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### Full report on roundtable on place management and placemaking in Singapore

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## IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series Two: Full Report on Roundtable on Place Management and Placemaking in Singapore

By Hoe Su Fern and Jacqueline Liu,  
IPS Research Fellow and IPS Research Assistant

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Singapore, the government has adopted a strategy it calls “place management” to inject “heart and soul” into the city. These efforts include the greening of streets, providing benches, closing roads for pedestrian access, and public activities and arts-centred events such as the [i Light Marina Bay festival](#) and the [Singapore Night Festival](#). Cities like New York and Paris have also attempted a similar strategy known as “placemaking” to develop human-centred places and improve the quality of life for their residents. “Creative placemaking”, a related concept, has also emerged to refer to the use of arts and culture to animate public spaces and neighbourhoods. However, despite their growing popularity, place management and placemaking remain vague concepts.

On 13 November 2015, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), together with the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), organised a roundtable entitled “[Place Management and Placemaking in Singapore](#)”. It sought to understand how place management is defined and to discuss its successes, challenges and the role of the arts and creative industries in such strategies. This is the second roundtable in the [IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series](#) — a platform to discuss arts and cultural policy-related issues in Singapore.

Chaired by IPS Senior Research Fellow Tan Tarn How, the Roundtable featured presentations on place management efforts by three government agencies — Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), National Arts Council (NAC) and National Heritage Board (NHB). All three government agencies highlighted the importance of working closely with stakeholders, particularly business stakeholders in precincts earmarked for place management, namely, Marina Bay, Singapore River, the Civic District, and Bras Basah. Bugis, among others.

Attended by more than 50 policymakers, arts practitioners, consultants and business owners, the Roundtable also discussed the difference between place management and placemaking. In particular, questions were raised on how spaces were transformed into places and what really made a “place”. Some ventured that a place was where conversations and connections between people happened. Others felt that a place was also one that was authentic and shaped by the community that resided within and used the space, rather than one that was “carefully manicured” and sterile.

Participants discussed at length on whether top-down efforts were sustainable compared to ground-up initiatives. Some noted that government-led place management efforts tended to be centred on “one-off” events. They called for more flexibility and support for privately-driven and ground-up initiatives that could have much longer-term and lasting impact in galvanising the community and thus shape the identity of a place. It was also noted by some participants that such events tended to be “celebratory” and superficial, highlighting the need for more critical programming. To do so, the suggestion was to include artists and creative-types in the decision-making and curatorial process.

A specific issue on arts housing and placemaking was also raised. Under NAC’s current arts housing policy, the Framework for Arts Spaces (FAS), artists under this scheme are encouraged to participate in placemaking activities like public engagement programmes. Several participants highlighted the importance of arts housing in providing artists with much-needed space and time to create works that are reflective of Singapore’s distinctive identity and culture. However, NAC explained that as arts housing received a considerable subsidy from the government, artists and arts groups should also recognise that a balance had to be achieved — between the need for time and space for art-making, and the need for public engagement.

As this was the first time place management was discussed at a public platform, the presentations helped to shed light on the government’s varied approaches towards place management in the city centre, and highlighted the need for the government to work together with stakeholders in order to achieve a common vision for places in Singapore and realise their vision for their respective precincts. Also, as formal place management efforts are still in their nascent stages, the Roundtable discussion assisted in teasing out the complexities of placemaking and place management in Singapore, and in providing crucial suggestions on how to improve and better sustain place management efforts.

## FULL REPORT

### INTRODUCTION

Singapore has won numerous accolades and garnered international attention for its physical infrastructure and architecture. Despite this, its government recognises that certain parts of the city still lack a certain human vitality and buzz. To address this, the government has adopted a strategy it calls “place management” to inject “heart and soul” into the city. Currently, place management ideas are being used to rejuvenate areas within Singapore’s city centre such as the [Civic District](#), [Marina Bay](#) and [Bras Basah Bugis](#). Beyond aesthetic improvements such as the greening of streets and widening of pavements, place management efforts have also featured innovative programming and arts-centred festivals.

Elsewhere, from New York to Paris, urban planners, community leaders, institutions, artists and philanthropists have made or are making efforts to revitalise their cities — to improve the quality of life for residents and create a sense of place, community and identity through strategies known as “placemaking” or “creative placemaking”.

To understand how place management strategies are deployed in Singapore, a Roundtable was jointly organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) on 13 November 2015.

Attended by more than 50 policymakers, arts practitioners, consultants and lifestyle business owners, the Roundtable discussed how place management was defined and practised in Singapore. The Roundtable also explored the successes, challenges and the role of the arts and creative industries in place management and placemaking strategies.

Below is a summary of the presentations and key issues discussed at the Roundtable.

### OPENING REMARKS

IPS Special Research Adviser, Arun Mahizhnan, and Director of SAM, Dr Susie Lingham opened the Roundtable. Both emphasised the significance of the Roundtable as part of an important partnership between IPS and SAM to create a platform for contemplation and discussion. Dr Lingham also noted the importance of conversations that stimulate ideas for the future, as “art cannot exist without thought”.

Dr Lingham highlighted this particular session on placemaking as an apt opportunity to make an impact. In a small country such as Singapore, government decisions and the actions of individuals could have tremendous effects and repercussions, unlike in larger countries such as the United States (US). Events, activities and policies in Singapore, regardless of scale, can therefore have drastic implications for Singapore’s global image. For instance, Singapore is known as a place where chewing gum is banned or as a “successful port”. However, perhaps it is also timely to position Singapore as a place for arts and culture as well, she said.

