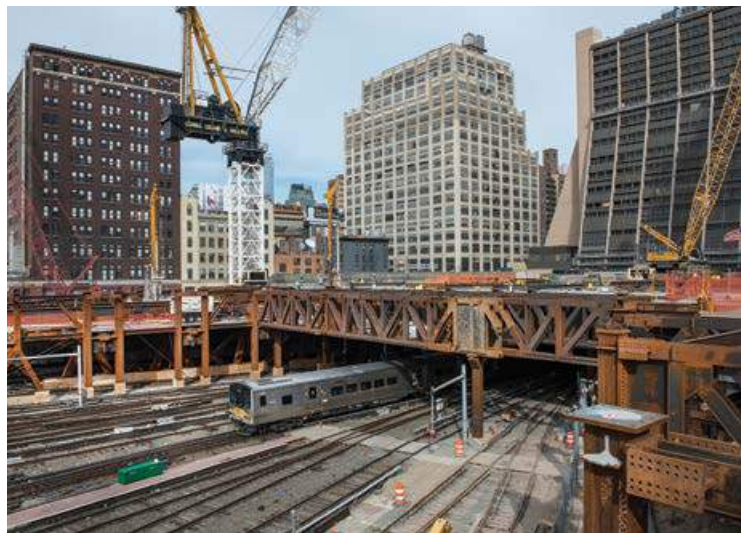
Third, there was an insistence on staying inclusive in the local planning of the area. More than half the site will be devoted to open public space. This includes two green corridors in the north-south and east-west directions, both of which will merge in a public square at the heart of the Hudson Yards development.

The neighbourhood will also have some 4,000 housing units, a public school for 750 students as well as an arts centre. Affordable rental housing—making up as much as 20% of some residential blocks—has been incorporated into the residential components of the development and is allocated by lottery, in accordance with city-wide rules on affordable housing. By 2025, as many as 125,000 people are expected to come through the area every day to work, live, play or learn.

Lessons for Other Cities

Other cities with similarly underutilised train depots should ask if the same factors that helped Hudson Yards succeed are available to them. The central idea here is that a rail yard that is not built upwards represents unlocked potential to do more, and do better, in its neighbourhood.

Given building technology today, the air rights for a rail yard plot can be fully harvested using a platform that enables high-rise construction over the trains. But a few other factors have to be favourable, among which the two most important would be location and connection. Is the depot located in a larger neighbourhood with development potential, and does it have well-connected transport nodes, preferably in the form of a subway station?



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“... a rail yard that is not built upwards represents unlocked potential to do more, and do better, in its neighbourhood.”

Beyond these crucial factors, other lessons from Hudson Yards would apply to most other developments: working with NGOs and the community to harness the best ideas; and having a lead public agency to function as a champion and a coordinator for other public agencies. Importantly, the well-designed and integrated open spaces and mix of land uses lay the foundations for a more vibrant and inclusive neighbourhood.

To conclude, transforming a train depot into a lively development has not been a walk in the park. In fact, a turnaround for Hudson Yards looked distant as recently as 2005. Its subsequent success should bring optimism that other sites too can be reimagined and remade. ○



ILLUSTRATION

Public Space Transformations

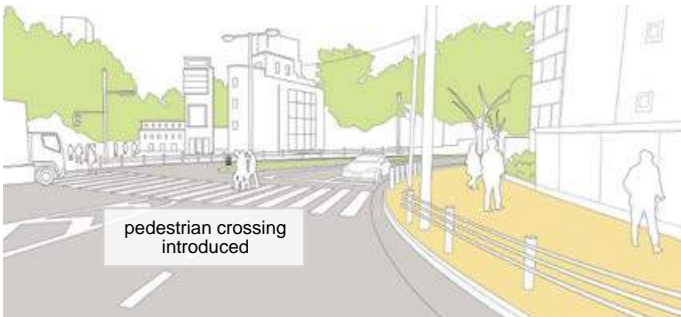
Reclaiming Spaces for People

Urb-i is an urban planning collective from Brazil that began in 2015 to document public space transformations in cities around the world. Using Google Street View and other online tools, they have compiled a gallery of 2,900 “Before/After” images of remarkable public space redesigns. CLC designer **Angee Neo** illustrates the changes that occurred in some of the best examples.





overhead bridge removed

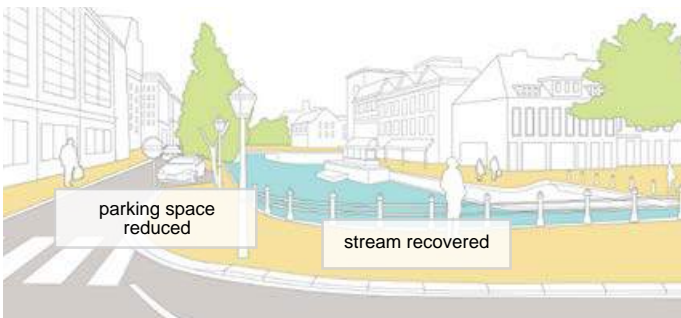


pedestrian crossing introduced

Shibuya 35 Jingumae, Tokyo, Japan

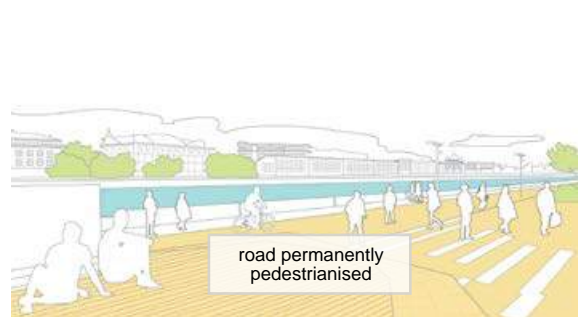
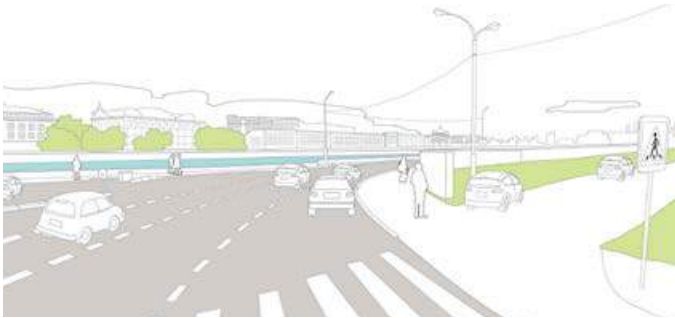


