

CHAPTER 11

50 Years of Urban Planning & Tourism

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In the 1960s and 1970s, Singapore's main focus was to build high-rise flats with modern sanitation for its population. However, by the 1980s Singapore had an oversupply of flats, offices and shopping centres. Attention then turned to tourism which became a key focus and partner in the urban planning of modern Singapore.

The 1980s: Turning the Focus to Tourism

***AT LAST THE WINDS OF CHANGE*¹**

The beginning of the decade was poised to see tremendous changes on the local scene. New hotels had been built in the 1970s but there were no new attractions—only some tired old ones. The Singapore Hilton, Shangri-La Hotel, and the Mandarin Hotel had all opened their doors, followed by the Oriental, the Marina Mandarin and the Pan Pacific. The only new attractions introduced by the STB² were the Handicraft Centre in 1976 and the Rasa Singapura Food Centre and the Instant Asia Cultural Show in 1977. The government's investment in attractions had not matched the private sector's investment in hotels. In the 1970s we liked the idea of being "Instant Asia". We promised visitors the chance to experience all of Asia in one-stop. We also expected instant action and change. In early 1984, Singapore saw a flood of even more hotels in the pipeline and anticipated a serious oversupply of hotel rooms. This caused a chain reaction. First to react were the hotel general managers, most of them foreigners, who saw a fight for the same tourists or market share. Then, the hotel owners, most of them local developers, who saw bank loans piling up and room rates coming down. Finally, the bankers recognised that the whole industry needed a solution that only the government could provide. For the first time, the STB research department got phone calls from bankers asking for hotel and visitor projections. Singapore is a small place, hence within a short time the jitters of the marketplace reached the ears of the government. At that moment, the light of attention focussed on tourism and the highest powers of government stepped in to resolve the problems of the travel industry.

¹ Indented text is from *Singapore, Tourism & Me*, by Pamelia Lee.

² The Singapore Tourism Board

"The Singapore Government is very concerned about the slowing down of the Singapore economy, therefore ways and means to stimulate the economy, especially the construction industry, are being sought. Facilities for tourist and tourist attractions have been found to be the primary underdeveloped area. The means for support at very high levels, never seen before, will be forthcoming. The Singapore Government will be encouraging construction and growth in this area involving hundreds of millions of dollars, to be spent on tourism related developments. This business climate is becoming more obvious. As large construction firms and architects find themselves with less work, many of them are seeking business opportunities."

(Source: Excerpt from author's speech on 1st Update Seminar on Development Projects to Government Officials, 26 October 1985.)

The Need to Plant Seeds

This was the turning point when the STB changed its focus by adding product development to its role. By the 1980s the charm of Singapore had indeed diminished. Hence, the world of tourism in Singapore changed dramatically. While in the 1960s and 1970s the focus was on marketing Singapore overseas, suddenly in the 1980s we started to look inward.

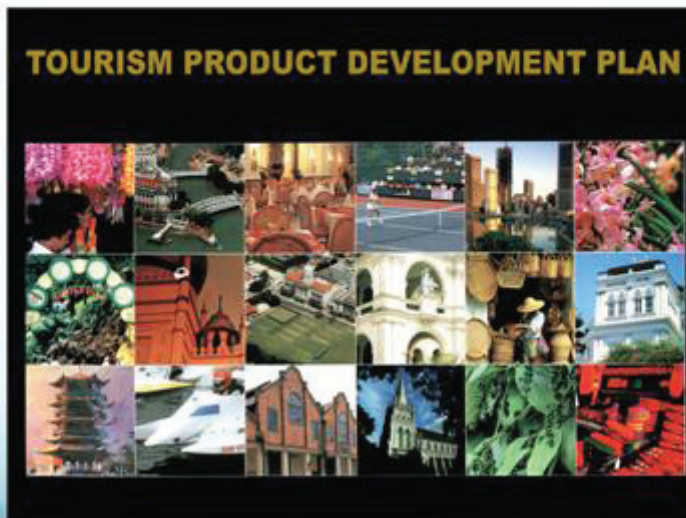


Figure 1. The Tourism Product Development Plan (1986 to 1990) was the first tourism masterplan of the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (now the Singapore Tourism Board). S\$1 billion was committed to this plan, which involved the conservation and revitalisation of selected historical sites and the development of new attractions.