In fact, artists and arts collectives have made efforts to create a place for the arts in Singapore. For instance, The Artist Village (TAV) could be considered as an example of placemaking, which emerged as an organic alternative to government plans for Singapore’s

arts landscape. Founded by Tang Da Wu, TAV was formed within a rural village in Sembawang in 1988. By functioning as an open space for artists to experiment, experience and exchange ideas, it soon became a place known for engendering some radical shifts in the thinking and making of contemporary art in Singapore.

Another instance of how the arts have been engaged in placemaking efforts was that of 5th Passage, a now-defunct arts collective. Despite its location in Parkway Parade, a shopping centre and commercial space, it functioned as an art space that brought together many disparate ways of thinking about city life. The space was also opened to people from all walks of life, from artists to teachers and children from special education schools.

Dr Lingham added that placemaking transforms the abstract concept of space into a place with identity, by empowering people to think for the future and motivating them to enact change. Places like SAM, and thought-spaces like the IPS-SAM Roundtable Series, can function as placemaking platforms where participants are empowered to think, discuss and trust one another to create Singapore as a place and a home.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### **Place Management in Singapore**

*by Jason Chen, Director of Place Management, URA*

Mr Chen presented an overview of place management efforts by URA, the coordinating agency for place management in Singapore.

Mr Chen began by defining place management as a “multi-stakeholder approach to improving precincts and making them more attractive for the benefit of its users.” Place management aspires to shape these precincts into destinations that all will enjoy, he said.

On the other hand, “placemaking” goes beyond the physical characteristics of a place. Rather, it is a “collaborative process” that focuses on maximising or enhancing a place’s identity and “shared value”. However, Mr Chen explained that as placemaking overlapped with place management in their objectives to improve and shape a place, some people use these terms interchangeably.

Mr Chen said that there were five key drivers of place management. The first driver, government policy, was critical in defining the parameters of a precinct and determined its identity and vision. The second driver was the people; they were important in ensuring the vision for the precinct was realised and that the precinct was well utilised. The third driver was projects and programmes that injected activity into a precinct. The fourth driver was partnerships and “multi-stakeholder involvement”. Finally, the fifth driver was performance measurement through tools such as key performance indicators (KPIs), to ensure that place management efforts were effective and successful in creating a “positive experience” for residents, users and visitors.

Mr Chen explained that the overall aim of place management was to achieve a “very high level of operational competitiveness.” Hence, place management efforts have been operational in nature and mostly concerned with the “fundamental and basic factors” of a place. Some place management initiatives include urban design, ensuring pedestrian

accessibility, and installing way-finding signage. He highlighted that effective place management would result in a place that was more “responsive” to issues from the ground and needs of its users. Effective place management could also help generate economic gain, as investments could be drawn to a well-managed place.

Mr Chen noted that place management only emerged recently as a formal governmental strategy in Singapore. While he noted that merchants’ and retailers’ associations had embarked on what could also be considered place management efforts much earlier, a more concerted effort by government had only begun in 2008.

Since then, a Place Management Coordinating Forum (PMCF) was established, with URA as the lead coordinator. A National Place Management Framework has also been jointly developed with key stakeholder agencies, including Singapore Tourism Board (STB), NHB, and NAC. The three strategic objectives of the National Place Management Framework are to:

1. Enhance the precinct;
2. Ensure sustainability of the precinct; and
3. Build strong communities.

Mr Chen listed the lead agencies for some of the key city centre areas that have been earmarked for place management (Figure 1). For instance, NHB is the lead agency for the Bras Basah-Bugis precinct; URA is the lead agency for Singapore River and Marina Bay; NAC and National Parks Board (NParks) are the co-leads for the Civic District; and STB is the lead for [Orchard Road](#), [Chinatown](#), and [Little India](#). He added that URA was also taking the lead as a conservation and place management agency for [Kampong Glam](#).

Mr Chen said that beyond government agencies, stakeholder associations had been taking the initiative to “promote” and “create vibrancy” for their respective precincts. For instance, business stakeholders in the [Sentosa-Harbourfront](#) area and Ann Siang Hill-Club Street are the latest two precincts that have formed associations. Elsewhere, the [Orchard Road Business Association \(ORBA\)](#) has been working closely with members to launch initiatives including a membership card for employees, road closures and car-free zones. These initiatives helped generate buzz and create more opportunities to draw consumers to the businesses along Orchard Road.