parking space reduced

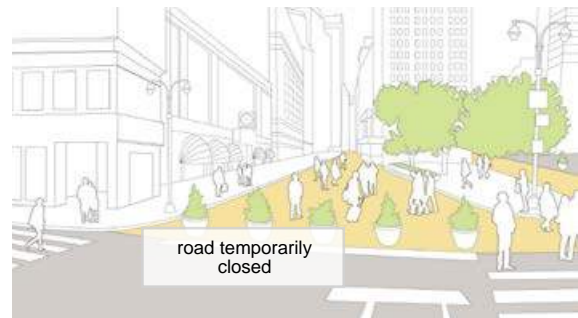
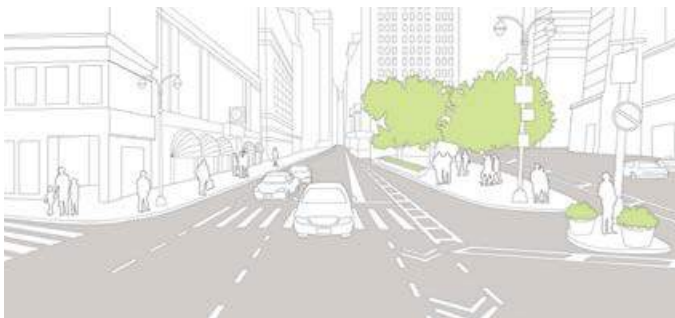


stream recovered

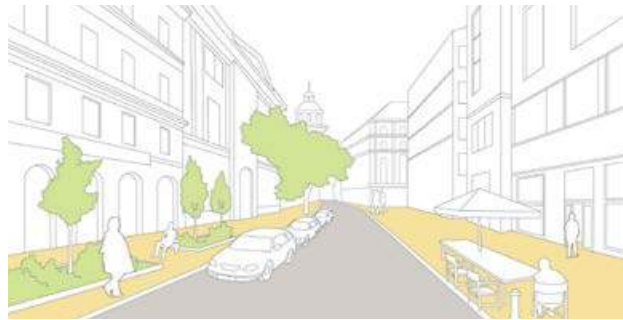
Noordwal Veenkade, The Hague, The Netherlands



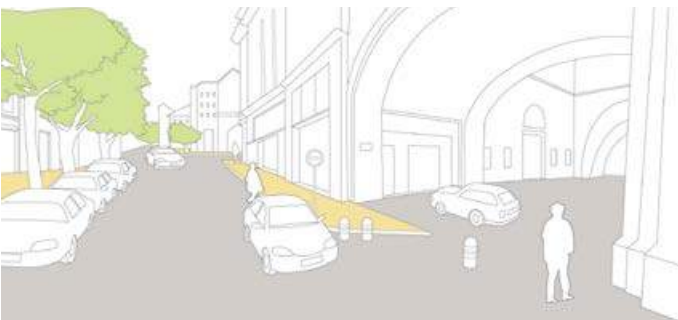
Krymskaya Naberezhnaya, Moscow, Russia



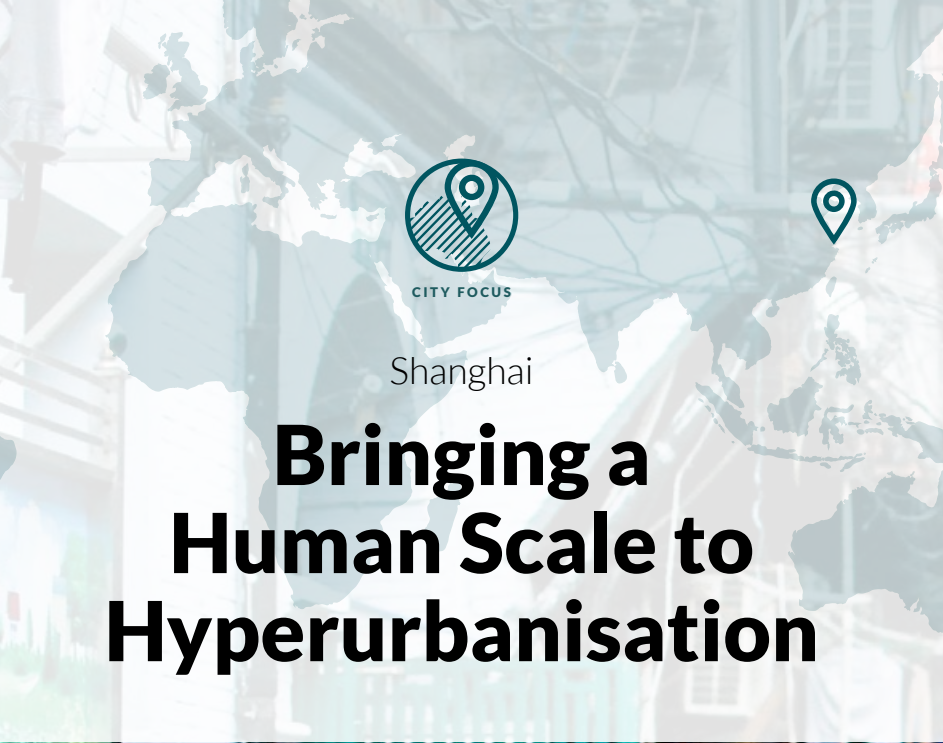
Herald Square, New York City, United States



Ferenciek tere, Budapest, Hungary



Váci utca, Budapest, Hungary





A small lane away from the main street reveals a different side of Shanghai.

China's economic reform since 1978 has propelled its growth on an unparalleled scale. Shanghai—a focal point of this growth—has become one of the most populous cities in the world. The city tries to put people at the centre of its hyperurbanisation through the remaking of its public spaces.

Shanghai is a city that is metamorphosing so quickly that its urban area has more than doubled the 1,500 square kilometre target set for 2020 in its master plan approved as recently as 2001. This port city at the mouth of the Yangtze River Delta has over 24 million people, of which two in five are immigrants from a predominantly rural China drawn to opportunities that Shanghai presents. To improve liveability, the city turns increasingly towards shared spaces for its community.

Nanjing Road: A Fully Pedestrianised Downtown

Up till the 1990s, Nanjing Road was a congested thoroughfare with overpasses that obscured street views, and railings that blocked pedestrians' access to the street. In 1995, when the Shanghai Municipal Government decided to

create a downtown to house the capital industry and also cater to the increasingly consumerist culture of its people, they experimented with car-free weekends on Nanjing Road to test the effect of road closure to the area.

