

ISSUE 04 • 2016

Skyline

Insights into planning
spaces around us



Communities go car-lite

Streets are the new venue for passion projects

Why the birds returned to Kranji Marshes | The evolution of urban resilience

Skyline



CLASSICALLY SPONTANEOUS: THE PEOPLE AT SERANGOON ROAD'S 'LITTLE INDIA' FORM THE BACKBONE OF A CONSERVATION AREA THAT IS ALWAYS ADAPTING EVEN AS IT STAYS THE SAME. WE CAPTURE SOME OF THEIR COLOURFUL TALES ON PAGE 21.

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The road to resilience

How developing urban resilience can help Singapore survive and thrive amid a host of global uncertainties.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland**

A decade ago, urban resilience referred to a city's disaster preparedness, but in recent years the concept has evolved. Certainly, devastating global weather events continue to take their toll. However, as other crises erupt around the world our attention is drawn to vulnerabilities created by complex and interdependent issues related to climate change and global economics, security and resource scarcity. With these in mind, experts have come to apply the principles of urban resilience to address a broader range of potential catastrophes beyond natural disasters.

Urban resilience is gaining traction as non-governmental organisations and agencies establish support frameworks to help cities adopt best practices. One example, The Rockefeller Foundation, aims to ignite an urban resilience movement with its 100 Resilient Cities initiative, or 100RC, dedicated to helping cities around the world control how they respond to physical, social and economic challenges, adapt to shocks and stresses and even transform them into opportunities for growth.

As a selected member of 100RC, Singapore's resilience challenges have been identified as coastal and rainfall flooding, heat waves, pollution or environmental degradation and rising sea level and coastal erosion with the city's expressed goals to share lessons about climate change while it works to address income inequity and strengthen civic bonds. So how exactly does a city achieve its urban resilience goals? Time was, a local government would focus its resources to build emergency networks and disaster-proof its infrastructure, but given the complexity and myriad of today's threats, urban resilience is now about developing systems and spaces with the capacity to evolve almost organically through smart, flexible, holistic and inclusive measures.

"Everyone – business, government, civic society, academia and NGOs – has a role to play in building resilience, and everyone stands to benefit," says Judith Rodin, president of The Rockefeller Foundation.

"Government partnerships with the corporate sector and non-governmental organisations like





environmental groups will bring capitalise solutions that are much more diverse and capitalise on innovative ideas from many more quarters,” says Jimmy Khoo, Managing Director of Singapore District Cooling (SDC), the world’s largest fully-underground district cooling system, located deep under Singapore’s Marina Bay.

SDC exemplifies the contribution of public-private partnership to resilience-building. The government paved the way with a vision for the innovative district-wide infrastructure, corporate partner Singapore Power brought in engineering know-how and commercial experience, resulting in a world-class infrastructure that saves the city space, energy and cost, and is one of the most reliable in the world.

“When implementation of integrated solutions is also built on partnership of the many,” adds Jimmy, “resilience is consequently a more likely outcome.”

Public participation is another key ingredient to resilience building, and at the centre of this idea is the concept of placemaking. When people have a hand in the design and creation of their community spaces, it fosters a deeper connection to these places – a connection that motivates citizens to proactively address major challenges. In this sense, communities and people are at the core of urban resilience. Singaporean non-profit Participation In Design (PID) is championing this approach, building resilience by partnering with grassroots organisations, educational institutions and statutory boards in various initiatives to design community-owned spaces and solutions, such as the Welcome to Our Backyard! (WOBY!) programme, where residents, grassroots leaders, and senior citizens at a local home are working

together to transform an empty lot into an identifiable place for the community and challenge the NIMBY, or Not In My Backyard attitude so prevalent today. PID’s Tampines Changkat Neighborhood Renewal Programme (NRP) is an ongoing partnership between PID, the Tampines Town Council, the Residents’ Committees of Tampines Changkat Zone 3 and 5, the Tampines Citizens’ Consultative Committee, and the Housing and Development Board (HDB) to develop an improved system for community engagement with regards to improvement works to local housing estates.

“One tenet of resiliency is the capacity of a group or community to adapt and react to challenges or disruption on the ground,” says Mizah Rahman, PID director and co-founder. “One of the biggest issues in the current top-down planning approach is that people expect solutions to the problems of urban living to be readily delivered to them. This is the result of a consumer-to-customer mindset where local agencies are largely seen as a service provider from which people expect the delivery of solutions.”

PID plays the role of the neutral facilitator, enabler and catalyst to encourage change from the ground up.

“We see our role as designers, community organisers, and members of our own communities,” says Mizah. “Participatory design can be a powerful platform for citizen participation. We see the potential for a participatory design process as being able to not only transform and improve public spaces and neighbourhood amenities, but to have meaningful citizen participation around that as well. We believe that a community that actively participates in its environment is a resilient community.”

For Colombian city Medellín, it's impossible to separate the idea of urban resilience from people and communities.

"Many times people don't even know they are resilient," says Anibal Gaviria, Medellín's former mayor, "but it's in our DNA."

Medellín is the winner of the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize 2016, an award that recognises the extraordinary strides the city has undertaken to transform itself over the past two decades, tackling economic and environmental issues in the face of abject violence – in the 1990s Medellín had the highest homicide rate in the world. Anibal puts the scope of the violence into a local perspective: "imagine in a country like Singapore, with more or less 5 million people," he says, "it means 20,000 murders a year."

Of the many innovative community-led projects that Medellín has spearheaded, Anibal highlights the

Universidades de Vida Articulada, or Life Articulated Units. Known locally as UVA, these projects welcome citizens to become actively involved in the building of sports, recreational and cultural venues, and host activities that are decided upon by the communities themselves.

"How does public participation affect resilience?" says Anibal. "One of Medellín's greatest assets is the pride of its citizens. It's a wonderful asset that is linked to resilience, because if you don't love something, you won't fight for it."

It is this sense of resilience that earned Medellín top recognition within the 100RC network and the second chief resilience officer to be appointed anywhere in the world.

"Resilience is not only to fight against a problem," says Anibal. "It's like what Singapore does; to make a challenge an opportunity. It's not just about winning, but about growing and becoming greater."



Medellín

This year, the city of Medellín was awarded the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize 2016.

Colombia's second largest city, Medellín has fought successfully to tackle challenges of urban sprawl and environmental degradation, social inequity and years of violent crime. The city's bold leadership focused on long-term planning and social innovation, unconventional approaches to infrastructure development, educational and cultural transformation and small-scale yet effective community projects

that have produced a lasting positive impact on urban neighbourhoods.

The Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize is a biennial international award that honours outstanding achievements and contributions to the creation of liveable, vibrant and sustainable urban communities around the world. Find out more about Medellín's transformation at [youtube.com/URASingapore](https://www.youtube.com/URASingapore).

Restoring Singapore's largest freshwater marshland

The rehabilitation of Kranji Marshes reflects a new kind of public-private-people partnership with nature at the heart of planning. And the birds are flocking back.