**Figure 1: Areas in the city centre that have been earmarked for place management**

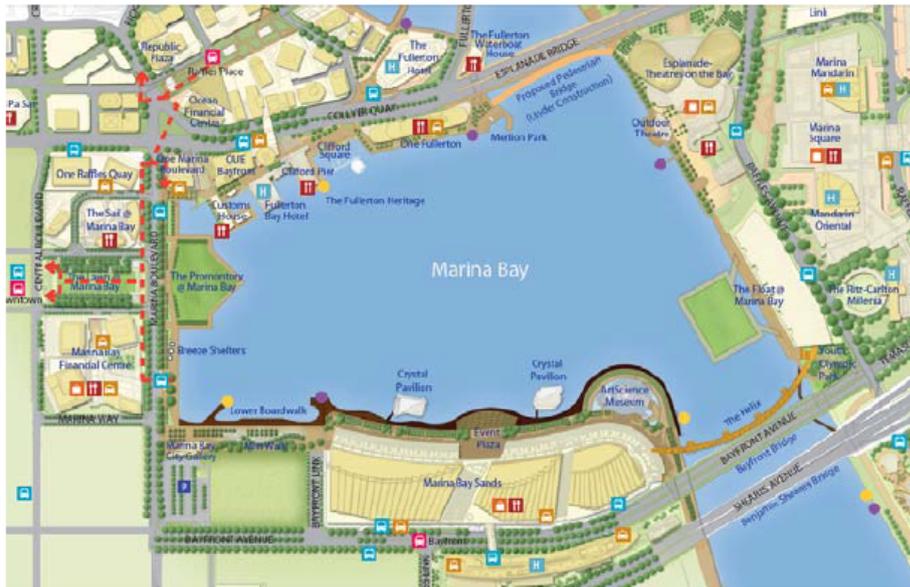


Source: "Presentation on Place Management" by Jason Chen, Director of Place Management, Urban Redevelopment Authority.

To illustrate place management efforts by URA, Mr Chen cited two case studies in Marina Bay and the Singapore River. In Marina Bay (Figure 2), URA spearheaded place management initiatives such as managing event spaces at The Promontory and waterfront promenade and installing street furniture like deck chairs. In particular, there was a deliberate effort to create "a space that the community [could] come to," he said. In addition, he outlined the plans to expand the water taxi network to improve accessibility to the precinct and to connect it with the Singapore River and the Kallang Basin.

In order to activate the many event spaces at the Marina Bay, URA has also organised and facilitated events. Mr Chen cited two signature events, namely, the [Marina Bay Singapore Countdown](#) on New Year's Eve and the i Light Marina Bay festival, an annual sustainable light art festival held over three weeks in March. To create a strong identity for the precinct, URA has also collaborated with partners including STB to organise year-round events including the Formula One (F1) Night Race, the National Day Parade at the Float and the Padang, and other water activities.

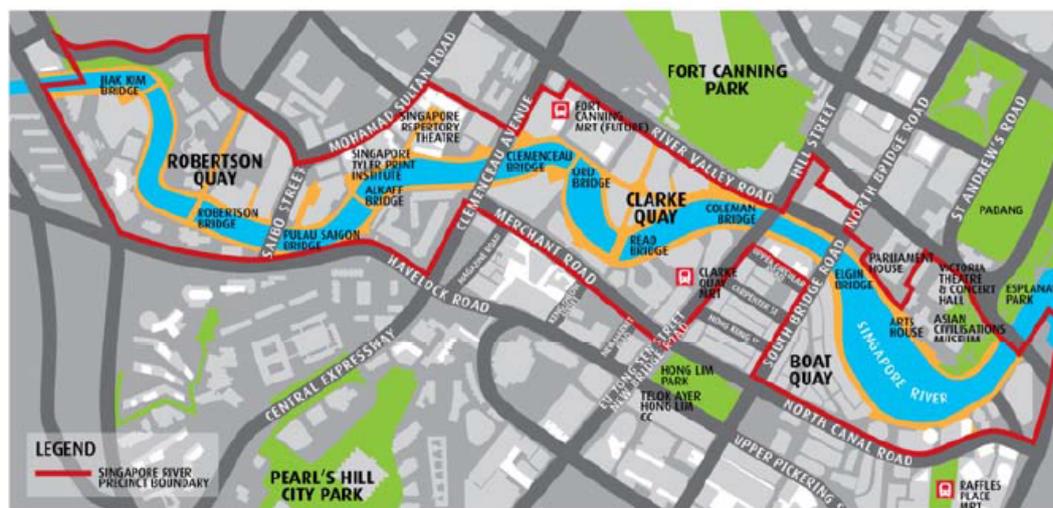
**Figure 2: Map of place management initiatives in the Marina Bay precinct**



Source: “Presentation on Place Management” by Jason Chen, Director of Place Management, Urban Redevelopment Authority.

While URA adopts a more proactive role in developing Marina Bay, a different approach was adopted for the Singapore River (Figure 3). In 2008, URA approached stakeholders along the River to seed their interest in assuming a more active role in place managing the Singapore River. The [Singapore River One \(SRO\)](#) precinct association was subsequently formed at the end of a two-year consultation process. Mr Chen explained that this was aimed at encouraging ground-up involvement and correct public perception that place management is a purely top-down process.

Since its establishment in 2010, SRO has been able to effectively garner support from stakeholders ranging from the private to the community and people sector. In addition, SRO has also demonstrated that such stakeholders can be empowered to drive initiatives that improve the management and image of the precinct.

**Figure 3: Place management boundary for Singapore River One**

Source: “Presentation on Place Management” by Jason Chen, Director of Place Management, Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Mr Chen highlighted the importance of ground-up community support in ensuring the sustainability of place management efforts. However, one of the challenges faced is that of “freeloaders” — stakeholders who benefit from the efforts of other stakeholders in the precinct without contributing. Nonetheless, this could be overcome with legislation through a formal place management model known as the Business Improvement District (BID). Some successful examples where the BID model has been implemented include Times Square in New York City and the new West End in London.

Mr Chen shared that in a BID, stakeholders within a precinct contribute towards a pool of funds to finance and implement a business plan for the precinct. In addition, as the BID is protected by legislation, each stakeholder is obligated to contribute to overall place management efforts. Beyond eliminating the problem of “freeloaders”, the BID model is also sustainable as decisions are made democratically among stakeholders who then have ownership and a stake in these decisions. URA is studying the feasibility of such a model.