The trial was a roaring success—visitors increased by 30% over the weekends, with retail turnover increasing by 90%. The government decided to fully pedestrianise the 1,030-metre-long by 28-metre-wide zone. Telegraph wires were buried underground and tram wires removed. The street was paved with a 4.2-metre-wide “Golden Line” of red granite and new street furniture to welcome people to linger and interact, while grey paths that ran parallel allowed uninterrupted flow of moving groups. Since its opening in September 1999, the vibrant downtown never sleeps—groups of people exercise in the mornings, while street performers entertain at night.



Hazelina Yeo is a researcher at the Centre for Liveable Cities.





Pedestrianised
Nanjing Road.



The "Golden Line"
of red granite along
Nanjing Road.

“ It is at the human scale
that the metropolis truly
comes alive. ”

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The Bund: Its People-Oriented Evolution

At the eastern end of Nanjing Road lies the Bund, a historic area characterised by colonial buildings and a scenic waterfront overlooking the modern skyscrapers of the Lujiazui financial district across the Huangpu River.

The Bund was once described as “an exceptionally scenic, open and well-planted stretch of public space”. But as the city modernised, a portion of it was turned into Zhongshan Road, an important north-south trunk road. In the 1990s, the government further widened the road to create a massive 10-lane expressway. Visitors had to use an underground walkway to reach the Bund.

“People had no chance to enjoy the waterfront view because there was so much traffic on the road and the lane was so close to the buildings,” said Dr Wang Lin, Professor at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University and former Director of the Shanghai Urban Planning Bureau. In 1998, Dr Wang led a big-scale construction project to make the Bund people-friendly again.

In 2010, a six-lane underground tunnel was completed. It diverted six lanes from Zhongshan Road and freed up a 50-metre-wide open space for a landscaped waterfront promenade.

01 Morning exercises are common along the Bund.

02 Aerial view of the expanded waterfront space.

M50: A Community-Led Revitalisation of an Industrial Landscape

As part of its economic and industrial reform, manufacturing industries were relocated while many factories and warehouses within prime areas of Shanghai were demolished during the 1990s. The old Xinhe Spinning Mill on No. 50 Moganshan Road was slated for demolition too until artists moved in during the early 2000s. Rent was cheap, and they had ample open spaces for the creation, storage and display of their artworks. The old mill became an established art hub known as M50, and attracted supporting enterprises like galleries, design companies and cafes to form a creative cluster that revitalised the industrial landscape.

In 2003, just a few years after M50's establishment, the government wanted to supplant the area with high-rise residential blocks. Artists and scholars convinced the Mayor's office otherwise, allowing the M50 art district to flourish as the city's largest and most influential creative hub within a riverfront open space. Today, art factories are thriving all over Shanghai with government support, leading to projects such as the Shanghai Sculpture Space, 2577 Creative Park and 1933 Old Millfun.



01 The M50 art district welcomes creative self-expression via graffiti.

02 & 03 Street dancing and card games are common public activities that bring communities together.

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Humans of Shanghai: Public Space, Public Life

Beyond art districts, street performances seem to permeate every public space. In the mornings and evenings, on main streets or parks, people gather in groups for foxtrot or rock and roll dancing, with music blasting from portable players and speakers. Choral groups come together to sing songs of patriotism and the Chinese culture. Women dressed in silk dance with large ribbons or fans. In large parks, opera singers and ground calligraphy masters armed with large water-dipped brushes draw crowds in the hundreds.



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Away from the main streets and tourist areas, the city reveals more layers of its intimate public life. Up till the 1950s, most people lived in crammed, cabined rooms that naturally meant that daily activities such as meals, hobbies and handcraft work had to be conducted outside. This local street life is still kept intact today in the streets and alleyways of the traditional neighbourhoods of Shanghai. It is at the human scale that the metropolis truly comes alive.

And this human scale seems to be Shanghai's focus for the future. One of the highlights of its new master plan, which will guide Shanghai's development from now till 2040, is the notion of "15-minute communities" as basic units of the city. These low-carbon communities will contain amenities such as offices, schools and recreational venues accessible within a 15-minute walk. Good public spaces in these mixed-use residential areas will be critical to facilitate such trips, and to promote social gatherings and community building among residents. ●



CASE STUDY

Chicago | The 606

Linking Up for Green and Good

Initially prompted by the need to increase green space for Logan Square, residents of four diverse neighbourhoods in the city of Chicago joined forces with partners to create a well-loved park and trail system that has galvanised community bonding.

The Challenge

Logan Square is one of the most densely developed neighbourhoods in the city of Chicago. A census of open spaces in 2000 showed that Logan Square could not meet the city's minimum standard of two acres (8,093 square metres) of open space per 1,000 residents. In fact, it had a shortfall of 99 acres (400,639 square metres)—a result of prioritising demand for industrial spaces when Chicago was rapidly industrialising in the early 20th century.

In 2002, the city, with the support of then Mayor Richard M. Daley, began to consider converting existing vacant land in Logan Square into public open space. After two years of research, surveys and public consultations, 11 recommendations were made to add 15 acres (60,702 square metres) of public space.

One idea was to convert the privately-owned, defunct Bloomingdale rail line

into a linear park. Overgrown with grass, trees and flowers, the elevated track had become an unofficial nature trail popular with joggers. It also attracted the homeless, drug users and young delinquents. Hence, it was often littered with beer cans, broken bottles, hypodermic needles and abandoned furniture while graffiti covered old rail cars and walls.

The proposed 2.7-mile (4.3-kilometre) park would start at Logan Square and run through three other neighbourhoods—all disparate in socio-economic terms. Logan Square and Humboldt Park comprise mostly Latino families who rented homes while those living in Wicker Park and Bucktown are mainly white property owners earning higher income. Therefore, apart from adding green space, the project would also connect diverse neighbours.

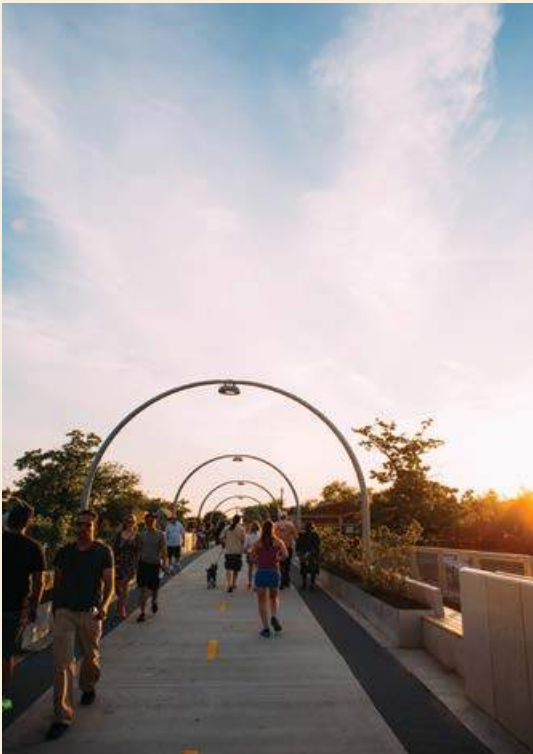




The Bloomingdale Trail moved goods to the city till the mid-1990s.