“Like other developing nations, we also watched the charm of our old city disappear and diminish, bit by bit. For along with the rows and rows of shophouses that were lost, the bulldozers also demolished the very special elements that made visiting Singapore a charming and unique experience. In recent years, we have often been described as a city without a soul: modern, efficient and hygienic, but lacking in grace, refinement and charm.”

(Source: Excerpt from author's Presentation to UK Parliamentarians, 25–29 April 1987.)

Taking Care of Your Own Backyard First

Instead of limiting ourselves to tourism attractions, like the Handicraft Centre, the Rasa Singapura Food Centre, and the Instant Asia Cultural Show, the STB started to enhance areas in Singapore that did not come under the STB's purview. The festive light-up of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam were introduced. In 1984, we introduced the festive lights along Orchard Road and called it Christmas at the Equator.

An All-Important Tourism & Urban Planning Partnership

The all-important partnership of tourism and urban planning came about during a time of crisis when the economy was slowing down and tourist attractions were lacking. The tourism industry was pleased at last to have a place at the table with urban planners. And presumably the urban planners found the inputs of the tourism industry fresh, creative, and bold yet practical.

Actually, we realised at the time that the quality of a visitor's experience in a city depends heavily on the big as well as the small decisions made by our urban planners. While we in the tourism industry may not use the correct technical urban planning term, we can tell you what works for tourism and what foreign visitors like and dislike. Hence, one could say, “the lines that a planner draws, his sensitivity to plot ratio, set back, and what it takes to achieve a human scale make a big difference to the eventual experience of every visitor who comes to Singapore. And, it makes an even greater difference to locals who “live their whole life experiencing the footprints that our urban planners conceive and build”.

It is important that urban planners and the tourism industry work together as partners. Planners need overseas visitors to use what they design, and the tourism industry needs our planners to provide all the things our industry needs.

And as we live in a world of rapid change, both sides need a clear vehicle for regularly scheduled communication to ensure that Singapore can be one of the first in the world to catch changing trends.

Ideas that are good on paper but do not work on the ground must be avoided. Hence, the inputs of travel industry members, more specifically people who work close to the ground, such as guides, tour bus drivers and the visitors themselves need to be sought. Early discussions and an open specific channel for regular discussion will

ensure more win-win solutions versus a we-lost-the-chance scenario. This formula will transform Singapore into a city with a difference in the eyes of all visitors, and of course locals who are often visitors or tourist in their own country.

Singapore is Different Things to Different Visitors

Regional Visitors: Not all overseas visitors come to Singapore for the same reason. In other words, Singapore is different things to different people. For those who come from neighbouring countries in the Southeast Asian region, a visit to Singapore is a visit to “the big city”, a place where they can find the latest in fashion, fancy dining or world-class cultural and sporting events. This is similar to what London, New York and Paris offer visitors from neighbouring countries.

For a regional visitor in search of big city amenities, Orchard Road is ideal with large, but not overwhelmingly large, hotels and shopping centres, plus a private hospital within walking distance. Furthermore, it takes only a short walk to buy the latest brand-name handbag or jewellery piece to take home. In urban planning terms, Orchard Road offers a cluster of desirable and needed facilities all within easy reach.

Cultured European Visitors: Seasoned, well-travelled visitors from Europe have the latest brand-name collection at home, so they come to experience multi-cultural Singapore, i.e., Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam, our Colonial Heart and our museums. French and Italian visitors love to stay in old shophouses within our historic districts. And the British love to stay in grand historic hotels, such as Raffles Hotel and Goodwood Park Hotel. (These hotels also happen to be a favourite venue for Singapore weddings. Young Singaporeans like capturing a special moment in time surrounded by old-world charm.)