### **Placemaking the Civic District — Where Worlds Meet**

*by Rebecca Li, Deputy Director for Precinct Development, NAC*

Ms Li presented NAC’s role in placemaking the Civic District. She explained that this was a joint effort between NAC and NParks to revitalise the Civic District. Ms Li shared that enhancements in the District would include more green spaces, and improved pedestrian connectivity and landscaping. Public art installations would also be featured as part of the Jubilee Walk, including installations by local artists and sculptors such as Han Sai Por, Kum Chee Kiong, Baet Yeok Kuan and Tan Wee Lit.

Ms Li said that although the Civic District, as the “birthplace of modern Singapore”, was one of the oldest districts, the most recent concerted effort to place manage the Civic District had

begun only in late-2014. She added that while place management was a “more formalised” effort initiated by government, it was also recognised that the vision for the Civic District should not merely be “government-imagined”. Rather, it should be a place that the “man in the street” could identify with. Hence, some 40 stakeholders were consulted in a workshop held in February 2015 on a possible place identity for the district, and on ideas to “invigorate” and increase the vibrancy of the precinct, Ms Li said.

Four key imperatives for the enhancement of the Civic District emerged from the workshop with stakeholders. First, it was important to develop a “core vision and identity”. Second, strong partnerships should be formed between the private and public sectors to ensure buy-in from stakeholders. Third, infrastructure should be viewed in a holistic manner and go beyond “hard” or “physical” infrastructure. “Software” infrastructure like “connectivity” and “way-finding signs” are equally important as well. Finally, coherent programming should enhance and strengthen the identity of the Civic District.

On the identity of the Civic District, Ms Li explained that six different identities had emerged from stakeholder discussions. First, given the number of historic buildings in the Civic District such as the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, the district was identified as a “meeting of worlds” — where the “old meets the new”. Second, the district should be “for Singaporeans”. Third, the district is a place of “history and heritage”. Fourth, the district is also a place for “arts and culture” where arts institutions such as [The Esplanade](#) and [The Arts House](#) are located. Fifth, it is a place with a “balance between solemnness and vibrancy”. Finally, the sixth identity is that it is a “place of city respite” with green spaces for the public to “relax and enjoy”. Given the number of identities, a challenge would be to consolidate and create a single identity for the district.

As co-place manager for the Civic District, Ms Li added that NAC would oversee two main areas: arts programming and marketing. NAC would also work closely with their co-place manager NParks, whose responsibilities on the other hand were to oversee community programming and logistics. On programming, Ms Li said that instead of creating new events, NAC would partner stakeholders to build on and enhance their existing programmes. In particular, NAC and NParks would look out for opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring precincts such as Bras Basah.Bugis (BBB) and the Singapore River. Programmes and activities within the Civic District would also be complemented by marketing and branding efforts, supported by online marketing channels, as well as maps and guides. Underpinning these efforts would be logistical support such as the management of booking of green spaces for concerts and performances within the Civic District.

### **Bras Basah.Bugis (BBB) — Be Inspired. Be Creative. Be More.**

*by Kennie Ting, Director for Policy and Development, NHB*

Mr Ting described the place management initiatives in Bras Basah.Bugis (BBB). As the designated place manager of BBB, NHB recognised the importance of cultivating strong partnerships with key public and private stakeholders in order to amalgamate efforts to activate the precinct and to inject more “street life”. However, rather than assuming a top-down approach of managing BBB, NHB’s approach has been more towards that of facilitation. This has allowed NHB’s relationships with stakeholders to evolve organically in a ground-up manner.

Mr Ting explained that this approach was taken as NHB had only received funding to organise the Singapore Night Festival in 2008. As such, considerable efforts were focused on engaging stakeholders to support and contribute to the programmes and activities during the festival, he said.

Since then, stakeholders have been involved in determining the vision for the precinct. He added that a visioning workshop was recently held in 2014 where stakeholders agreed on the importance of strengthening the identity of the BBB precinct. Mr Ting shared that feedback from the workshop was then incorporated into a work plan for 2014–16.

Currently, BBB is only at the “placemaking phase”, which is primarily concerned with issues such as “improving pedestrian infrastructure”, programming and activities to “enhance the visitor experience”, among others. Ideas to improve the precinct included installing way-finding signs and opening up new spaces such as Cathay Green, among others. To increase “street life”, NHB is also working on “seeding smaller activities” beyond major festivals like the Singapore Night Festival. Besides working with stakeholders within the precinct, NHB has also collaborated with URA on “environmental improvement works”, and STB to brand the precinct as a tourist destination.