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01 The Milwaukee Avenue bridge is an iconic fixture at The 606.

02 The elevated space opens up new opportunities for gathering and activities.

02



04

The Solution

Most residents from the four neighbourhoods welcomed the prospect of more community space and a safer environment. In fact, some had formed the Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail (“Friends”) in 2003 to explore ways to transform the underutilised space. They began to lobby actively for the new park—eventually named The 606 after Chicago’s postal code—to be realised.

In 2005, Friends turned to The Trust for Public Land, a non-profit experienced in creating public parks and protected lands, to manage the project. In turn, it reached out to city and civic organisations, marking the start of a public-private partnership between the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District and The Trust for Public Land.

To raise the US\$95 million needed for construction and community engagement activities, the Trust mobilised Chicago’s philanthropic community while neighbours held bake sales, pledged gifts and donated portions of their shop sales. Together they raised US\$20 million.

While much of the planning work for The 606 was done during Mayor Daley’s term, the project moved into high gear when his successor, Rahm Emanuel, promised to complete The 606 in his first term if elected as Chicago’s next mayor. True to his word, Mayor Emanuel later secured a US\$50 million federal grant (aimed at mitigating congestion and improving air quality) by pitching the trail as a useful car-free commuting route. Local government committed another US\$5 million.

03 The 606 is popular with joggers and those wanting a more relaxed stroll.

04 The Graffiti Walk on The 606.

“... the Trust mobilised Chicago’s philanthropic community while neighbours held bake sales, pledged gifts and donated portions of their shop sales. Together they raised US\$20 million.”

The final design plans were unveiled in 2013 after years of community meetings, including a three-day design workshop with residents. Apart from a cycling path bordered by running tracks, six parks would be built or refurbished along the rail line with 13 access points for users to reach the elevated path.

When construction began, care was taken to retain and reuse some of the line’s original features (like embankments and bridges) as residents wanted to retain the character of the freight line. The spirit of reuse kept cost down too. For instance, an old bridge was repaired and moved to another spot while soil excavated from one part of the trail was reused in another location.

Though the use of the federal grant required The 606 to be used primarily as a bicycle trail, the community found ways to use it creatively. This resulted in the idea of making The 606 an outdoor classroom as well as “a living work of art”—as a laboratory for creative practices to link art and life, nature and culture to create a new type of urban green space. “Art” is broadly interpreted: from a trail with plant species that flower and change with the seasons to an observatory for star-gazing; temporary art installations, performances and regular community arts programmes encourage neighbours to mingle.

01 The observatory on opening day.

02 Participants of the annual “A Walk With Light” festival at The 606.



01



02

“The rail line was once a barrier that physically separated neighbourhoods ... now it is the connective tissue that brings them together.”



The Outcome

The 606 officially opened on 6 June 2015, adding 20 acres (80,937 square metres) of green space to the four neighbourhoods. Today, The 606 serves more than 80,000 residents who live within 10 minutes' walk to the trail; hundreds of walkers, joggers and cyclists use it daily for exercise and as a safe commute to downtown Chicago. Altogether, it had taken the community more than 10 years to create this well-used, well-loved public space.


Chicago's Deputy Mayor Steve Koch attributes The 606's success to the "robust community engagement process." Even after the trail was opened, he said in an email interview with *Urban Solutions*, "the community continued to contribute to ideas about programming and methods of operations. Many have taken ownership of the park in a positive way and there has been significant interest in volunteer opportunities."

Jamie R. Simone, Interim Chicago Region Director at The Trust for Public Land noted in her interview with *Urban Solutions* that "the rail line was once a barrier that physically separated neighbourhoods ... now it is the connective tissue that brings them together. Even in the design process, public meetings were a unique opportunity for people from

the surrounding neighbourhoods to spend time together and work towards a common goal."

The extensive community involvement was recognised by the American Planning Association, which awarded The 606 the 2016 National Planning Excellence Award for Urban Design in March 2016. The awards jury chair told the Chicago Tribune that "The 606 is a stunning example of a community working together to realise a dream".

Today, The 606 attracts more than six million visitors annually from other parts of Chicago, the USA and the world. This growing popularity has caused property prices, taxes and rent, particularly in Logan Square, to spike. While Logan Square is more economically vibrant than before, the inevitable gentrification has forced lower income families to move further from the city.

To ensure that homes remain affordable, the city launched The 606 Bloomingdale Trail Homeowners Forgivable Loan Programme in 2016. The loans, which cover up to US\$25,000 in exterior and repair works, do not have to be repaid and are available to eligible home owners living within two blocks of the trail through Logan Square, Humboldt Park and West Town. 



CASE STUDY

Singapore | Bras Basah.Bugis

Breathing Life Back into BBB

Rapid redevelopment in the 1980s improved the quality of life in Singapore but the changes also led to a loss of vibrancy to formerly bustling districts. To inject life back into the Bras Basah.Bugis precinct, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) embarked on a 20-year plan, with a focus on encouraging walking, to bring life back to the streets again.

The Challenge

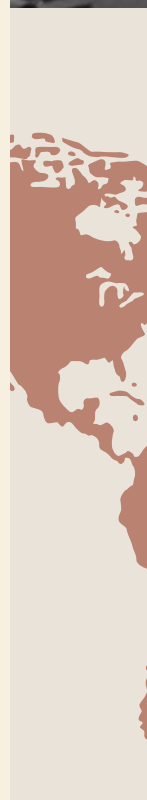
Bras Basah and Bugis are adjacent neighbourhoods in downtown Singapore. Since the mid-19th century, Bras Basah has hosted a high density of religious and educational institutions. Up till the 1970s, students thronged its myriad book shops and cinema. In contrast, Bugis was most well known in the 1950s for the spirited nightlife on Bugis Street, where locals, tourists, sailors and, most famously, transvestites gathered to eat street food, people-watch or carouse till the wee hours.

Both districts were abuzz, but like other inner city areas, the streets were congested and housing overcrowded with poor sanitation. To address these issues, the government started, from the 1960s, to demolish the city's ubiquitous but

dilapidated “shophouses”. Residents were relocated to improved public housing—sometimes within the area—while the land was redeveloped as offices, hotels and malls.