Writer **Timothy Misir** | Photographer **Mark Teo**

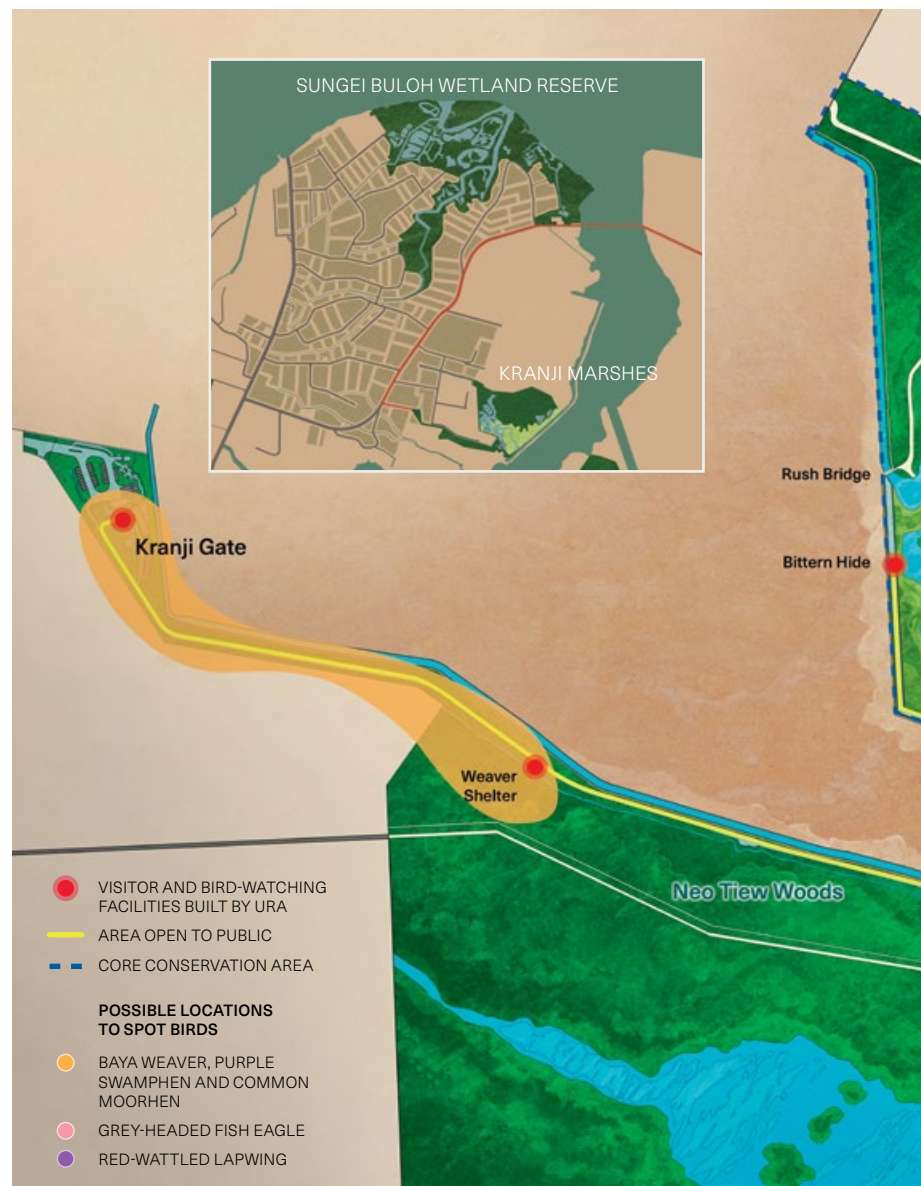
Stepping into Kranji Marshes early in the morning is like stepping into another world – completely new sounds, smells and sights.

Lying on the northwestern shore of Kranji Reservoir, Kranji Marshes is one of Singapore's newest nature areas. There's already plenty to look out for during the 20-minute walk through Neo Tiew Woods, from the main entrance at Kranji Gate to the Marsh Station and Core Conservation Area, including insects, monitor lizards and birds perched atop trees or flying overhead. It is a sanctuary for both resident and migratory birds, especially marsh birds, a respite from the city for the rest of us.

Marshes are waterlogged low-lying land areas that flood during wet seasons or at high-tide. They support a wide range of aquatic plants, including reeds and grasses that function as natural habitats and shelter for a variety of fishes, amphibians, invertebrates and birds. While the public might be familiar with wetlands because of the Sungei Buloh Nature Reserve, a brackish (saltwater) mangrove swamp, the freshwater Kranji Marshes is dominated not by trees but by aquatic plants, grasses, sedges, ferns, resulting in an open landscape.

"Freshwater habitats are very rare in Singapore. Kranji Marshes, which at close to 57 hectares has one of the largest freshwater marshland that is accessible to the public, as well as woodland and grass habitats. Visitors will see a lot of interesting birds that are not found anywhere else," National Parks Board (NParks) director of conservation Wong Tuan Wah says.

The marsh was created by accident in the early 1970s with the damming of the Kranji River that flooded the low-lying catchment area. It functions as a natural filtration system, cleaning and filtering sediment-heavy water from several canals that flow into the marsh before draining into the Kranji Reservoir. Left untouched for many years, the area



Balancing water and vegetation

To ensure birds kept coming back, a good balance of exposed water area and vegetation needed to be struck. An amphibious excavator cleared overgrown areas.

BEFORE



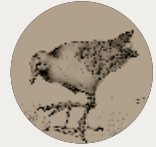
AFTER



Spot these birds!

Purple Swampphen

This striking bird has long legs and large feet for wading in shallow water and walking over floating vegetation in the marsh. It is known to move seasonally in response to changes in water level and habitat.



Red-wattled Lapwing

The bird's distinctive appearance is complemented by its loud calls. It also known as the "Did-he-do-it" bird, because of the shrill calls it makes when alarmed that sound like "Did he do it?" or "Pity to do it".



Grey-headed Fish Eagle

Hunting from a vantage point overlooking water, the eagle swoops down to glide along the water surface and grabs its prey behind the head with its powerful talons. It is listed as Near Threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species.



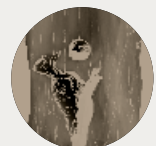
Baya Weaver

The male sings and performs on the unfinished nest to attract females. The female inspects all the uncompleted nests before finally selecting the best. The birds pair up and complete the nest by adding the egg chamber and entrance tunnel.



Common Moorhen

The Common Moorhen forages both in the water and on land, and often swallow sand and gravel to help grind up tough plant material. This bird is able to swim even though it does not have webbed feet.





became a habitat for many types of wildlife, but the vegetation has since become overgrown, cutting off the water surface and preventing birds from foraging and hunting for food sources.

"If not maintained, the water surface areas will not be left open for long, as water weeds grow very quickly. For birds to return, they need the area to have a good balance of exposed water area and vegetation," Tuan Wah explains.

Opened to the public from 1 February 2016, Kranji Marshes is substantial and its marsh, woodland and grass habitats support a very rich array of marshland wildlife, in particular birds. The area is home to more than 170 species of birds, 54 species of butterflies, and 33 species of dragonflies. One can also find threatened species of birds like the Purple Swampphen, Red-wattled Lapwing and Grey-headed Fish Eagle.

A concerted effort

Nature Society (Singapore) has managed two ponds in the area since 2008, when it adopted part of the marsh under Public Utilities Board (PUB)'s Active, Beautiful, Clean Waters Programme, but the restoration of the larger marshes saw the involvement of public agencies like URA, NParks, PUB, and groups like Nature Society (Singapore), as well as experts, consultants and engineers to restore and enhance the existing habitats, provide public amenities and enable visitors to learn more about the area's biodiversity.

"This is a very good example of the 'three- Ps' model where nature conservation involves the engagement of the three sectors of the community – the public, private, and people, resulting in the successful long-term conservation of a

substantial nature area," Nature Society (Singapore) vice-chairman Ho Hua Chew says.

Enhancement of the area began in 2014, and it took almost two years to clear and develop the area.

URA executive architect Lim Chu Hwai says the agency approached the site differently from how it plans parks or its other projects, as the primary user at Kranji Marshes is nature – birds in particular. "In this rather urbanised setting, parks are usually man-made where you can put in structures and plant lots of things to recreate nature. But here is a natural landscape formed over time, left intact and nature has claimed it back, so the primary idea is to retain and sensitively restore this old and pristine landscape for the natural inhabitants, and only after achieving that, to provide public amenities and access so the public can enjoy this area," he says.

The project team involved conservationists and ornithologists from the onset. "This is important because there are some very rare species here, and freshwater marshes have birds that are disappearing from Singapore altogether. Once the baseline of the flora and fauna of the area was set, we determined where the important areas are, and fine-tuned the development plan: where to put the footpaths, bridges and hides, as we know where the sensitive areas are to avoid," wildlife consultant Subaraj Rajathurai, who also monitored the bird and wildlife population of the habitat monthly during its refurbishment, says. "We made sure not to cut down certain trees, like the albizias, which are very good for birds," he adds.