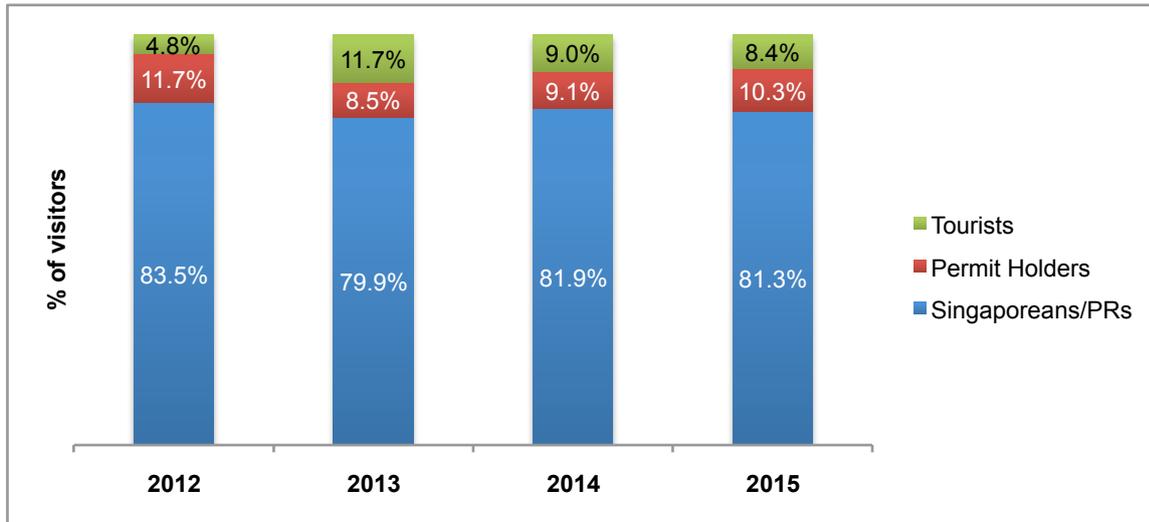
However, NHB’s efforts for the BBB precinct are not without challenges, which include barriers to the use of public spaces. For instance, stakeholders are required to pay for a Temporary Occupation Lease in order to use pavements, green spaces or vacant state land for installations and performances. Other challenges include implementing road closures for more pedestrianisation within the precinct, and coordinating efforts across a diverse group of stakeholders and organisations.

Mr Ting cited the Singapore Night Festival — a nocturnal, large-scale open-air event featuring performances and installations — as a successful example of how NHB leveraged support from stakeholders to increase vibrancy in the precinct. Since its first edition in 2008, the number of stakeholders involved in the Night Festival has increased, and the number of visitors has risen from 40,000 visitors over one weekend to 680,000 over two weekends.

Stakeholders have also shifted from being passive venue providers to partners who actively co-programme the festival. He added that there was greater support from stakeholders within the precinct as business owners began to recognise the economic benefits and spin-offs from participating in the festival. In fact, receipts per visitor at the festival had increased from \$20 to \$36. Given the degree of public interest in the festival, NHB recently introduced a “charged component” to “gauge demand” and found that a third of the public surveyed was willing to spend on such components.

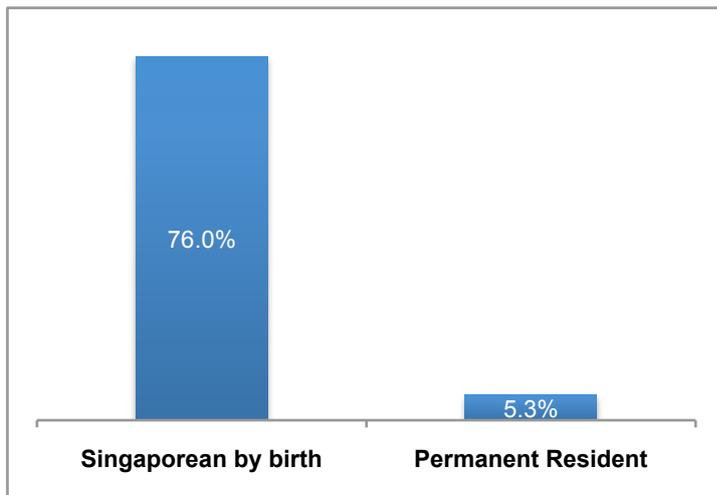
On its impact and reach, Mr Ting shared that the festival continued to appeal to Singaporeans. In fact, over 80% of visitors to the festival were Singaporean or had Permanent Resident (PR) status (Figures 4 & 5).

**Figure 4: Percentage breakdown of visitors to the Singapore Night Festival (2012–2015)**



Source: “Presentation on Bras Basah.Bugis (BBB) — Be Inspired. Be Creative. Be More.” by Kennie Ting, Director for Policy and Development, National Heritage Board.

**Figure 5: Percentage breakdown of Singaporean visitors to the Singapore Night Festival (2015)**



Source: “Presentation on Bras Basah.Bugis (BBB) — Be Inspired. Be Creative. Be More.” by Kennie Ting, Director for Policy and Development, National Heritage Board.

Overall, visitors expressed high levels of satisfaction with the festival with over 80% indicating that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the 2015 edition. However, he noted that there had been feedback stating that the festival had become “too crowded”, impacting visitors’ experiences.

Beyond visitor numbers and footfall, Mr Ting added that the festival also received considerable interest on social media. For instance, the festival website received more than a million page views and its Facebook page received over 8 million views.

Mr Ting concluded that the Night Festival's relative success and popularity was a result of an eight-year effort by NHB and the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) to engage stakeholders. He added that beyond working closely with stakeholders to co-programme and commission works for the festival, NHB would also continue to work on overcoming challenges such as facilitating more road closures to ensure the safety of visitors to the festival.

## RESPONDENTS

### Response by Dr Hoe Su Fern

IPS Research Fellow Dr Hoe Su Fern was the first respondent. She said that the idea of "place interventions" — or specific strategies and activities targeted at improving a place — was not a recent phenomenon, but in fact, developed from the 1960s, as a response to post-industrial capitalism, which had resulted in the "emptying out of city centres". To address this, urban planners and community leaders sought to create "people-oriented, human-centred cities". With the rise of globalisation between the 1960s and 1970s, cities also competed for "global city" status and looked to new strategies, including using place interventions, to improve the attractiveness of their respective cities.