The urban renewal efforts culminated in the 1980s. Most schools left, leaving empty structures behind, while Bugis Street was levelled to build the underground MRT (mass rapid transit) system, marking the end of the street's rowdy revelries.

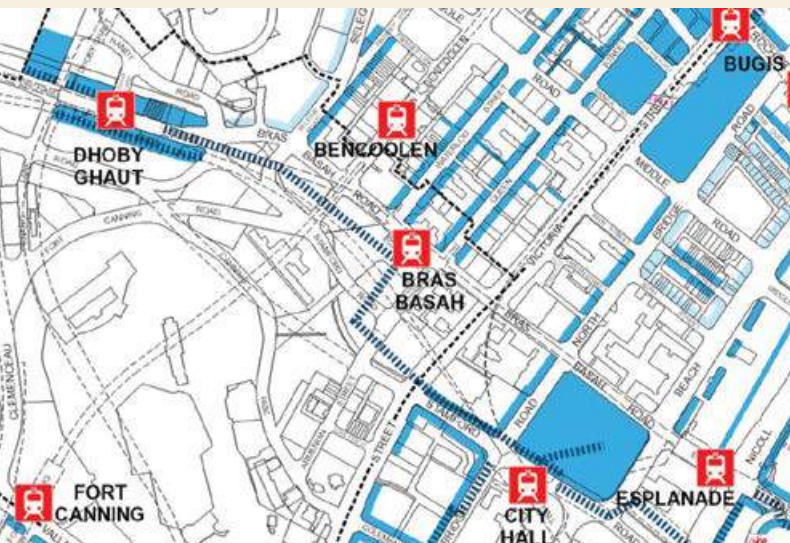
By the late 1980s, both districts had developed a new shine but were discernibly quieter and less vibrant than before.





Bugis Street undergoing redevelopment in the late 1980s.





01 The entrance of Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple after pedestrianisation of Waterloo Street.

02 Areas where "activity-generating" uses are required are indicated in blue.

03 A street party and bazaar during the Singapore Art Week.



The Solution

To rejuvenate the area, URA decided to develop it into a lively heritage, arts and learning enclave. To this end, the districts were branded as a single Bras Basah Bugis (BBB) precinct. A master plan was also drawn up to guide its development.

A key strategy to enliven BBB was to get people to walk from place to place. Measures were explored to create a pedestrian-friendly precinct with friendly, active and vibrant streets. The vision was to link up BBB by a network of pedestrian malls, covered walkways, laneways between buildings and even second-storey links, where street-level crossings are not possible, so that pedestrians can move easily and comfortably.

The earliest effort to create a pedestrian mall was in 1989 when the land above the new Bugis MRT station was sold for commercial development. URA guided the developer to retain the three old streets that intersected Bugis Street in its shopping mall to encourage human traffic and recapture the human scale of the original shophouses in its permanently accessible indoor streets.

This was followed by the pedestrianisation of parts of Albert and Waterloo Streets in 1996. These streets, home to prominent Chinese and Hindu temples, were often congested with cars and people, especially during religious festivals. URA converted

“A key strategy to enliven BBB was to get people to walk from place to place.”

these streets into a 700-metre pedestrian mall where festival markets and street activities could be held. This encouraged a freer flow of people, adding colour and bustle to the streets.

URA continues to work with other partners to reclaim road space for people and events, especially those with potential to draw vibrant crowds. In 2013, a portion of Queen Street was narrowed by removing kerbside parking to create expanded sidewalks, with attractive seating and paving to encourage people to hang out. The wider sidewalks makes it more conducive for arts and cultural events in the area.

Beyond pedestrian infrastructure, planners know that paths lined with shops and cafes are more walkable than paths without them. URA guidelines therefore stipulate that “activity-generating” uses such as retail, dining and entertainment are to be provided at the ground level fronting pedestrian thoroughfares along BBB’s main roads.



“Many BBB buildings were conserved, thereby preserving the identity, beauty and human scale of adjacent streets.”

As part of its conservation programme from the late 1980s, URA decided to retain BBB’s eclectic mix of heritage shophouses, schools and places of worship, alongside modern high-rise buildings and public housing. Many BBB buildings were conserved, thereby preserving the identity, beauty and human scale of adjacent streets. Former schools were also reopened as museums or other public facilities, which expanded and enriched the public realm.

URA also began clustering arts and educational institutions in BBB, reserving several plots of land for such institutions. Planners and architects developed good public places at institutions like Lasalle College of the Arts, School of the Arts (SOTA) and Singapore Management University (SMU).

BBB institutions organise a rich calendar of events, including the Singapore Writers Festival and Singapore Biennale, which draws people into their semi-public areas. In the case of BBB’s eclectic and massively popular signature event, the Singapore Night Festival, events can also spill excitingly into public spaces.

While cultural facilities draw many students, artists, tourists and others to BBB daily, planners also took care to retain BBB’s existing public housing in the master plan. This rooted community contributes to the precinct’s authenticity and vibrancy, especially after hours. Additionally, three blocks of old public flats were refurbished as a hostel for SMU’s students. This further injected a youthful population, making for a livelier BBB at night.



-
- 01 The public steps at SOTA are popular with both students and passers-by.
 - 02 The Wheel House performs at SMU Campus Green during the Singapore Night Festival.
 - 03 The Waterloo Street Food Centre is a favourite haunt for locals to eat and mingle.

01



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“ Today, BBB is a unique mash-up of old and new. Hipster cafes sit next to traditional coffeeshops or *kopitiam*s; conserved shophouses beside high-rises. ”




The Outcome

Today, BBB is a unique mash-up of old and new. Hipster cafes sit next to traditional coffeeshops or *kopitiams*; conserved shophouses beside high-rises. You are as likely to see arty young types as older Singaporeans who chit chat at *kopitiams* or read the papers at the national library.

URA's 20-year efforts to rejuvenate BBB and to create a strong cultural identity was recognised by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) with the ULI Award for Excellence 2008 (Asia Pacific).

The ULI jury praised URA for “bringing arts, culture and education into an urban area with the combination of conservation practices and modern infill building. The pedestrian life and quality of the public realm was emphasised.”

To encourage stakeholders to make BBB even livelier, the National Heritage Board led a series of visioning workshops in 2014 with 50 commercial and non-profit organisations in BBB.

They discussed future plans, such as allowing more regular activities that spill out onto the streets and public domains, such as busking. One suggestion to close off certain streets for the 2015 Night Festival was done to great success. This has since prompted URA to consider closing parts of Armenian Street to encourage a vibrant street life. 

