
Singapore: From Liveable to Lovable City

Melissa Kwee

The foremost challenge ahead for Singapore is to create a **loveable** city. Our history has brought us through the challenges of viability—in our founding years, productivity—in our early growth years, and liveability—as we matured and valued aesthetic and sustainable environmental attributes to create the bustling, dynamic destination we are today. I believe that for Singapore to be significant and truly successful, it must be a nation and home we love. The city: ours—by and for the people, both loved and loveable by locals and visitors alike. To be loveable means every person practising the love of neighbour, community and self. This may be more instrumental than social defence and national resilience. The essence of a great city is one that is built upon a collective spirit and common purpose.

How does a city-state like Singapore embrace this next stage and incorporate the principles and posture of love into our planning structures and processes?

I propose three broad guiding principles.

The first is that planning must be based on a conscious examination and co-articulation of our national values in action. Values define a leader, an organisation and a city. If form follows function and values determine our priorities, then the definition of function must be rooted in the values and priorities of its use. In planning, this approach would begin with a reflection of how our spaces carry the look, feel and function of the values of our nation. Truly shared values can only emerge from authentic engagement and participation especially, amongst different voices. Urban leaders are the civic facilitators where they find ways to collaborate, collect ideas and resolve conflicts. Co-created visions are best owned when every stakeholder's interest is heard.

The second related principle is that city-making must become a more participatory and humanised process. We must rethink how processes in themselves could be redesigned to be more relational.

What if citizens and neighbours could re-envision their neighbourhoods and work places? What if you and I were invited to dream together and envisage how new buildings, recreation or services could help communities integrate better, reduce crime or improve a sense of well-being?

Imagine this: our planning systems have been designed to foster empathy and inclusion—from children to grandparents; the able-bodied to the handicapped and socially-estranged. **Anchoring citizen participation in the context of family and relationships may also create a more human-centric and relational view of places and spaces.** Participation is about timely, meaningful, relevant and respectful engagement in a process towards solution seeking for the greater good.

The final principle is to keep iterating at the fringes and core. Iteration improves the accuracy and relevance of any plan towards achieving its ends. It is flexibility and responsiveness, that encompass humility to know that there is rarely a single right answer in nation-building. It drives a freedom to experiment at the fringes with moderate risk. What remains constant is how the changes reflect fundamental values. **In this new world, planning is not purely administrative or analytical but a value-driven, human-centric and a transformational learning journey.**