The Making of State — Business Driven Public Spaces in Singapore

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Abstract

Public policy can significantly affect the design and quality of public spaces. This may be truer in Singapore than elsewhere. The making of new public spaces after Singapore's independence has been attributed to the extensive authority and perhaps draconian powers of the building authorities. Enacted in 1966, The Land Acquisition Act empowered the Singapore government to compulsorily acquire land for public development, facilitating the acquisition and combination of fragmented lots. Such land is sold by public tender to private developers through the Government Land Sales (GLS) programme. The ensuing large footprint buildings with a strong public agenda have changed the landscape of Singapore. The resulting public spaces have been named State – Business Driven Public Spaces, or SBDPS, to reflect the close proximity and integration of state policies and business concerns. Through the examination of planning/design policies, plans, circulars, and land sale packages, this study examines how the GLS programme evolves and responds to Singapore's economic and social conditions. It also explores the design review and evaluation process to reveal the hidden dynamics behind the development of public spaces, providing a clearer model to understand Singapore's urban policy and to compare it against the regulatory structures of other countries.

Keywords: State – Business Driven Public Spaces (SBDPS); public space; urban planning; urban design

1. Introduction

The government of Singapore plays a strong interventionist role in many aspects of society in this island city-state, including urban planning. Much has been written to place Singapore's urban management in the context of its changing political and economic environment (e.g., Chua, 1997; Dale, 1999). For some, the physical transformation of the city was seen as a process of social change underlined by a strong political will in pursuit of city image enhancement and material progress. The evolving planning approach was a process of diffusion of Western urban planning ideas, for example, the implementation of the postwar modernist idea of Urban Renewal in the form of slum clearance and total redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s, and the pursuit of a world-class Central Business District in the 1980s (e.g., Wong, 2001). Others, such as Soh and Yuen (2006), examined the urban structure from cultural studies and experiential perspectives, arguing that changes might have to be made to the largely state-dominated planning process to include more voices. The government's regulatory intervention, with its strong association with political and economic priorities, is well recognized to have played a significant role in the shaping of Singapore. Major shifts in urban development agendas have been examined and well documented (Perry et al., 1997). However, little is discussed about how the planning system has been operating and evolving in relation to its implications on the changes of the physical environment, in particular, the public spaces — potentially the most important aspect of public intervention in the quality of the built environment.

If the quality of the public realm is one of the key concerns for urban planning, the planning instruments, the operational mechanisms, and their implementation need to be thoroughly understood to comprehend the development of Singapore's public spaces. The first part of the study investigates the evolving planning/design control approaches through the examination of the planning policies/plans, circulars, tender packages, and other relevant documentation over the past 40 years since Singapore's independence. Case studies are presented in the second part of the study to evaluate the impact of the planning control approaches on the physical development of Singapore's public space. Enacted in 1966, The Land Acquisition Act empowered the Singapore government to acquire land on a compulsory basis for public development. It facilitated the government's acquisition of fragmented...
land lots from separate owners and their assembly into larger plots for comprehensive development. Such land was sold by tender to private developers through the Government Land Sales (GLS) programme. The programme was first introduced in 1967 following the formation of the Urban Renewal Department under the Housing Development Board. It later became an independent statutory body under the Ministry of National Development and was renamed the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) in 1974. As one of the primary government agencies that regulate land use and urban development, the URA acts as the key agent for the government in carrying out land sales for commercial, private residential, conservation, and recreational developments.

The GLS programme was the primary tool to facilitate cooperation between the government and the private sector. Fragmented land lots are assembled and sold to developers by a public tender system, which offers a combination of conditions and concessions tailored to achieve planning objectives within the framework of a free market economy. Through the GLS programme, particularly in the case of commercial developments, large footprint buildings with a strong public agenda have been changing the landscape of Singapore. This agenda and related planning policies are reflected in the tender documents in the form of sale conditions. The tender documents are the main legal instruments of planning control that communicate with developers outside the confines of existing building regulations and urban guidelines. Within such a framework, the role of private developers in the production of public spaces has increased. These public spaces have been named State – Business Driven Public Spaces, or SBDPS (Heng and Low, 2005), in order to reflect the close proximity and integration of state policies and business concerns.