02



03

- 01 Formerly Tao Nan School, the historic structure now houses the Peranakan Museum.
- 02 SAM at 8Q at Victoria Street boasts an open space that accommodates public events.
- 03 Residents can often be seen lingering in BBB's various public spaces.



CASE STUDY

Seoul | Yonsei-Ro Transit Mall

Road Diet for a More Active Street

To give shoppers a safer and more satisfying experience, the city of Seoul closed off a stretch of road from private cars and transformed it into a 550-metre transit mall.

The Challenge

Situated in the centre of the Shinchon area, a popular nightlife district, Yonsei-ro is a 550-metre stretch lined with retail stores, eateries and fashion boutiques. The area used to suffer from poor pedestrian safety and persistent congestion—cars crawled at 10 kilometres per hour. A 2009 study showed that pedestrian volume on Yonsei-ro was 2,000–3,000 people per hour, averaging 30,000 per day. The 3 to 4-metre-wide pedestrian path could accommodate pedestrians, but facilities such as power distribution equipment and street vendor stalls constricted the path,

reducing walkable space to between one and two metres.

A study found that most of the traffic in Yonsei-ro was only passing through the area. This not only affected Yonsei-ro but also the Shinchon Five-way Intersection that it was part of, and consequently the segment between Shinchon and Yanghwa-ro, another major road to the west. Tackling this challenge became a priority for the Seoul Metropolitan Government.



This article was adapted from *Walkable and Bikeable Cities: Lessons from Seoul and Singapore*, published by the Centre for Liveable Cities and The Seoul Institute. Download it at www.clc.gov.sg.





A congested Yonsei-ro before the transit mall was created.





01

The Solution

Seoul looked towards transit malls—streets in which automobile traffic is prohibited or greatly restricted with only public transit vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians permitted—as its solution. Yonsei-ro was selected as a pilot site as part of the city’s comprehensive transit mall plan in 2012.

The plan was to close off the 550-metre stretch to all private cars, allowing only trams, buses (carrying 16 or more passengers), emergency vehicles and bicycles. Taxis are allowed only between midnight and 4 am when there are no other modes of public transport. The speed limit was 30 kilometres per hour. Business vehicles that need to enter the area must obtain approval in advance and are only allowed to travel within two fixed time slots between 10–11 am and 3–4 pm. All other vehicles are prohibited from stopping or parking on the road. On weekends, the area would be fully closed to all traffic, making the mall completely car-free.



02

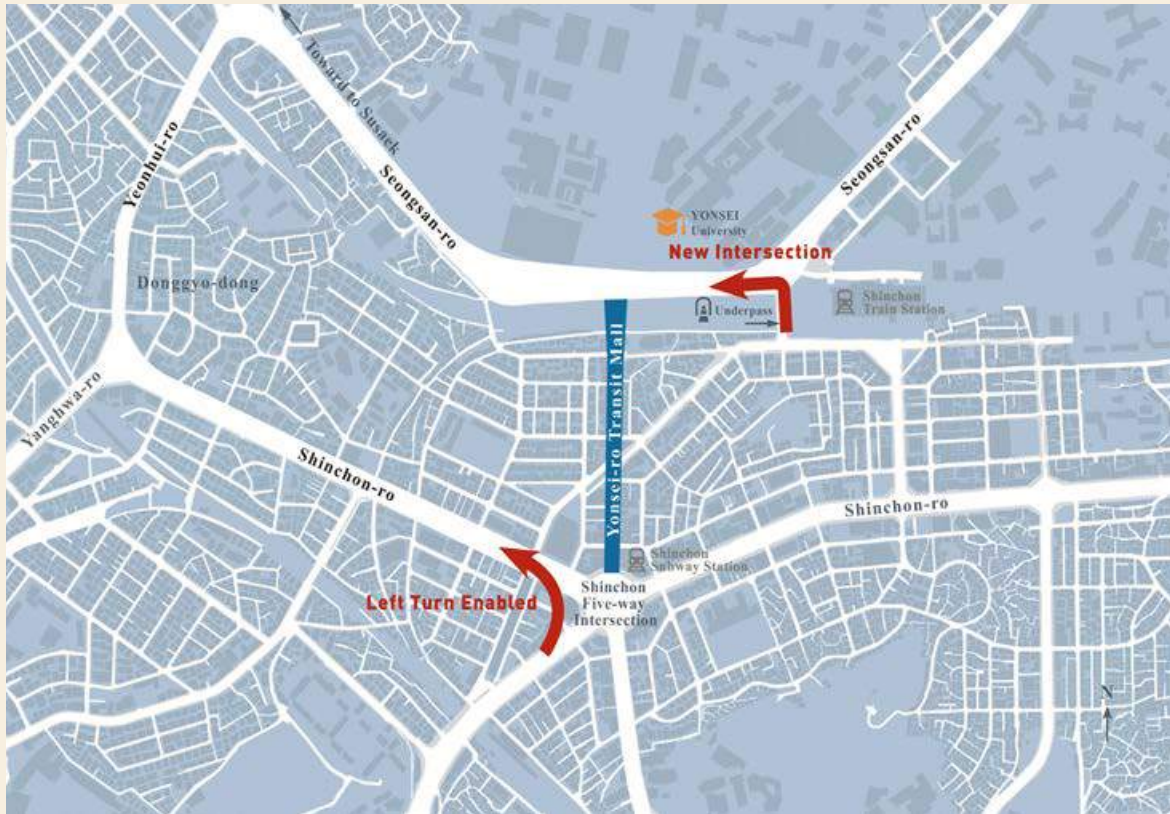
Four vehicle lanes would be reduced to two, and this “road diet” would allow the narrow sidewalk to be widened up to eight metres. Obstacles like power distribution equipment and street vendor stalls would be relocated to provide a comfortable walking space for pedestrians.



03

In anticipation of possible congestion, two car-free days were implemented to analyse the effect of vehicle restrictions. The study indicated that vehicles going north to south were distributed across nearby roads and did not contribute to the congestion in the surrounding

- 01 The road was made free of most automobiles, except buses on weekdays and a small number of regulated business vehicles.
- 02 New space from the widened sidewalks has been used in interesting ways.
- 03 A raised wooden platform serves as a bus waiting area on weekdays.
- 04 Traffic improvements made around the Yonsei-ro Transit Mall to handle the vehicular restrictions.



areas. However, most of the vehicles going south to north took a three-way intersection in Donggyo-dong and detoured to Yanghwa-ro and Yeonhui-ro, increasing congestion on both roads. A detour route for vehicles going toward Susaek in the north was identified as a suitable way to address this issue. The city also built an intersection in front of the underpass for Shinchon Train Station.