Many & Most Visitors: Many consider Singapore’s fines for littering, spitting and smoking “scary”. Most find Singapore wonderfully compact and convenient. Almost everyone likes our food. And everyone loves our greenery, cleanliness and safety, including our green buildings, made lush with walls of cascading plants and roof tops where greenery camouflages M&E “guts” or necessary back-of-the-house equipment. In urban planning language, we can say that they all marvel at Singapore’s bold measures to be a modern, well-planned city that works.

First-Time Visitor Groups: They come in large numbers, it may be their first trip out of their country, and they all come to see if Singapore is the Asian wonder they have heard about. For many, it may be the only trip they will ever make to Singapore. In the 1970s, it was the Japanese who took countless pictures in front of Singapore’s British Colonial buildings. At that time, the Singapore Tourism Board promoted Singapore using a picture of the Padang with some young Japanese office girls carrying shopping

bags filled with brand-name goods. Tea at the Raffles Hotel was a “must”. And to show we welcomed them, Singapore introduced signage in Japanese.

Then for a very short spell it was the Koreans, and now it is the Chinese.

The Chinese come in huge numbers, and they have developed a pattern of their own. Simply put, the local ground handling travel agent gets paid next to zero or nothing at all for handling the group. He has to recover his expenses and make his profit from the commission that he gets when the visitors on his tour package go shopping. The Chinese visitor is therefore taken to all the “free” attractions, such as Mount Faber and the Botanic Gardens. A ride through Sentosa and Marina Bay is included. According to people who know this market, “Despite the emphasis on shopping, visitors from China go away quite pleased with their stay in Singapore”. The pattern explains the frequent requests from Singapore’s tourism industry for proper and more places to park their tour buses at all our free attractions and wherever there is a shop that caters to such tour groups.

Tomorrow’s Hip and Trendy Traveller: Such visitors are “citizens of the world”, as they do not come from any specific country or region. They travel light, achieve what they want to achieve in a short time, and then leave right away. They expect fast Wi-Fi connections, quick meals, and reasonably-priced hotel rooms, preferably near the shopping or business districts. A “keep our world green” policy is something they expect. In urban planning terms, this group will tolerate a smaller hotel room foot print, and, interestingly, the lobby need not be on the ground floor.

Still Other Travellers: Countless other visitors come because we are an airline hub. And then there are those who come to simply see if Singapore is indeed the modern miracle everyone talks about.

Travellers by and large: They love the fact that Singapore is so compact. Sadly, most people find Singapore uncomfortably hot and far too humid, an “abrupt” place that is also expensive, especially when it comes to beer and wine!

Given the fact that different visitors come for different reasons, one wonders how the pencil lines defining zones, density, plot ratio and land-use as drawn up by our urban planners, positively or adversely impact the quality of what a visitor experiences today.

Singapore’s Urban Planning History & the Winds of Change

Singapore Inherited a Wonderful Legacy

The legacy that the British left us is still enjoyed by residents and tourists today—a wonderful town plan, beautiful colonial buildings, very good systems and the English language. Visit Penang in Malaysia and indeed other British colonial cities as far away as the West Indies, and you will find the same footprint. There is the Padang, a big open green space or a

“commons” framed with an old boys’ club, a city hall and other government buildings, and a church. Nearby is the harbour as well as an esplanade or seaside promenade. Today, our Padang continues to thrive. Although the Japanese occupied Singapore from 1942 to 1945, they left the colonial buildings intact. Singapore gained independence, but left these obvious symbols of British colonialism intact. And the biggest threat of all, the growth of the almighty car was controlled and diverted to a bridge to protect the Padang.³

After 50 Pioneering Years—This is What We Created

The first thing a visitor to Singapore experiences is Changi Airport. It is also the last thing he experiences. Visitors are impressed with Changi’s efficiency, amenities, ease of movement, and speed. They like the fact that there is good shopping, free luggage trolleys, clean toilets, as well as a good range of other amenities—even a free city tour.

Although Changi is rated efficient and convenient, the industry worries that the airport will lose its appeal if it grows too big. They wonder how older travellers and those with young children will cope with movement within Changi. Hence, the industry wonders if our future airport will include innovative internal transport.