To minimise disturbance to wildlife and the marsh, an amphibious excavator was used to clear overgrown vegetation in the ponds and to form new islets. Habitat enhancement efforts such as creating



islands with stony surfaces different surfaces and plantings that are favoured by certain bird species as nesting grounds and installing perches for birds in open waters have been carried out at Kranji Marshes to encourage a diverse range of wetland-dependent birds and other wildlife to thrive in this nature area.

The amenities and facilities, mostly pre-fabricated offsite, include the about 11-metre tall lookout tower, floating boardwalks and eight blinds and hides for bird watching and observing wildlife at close quarters. The eco-friendly and sustainable infrastructure and amenities – skylights, green roofs, and benches made from recycled tree trunks – blend seamlessly into the natural surroundings.

Putting nature at the core of planning

Singapore has proven that a high-density living environment does not have to come at the expense of nature – despite the scarcity of land, the government has set aside about 10 percent of the country's land area for nature, including nature reserves and parks. Policymakers see the city as a living space, not only for people, but for nature too.

Kranji Marshes is an Environmental Improvement Project as part of the third phase of the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve Masterplan announced in 2008. Tuan Wah said that Kranji Marshes shows the government's commitment to conserve green spaces with rich biodiversity, despite being a dense city.

"I think in terms of biodiversity, it is important to have a variety and network of different habitats complementing and supporting each other to form a rich and complex whole, otherwise, fragmented parks and greens are generally weaker and have less biodiversity on their own," Chu Hwai says about the importance of wetlands in Singapore's urban fabric.

Giving wildlife a boost

The core conservation area is not usually opened to the public, as the area is ecologically sensitive, apart from guided tours conducted by the Nature Society and NParks. To minimise disturbance to the wildlife, parts of the core conservation area will gradually be opened for public access after further assessment.

"We're not just talking about a dense city itself, but a dense city with lots of greens, and different types of greens. Success for this particular project is how much nature we retain, and how many birds we'll be able to keep at the end of the day," URA director (Projects Department) Teo Chong Yean says.

Subaraj said he noticed a rapid increase in bird life and other biodiversity as soon as the overgrown aquatic vegetation was cleared. "So far, based on the variety I've found – I've just carried out a survey a few weeks ago and found 68 species of birds in one morning – indicates that it's been successful," he said.

"The fact that URA is willing to come to a nature area to do planning and design here, and got us [Nature Society] to give advice and consultation... shows the government's commitment to preserving this place as a nature area for the public to enjoy, which is a good thing. The enhancement they've done...will definitely bring a larger variety of wildlife, birdlife especially, to the area," Hua Chew said at the opening of the nature area.

Information on guided tours is available at NParks' and the Nature Society of Singapore's websites.

Watch the marshes being restored at [youtube.com/URASingapore](https://www.youtube.com/URASingapore).

Keeping Marina Bay cool

Deep below the iconic Marina Bay lies the world's largest district cooling system. We discover the cool factors behind this engineering feat.

Writer **Justin Zhuang** | Photographer **Louis Kwok**

Drivers whizzing by Bayfront Avenue would most likely miss it. Standing next to the towering Marina Bay Sands hotel is a boxy structure that could well be a mirage. Shimmering in the sunlight is a curtain of aluminium flappers seemingly dancing with the wind – a mesmerising sight that camouflages the cooling tower of the world's deepest district cooling system in plain sight.

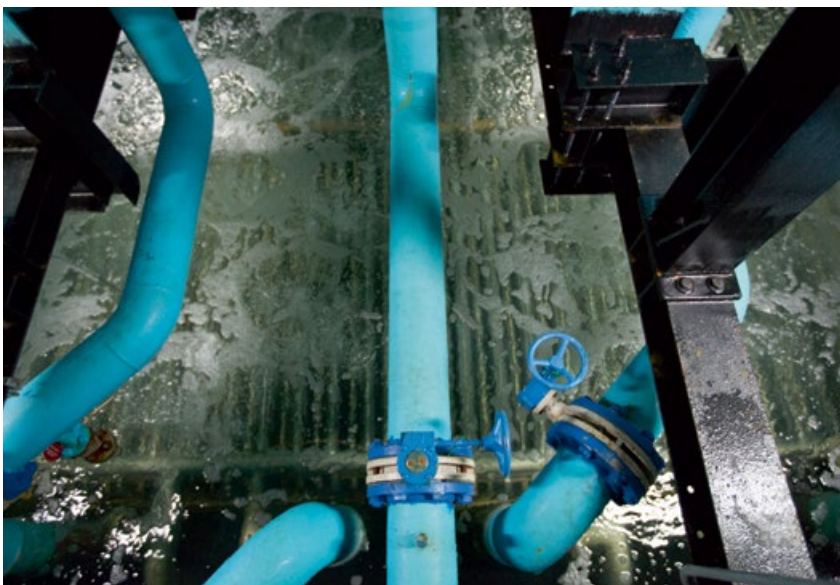
Underneath this tower wrapped in a screen by the artist Ned Kahn is a plant that produces chilled water, which is five storeys and extends to 25m deep. The only other sign of this round-the-clock operation is a silver-on-silver sign of the “Singapore District Cooling Pte Ltd” tucked underneath Bayfront Avenue. Located just steps away from the Helix Bridge and the ArtScience Museum, this rectangular plaque points towards an off-white door: the entrance to the underground facility that keeps Singapore's business district cool in its tropical climate.

Quality spaces above

Traditionally, buildings have their own chillers and cooling towers on-site. But a district cooling system centralises them into an urban utility instead. The one at Marina Bay Sands is the second plant, the first one being at the One Raffles Quay development. They are connected together by a five kilometres network of pipes that pump cold water into the air-conditioning systems of buildings in the precinct, while receiving their warm water in return – a first in Singapore. Every hour, some 12,000 cubic metres of water chilled to 4.5 degrees celsius circulates around the network, just like the cars driving up and down Bayfront Avenue above.

Even as this cooling system brings the temperature down a notch in buildings such as the Marina Bay Financial Centre and Gardens by the Bay, it has also raised the district's cool factor by freeing up space above ground for more quality and vibrant urban environments. It allows developers to achieve better building design and enhanced urban landscape without the need for cooling towers on rooftops,





giving all developments in Marina Bay the freedom to use their rooftops for other uses. For example, Marina Bay Sands has turned its rooftop into an iconic space with an observation deck, an infinity pool and restaurants and bars serving up stunning views of the Singapore skyline.

Staying cool with less

What has also come down for building owners of Marina Bay is their energy costs. A centralised system means they do not have to pay upfront for their own chillers, but instead subscribe to a network designed and managed by the Singapore District Cooling Pte Ltd (SDC). According to this subsidiary of Singapore Power, its customers enjoy energy savings of more than 40 percent, an amount which can power about 24,000 three-room HDB units a year.

The key to this is the plants' thermal storage systems. Underneath Bayfront Avenue and Marina Bay Sands are six concrete ice tanks each towering 20 metres high, stretching 10 metres wide and 12 metres deep. Holding almost 15,000 cubic metres of water (equivalent to three and a half Olympic size swimming pools), these tanks act like "giant batteries" that allow the system to cool buildings with fewer chillers that run on electricity. Instead, SDC produces and stores chilled water during the non-peak hours such as at night when electricity usage and tariff rates are lower and discharges them to the buildings as and when required. In the event of an electricity outage, the tank even has the capacity to keep a large office building cool for 10 hours.

A uniquely Singapore solution for the world

URA had identified district cooling as one of the several utilities, including electricity, water and telecommunications services that could be housed in a comprehensive common services tunnel for Marina Bay. The tunnel is a significant piece of infrastructure that planners have envisioned in the 1990s and catered for in their systematic mapping of underground space in Marina Bay. A first in South East Asia, the tunnel demonstrates how locating suitable uses underground can improve operating and environmental efficiency and free up land for a more vibrant environment above ground.