Worried about the impending vehicular restrictions, citizens voiced concerns about inconvenient access to the area while merchants and street vendors worried about a slowdown in business.

Nearby residents feared that their neighbourhoods would be affected by traffic diversion and congestion, as well as increased parking demand. There was also conflict between the metropolitan government and other stakeholders, like the power company KEPCO which demanded that the city pay for the relocation of 40 of their electric distribution boxes on the sidewalks to make way for the transit mall.

To allay fears, the city set up a committee to seek public opinions and made it a priority to respond to the concerns of those affected. For example, it offered actual examples of how increased footfall boosted business, and explained how various activities like cultural events could attract more visitors. It also negotiated an agreement with the Hyundai Department Store for night-time discounts to merchants to counter a potential drop in customers. Additionally, the committee engaged legal advisors to convince KEPCO that their demand for the city to pay for the relocation was not consistent with KEPCO guidelines and the Road Act.

The effective conflict management enabled the transit mall to be built quickly and opened in January 2014. The efforts to resolve various concerns was evaluated and selected by the city and the central government as a successful example of conflict management in South Korea.

“There is space on Yonsei-ro for spontaneous performances ... such liberal use of space by the public helps create a culture unique to Shinchon.”



The Outcome

In the six months following the opening of the transit mall, traffic congestion eased substantially, leading to a reduction of traffic accidents by 34% from the previous year, and an increase in bus commuters by 11.1%. A majority of people said in a survey that they felt much safer than when both people and vehicles shared the roads; visitor satisfaction in 2014 was at 70% compared to 14% in 2013.


Business boomed for shops in Shinchon with shoppers rising by 28.9% in 2014, while transactions that resulted in revenues went up by 10.6% and total revenues rose by 4.2%.

Due to vehicle access controls, there are no through roads at either end of Yonsei-ro mall. The resulting plaza space is used for open-air theatre performances, breakdance battles and festivals. There is space on Yonsei-ro for spontaneous performances without performers having to apply for permits.

02



Such liberal use of space by the public helps create a culture unique to Shinchon and provides visitors with more to see and enjoy.

The resounding success has prompted the authorities to consider turning it into a complete pedestrian-only zone in the future. Also, another district is being reviewed to replicate the success of Yonsei-ro. 

01 A new vibrant plaza space has taken over what was once a road intersection.

02 The colourful Sinchon Water Gun Festival can be held along Yonsei-ro now after the street's pedestrianisation.



CASE STUDY

Singapore | Remaking Bedok

Crafting and Activating New Civic Spaces

Bedok, an ageing and increasingly crowded suburban town, received a makeover in recent years under the Remaking Our Heartlands programme. Commercial, social and transport facilities were boldly consolidated to carve out people-centric civic spaces, and nurture a sense of community and place identity at the heart of a rejuvenated town centre.

The Challenge

Planned in the 1970s and completed in the early 1980s, Bedok was the fifth town developed by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) to provide affordable public housing and improved living conditions.

Originally built for a population of 150,000, Bedok was designed as a self-contained town with a full suite of transport, commercial, educational and community facilities, including a bus depot, food centre, polyclinic, community centre, public library and swimming complex.

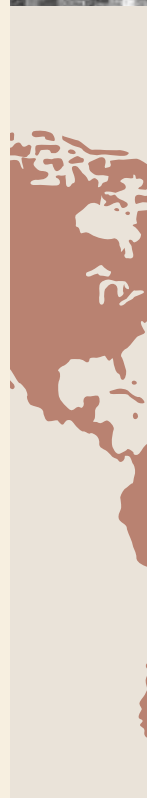
The town facilities greatly improved living standards. However, as the population grew to almost 295,000 by 2010, it became apparent that the town centre was becoming inadequate in meeting residents' needs.

Town amenities were scattered widely in low-rise buildings surrounded by car parks, which discouraged walking and instead attracted a growing number of cars that created traffic congestion. Inefficient land use by the sprawling, single-storey bus interchange and an underutilised Bedok Adventure Park also meant that existing facilities could not be easily expanded.

Significantly, the town lacked a sense of place and identity as past developments had overlooked the history and heritage of the area. In addition, without a central public space where people could gather, residents did not have opportunities to interact and bond.



Joanna Tan is a researcher at the Centre for Liveable Cities.





Sprawling and scattered amenities in Bedok New Town in the 1980s.





01

The Solution

To rejuvenate ageing towns like Bedok, the HDB launched the Remaking Our Heartlands (ROH) programme in 2007. The scheme aimed to create more engaging and attractive homes through town improvements that built on the unique identity of each estate. Bedok, as part of the larger East Coast area, was selected in 2011 for the second phase of the programme.

The first improvements sought to inject new life into the town centre by boosting commercial activity and improving public transport. Between December 2013 and November 2014, the new integrated Bedok Mall and Bedok Residences was launched with a transport hub linking a train

station and a new air-conditioned bus interchange, for more convenient pedestrian access while tucking the interchange out of sight.

The well-loved Bedok Interchange Hawker Centre that sold affordable food to the general public was relocated next to the new mall. The relocation of some of the original stall holders to the new centre—with its increased seating capacity, larger stalls and barrier-free accessibility—continued to draw residents and regular patrons to the new site.

The next phase consolidated other non-commercial civic facilities into the high-density, high-rise Bedok Integrated Complex, to be completed

01 Commercial activity at Bedok Mall has injected new life into the town centre.

02 The hawker centre, a community favourite, now sits next to its old location.



02

in 2017. Replacing the underutilised Bedok Adventure Park, the site will house former low-rise, stand-alone facilities such as the swimming complex, polyclinic, library, community centre, sports centre, senior care centre, childcare centre, and retail and food outlets, thereby releasing more sites for redevelopment.

The consolidation of commercial and civic amenities at the town centre freed up space for pedestrian circulation and activities.

By March 2016, the 320-metre pedestrian mall was enhanced with benches, wheelchair-friendly ramps and better lighting to enhance accessibility. New landscaping beautified the area flanked by shops and the food centre.

The enhanced pedestrian mall connected the mall, transport hub and food centre seamlessly to the new Bedok Town Square—the most significant feature of the town centre redevelopment. The first of a new generation of town squares introduced in housing estates, the sheltered plaza has a high ceiling equipped with a huge industrial fan to keep the space well-ventilated and conducive as both a thoroughfare and rest stop for pedestrians.

Recognising that the key to transforming public housing estates into more vibrant

places was not merely about improving physical infrastructure, HDB turned towards community-based placemaking efforts.

In April 2016, about 1,000 residents participated in a public consultation exercise to name their town plaza and contribute suggestions for activities to be held there. Ideas included outdoor movie screenings, mass yoga sessions and performances. These inputs helped to shape the square's identity and purpose.