According to Dr Hoe, Singapore is no exception. In recent years, the government has recognised the need to go beyond the renewal and improvement to physical infrastructure or "hardware". More attention has been paid to building up "software" where Singapore is recognised as a "Home with Hope and Heart".

Dr Hoe then gave an overview of various place intervention strategies such as "place maintenance", "place activation" and "place regeneration", which share similar desired outcomes such as "vitality", "liveability", "vibrancy" and "buzz". However, such terms were nebulous and expansive, and hence, challenging to implement and evaluate effectively.

Dr Hoe urged for more clarity and better appreciation of nuances between outcomes and approaches towards placemaking and place management. For instance, she questioned whether there was a difference between terms like "busy-ness" and "buzz", and "liveability" and "lovability". Dr Hoe also questioned the current outcomes-driven approach to place management. For her, the process was equally important, and there should also be room for unintended organic outcomes and spontaneity.

Dr Hoe ended her presentation by asking if place management and placemaking were fundamentally different approaches, and whether placemaking was even possible in Singapore, especially in the development and sustainability of authentic places.

### Response by Kok Heng Leun

Kok Heng Leun, Artistic Director of Drama Box, was the second respondent. He highlighted the importance of sustainability in placemaking efforts. Key to this sustainability was creating a sense of connection between the community and the space.

Quoting the geographer Tuan Yi-Fu, Mr Kok said that places came into existence when there was a "moment of pause", which provided people with the space to reflect and connect with others. He cited his company's community arts project called, "[Both Sides, Now](#)" as an

example of how a space was transformed into such a place. The project featured exhibitions and plays that broached the taboo topic of dying. Held in Toa Payoh and Yishun, the project attracted passers-by who “played games” and talked “animatedly” with relatives, friends and strangers on the issue of living and dying. The public was also encouraged to create artworks that reflect on their respective life experiences. In this sense, the project eventually “turned a space into a place” where people could share advice and their stories.

Besides resulting in the creation of places that brought diverse people together to exchange ideas and build relationships, he felt that placemaking was also a “process of creating quality places” for people to live, work, play and learn. In particular, it should also be geared towards creating sustainable, viable and equitable places where all residents regardless of socio-economic class have a sense of belonging.

He stressed that placemaking should be a ground-up process of engaging communities. However, were the current forms of engagement and consultation by government used as tools for placating citizens or as genuine channels to reach out to the public as individuals, he asked.

He noted that as placemaking activities also often involve artists and arts groups, there should be greater engagement with such artists to build their capacities for such activities. For instance, foreign artists are typically commissioned to create light installations for festivals such as the Singapore Night Festival or i Light Marina Bay. Perhaps more space could be created for local artists to showcase their works as well.

Mr Kok also said that residents should have a say in how public spaces were used. It was ironic that the making and management of places in Singapore were primarily state-led, rather than driven by the people who used the spaces, he said. In fact, there must be genuine engagement and consultation with all stakeholders. For example, the food street at Smith Street was created in Chinatown to restore street life in the area. However, were the hawkers in the surrounding food centres consulted about how it might affect their businesses, he asked.

If placemaking was dependent on community engagement, Mr Kok also asked how the current efforts to revitalise districts through one-off festivals in the city centre such as BBB or Marina Bay could be sustained since these areas were largely devoid of residents and people. Would these people form an “affiliation to the place”? Similarly, he felt such a connection was lacking in areas with arts housing, namely, [Goodman Arts Centre](#) in Kallang and [Aliwal Arts Centre](#) in Kampong Glam, despite government expectation that arts housing should contribute towards placemaking efforts.

Mr Kok concluded his response by calling for the creation of spaces shaped by social interaction rather than transactional spaces shaped by commerce. While most place management efforts were concentrated within the city centre, perhaps more attention could be paid to regional centres and neighbourhoods that were inhabited by larger and more diverse groups of people from the elderly to young children, working adults and even foreigners.

## OPEN DISCUSSION

IPS Senior Research Fellow Tan Tarn How chaired the discussion. Several themes that emerged included the need for greater inclusivity in place management efforts, the sustainability of state-driven efforts, the adequacy of “one-off” placemaking events, and the importance of preserving the authenticity of places.

### **Need for greater inclusivity in place management efforts**

One participant noted that areas earmarked for place management within the city centre include heritage districts like Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India, which were ethnic enclaves for the Chinese, Malay and Indian communities, respectively. However, as such efforts were being concentrated within the city centre, certain communities such as the Eurasians and Peranakans, which had enclaves outside of the city centre (e.g., Joo Chiat), were excluded from such efforts. The participant highlighted that perhaps place management efforts in Singapore could be expanded geographically so as to impact a greater diversity of communities and people.

Another participant echoed Mr Kok’s earlier point on the importance of neighbourhood spaces. As neighbourhoods are spaces that many Singaporeans would likely call home, this participant felt there should be efforts to encourage the creation of a “sense of place” in areas located outside of the city centre. He also said this could be an opportunity for the government to partner the private sector in strengthening residents’ sense of belonging and place through placemaking and place management.

In response to observations on the concentration of place management efforts in the city centre, NAC Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Dy CEO) Paul Tan recognised the importance of activating areas beyond the city centre. Mr Tan added that this was a “work-in-progress” and that NAC was working closely with People’s Association (PA) to open more spaces and opportunities for the arts, to add vibrancy to neighbourhoods.