"We were venturing into new territory and it was a huge plunge into the unknown, particularly given the massive scale of this undertaking," said National Development Minister Lawrence Wong at a ceremony in March 2016 to officially commission the district cooling system's operations. "If left to the market, this project would never have taken off." To "de-risk" this project, the government took on an active role to formulate policies even before the system was laid. For instance, in 1998, the Energy Market Authority as the regulator for the DCS demarcated a 1.25 million square metres zone in the district for this pilot project. Within it, the agency

made it mandatory for new developments within the pilot zone to take up the supply of chilled water. These laid the ground for Singapore's first district cooling plant to be built at One Raffles Quay, which commenced operations in 2006 under the SDC, a homegrown venture established to implement this system.

Since then, the district cooling system in Marina Bay has steadily expanded its total capacity to 217 megawatts — the largest such underground DCS system in the world. It now serves many customers, three of which are One Marina Boulevard, Gardens By The Bay and Ocean Financial Centre, who chose to use the system even though it was not mandatory for them to do so, seeing the benefits of the system. Most recently, it also signed on Marina One at its commissioning ceremony, adding another 60 megawatts of chilled water capacity and increasing its overall capacity by a third. The upcoming Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre will also be tapping on the DCS supply. In addition, Singapore Power has taken its newfound capabilities overseas to Chongqing, China, where it is currently designing and building a similar system that it would eventually operate too.

With the success of Singapore's first district cooling system, a similar one is now being explored for Jurong Lake District, the city's next central business hub. An underground masterplan is also being developed to explore how Singapore can best utilise underground spaces for storage, utilities and infrastructure. Some examples that have started are the Jurong Rock Cavern and the Deep Tunnel Sewerage System.

Looking back on this decades-long journey to introduce district cooling to the city, Minister Wong attributed its fruition to the “uniquely Singaporean way” of a good public-private partnership. The result is an engineering feat that has not only improved the lives of Singaporeans, but also become a solution that can be exported to the world.

“It's an illustration of how we all come together to achieve something quite incredible,” he explained. “This is an excellent example of what our Singapore story is about.”

Marina Bay District Cooling System

District cooling is the centralised production of chilled water that is piped to buildings for air-conditioning. As a communal utility, it services buildings close to one another within a district.

Marina Bay's district cooling system comprises three plants producing chilled water, which is subsequently piped to buildings in the network to feed into their air-conditioning systems. Warm water is then returned to be re-chilled and redistributed.



Number of plants and capacity

3 plants

with a total installed capacity of

217MW



Depth

20–25 metres

(around five basement levels)



Network

5 km

pair of pipelines servicing the network



Area under service

1.7m sqm GFA

across over a dozen buildings in the Marina Bay district


Key facts

- The Marina Bay system is the world's largest* fully underground district cooling network, and among the world's largest in terms of cooling capacity
- The world's largest dual evaporator chiller was developed for SDC
- Zero safety incidents since the start of operations in 2006

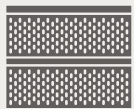
* SOURCE: BENCHMARKING OF THE SINGAPORE DISTRICT COOLING NETWORK, 2014, FINAL REPORT

District Cooling System Customers



 District Cooling Network Facilities

Key Benefits



Design

Preserves the Marina Bay landscape through innovative concealment of cooling towers



Acoustics

Concealed acoustics through design features like ultra-low noise fans and water landscape features



Reliability

Offers 99.99% reliability, with multiple back-up systems



Cost savings

Reduces overhead costs, as much as 42% in energy savings and total costs

Eliminates upfront investment costs in on-premise chillers



Asset efficiency

Centralisation means less chilling equipment is used more intensively, compared to individual buildings running separate equipment at lower intensity



Space savings

Saves on premium commercial space and allows more design flexibility, by negating need for in-building chilling equipment



Support availability

24/7 engineering and technical support

Towards a car-lite Singapore

A car-lite Singapore isn't just about adding a cyclist path or removing cars from roads – Ruthe Kee reflects on how it's about a Singapore for everyone and our future generations.

Writer **Ruthe Kee** | Photographer **Chee Boon Pin**

With all that Singapore has been doing thus far, it's not hard to ride on the momentum towards a car-lite Singapore.

On a recent work trip to Mumbai, I noticed how apt its "Maximum City" moniker was. Nothing was less than maximum about it, whether tastes of food, colours of the streets or the kindness of its people, and the same could be said of its roads – almost every tarmac surface had a vehicle on it.

It is not a stretch to say that Singapore could well be on the road (pun unintended) towards this same maxing out of road space.

On the road to car-lite

Fortunately, the Land Transport Authority's statistics show a 0.7 percent decline in Singapore's car population from 2013 to 2014, the first downward trend in more than a decade. Good news, given Singapore's recent emphasis on becoming a car-lite city, alike other major cities in the world.

And a few, like Copenhagen, have already succeeded.

In the 1960s, the poster child of car-lite cities saw dense traffic, car parks, pollution, congestion and traffic accidents just like any other modern city after World War II. But the 1970s energy crisis pushed Copenhagen to introduce car-free Sundays and later, to designate a cycling track on its main roads. However, many have long argued that the success of Copenhagen cannot be replicated in Singapore, citing our tropical climate as the top deterrent.

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong begs to differ.

"I visited Copenhagen ... for the Climate Change Conference ... in December 2009 [when] it gets dark at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and at night at 7 o'clock it is dark, snowing, below freezing and people are going around, going about their business riding bicycles, wrapped up warmly but cycling on the roads. It is just their way of life. So if the Danes can do that in winter, I think we can do that in the tropics."
– Clean & Green Singapore launch, November 2015

And PM Lee has Singapore's past 24 years to prove we are prepared for such a time as this: our park connector network just reached 300 km last September. At a time when cities like Hamburg are just starting plans to create networks of connected green corridors, we are certainly riding on the coat tails of good policies such as this, the ERP and COE systems set in motion from before our generation.

While we have much to be thankful for in the past 50 years, Singapore cannot simply remain at status quo. It bears noting that 12 percent of Singapore's land area has already been taken up by roads, in comparison to the 14 percent occupied by housing.

"We have to rely less on cars," PM Lee said at the Clean & Green Singapore launch, "...we cannot keep on building roads – more roads for more cars."

Singapore's first Car-Free Sunday

Singapore held her first Car-Free Sunday on 28 February 2016, where thousands of participants cycled, skated and jogged in the Civic District and Central Business District.

Happening every last Sunday of the month for a trial period of up till end July 2016, Car-Free Sunday SG has about 5 km of roads closed to vehicles, including Connaught Drive, Fullerton Road, St Andrew's Road, Stamford Road and Esplanade Drive. Before this, planners piloted carfree zones on a smaller scale with the first temporary road closure at Club Street and Ann Siang Road in 2013. With positive reception, other areas like Circular Road, Kampong Glam, Little India and most recently Liang Seah Street along Beach Road have also enjoyed road closures with activities.

But what do Singaporeans think about Car-Free Sunday and the larger move towards a car-lite Singapore?

A "more democratic" transport system

Noel Tan, 46, was present at the inaugural event with his daughter Edna, 10 and son Ezra, 8, as a show of support for the move towards a car-lite Singapore,







which the father of three believes will make the transport system “more democratic”.

“People should have a choice how they want to go about [commuting]. For reasons of choice or economics, [they] may not want to own a car and [Singapore] should be able to provide a space ... to exercise your choice.”

Noel's 10-year-old daughter, Edna, has just picked up cycling last year.

“I love cycling because it's very fun, you can go fast and slow at times, and you can choose where you want to go. And because there are park connectors, you can go wherever you want from anywhere in Singapore.”

The little girl's favourite part about Car-Free Sunday, however, was not cycling. “The bouncy castle!” she grinned.

As for cycling on the car-free road, the primary four student said it was “an exciting first time” and that she would like to cycle on roads again in future, albeit with uncertainty as she finds it dangerous sometimes.

However, Edna has a suggestion for improving road safety: “[we can] have a cycling path on the road that no cars can go on.” When asked if she has anything to say to the people who can make this possible, the little girl smiles sweetly and quips, “thank you!”