Once a visitor exits Changi Airport, he has the joy of experiencing an impressive straight and level road that links Changi to the rest of Singapore. This highway, the East Coast Parkway, is the result of sound planning. More specifically our planners designed a long straight road with no level change and no stops. Furthermore, they made sure we would enjoy patches of greenery and views of the sea! And, we are grateful that our small yet dense city does not have a skyline marred by “a labyrinth of ugly spaghetti highways” or tiers of highways as found in other big and dense cities throughout the world.

Hence, to give visitors a good impression, we always encourage them to go by East Coast Parkway instead of the Pan Island Expressway, as although the ride may be slightly longer, it offers an immediate dramatic view of Singapore. And when we explain that this highway is built on reclaimed land, their amazement turns to deep respect for Singapore’s forward thinking.

After 15 minutes, a surprise awaits the arriving visitor. A dramatic scene change takes place, as instead of just greenery, Singapore River with its collection of historic Colonial Government buildings and little shophouses become visible. Then, the skyline of modern Singapore with its towering buildings, such as Asia Square and Ocean Financial Centre, comes into full view. Nearby is a generous patch of reclaimed land waiting for the future growth of our tiny island republic. In the distance is a view of Singapore’s tourism icon, the Merlion, our famous deep harbour, and with it, a 24-hour operational container port.

³ *Ibid.*

A closer look reveals Singapore's sensitivity to the conservation of its heritage. Namely, old Clifford Pier, the Waterboat House, Fullerton Hotel (the old General Post Office), Raffles Place and Telok Ayer Market. All these landmarks, solidly built during Singapore's Colonial era, were quietly saved and systematically put to appropriate adaptive reuse. The word "quietly" is used, as there was a time when not everyone in the Singapore Government was keen on conservation. Also, if our Urban Planners did not have the strength to hold on or fight, buildings such as the old general post office could have ended up as the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Economic Development Board, which would have restricted public access. Now, this grand old building is an elegant hotel which has brought new life to the entire waterfront. Visitors as well as locals are now able to feast in its grand atrium.

As for new and old Singapore, our Colonial Heart sits in interesting contrast to Marina Bay, our new tourism belt. Old Singapore and new Singapore are different and distinct, yet both are visible in one swift panoramic view. Balancing development in this area took great skill, foresight and the ability to imagine how scale perceived on paper would end up "when actually built". Many things could have gone wrong, as on the one hand you have the gentle historic Empress Place and the Padang, and on the other you have the towering buildings of Marina Bay with bridges of heavy steel nearby. Careful thought went into all aspects. For example, to ensure our sea frontage would not get blocked by a wall of buildings, the developer of Fullerton One was asked by the Design Review Panel that URA set up, to keep a viewing channel open so that the ocean would remain visible from Collyer Quay.

Our Government agencies are always trying to find ways to improve the city and the experience of visitors and residents alike. Decades ago we introduced temporary festive lighting, and later permanent lighting of our historic buildings. The permanent buildings that we lit up are Empress Place and City Hall, then we got the private sector to light up CHIJMES and Fullerton Hotel.

To give our city a greater buzz, we have introduced decorative lighting to give our historic districts a festive air for every major festival. Singaporeans cannot imagine our city without its annual decorative lights, as we have come to expect it as a normal part of our city life.

The way in which Singapore decorates its historic areas for major holidays is a multi-pronged effort. In most countries it is the merchants who get together to decorate a street. In Singapore our net is cast wider. While the National Parks (NParks) gave their full support, it also came up with strict instructions on how to protect tree trunks and branches. The Land Transport Authority (LTA) advised on height clearances so that double-decker buses could travel smoothly. When new lamp-posts were installed, they kindly ensured the new lamp-posts would not only be strong enough to carry decorations but also serve as a power source. Now this small city comes alive throughout the year: Christmas, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Hari Raya and



Figure 2. The shopping mall orchardgateway straddles both sides of Orchard Road and is linked by a glass bridge.