Mr Tan also said that although government agencies tended to treat place management of districts in a carefully organised and systematic manner, in reality, a place was much more “borderless”. As such, agencies would continue to exercise flexibility in recognition of the porosity of public spaces.

Beyond expanding the geographical boundaries of such efforts, a participant suggested that the place management process could also include views from a wider range of creative people. While current efforts have engaged artists, others like architects, designers and even regular citizens should also be able to contribute to ongoing place management efforts and activities. Hence, perhaps more platforms should be created for individuals to participate in the making of places in Singapore.

Ms Li agreed that the sphere of creative people extends beyond artists. In recent years, NAC has also begun working with and consulting commercial businesses and creative agencies on ideas to revitalise the Civic District. Moving forward, she assured that NAC would continue to actively involve such creative agencies and individuals.

### **More support for privately-driven placemaking efforts**

Several participants called for greater engagement between government and private stakeholders who have initiated efforts to placemake or rejuvenate public spaces.

One participant noted how place management efforts have mostly been agency-driven, and called for the importance of engaging and encouraging “fire-starters” — people and private organisations that have been managing vibrant places for years. He said there should also be studies conducted to investigate how these places have survived and thrived over the years.

The same participant also noted how place management was concerned with “people development” and “content development”, especially in collaboration with stakeholders of the precinct or district. As such, he felt businesses should also play a key role in participating in such efforts. He also highlighted the need for continuous encouragement of stakeholders — both private businesses and the public — to collaborate in initiating projects and activities for their respective districts.

A participant added that private initiatives were important and should not be ignored, especially in a landscape where place management projects were driven by government from the top-down. Although the government encourages the organic growth of ground-up efforts, such efforts continue to suffer from the public misperception that they are state-initiated. What can policy do to support initiatives outside of the current place management framework, she asked.

Another participant agreed that more support should be given towards organic, ground-up developments and initiatives. Such initiatives have also proven to be relatively successful. In one instance, over 400 visitors attended an art event that was organised independently by a collective of visual artists. However, the participant also highlighted the difficulties in sustaining these efforts due to rising costs and asked if there was scope for existing activities to be enabled by government support.

A participant added that several missed opportunities to enhance and enable good projects initiated from the ground have arisen because government often prefers to initiate new programmes and activities on its own effort. He also agreed that the high cost of using a space is a barrier to place management and placemaking. For instance, the [Singapore International Festival of Arts \(SIFA\)](#) and NAC had to fork out a significant sum to the URA for the use of the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station. With such high rentals, is it even possible for ordinary citizens to initiate projects that truly “make a place come alive”, he asked.

Chairperson Tan Tarn How agreed and questioned the feasibility and impact of ground-up initiatives in rule-bound Singapore.

Mr Chen responded by assuring all participants that URA would continue to focus its efforts on engaging more business stakeholders in place management, which would result in further economic benefits and spin-offs.

Mr Chen also affirmed the importance of engaging the public as key stakeholders by sharing how URA has also initiated small-scale efforts to activate and “return” public spaces to the public. For instance, URA has started a programme called “[PubliCity](#)”, which encourages the community and businesses to set up “street furniture in public spaces”, so as to create a more “positive experience” of spaces for the public. Another initiative is “[Streets for People](#)”, aimed at encouraging the public to submit ideas and implement activities that reclaim roads and surrounding spaces for people.

### **Need to invest in critical programming through capacity building for arts and cultural practitioners**

Some participants noted the over-reliance by government on infrastructural changes in place management. They felt that more importance should be placed on improving the quality of programmes that could activate and maximise the potential of spaces.

One participant felt that programmes should have a lasting impact on participants and audiences. Programmes such as the Singapore Night Festival, tended to be primarily celebratory and spectacular. He called for a balance to be struck between such programmes and programmes that challenge, educate and prompt citizens to think critically about their surroundings, relationships and issues.

In order to achieve this balance, another participant highlighted the need to invest in capacity building for arts and cultural practitioners to create such programmes. Rather than look to institutions and commercial providers to drive place management efforts, the participant felt that it was also time to involve artists, arts managers and curators in the decision-making process. More importantly, this then requires government to adopt a different attitude to place management and the role that arts and culture plays — one that is trusting and has an understanding that culture is more than just entertainment.

In response to the issue of the lack of critical programming at the Night Festival, National Museum of Singapore (NMS) Director Angelita Teo shared that the festival has in fact, included a wide spectrum of activities and performances from the celebratory to the critical and alternative. This was only made possible with the increase in the number of partners and co-programmers, which have contributed to the eclectic character of the BBB precinct.

Ms Teo added that the Night Festival has gone beyond “glitzy” light projections on buildings and acrobatic performances. For instance, punk music performances along Armenian Street have been featured in the programme line-up. Given the scale of the festival and the involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders, the programme is now more multi-faceted, from [The Substation’s](#) fringe offerings to design-centred activities by the [National Design Centre](#). Overall, public response to the Night Festival has been overwhelmingly positive despite the fact that government funding for the event has decreased over the years. This was an indication of the high level of public ownership for the festival, she said.

NAC Dy CEO Paul Tan added that NAC has tried to ensure that works featured at such platforms are not merely “one-note” or celebratory. However, although NAC has continued to create space for critical works, he added that the “heterogeneous” nature and sensitivities of audiences would still need to be recognised and respected.