A community-building seminar and a Build-a-thon were also held in May 2016, where participants brainstormed ideas on how to create a lively town centre through design interventions, installations and programming. To keep residents informed and to get their feedback on work in progress, community exhibitions were staged to mark the launch of the ROH programme, followed by smaller exhibitions in January 2015 and June 2016.

A Town Plaza Activation Team, comprising local community partners, schools, grassroots leaders and the National Arts Council, was set up to continue involving local residents in keeping the space alive through events and interaction.

“ Having been involved in remaking the town centre, residents have continued to organise and participate in community events ... ”





02

The Outcome

HDB's efforts to gather residents' views helped to identify key issues relating to accessibility and the need for public space for community interaction. These inputs helped to remake Bedok town centre as a thoughtful blend of integrated, accessible facilities and well-loved public spaces.

More significantly, the participatory planning process added to the sense of ownership among residents. Having been involved in remaking the town

centre, residents have continued to organise and participate in community events, supported by the dedicated Activation Team set up.

Since its opening, the Bedok Town Square has hosted numerous community events, including a community job fair and a dance appreciation event. The constant bustle and activity at the town square has created a buzz that residents and businesses have welcomed. ○

01 Bedok residents share their hopes and aspirations for the town at a pop-up public engagement event.

02 The sheltered town plaza is a key community event space suitable for all weather.



ILLUSTRATION

POPOS—Privately-Owned Public Open Spaces

Secrets of San Francisco

Downtown San Francisco is peppered with vibrant privately-owned, publicly accessible spaces thanks to the regulatory and outreach efforts of the San Francisco Planning Department.

In the downtown office district of San Francisco, the city government owns and manages just five benches and a few ledges for sitting and relaxing by the public. Yet, this work and living space for over a quarter million people has a rich and diverse network of plazas, terraces, atriums, small parks, and small, sunny sitting spaces called snippets. These are developed and maintained by the private sector as Privately-Owned Public Open Spaces, or POPOS. Many of these were deliberately designed to be obscure or inaccessible despite the public's right to use them, until in 2012 when the city actively intervened with a new legislation that upgraded

signage controls and increased public outreach efforts.

Today, every POPOS has to be accompanied by a standardised plaque bearing a “Public Open Space” logo and comprehensive information, including directions to the space where it is not visible from the public sidewalk. To increase public awareness, the San Francisco Planning Department put up an online interactive map that allows users to search for all POPOS by location, opening hours, and availability of seating, food and restrooms. More information appears when you click on each pin. ●





Sun Terrace at 343 Sansome Street

- Hours:** Open during business hours
- Seating:** 18 chairs, 50 linear seats on planter box sizes
- Food:** None
- Restrooms:** None
- Location:** 15th floor
- Description:** This 15th floor open space has excellent views of surrounding buildings and streets, as well as the San Francisco Bay. It has various types of seating and landscaping. It also has art in the form of a large sundial.



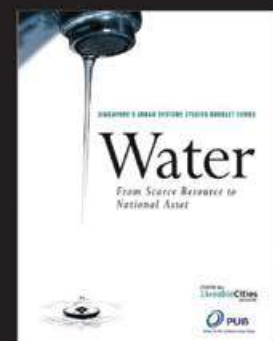
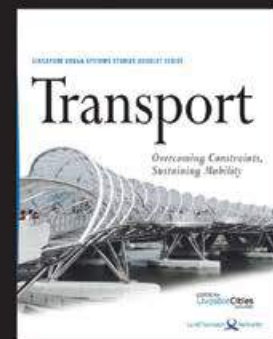
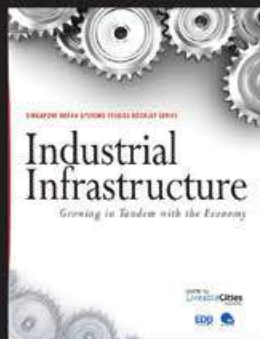
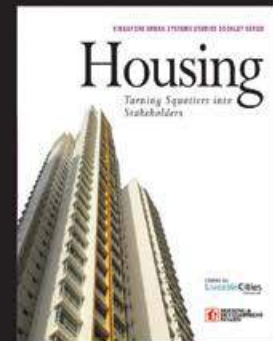
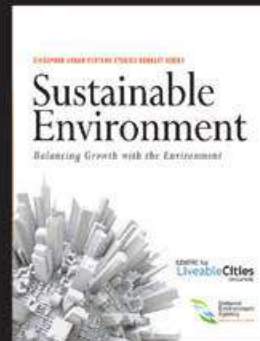
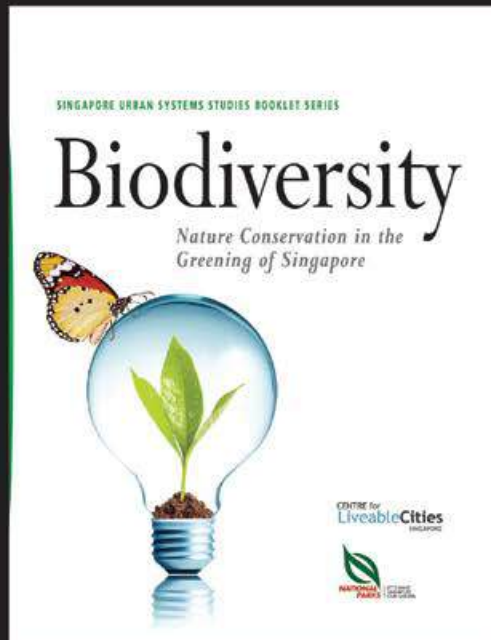
Green House at 222 Second Street

- Hours:** Open during business hours
- Seating:** 13 tables, capacity of 61
- Food:** Cafe
- Restrooms:** Yes
- Location:** Ground floor lobby
- Description:** An enclosed open space, with operable floor-to-ceiling windows and doors; located within the street-level lobby.



Urban Garden at 560 Mission Street

- Hours:** Open at all times
- Seating:** 45 chairs with 15 tables, 134 linear seating on ledges, 10 linear seats on benches
- Food:** Cafe
- Restrooms:** None
- Location:** Plaza: northeast of building; side of building; indoor part/arcade along Anthony Street
- Description:** This large plaza features a sculpture in a pool of water, a large bamboo grove and various forms of seating. It is served by a cafe.



The **SINGAPORE URBAN SYSTEMS STUDIES BOOKLET SERIES** draws on original Urban Systems Studies research by the Centre for Liveable Cities, Singapore (CLC) into Singapore's development over the last half-century.

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