While we do not have any cycling lanes on the road right now, it is not impossible to start small by thinking about the small ways we can change our lifestyles to contribute towards change for our future generation.

Lee Wai Pong, 59, an electric scooter aficionado, feels the same way about bequeathing a greener Earth to the next generation.

“I will be welcoming my grandson next month, so it's very important to me that we give [our children] an environment that is better than when we found it.”

To the grandfather-to-be, one way to keep the Earth green is by using the car less and personal mobility devices (PMDs) more.

“I go everywhere now using a combination of bus-PMD [personal mobility device]; MRT-PMD and it works just fine.”

“I live near an MRT station, but not near enough for me to walk comfortably in this very hot tropical climate of ours. So with this [PMD], I can use the back road and pavement and be at the station in 3 minutes. And then I take the train to the station right next to my office. [This] makes for a very, very nice commute... and it's very green! I don't have to use my car, which is very extravagant, because it's just one car to transport one person.”

These days, Wai Pong hardly drives on weekdays, only on weekends, and even then, he parks a distance away from his destination. “It's good to park the car further away and commute, and finish the last mile using a PMD; that leads to less congestion within the city.”

“Singaporeans have the spirit to share.”

A member of the biking group Brommie Owls, Felipe Ong, 50, and his group of friends came together because of their enthusiasm over the foldable Brompton bicycle.

To him, the first Car-Free Sunday was a pleasant experience:

“I was expecting a major jam, but the road is big enough for everybody. It's nice to be able to ride nonstop, without traffic lights, and everybody is sharing the road, so I don't see any major congestion

between the cyclists, the skateboarders, [etc.,]... it's just a matter of sharing. I think Singaporeans have the spirit to do that."

Singaporeans may have the spirit to share, but until they have experienced the joy of going car-free for themselves, it is easy to shrug the car-lite movement off as just another passing fad.

Into the heartlands

One way to do so is to bring Car-Free Sunday to the heartlands, away from the central district that some may not wish to travel to on a weekend.

Han Jok Kwang, 62, feels that "if the activities are brought to their doorstep, especially the heartlanders, then they don't have to travel so much... it becomes an extension of their Sunday; they [can] just step out of their house and then participate in something that's very close to their neighbourhood."

In this way, the cycling enthusiast believes "people who live on different parts of the island will become familiar [with car-free zones]."

Jok Kwang was also donning a cardboard car as part of his getup for the special occasion. The outfit touted various benefits of going car-free, including "No COE", "No ERP" and "No Pollution".

But to the Car-Free Sunday sponsor, the most special of these catchphrases had to be "2 Wheels are Better than 4" when he met Yip Pin Xiu, Singapore's golden girl, at the National Gallery grandstand.

"[She] asked if they can take a picture with me; and she was on two – we must remember that she's on two wheels – so I turned around ... and she took a photo in her wheelchair with this sign that reads 'two wheels is better than four wheels' ... I hope I made a little bit of her day. I felt very touched."

Pin Xiu, 24 may be on two wheels but that has not stopped her from breaking a world record for the women's 50m backstroke, and winning five other gold medals at the ASEAN Para Games last December.

The SMU final year student is also positive that with more car-free zones, "our society is becoming a bit less selfish; it is becoming more open to ideas ... it's nice to see Singapore becoming more inclusive and progressive."

Regulations on personal mobility devices (PMD)

Interestingly, a wheelchair is listed as a PMD under Singapore's Road Traffic Order. With the rise of PMDs as an alternative mode of transport, the Ministry of Transport is looking into regulating use of PMDs under a code of conduct to keep all road and pavement users safe.

Just last week, the Active Mobility Advisory Panel submitted its recommendations on the types of PMDs to allow on footpaths, cycling paths and roads.

Where do the cyclists go?

Some have been against the idea of allowing cyclists on the footpaths. At the same time, there are drivers who are against the idea of cyclists on the road.

In both instances, the cyclists are cited as hazardous.

My neighbourhood Tampines was the first town to be developed as a cycling town. Strangely, when designated cycling paths appeared alongside footpaths, the cyclist's path did not necessarily become easier to navigate. As a cyclist myself, I often found myself frantically ringing the bell while swerving through a maze of pedestrians... on the cycling path.

Cyclists are also not without fault: in the two years that Tampines has become a cycling town, I have also almost never seen a cyclist dismount his/her bicycle at the areas where "dismount and push" signs are.

These are accidents waiting to happen, and unless we as pedestrians, drivers, cyclists, scooters, inline skaters, etc. become more attuned to sharing our walkways and roadways, no number of designated cycling lanes or car-free zones is going to make a difference.

As a country that has come far in becoming car-lite, all we need now is an understanding between the various groups of commuters.

The Minister for National Development, Lawrence Wong, has this to say: "Once people get used to the idea that closing off roads is not just preventing cars from using the roads but creating more public spaces for Singaporeans and for people to enjoy, they see the positive side of it. I hope it will bring about a change of mindset that being car-lite is not just a negative thing. It's not just reducing car usage, but it's a positive thing – we are gaining something from it."

Before we arrive at car-lite, let's start by making the effort to be more considerate in our day-to-day lives. That way, even if there is no cycling path when little Edna grows up, she would have inherited a city that is friendly for all commuters, graciously shared between all.

Curious how you can do your part for a car-lite Singapore? Start by going for Car-Free Sunday SG on the last Sunday of the month in the Civic District and parts of the Central Business District.

Visit ura.sg/carfree Sundays for the latest updates and activities.

What does it take to keep a place alive?

Local and UK experts discuss the important role of place management and the potential of the business improvement district model for Singapore.

Writers **Cassandra Yeap** and **Serene Tng**



Sometimes when you enter a particular place, a neighbourhood, a district, there is a special quality about it. There is a sense of buzz and excitement. There is great comfort and enjoyment when you walk through the streets. You find a wide variety of engaging and memorable activities. You feel so welcome you want to reach out to a stranger or a friend. You come away enriched and inspired. And vow to visit the place again.

Behind every successful place is a team of many individuals from different walks of life who feel so

passionate about their own districts that they have come together to turn these into destinations for both locals and tourists. This is place management – a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach to improve precincts and make them more attractive with each having their own unique characteristics.

Think about Marina Bay, Singapore River or Little India and Chinatown. Over the past few years, planners have placed a stronger emphasis on place management as the more sustainable approach to continue to retain and attract interest in Singapore as



a key destination and to keep locals engaged in their own neighbourhoods too.

Place management in Singapore today is undertaken by stakeholders based on a voluntary model while other cities have seen their precincts forming associations with the support of legislation known as the business improvement district (BID), where all stakeholders in the precinct contribute to sustain place management efforts if majority vote positively to make their precinct a BID.

We catch up with three experts to find out what it takes to make a place successful and the potential of Singapore adopting a BID model – Mo Aswat, founder and director of The Mosaic Partnership, an international consultancy firm for place management, Richard Guiney, chief executive officer of We Are Dublin Town, a BID in Dublin, Ireland and Wilson Tan, chairman of Singapore River One.

Why is place management important for cities?

Richard: All cities compete with other destinations whether they are other cities or out of town shopping malls. Without managing our town centres professionally, marketing them and making destinations of choice, our town centres will fade, find it more difficult to maintain a solid customer base or businesses may find it challenging to prosper. The success of our town centres not only drives their vibrancy and business fortunes but is also essential in attracting inward investment. Global capital is very mobile. When considering where to invest in, multi-national corporations will consider the quality of life a location can offer for its employees. Place management is vitally important in creating town centres that provide that essential quality of life.

Mo: Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* said, “cities have the capability of

providing something for everybody, only because, and only when they are created by everybody.” An evolution in thinking and evidence now suggests a more holistic ‘place-led’ approach bringing together a range of disciplines including marketing and culture leads to more successful destinations for both investors and users. With the creation of a place, it ensures it is sustained in a way that it continues to provide the best and right environment for its varied users to prosper creatively, economically, culturally and as a community.