National Day. A small city with so many happenings throughout the year—all this is possible.

Reversal is Possible

The amazing thing is that Singapore's urban planners were able to turn back the clock some 40 years, so that Orchard Road now pleases the pedestrian once again. In other words, one can walk the full length of Orchard Road using wide, tree-lined pedestrian malls without dodging cars as they step in and out of buildings and shopping malls. This reversal of Orchard Road wherein the pedestrian instead of the car has become king once again has happened before our eyes. Indeed, urban planners the world over will come to study how Singapore achieved this. How did Singapore manage to reverse road patterns, and make the pedestrian king again? How were the roads department and the property owners convinced to make this dramatic change? Were there trade-offs? Was a stern hand needed or very strict enforcements? How did it impact property values? In the eyes of urban planners, the impossible has become possible. Likewise, underground links and dramatic sky bridges now make it possible to cross Orchard Road, a five-lane highway that runs in the heart of this tourism-cum-shopping belt,

without the worry of cars. This is a good example of how Singapore continues to improve and reinvent itself.

Singapore's Historic Districts

Singapore's planners in the 1980s drew generous lines. Hence, today, Chinatown, Little India, and Kampong Glam are good-sized historic districts. In Singapore, visitors get to enjoy not only one street, but also a collection of streets and multiple rows of shophouses. Internal roads within Singapore's historic zones have controlled traffic, so a visitor does not have to dodge cars or buses when walking within these historic districts. Additionally, external or periphery roads are designed so taxis, private cars and tour buses have a designated place and visitors have easy access to whatever mode of transportation they prefer. We are also grateful that the stepping of building heights took place so our historic areas enjoy light and air and are not overwhelmed by surrounding high-rise buildings. And we are so glad that familiar places still exist and are recognisable!

When the first lines were drawn demarcating Chinatown as a whole zone, the urban planners remarked, "In other countries Chinatown is just one or two streets, that is why they need a gate to demarcate Chinatown." A good example is Grant Ave, San Francisco. In the case of Singapore, we have saved a whole zone and that zone blends nicely into surrounding zones, such as the financial district. So we don't need a gate to identify Chinatown!

Given the fact that different visitors have different preferences, would Singapore's report card get high or low ratings for what it has achieved and possibly lost over the last 50 years of rapid development? At this juncture, we need to also think beyond the fundamentals of defined zones, density, plot ratio and land use as drawn up by our urban planners. After 50 years of development, Singapore is ready to also address practical creature comforts and creative edges. Practical creature comforts could be as simple as safe and pleasant places to board a tour bus, conveniently located toilets and covered walkways. Creative edges should force us to search for and take advantage of any possible beautiful or nice element that a visitor could enjoy, be it the roof line of an old shop house, the bark of a tree or light astutely placed to guide our view, and then there is always the possibility of the art work of a Singaporean artist.

Singapore's Report Card

Clifford Pier & Singapore River

Fifty years ago, Singapore was a famous port town. Clifford Pier bustled with passengers and sailors coming and going. Change Alley was on every map, and Singapore

River was rich with daily economic activity. Then came the jumbo jet age and containerisation. Our world has changed dramatically. Today, the tourism industry thanks the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) for not only preserving Clifford Pier, but also guiding its adaptive reuse into a place for casual and fine dining in an old world setting. So, while we still miss the hustle and bustle of seeing sailors and money changers come and go, today we go to Clifford Pier to enjoy fine dining and the occasional wedding when young Singaporeans make new memories in an old world setting.

As for the Singapore River, gone are the bumboats laden with towering piles of rubber and weatherworn coolies. Also gone are the offices of the rich merchants, who would systematically count their wealth in the piles of rubber sheets moving past on bumboats. Today, instead of the offices of rich rubber merchants, we find pubs and restaurants. Instead of bales of rubber, we find bumboats carrying visitors, both Singaporean and from overseas. The bridges built when Singapore was a British colony are now nicely lit. If you look carefully, you can find some cute statues of children and a typical Singapore cat at play.