### Table 1. The Urban Planning System of Singapore

| The Concept | A broad visionary plan that guides
| Plan | Singapore's physical growth over a long term of 40 to 50 years. Concept Plan, 1971 1st Revision, 1991 2nd Revision, 2001 |
| The Master Plan | A medium-term (10 to 15 years) development control plan prepared through the Development Guide Plan (DGP) approach. DGPs for 55 planning areas island-wide were prepared then gazetted as the statutory Master Plan for the nation. 1st Master Plan, 1998 2nd Master Plan, 2003 |
| Development Control Guidelines | Regulations, Guidelines, and Circulars |
| Site-specific planning/design guide | Contained in the tender documents released under the GSL programme |

2. Evolving Planning/Design Control Approaches

The GLS programme is the most direct development control mechanism at the operational level of a four-tiered urban planning system implemented by Singapore. The system consists of the Concept Plan for the state, the Master Plan prepared through an area-based Development Guide Plan approach, development control guidelines, and the site-specific planning carried out through the tender documents under the GLS programme (Table 1.). Supplemental development control in the form of Urban Design Plans and/or guidelines is also provided for areas deemed to require additional considerations. At the most detailed level, the tender document prepared for land sale is the primary legal form of planning/design control instrument to communicate with developers.

2.1 Inception of the GLS Programme in the 1960s

At the inception stage of the GLS programme, the first three trial land sales were launched by the Urban Renewal Department in 1967, 1968, and 1969. The details of the proposed schemes and the mode for tender were released to the public in the form of a 'Developer's Packet'. The packet included a 'Simulated Sketch Design' as the main carrier for planning/design requirements, illustrated by plans, sections, and a physical model.

Upon the release of the tender packet for the first land sale in 1967, feedback from developers and professionals indicated a need for clarification in many areas. It was widely felt that the simulated proposals, although comprehensive in terms of design details, were not accompanied by sufficient analytical and factual data. Neither did they stipulate the planning parameters explicitly. Contrary to the descriptiveness of the simulated designs, the compliance requirements of any alternative scheme were minimal. Except for basic planning criteria such as plot ratio, density, and car parking requirements, the rest of the design considerations were largely left to the planner's discretion. The confusion led to two extreme responses from developers and their designers in the implementation.

On one hand, hesitant about which specific design solutions provided by the simulated design could be altered and still be acceptable to the planning authority, most developers deviated little from the ready-to-use formula. On the other hand, the minimum design requirement for alternative proposals seemed to have provided opportunities for some avant-garde design schemes.

In response to the inquiries, the Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA) promptly convened a meeting to discuss the tenders. This resulted in a memorandum to the Ministry of National Development expressing the consensus of members' views. The recommendations of the SIA addressed a wider range of issues including the additional data required for design (SIAJ, 1967). With the additional information included, the tender conditions provided land use control and some basic
control parameters such as height, gross floor area (GFA), and street setbacks.

2.2 Formation of Standard Practice in the 1970s and 1980s

With the first few sales acting as pilot schemes, the Developer’s Packet took on a fairly standard format after the fifth sale in 1976. It included a specific section addressing planning/design issues — Additional Conditions of Tender (Technical). The simulated design illustration shifted towards a control plan and guidance-orientated approach with an emphasis on written policy. Aside from the elements typical of conventional planning regulations such as land use, gross floor area (GFA), plot ratio, building setbacks, and height control, considerations for the design of public domains started to emerge.

While a request for a covered walkway or pedestrian underpass was often straightforward, i.e., 'the proposed development shall incorporate a 3.6 metre-wide colonnaded covered walkway on the first storey as shown on the Control Plan' (URA, 1990), a performance-oriented guideline was given for public spaces with more design complexity. As an example, 'the public concourse areas shall be of a size sufficient to allow the smooth flow of pedestrian movement from the proposed development to the Raffles Place MRT Station. The public concourse shall be kept open for public use during the hours of operation of the MRT Station without any hindrance whatsoever' (URA, 1980).

In some cases, instead of including safety clauses, some important design choices were identified and referred to an internal design review mechanism within the URA. 'The successful tenderer shall be responsible for the implementation of the proposed pedestrian mall, riverside promenade, and plaza as shown shaded on the said guide plan … the design of the proposed landscaped pedestrian, promenade, and plaza shall be subject to the approval of the Authority and other relevant Competent Authorities' (URA, 1989).