Wilson: Places are only as good as the people living, working and playing in it. As a ground up initiative, stakeholders in the precinct decides and carries out what is agreed to be beneficial for the precinct. It is a concept that fosters community solidarity as stakeholders come together as one. It instils a sense of ownership for the place as stakeholders start thinking beyond themselves. It confers power as the collective voice of stakeholders can be better heard in negotiations with public and private organisations. Only with ownership and responsibility, can there be sustainability.

Resources are limited! The best people who will understand the needs of a precinct are the very people who operate within it. The precinct can develop and grow at a more efficient rate; public services are able to concentrate their support in areas where it matters most; making it a useful concept for cities, like Singapore.

What are the roles of businesses, stakeholders and citizens in place management?

Mo: Businesses provide the investment, vibrancy and opportunity that allow a place to boost variety, offer, employment and innovation. Stakeholders like the public sector, museums, theatres and cultural

organisations can create something comforting and unique about a place through policies, activities and creativity. Citizens will want a 'heart' or a 'focal point' for the community where they can enjoy a variety of things from working, shopping to just meeting a friend. The success of a place is determined by how well the citizens are invested in it and use it in its many forms. It is essential that those practising place management understand this and find ways to connect and reflect these diverse aspirations.

What are key factors that will make a place successful?

Mo: *Policies* – The right ones are important and will always help. We have to be at the forefront of developing and influencing these. *Projects* – Making sure that the right ones are carried out and have a connection with the users of a place. *People* – The right ones are essential to the success of a place and they can make or break things. You need a combination of visionaries, strategists and doers. *Performance* – Making sure that what you do makes a real difference. *Partnerships* – The need to involve the right organisations, the ones that are truly invested in a place in its many forms and may not always be the ones that agree with you. *Passion* – A passion for this work and the place where you live, work or play.

Tell us more about the business improvement district (BID).

Mo: BIDs are a concept that allows businesses to get together, decide what additional improvements they want to make to their environment, how they are going to manage and deliver those and how much they are prepared to pay towards it. Put together in a formal and detailed business plan, it will be voted on in an independent ballot by those who have to pay. If the majority vote yes, then everybody pays a mandatory levy for a prescribed amount of time, usually five years. It has been a successful model applied in many countries, with over 1,500 BIDs in North America, over 250 in Europe and in places such as South Africa.

The key behind its success is the ability for places to tailor their own solutions to meet the aspirations and challenges it has. This is combined with a truly independent delivery set up that gives them real control and responsibility. The process is not for the fainthearted though, as setting up a BID is hard work with the unenviable task of persuading people that it is just not another 'tax' or 'cost' and that they truly will get a return.

Almost every place that has developed a BID continues with it as there are demonstrable and tangible successes in places from New York and London to small business parks and communities. In the UK where BIDs have to obtain a new vote

every five years to continue, nine out of 10 BIDs are renewed in areas like New West End covering Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street now in their third term and raising £25m.

DublinTown as the first BID in Ireland from 2008, implemented a range of initiatives from creating a memorable brand, to addressing critical issues of public safety, actively engaging citizens and creating distinctive districts.

What has worked well?

Richard: Communication is key. It is a two way process. We need to listen to citizens, members and stakeholders. Ultimately, we need to understand the needs of the local population not only as citizens but customers for the city's businesses. It is their preferences which will shape how place management policies develop. Another key issue for BID managers is to understand that they will not achieve universal support and should not become disillusioned when some people don't say 'thank you'. The BID team need to keep focused on what it sets out to do and make sure that the points contained in the business plan are delivered for the betterment of the business community and the citizens of the city. The BID team also needs to be flexible and willing to change and adapt plans to meet changing needs of both members and the city, trying out untested solutions to establish what works best.

How has the city changed in the last seven years as a result of DublinTown's efforts?

Richard: The public themselves through surveys have indicated that they feel a significant improvement in the city over the past five years in spite of difficult economic times which we have come through. We have seen a steady rise in footfall in the city since 2011 and vacancy rates have tumbled by 40 percent in the same period. We now have a clear understanding of what people expect from the city and clear district messages and brand promises that deliver on the experiences being sought after. We have addressed perceptions of public safety that seemed intractable and are achieving results in this regard.

We have initiated place management efforts in districts like the Singapore River and Marina Bay. Can BID work for such areas?

Mo: The place management efforts in Singapore River and Marina Bay follow the same pattern we have seen worldwide. They carry out great work with limited resources and membership. Over time, the enthusiasm and hard work of those few volunteers that do all the work combined with the limited resources takes its toll. There is an expectation in time that there must be a fair, more egalitarian and sustainable way to do this. Combined with this is the resources that are at the disposal of managed

estates and the very competitive and compelling offer from other platforms such as the Internet. This rightly leads to an analysis of whether this can be done more effectively and I think this is the place where Singapore is at now, not only on Singapore River or Marina Bay but also for its other precincts.

So would this be a good time to introduce BID to Singapore?

Wilson: Moving into a BID and adopting a ground up approach is beneficial in many ways. For example, to businesses, it has the potential to increase footfall, giving a united voice to the business community and cost savings potential from bulk buying. It is a system that discourages 'freeloading', since it will be a mandate for everyone to pay a levy towards the BID

organisation. To the landlords, it is a way to increase capital value, makes the place more desirable and strengthen partnerships with authorities.

With a well-educated population like Singapore, it is good to involve stakeholders, giving them a better sense of place and ownership. To have a say in their well-being and to drive the desired economic growth. Since 2012, SRO has been playing the role of Place Manager along Singapore River. Although membership is voluntary, there has been good response from the businesses to take it up and play a proactive role in the future of the precinct. The results of what SRO has accomplished over the years are visible, therefore, it might be a good time to garner more support and move into a BID model.



Up close with Singapore River One (SRO)

SRO as the place manager of Singapore River is dedicated to implement projects and initiatives as set out in its five year business plan.

The organisation engages stakeholders, understands the needs and wants of stakeholders, facilitates collaboration and consensus among the diverse mix of stakeholders along the River.

For example, Singapore River One gathered feedback from the businesses to pedestrianise Circular Road to enhance the area. It then coordinated with agencies to successfully get the car-free zone off the ground.

SRO also leverages on resources from both

the public and private sectors that are invested back to benefit stakeholders and ensure long-term viability and success. In 2015, SRO secured private sponsorships for the Singapore River Festival, which drew more than 100,000 visitors to the three-day event where the three quays were celebrated as one river.

SRO chairman Wilson Tan was awarded the Place Champion Award in 2015 for his proactive efforts in shaping the Singapore River precinct.

Documenting Little India's charm

Meandering about this timeless enclave reveals stories and personalities that are surprising and always colourful.

Writer **Sarah Liu** | Photographer **Wilson Pang**

The street scenes of Serangoon Road's 'Little India' are arresting. Compared to other orderly, uniform spaces in Singapore, the arterial stretch leads to multiple places; at once varying, unpredictable and colourful. Jevon Liew, URA's executive planner for the Little India conservation area, shares that in his work of protecting the key architectural features of the many heritage buildings, and of ensuring the urban scale is kept to, there is a fine art to balancing planning order and innate spontaneity.

"Little India's charm is the organic nature of the place. How it adapts, how the different communities find their spaces," said Jevon.

It is this organic character that a troop of around 50 young photographers, aged between 15 and 20, hope to capture under the mentorship of experienced professionals such as photographer Darren Soh, as they embark from March 2016 on a year-long documentation project of Serangoon Road supported by URA and the National Youth Achievement Award. Photographer Wilson Pang takes a precursory ramble to see what treasures the area may hold.



ABOVE (TOP) | 48-YEAR-OLD GARLAND MAKER CHANDRAN FACES INCREASING COMPETITION FROM OTHER FLOWER SHOPS POPPING UP. IN HIS SHOP SPACE WITHIN THE CONSERVED AND COLOURFUL RESIDENCE OF TAN TENG NIAH, HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF LUCKY TO HAVE CONTRACTUAL ORDERS FROM THREE SURROUNDING TEMPLES. "MY DAUGHTER'S COLLEAGUE TELLS ME THAT THE CHINESE WORDS ON THIS DOOR MEAN BRIGHTNESS, LUCK AND HEALTH."