Our Famous Historic Hotels

We saved Goodwood Park Hotel, Raffles Hotel and Majestic Hotel. Fullerton Hotel, formerly the General Post Office, and Fullerton Bay Hotel, formerly a marine police pier, came as a great bonus! We did not just conserve these “grand dames”, we also managed to protect their surroundings. Hence, today the original Raffles Hotel has an extension that is in keeping with the original hotel, in terms of its massing and form. Without looking at the original plan, few visitors would know what is old and what is the new addition. Saving old Raffles Hotel without having to build a high-rise extension of 20 storeys on the same block is a real achievement that conservations experts would loudly applaud.

However, sadly, we have forever lost the beautiful Adelphi Hotel with its gracious courtyard.

Through a national conservation plan, involving the URA, STB, the National Heritage Board (NHB), LTA and the Land Office, we saved Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam, our Colonial Heart, Bugis Street and Tiong Bahru. This conservation momentum also made a difference for Emerald Hill, Neil Road and areas in Joo Chiat. While Singapore was strict about roof lines, facades, back lanes and five-foot ways, it did not protect trades as is done in some other countries. The view of the Singapore Government is to let the private sector adapt itself, in other words, not to interfere with business. At first our foreign consultants were very perturbed, as we would lose the clog maker, the calligrapher as well as all trades that could not survive in a fast-developing world. However, our government was wise, as they knew it would

not have been possible to sustain these particular trades as small businesses, in their natural form, in a fast-changing Chinatown.

Today, our historic zones have new business enterprises. While we had hoped, initially we were never 100% sure that new players with appropriately-themed businesses would come to our historic areas. Happily, Chinatown has new restaurants from different parts of China, while Arab Street with the influx of more visitors from West Asia now boasts restaurants from Morocco and Lebanon. Bugis Street continues to sell cheap T-shirts, fruits and amusing gadgets. To our great relief, it is fortunate that most of the new businesses fit and enhance the respective theme of the areas.

The Singapore Botanic Gardens

Today, it is a popular place for early morning *tai chi* sessions, mid-day tours for visitors from China, and in the early evening, residents go there to jog or stroll. While enjoying the beauty of the Botanic Gardens, we must never forget the original British intent which was not to build a pleasure garden but to build a centre for research. And, in the case of Singapore, research was conducted on improving rubber production, a crop that brought great wealth to England.

Visitors, including professional planners from overseas, praise the manner in which we have saved our historic areas. We saved them as thriving, lively zones, rather than as “ghost towns” or museums: Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam, our Colonial Heart, Bugis Street, Fort Canning, Botanic Gardens, Chek Jawa, Labrador Park, MacRitchie Reservoir Park and the coral beds and green hills of the Southern Islands. While we did not have to shout about what we did, quietly, Singapore has paid respect to its changing history. We have kept the original names of places, like “The Padang” and “Dhoby Ghaut”, and we even kept the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles, who founded modern Singapore.

Look Back to Look Forward: 50 years of Experience Worth Tapping on (1965–2015)

How Exact a Science?

Urban planning and architecture are not exact sciences. Anyone who has planned a zone or built a house or building knows the number of things that can go wrong. Surgeons would find this shocking as in surgery, very clear procedures and steps are laid out. In the case of urban planning and architecture, creativity and a feel of the space being created demand skills and daring of a different kind. Hence, sometimes what we plan on paper does not turn out as we anticipate.

In the 1980s, the Singapore Tourism Board had a strong team of consultants, who came to us through the Pacific Area Travel Association. First there was Robbi

Collins, who made us realise that the Botanic Gardens should be seen, as earlier mentioned, as a place for scientific study. In line with this thinking, one patch of original forest has been preserved just as it originally was. We have in the Singapore Botanical Gardens a living and thriving “museum of plants”. Collins also gave us the idea of building a cloud forest, featuring plants that grow near the equator on high mountainous areas. This idea eventually led to the building of the Flower Dome & Cloud Forest at Gardens by the Bay. Also in the team was the famous architect from Hawaii, Pete Wimberly, who gave us the idea that the new extensions of the Raffles Hotel should match the original Raffles Hotel. He kept insisting on the fact that architects should try to hand sketch buildings, instead of simply using a computer to draw. Likewise, photographs may not guide you to see the details. Sketching nurtures the growth of ideas, such as the flow of sunlight during different times of the year, and nearby vegetation and other subtle features come to life. Sketches give architects and planners a deeper feeling of how the end result will look.