While the planners started to recognize the importance of urban design concerns for public spaces, the tender documents demonstrated a number of good intentions, such as the recognition of the importance of permeability among/across blocks, multi-purpose open spaces, and in some cases, a forward-looking reserve for future extension of public spaces. To retain the characteristic of places with cultural/historical value, the GLS programme responded to the growing concern over the issue of conservation. The year 1987 saw the first 38 land parcels of conservation shophouses at Tanjong Pagar and the Raffles Hotel Extension project that reflected the new focus on heritage and the cultural aspects of the built environment. Along with the release of the Conservation Plan, more conservation sites were launched. An emphasis on the local context and identity of the place was found in the tender documents released for sites with conservation status. As a result, some pleasant public spaces were created that remain popular today.

To weigh design quality in the tender process, all tenderers were required to submit design proposals for evaluation. The selection of tenders was not to be judged on the premium offered alone, but also on the overall economic return and design merits offered.

2.3 Emphasis on Urban Design and the Integrated Pedestrian - Transportation Network

By the end of the 1980s, much of Singapore’s transformation envisaged in the 1971 Concept Plan had been put in place. In 1989, the URA merged with the Planning Department and Research and Statistical Unit of the Ministry of National Development, and became the national planning and conservation authority with expanded resources. The thrust to guide the physical development of Singapore into the new millennium led to a series of reviews of its existing plans and regulations through public forums, exhibitions, and cross-talks with people from relevant industries and professions.

The city’s planning control and its efficiency were hotly debated. Views ranged from those who believed that the success of the planning system was proven by the nation’s reform from its old days and its pleasant urban environment today, to those who felt that such a system produced mediocrity by its excessively detailed guidelines and review process. The cross-talks have induced challenges and changes.

The main challenge was to conceive regulations that avoided ambiguous language or subjective implementation, yet provided a flexible, fine-grained control of urban form without resorting to a case-by-case design review. Since 1991, an individual section titled ‘Urban Design Guidelines’ has been produced under the Technical Conditions of Tender in the Developer’s Packet. Urban design issues were dealt with in a more structured way and with a broader coverage.

The planning authority made explicit its vision for Singapore’s public spaces system as an integrated pedestrian-transportation network. In fact, the URA’s vision of developing such a network for the downtown area began in the early 1980s. Starting from the reservation of future links between buildings, and proposals for covered pedestrian walkways and second-storey links, this concept has developed into a comprehensive pedestrian network system consisting of links not only on the ground, but also above and underground. It was a network where public transport facilities could be fully integrated into development. To achieve this vision, land parcels were released with stringent requirements for a link system that was mostly mandatory. Some individual land parcels were even released with designated use as public links.

It was also realized that these links, often with busy
human traffic, provide great opportunities for recreation and activities. By accommodating such opportunities in design, some places conceived primarily as pedestrian walkways could become destinations in their own right. To achieve this, guidelines were issued to encourage developers and existing owners to contribute to the activity and liveability of such spaces.

One example is the URA's relaxation on GFA computation. In July 1993, the URA revised its computation guideline for GFA to encourage the provision of public spaces (URA, 1993). Areas exempted from GFA computation included open-sided link ways and pavilions incorporated as part of a landscape, link ways designed as connections between buildings and/or facilities at first-storey level, certain covered public concourse areas, etc. This guideline was again revised in 1997 aiming to 'further enhance design flexibility in providing more pedestrian thoroughfares and linkages for ease of pedestrian movement ... to encourage greater provision and use of covered public spaces' (URA, 1997). The relaxation allowed the exemption of GFA for link ways through building blocks, second-storey links, and some covered public areas if they complied with the criteria. The guideline was revised again in 2003 with the same intention of creating robust public spaces. Similarly, revisions were made to the guideline for Outdoor Kiosk and Refreshment Area for the Orchard Planning Area in 1998, 2002, and 2004 to elicit the desired behaviour from the private sector.

Another example is the Guideline for the Outdoor Kiosk and Refreshment Area for the Orchard Planning Area. This was first introduced in July 1996 to make the streets more exciting and lively (URA, 1996). As a start, it allowed building owners to build second-storey links with the built area exempted from GFA computation. Subsequent revisions in 1998 and 2000 permitted the incorporation of shops and eating outlets into any second-storey links as an incentive for such provisions.

With the more comprehensive and structured urban design regulations in place, the URA revised its design review process for tender. From 1990, a proposed design scheme was no longer required to be included in the tender submission. Design review before the acceptance of tender was removed. In the meantime, to safeguard against some appalling designs in the city, a post-tender stage design screening process took place. Upon the award of a tender, the successful tenderer must submit the preliminary design to a Design Screening Committee led by the URA. For projects on significant routes and in important urban areas, the proposal would be referred for further evaluation through an Architecture Design Panel (ADP). Comments from the Design Screening Committee and ADP were considered as conditions for the URA's planning approval.