ABOVE (BOTTOM) | THE OWNER OF SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO, K SAJEEV LAJ, PROVIDES THE UNUSUAL SERVICE OF TAKING PORTRAITS FOR INDIAN MIGRANT WORKERS SEEKING BRIDES BACK HOME. WHEN SOME OF THEM GET MARRIED, THEY RETURN WITH THEIR WIVES, HE EXPLAINS. "WHEN THEY BRING THEM HERE, THEY TELL THEIR WIVES, 'HE'S THE ONE WHO TOOK MY PHOTO!'" "SEE THAT PHOTO THERE? BOTH SO HAPPY," SHEEJA, SAJEEV'S WIFE, CHIMES IN, POINTING TO A SET OF LOVEBIRDS.



ABOVE (TOP RIGHT) | CHANDRAN'S HANDS ARE SLIGHTLY SCABBY, SOME PARTS OF THE SKIN PEELING OFF. THE REASON? "ALLERGY. WHEN WE TIE GARLANDS, THIS YELLOW MARIGOLD FROM THAILAND HAS CHEMICALS THAT GO INTO OUR HANDS. ONLY THE FERTILISED YELLOW MARIGOLD GOT THIS PROBLEM."
 ABOVE (BOTTOM) | BENT OVER PILES AND PILES OF FRESH BANANA LEAVES, AN ELDERLY AUNTY TELLS US THAT SHE'S BEEN SELLING THESE MALAYSIAN IMPORTS FOR OVER 30 YEARS. "ONE PIECE, 20 CENTS. MOSTLY MALAY PEOPLE BUY TO SELL NASI LEMAK," SHE SAYS OF HER REGULAR CLIENTELE.

Imagining streets without cars

Where others see road closures, they see opportunity.

Writer **Adora Wong**

With the aim of transforming our streets into enjoyable public spaces, the URA last year launched Streets for People, a programme that seeks to offer support and access for ground-up activities at road closures.

And with more and more car-free zones hitting our island city as we aspire to a 'car-lite' society, a new breed of dynamic champions are paving the way. These individuals from different walks of life deftly take advantage of these spaces and align them with their passions, making them their own in their unique way. We speak to three champions on how they have transformed streets into vibrant public spaces without cars.

Ejan A Rahman

Director, We Experiment

What is The Lab SG?

The Lab SG is a Halal cafe under the umbrella of We Experiment Pte Ltd, which is run by myself and my husband, Luke, for the love of great food, good coffee and good vibes. Our Slogan is "We Experiment"; we strive to create quirky food and beverage items.

What are you guys passionate about?

Besides the Lab SG cafe, Luke and I have started a movement called MCMCMM (Macam Macam Movement). Macam Macam means "everything and anything" in Malay. This movement was created by us to support everything and anything related to local independent subculture.

I love seeing people come together to support underground local music, exhibitions and gigs. This is my reason for starting the movement. I want to continue the subculture scene in Singapore for future generations, and create a go-to event for them to experience and support local independent talent like how I used to in the past.

How has the establishment been involved with Streets For People?

So far, we have worked very closely with URA under

the Streets For People programme and managed to close the road at Jalan Pisang for the event in March 2016. We collaborated with Samantha Lo for an event called Barter Market, a collective effort by local makers, craftsmen, artists, musicians and other skilled individuals.

Our social initiative explores a scenario where money has been taken out of transactions and attendees and vendors exchange their goods and services. Based on the concept of sustainability, the Barter Market seeks to encourage a more human bonding experience as well as a possibility of an organically progressive society, one that recognises and supports each other regardless of background.

What are some of your upcoming plans?

We are planning to close the road on Jalan Pisang every quarter so that we may have more of these events. We will collaborate with more independent local organisers to push the sub-culture scene in Singapore – from the locals, for the locals.

Cai Yinzhou

Founder, Geylang Adventures

What does Geylang Adventures do?

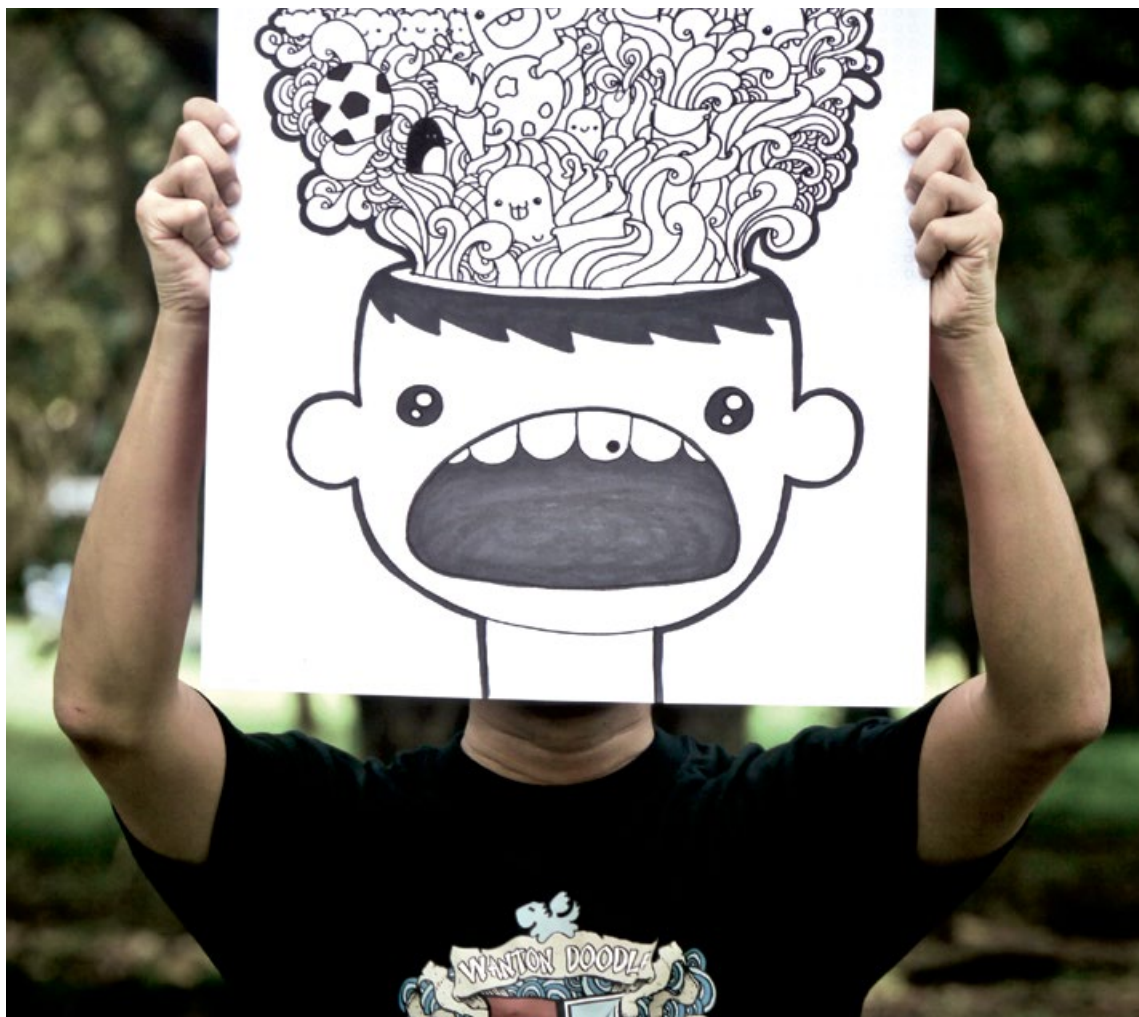
We strive to debunk stereotypes about Geylang and create learning journeys and educational programmes for different organisations to find out more about the community.

How has the initiative made use of public spaces under Streets for People?