Visitors, laymen, as well as architects and urban planners give Singapore high marks for what we have achieved. When they think how rapidly we have achieved all this, their praise turns to wonderment.

If you are a gifted designer who can translate drawings and calculations into accurate built forms, you must treasure the gift that you have. It is a precious one.

Landmarks are equally important. Sad is the day when locals feel lost in their own city.

Going Back to the Basics—Getting the Fundamentals Right

Visitors, like Singaporeans, love space, greenery, sunlight, clear air, and a human scale. While visitors can choose whether to visit a place, locals have no choice but to live with what we build. They can enjoy the genius of our plans or endure our mistakes.

In the case of Singapore, where development takes place at such a fast rate, the impact of such speedy change is multiplied and intensified. Hence greater caution and heavy doses of astute judgement are needed.

The Great Challenge Ahead for Future Generations of Urban Planners and Architects

The Bad News

Singapore's future urban planners and architects have a very small palette upon which to achieve so much.

The car population will continue to grow, and demands will continue to increase, so the challenge will be even greater than that faced by those before, until someone invents the perfect car that does not pollute or jam our roads.

Visitors will love almost everything the future planners and architects will do, and they will want to do the same in their country, but while the planners and architects can draw up a similar plan for them, and build beautiful models, few can live life according to that grand plan.

Singapore's ageing population will continue to grow, so the city will have to be designed to accommodate them with innovations that have been sorely ignored in the past.

While technology will dominate our lives, the job of keeping a warm human touch over how Singaporeans live will be a great challenge.

The Good News

The urban planners are leaving their future counterparts a beautiful city to build on—a city with few mistakes to correct or clean up, and lots of good examples to follow.

The En-Block Formula of upgrading and renovating will ensure that you future planners and architects have the chance to change or bring new life to Singapore's built up areas every few decades.

A Conservation Formula is in place to preserve Singapore's historic fabric. Hopefully one day Singapore will share the French and Italian approach to conservation, which is to be humble and keep as much of the original fabric and space as possible, which were built for "the weather". At that point, hopefully owners will free the five-foot passage in front of their house or shop, so that pedestrians can walk from one end of a historic zone to another, protected from sun and rain.

It also begs the question, "Can Singapore adapt to change with the speed needed to keep us ahead of the game?" To ensure that Singapore remains a leading visitor destination, urban planners and the travel industry have to anticipate and embrace change even before the need becomes obvious. The tourism industry can give inputs, but the industry needs the planner to bring ideas to life.

Our present planners have left vast expanses of land undeveloped, including the Southern Islands. This means that our future planners will have the opportunity to build new cities with new concepts linked to the fast-changing lifestyle of our citizens. An aerial map will show that development has been concentrated in zones, so future planners will have sizeable zones and big belts of reclaimed land to build on. Imagine the new lifestyle opportunity that the Southern Islands, a cluster of islands near what was Singapore's early harbour, make available for our future planners to develop into a viable lifestyle alternative.

A few words to any young designer: "If you should be given a whole canvas, more specifically the chance to be the Master Planner of a whole new city or a vast piece of unspoilt terrain, may you bring all that you have learnt watching first-hand Singapore change over the last few decades. Under any grand plan is the hard (and rather sad)

fact that while plans can be drawn, beautiful plans and models using the latest computer programme, a whole society from top to bottom has to work in unison to make a plan function as designed. The people who live in the beautifully drawn up plan have to be ready to live the lifestyle that the plan promises.

In summary, the good news is that the planners who went before are leaving future generation of planners with an excellent town plan that works and many blank slates for the development of the small red dot called Singapore into a city of innovation and excellence.