2.4 Recent Initiatives and Responses
At the end of the 20th century, urban development in Singapore was affected by the Asian financial crisis. The recession in the property market led to decreasing interest in the URA's regular site sales from the private sector. In response to the rapidly changing and worsening market conditions, the URA launched the Reserve List System in June 2001. This is the latest in a series of steps taken by the URA to make the GLS programme more flexible and responsive to the market.

Under the Reserve List System, a site will only be launched for sale if there is a successful application from an interested developer who is able to offer a minimum price acceptable to the government. The successful applicant must undertake to subsequently submit a bid for the land in the public tender at or above the minimum price offered in the application. Since 2002, the URA has suspended its annual release of land, and all land parcels available for sale go through the Reserve List System only.

Under the Reserve List System, at the beginning of the new millennium the GLS programme saw the launch of a few prominent sites. These are located within the new downtown area at the Marina Bay and Orchard Planning Area. New initiatives on urban design are being explored in these recent developments. For example, at the new downtown at Marina Bay, further emphasis is now given to the variety of living and working environments, the integration of public transport facilities via an 'all-weather' pedestrian network, and the requirement for a 'Vertical Circulation Point' that was introduced in the tender briefs for the first time, reflecting an expanded dimension of the network — the vertical (URA, 2001).

Design options have also been explored to establish the network of public space systems not only for ease of pedestrian movement, but also for the integration of public activities. The explicit task of developing a fully integrated public space network with a variety of pedestrian activities was also manifested in the guidelines for some other major developments.

Meanwhile, with the lack of new developments in the old downtown area, there has been a need to coordinate these urban infill and improvement projects. It is realized that the piecemeal approach of 'parcel by parcel' GLS tenders will have to be complemented by a wider framework especially to safeguard the quality of public spaces over a long period of time. Hence, the URA initiated Urban Design Plans for key urban districts. In 2002, the Urban Design Plan for Orchard Planning Area 2002 was finalized, which aims to enhance pedestrian connectivity, attractiveness, and vibrancy in the area. Guidelines were provided for urban verandas, first-storey links, second-storey links, building edges, and underground links (URA, 2002).

Along with the change of its urban planning policy, the URA again embarked on a review of its
practice concerning urban design. Consultations with professionals from relevant industries revealed a largely supportive view of the centralized control of urban development and planning in Singapore. However, alternative opinions about the existing authority's excessive control were raised. Some argued that the stringent hyper-planning eliminated natural complexity in the city and produced a pale and artificial reflection of the organic environment. Critics of the excessive control of design argued that the design guidelines and site-specific requirements stipulated in the tender conditions largely predetermined the physical development, leaving little room for design professionals to exercise their expertise. It was felt that existing control has avoided undesirable developments, but may have indeed prevented exciting ones. The result is thus an inoffensive but often uninspiring urban landscape.

The role of the ADP in the planning process was also questioned. Since most tenders were awarded based on the highest premium offered, the ADP was not able to influence the design of the successful tenderer at a fundamental level. Its advice was taken as a 'band-aid' device. While safeguarding the public interests through stricter control over urban design issues, a more relaxed design review process and more flexibility in architectural design should be given to designers.

In 2000, the URA dissolved the ADP and replaced it with a Design Waiver Committee. Different from the ADP, this committee only evaluates cases of high-quality designs that propose to vary from relevant guidelines. Such modification is intended to give leeway to good designs that deviate from the norm.

The dissolution of the ADP implies that the designated ADP Review Routes no longer apply, and that proposed developments within the central area do not have to endure the ADP review process. However, it was deemed necessary for the developers of some important urban projects to consult relevant professional bodies. Hence, some strategic developments have been referred to a newly established Design Advisory Panel (DAP) on a case-by-case basis. The DAP review process has been applied to a few recent landmark developments, e.g., the downtown at Marina Bay, the Orchard Turn, and the Somerset development.

Similar to the ADP review, the DAP review is still a post-tender process that takes place after a successful tenderer has been appointed. To complement the profit-based tender selection, the URA started another experimental tender review process that allows the development concept to be weighted up front. As suggested by its nickname, 'the two-enveloped process', two separate envelopes containing 'Concept' and 'Price' are required for submission. 'Only acceptable use and development concepts for the land parcel in line with the planning intention for the site will be considered for award of Tender' (URA, May, 2005). So far, two projects have gone through this review process. In these two cases, however, the evaluated 'Concept' concentrated on business and development strategies; design quality was still rather left out in the process. It is argued that further experimentation should be implemented to explore alternative ways to uphold good design without compromising the financial aspect of the development.