We try to make meaningful use of the back alley space in Geylang. One that we were involved in December 2015 even had an art studio and food truck on site and they were all so that we could share with the community. The event was open to anyone and everyone, and more than 70 migrant workers had come to mingle with Singaporeans.



ABOVE | ADVOCATES OF ACTIVATED STREETS HELD A BARTER MARKET (TOP LEFT) AND COMMUNITY ART EVENT (BOTTOM) AT JALAN PISANG AND GEYLANG RESPECTIVELY RECENTLY. MEANWHILE, BLANK WALLS AT SIGLAP SECONDARY SCHOOL WERE JAZZED UP BY THE BAND OF DOODLERS (TOP RIGHT).
PHOTO CREDIT: THE LAB (TOP LEFT), WANTON DOODLE (TOP RIGHT)



Mas Shafreen

Illustrator, Wanton Doodle

Who is Wanton Doodle?

I'm a corporate cog by day, illustrator by night, with the dark eye circles to prove it. My illustrations are inspired by doodles borne out of sheer boredom, the desire to stay awake during meetings and the compulsion to expend office supplies.

How have you been involved in car-free zones in the past?

We were involved in the SHINE Youthfest where there were road closures at Orchard Road and we got to doodle over remixed photos on a long showcase.

How do you think initiatives like Streets For People help create a culture?

We call ourselves white space bandits, as we take over walls and transform them from something bland to fun. Likewise, I'm a strong advocate of communities taking control of spaces from the ground-up. If you want to do something, do it, don't

complain! What we as Band Of Doodlers (a group I started) do too is encourage co-creation and interaction with the community through art. For example, we leave empty spaces such as speech bubbles in some doodles, inviting the public to participate and get emotionally connected to the art. There's that community-centric element that ultimately promotes active citizenry as more feel inspired to step up and express themselves.

What are some of your upcoming plans?

We hope to rob all white spaces by transforming them to doodle-filled co-creative art.

URA last year launched Streets for People, a programme that supports community-initiated projects that transform streets into meaningful temporary car-free public spaces. Many communities have come forward with innovative ideas and even held full-fledged street festivals, such as the highly popular Urban Ventures at Keong Saik road. Visit ura.sg/carfreezones for more information on the car-free zones and how to set up your own.



Activating spaces through music

Writer Jeannie Quek

Meet Lee Yan Chang, a URA architect from Conservation Management who not only handles conservation work, but goes a step further in activating spaces through music.

Yan Chang and two other friends are the founders of Play It Forward Singapore, an initiative that provides opportunities for public piano playing. While this is not uncommon overseas, it is possibly a first for Singapore.

The trio seeks to promote the appreciation of piano ensemble music, offer opportunities for aspiring pianists to perform and the experience for the community to play the piano in collaboration with others.

Tell us how you got started with Play It Forward SG

Play It Forward Singapore is a homegrown public piano movement that started in September 2015. We know there are many like us who love to play, but for various reasons have stopped doing so. There are also many who do not have access to the instrument. Yet at the same time, hundreds of neglected pianos are gathering dust in households across Singapore. So we thought, why not rescue these unwanted instruments and share them with those who need it?

Our first display of pianos was at PARK(ing) Day 2015. In bringing pianos to public spaces in Singapore, urban spaces become social spaces for interaction and bonding. We have brought together ordinary folk who give away their pianos for a good cause, the beneficiaries who can now regularly experience the joy of music with the donated pianos,

local artists and designers who lend their creative talents to transform old pianos into art pieces, everyday Singaporeans whose faces light up with a smile when their friends play a tune, and musicians who now have a place to practise and perform.

With URA's support, what began as a two-day event became an initiative running over two months in seven different locations in the city!

How has it been trying to bring music to the public?

At the start, the public needed some encouragement to overcome their apprehension of playing music in public. Once we started to play, the public gradually warmed up to the idea. We are happy to see complete strangers coming together and bonding over music. We are also glad that our pianos are able to meet the needs of a diverse group of people, ranging from children who absolutely enjoy playing in public, to adults simply looking for a quiet place to play. When the pianos were under the Esplanade Bridge, we found people playing them till the wee hours of the morning. There is even a music video that featured our pianos!

Track the latest locations of the pianos at www.facebook.com/playitforwardsg

Play It Forward SG is an initiative under Our Favourite Place, a programme that supports community projects to enliven public spaces to build community interactions and create shared memories. Apply for support to activate public spaces in your neighbourhood at ura.sg/ourfaveplace.

ABOVE | PLAY IT FORWARD SINGAPORE FOUNDERS (FROM LEFT) LEE YAN CHANG, JEAN HAIR AND BILLY SOH SHARE A PASSION TO ACTIVATE PUBLIC SPACES BY MAKING PIANOS ACCESSIBLE TO THE COMMUNITY, WITH PIANO MUSIC EASILY EXPERIENCED UP CLOSE AND LIVE.

At a glance

We check out the latest initiatives and ideas shaping the landscapes and neighbourhoods around us.

Bringing light to shadows

i Light Marina Bay 2016 returned to dazzle the bay from 4 to 27 March 2016, with more than half of the festival artworks designed by local artists and students for the first time. Themed "In Praise of Shadows", the festival invited visitors to re-imagine the fundamentals, forms and roles of light and drew a record 740,000 visitors. The i Light Symposium 2016 also gathered thought leaders from various fields and industries to provide insights and discussions on the topic of light, in relation to the city and its people.



Buzzy streets

More street festivals are on their way! Previous editions at Keong Saik Street and Maju Avenue are making repeat appearances in their neighbourhoods, as ground-up groups capitalise on the Streets for People programme, which allows the public to reclaim streets used by vehicles and turn them into attractive public spaces. Check for the latest car-free zones at ura.sg/carfreezones.

Explore local

Contemplate local identity through the lenses of architecture and design at the Singapore City Gallery. The gallery hosted *Sayang Singapura*, 28-year-old illustrator Xin Li's inaugural exhibition of artwork inspired by growing up in a changing Singapore, and *Homegrown: A Singaporean Design Consciousness*, MKPL Architects' meditative 20th anniversary exhibition over March to April. An immersive multimedia display of the President's Design Award recipients' exhibition over the past decade, and *All Lined Up*, a solo exhibition of line drawings used to record our streetscapes, come to the gallery in May.





Heritage symposium

Insights on the best practices in protecting, restoring and reusing heritage buildings were shared by conservation pioneers from France and Singapore, as well as current practitioners in the region, at a symposium on heritage and sustainable urbanism in May. The panellists include Mr Didier Repellin, Chief Architect and Inspector General of Historic Monuments, who assisted in early restoration efforts of Armenian Street shophouses, CHIJMES and the Empress Place Building.

Car-Free Sunday

Every last Sunday of the month since February 2016, the Car-Free Sunday SG pilot has seen cyclists, skaters, joggers, families and more coming by to enjoy the closed roads and activities at the Civic District. Whether it is yoga, museum tours, street-side food stalls or sporting challenges, there is something for everyone at the walkable and cyclist-friendly precinct. Find out more details for the next edition at ura.sg/carfreesundaysg.



Inaugural Urban Planning Festival

Aspiring planners experienced and learned more about the profession at the inaugural Urban Planning Festival organised by URA in April. Pre-tertiary students were able to attend a Young Planners' Forum and Model Making Workshop, and find out about educational options through a career information fair. The winning entries from the annual CUBE for pre-tertiary students, held in 2015, were exhibited at the Singapore City Gallery in May.



"OUR SOCIETY IS BECOMING A BIT LESS SELFISH; IT IS BECOMING MORE OPEN TO IDEAS...IT'S NICE TO SEE SINGAPORE BECOMING MORE INCLUSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE." YIP PIN XIU, PARA-SWIMMER, ABOUT THE FIRST CAR-FREE SUNDAY SG.

PICTURED: CAR-FREE SUNDAY SG PARTICIPANTS WORK OUT AT THE LAWN FRONTING THE VICTORIA THEATRE AND CONCERT HALL.