3. The Making of Public Spaces under the GLS Programme

In order to analyse the impact of the GLS programme on the development of SBDPS, case studies were carried out. The four cases presented here include land sales in the late 1970s and the 1980s, and very recent developments. The making of public spaces in Singapore is further illustrated through a close examination of the control plans/guidelines and the performance of their resulting physical landscapes.

3.1 Orchard Plaza and Cuppage Road Area

The Cuppage Road area along Orchard Road was one of the earliest redevelopment projects in the Orchard Planning Area under the GLS programme. The phased redevelopment started with the sale of land parcels for Orchard Plaza in 1976, followed by three joint land parcels released to Holiday Inn, Cuppage Plaza, and Centre Point in 1978.

A Simulated Control Plan was the main vehicle to deliver planning/design control parameters. From an analysis of the control plans, it could be said that the concerns for public space were basic and utilitarian. Three main types of public space were planned: a covered walkway, a pedestrian link way, and an entrance plaza. The main purpose of the plan's provision of these spaces was to assist pedestrian movement around building blocks (Fig.1.).

Fig.1. Analysis of Control Plans — Cuppage Road Area
For Orchard Plaza, a 3.6 meter wide covered footway was required all around. Although the building fronted the prime shopping street, no further concern was stipulated to address the building's main frontage. The covered walkway requirements were also given to the other three land parcels. An entrance plaza was planned for Cuppage Plaza opposite the previously planned pedestrian link through Orchard Plaza. However, with Orchard Road being the main shopping street, the streets perpendicular to it became secondary without much pedestrian flow. The plan was implemented with most of the features being constructed, such as the second-storey pedestrian links between Orchard Plaza and Cuppage Centre and the entrance plaza, but they are mostly now redundant (Fig.2.). The lack of attractiveness of the side streets was further strengthened by mundane building facade design. It could be argued that the lack of careful consideration in terms of the nature and function of these side streets led to the redundancy of some of the planned public spaces and their poor performance. The mere existence of such provisions as features on a plan does not guarantee attractive public spaces.

Despite some underperforming public spaces in this area, the authority's decision to preserve a block of old shophouses along Cuppage Road brought an opportunity for the creation of an interesting urban niche. The row of shophouses was noted for their Malaccan-style architecture and intrinsic charm. By closing Cuppage Road to vehicular traffic and turning it into a pedestrian mall — the Cuppage Mall — this area was transformed into a relaxing dining area just a step away from the busy main street. The charming side street is now filled with activities that spill out onto the outdoor refreshment areas from the restaurants and bars occupying the quaint restored shophouses. The sensitivity towards site context shown in the planning of Cuppage Mall has created a popular addition to the public spaces in the area.

3.2 Wheelock Place and Orchard Turn

The Orchard Area is Singapore's premier shopping area. Located at a strategic point at the junction of Orchard Road/Paterson Road, the site for Wheelock Place was released in 1989 (Fig.3.). Because of its strategic location, a main pedestrian entrance on the first level fronting the junction of Orchard Road and Paterson Road was called for during tender. Special design emphasis was given to the 'Main Pedestrian Entrance', which 'shall be in the form of a public concourse of suitable architectural scale that enhances its position as a meeting place for pedestrians. The concourse should facilitate direct pedestrian access into the proposed development and give access to the possible future underpass across Orchard Road and Paterson Road' (URA, 1989). To ensure the pedestrian connection at the busy junction, underpasses beneath Orchard Road and Paterson Road were planned. The provision of knock-out panels was required in the basement at designated locations. The underpass in connection to Shaw House across Orchard Road was later constructed.

Today, the entrance concourse of Wheelock Place, with its distinctive conical glass structure and the entrance plaza, marks one of the four most prominent urban corners in Singapore (Fig.4.).

It is worth mentioning that, in addition to the required entrance plaza, the architect took initiatives in designing another plaza at the junction of Paterson
Road and Orchard Boulevard. Compared with the front entrance, the semicircular outdoor public atrium is a quieter alcove enjoyed by booklovers after browsing at the bookstore in the building. With a fountain as its centrepiece and a restaurant by the side, it is also a popular place for people to gather (Fig.5.). It is evident here that, besides the planning/design requirements, the architect's skill and awareness of urban context played a crucial role in the creation of successful urban spaces around Wheelock Place. While the guidelines heed urban design concerns, flexibility should be given to architects to exercise their expertise.

At the same junction of Orchard Road and Paterson Road opposite Wheelock Place, the recent Orchard Turn development was launched in 2005 (Fig.4.). On an urban level, the main urban design objective was for the development to contribute to the vibrant street life and pedestrian-friendly environment. To achieve this, a few main strategies were established in the tender guidelines (Table 2.).

Table 2. Main Urban Design Strategies for the Orchard Turn Development, 2005 (URA, Sept., 2005)

- A Public Event Space as a central venue for major festive events and celebrations, as well as a central focal point for pedestrians and commuters in the area.
- A Public Concourse at the basement level contiguous with a public concourse at the public transport node.
- Underground links from the Public Concourse to adjacent buildings and existing underpasses.
- A Vertical Connection Point to link the Public Concourse at the basement, the Public Event Space at the first-storey level, and second-storey connections.
- An observation deck on any of the top three floors of the tower development.
- The provision and integration of public art is strongly encouraged. Tax incentives are available.
- The provision of activity-generating uses on at least one side of the underground pedestrian walkways.
- Night lighting; illuminated signs shall be fully integrated into the overall architectural treatment and landscaping of the open spaces.

Similar to the Wheelock Place development, the corner space of Orchard Turn facing the main junction was emphasized. A Public Event Space was planned as a central venue for events as well as a central focal point for pedestrians and commuters in the area. A Vertical Connection Point was planned to link the Public Concourse at the basement level, the Public Event Space at the first-storey level, and second-storey connections. Nevertheless, because of the new development's intricate relationship with the existing MRT station, more guidelines were stipulated to address the connections between the surrounding buildings and the public transportation node.

The urban design guidelines for the Orchard Turn project demonstrated a more comprehensive concern for the design of the public realm than previous projects. With the architectural design underway, it is yet to be seen how these strategies are executed and how the resulting public spaces will perform in their urban settings. What the local authority can take credit for at the moment is its ability in coordinating urban design across the boundaries of different developments through planning. For example, the provision of multiple connections in Orchard Turn was only made possible at various locations via knock-out panels that were incorporated in the earlier development. The URA's vision of an integrated pedestrian system has been gradually realized through the reinforcement of urban design strategies via this coordinated planning approach.

4. Conclusion
Singapore's significant urban transformation and its intricate urban planning and management system have attracted many accolades. What keeps urban development in Singapore distinctive is its extensive authority and perhaps draconian power to implement key aspects of its planning control within the framework of the free market through the GLS programme. Public spaces arising from this system reflect the close proximity of planning policies and business concerns. This paper examined planning/urban design interventions on the SBDPS that have appeared in central Singapore over the last three to four decades. Rather than a study to analyse their uses and physical settings, it attempts to provide a framework for understanding the implications of government planning intervention on the genesis and transformation of such spaces. It reveals the causes of the emergence and alteration of these interventions and their analytical basis and objectives, as well as how they have been translated into the negotiation and decision-making processes.

It is evident in the case studies that the physical development of SBDPS has echoed the different agendas and impetus of the planning system. The approach for their creation has been shifting away from piecemeal development towards an integrated
public space system with explicit focus on the task of building links across disparate networks. The rising urban design concerns over the accessibility and liveability of public spaces have been reflected in the constant amendments of local regulations/plans and tender conditions. Furthermore, the inadequacy of a heavy reliance on stringent legislative measures in creating an inspiring urban landscape has been gradually recognized and reflected in the modification of plan preparation and in the design review process. It is still debatable how efficient the existing planning system is in delivering good quality public spaces. Nevertheless, the experiences and lessons learned from its evolving process could provide useful insights for other countries in their development of a regulatory urban planning structure, especially in dealing with the issue of public spaces.

Resume
This paper is part of an ongoing research project that aims to develop a framework for analysing the development of Singapore’s public spaces. We see the urban landscape as an accumulation of layers of intervention in time. These underlying layers include the auspices of British colonialism and British sensibilities in planning before the nation’s independence, the implementation of the government’s development agenda through land release and planning control within the free market, the approach to urban revitalization and conservation in association with a constant search for cultural identification in the post-independent Singapore, and more. Needless to say, not everything fits into these layers neatly. With this exploration of the government’s planning system and land sales programme as a start, we hope to continually refine our approach and to provide more comprehensive analyses of the transformation of public spaces in Singapore.

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