### **Need to preserve and sustain the authenticity of places**

Several participants also raised the importance of preserving the authenticity of a place in placemaking and place management. With government taking the lead in developing or redeveloping spaces and districts, several participants felt that such spaces tended to be over-regulated and too carefully manicured, and might have resulted in sterile places.

One participant cited Mustafa Centre in Little India as an example of an authentic place. It has grown, albeit in a haphazard or chaotic manner, to become a confluence of different

cultures and nationalities. He felt that Mustafa Centre should be cherished as the “Night Festival” that Singapore has every day.

Chairperson Tan Tarn How agreed and observed that places like Little India were considered authentic because they were “self-made”. For instance, The Substation during the 1990s was also such a place. Together with the National Library, the S11 and other coffee shops, the area surrounding The Substation became a naturally occurring “complex” or hub. As everyday necessities such as food were affordable, it also evolved into an accessible place for all Singaporeans to enjoy.

Another participant added that some spaces should be set aside for contemplation and respite from the city. He called for a more “minimalist” approach to place interventions and place management to enable more flexibility to citizens in determining how they could claim the space as their own.

This line of discussion also led some participants to raise the issue of sustainability. One participant observed that rapid and excessive change to spaces in Singapore had resulted in a sense of “rootlessness” amongst residents as such efforts often removed “spatial anchors” that provided “familiar frames of reference” for users of the space. As such, there was a need to balance between retaining the pre-existing layout and characteristics of the space and introducing new elements to improve the physical aspects of the space.

### **Arts housing and placemaking — balancing between space for art-making and the creation of works that reflect Singapore’s culture and identity, and public engagement**

The Roundtable included a discussion on how the concept of creative placemaking had become increasingly linked to arts housing and arts spaces.

NAC’s Framework for Arts Spaces (FAS) was launched in 2010 after a review of subsidised rental schemes for artists under the Arts Housing Scheme (AHS). One of the reasons behind the review was the need for “arts housing to facilitate more meaningful engagements with the public as well as greater collaborations amongst the arts community.” Consequently, arts spaces under the FAS were envisioned as connectors that brought the arts into the lives of the wider community and injected a sense of vitality in the neighbourhood.

A participant observed that place management efforts in Singapore tended to be events-centred and “ephemeral” in nature. However, what was more important was the fact that artists need more permanent spaces to create and produce these events — an issue that was sidelined during the presentation. She then asked about government plans on placemaking for arts spaces, especially since these encouraged artists to open their private spaces for public view. Another participant agreed and added that the arts required “time and space” in order to evolve and establish Singapore as a place with its own distinctive culture and identity.

Ms Li agreed that privacy was important for artists to create work. However, she stressed that artists should also recognise the need to balance between art-making and public engagement as there was a “time and a season for everything”. Arts housing spaces receive a large subsidy from government — over \$3 million annually for rental subvention. These benefits should therefore still trickle down to the public. Although NAC respects the artists’

need for a “sanctuary” to create art, the public is also interested in partaking and participating in the art-making experience. As such, there is much value to be gained from sharing these spaces with the public.

## CONCLUSION

Chairperson Tan Tarn How invited the three presenters to round off the discussion. All three presenters assured participants that they would consider the suggestions shared at the Roundtable, especially when formal place management efforts were still in their nascent stages. They also acknowledged the need to continue efforts to engage a wider range of stakeholders, including artists, to work together to achieve a mutual understanding and a common vision for places and precincts, in the spirit of collaboration and partnership.

*Dr Hoe Su Fern is a Research Fellow (Arts and Special Projects) at IPS. Jacqueline Liu is a Research Assistant (Arts) at IPS. Together, they are working on two studies: (1) Arts Housing and Creative Placemaking in Singapore and (2) Place Management and Placemaking in Singapore.*

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*If you have comments or feedback, please email [hoe.sufern@nus.edu.sg](mailto:hoe.sufern@nus.edu.sg)*



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**ANNEX: LIST OF SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS**

<b><u>No.</u></b>	<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Designation</u></b>	<b><u>Organisation</u></b>
<b>Chairperson</b>			
1.	Mr TAN Tarn How	Senior Research Fellow	Institute of Policy Studies
<b>Speakers</b>			
2.	Mr Jason CHEN	Director (Place Management Department/ Conservation and Urban Design Group)	Urban Redevelopment Authority
3.	Ms Rebecca LI	Deputy Director (Precinct Development)	National Arts Council
4.	Mr Kennie TING	Director (Policy and Development)	National Heritage Board
<b>Respondents</b>			
5.	Dr HOE Su Fern	Research Fellow	Institute of Policy Studies
6.	Mr KOK Heng Leun	Artistic Director	Drama Box Ltd
<b>Respondent (<i>in absentia</i>)</b>			
7.	Mr LEE Weng Choy	President (Singapore Section)	International Association of Art Critics

## Participants

8.	Mr ADIB Jalal	Director	The Shophouse & Co Group Pte Ltd
9.	Mrs Frances ALLEBLAS	Artist	-
10.	Mr Lionel ANG	Co-Founder	Lepark Singapore
11.	Ms Joanne BERGENWALL-AW	Assistant Manager (Geospatial Policy & Planning)	Singapore Land Authority
12.	Dr Sharon CHANG	Deputy Director (Strategic Planning [Research])	National Arts Council
13.	Associate Professor CHANG Tou Chuang	Department of Geography & Vice Dean (External Relations and Student Life)  Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	National University of Singapore
14.	Mr Nelson CHIA	Artistic Director	Nine Years Theatre
15.	Mr CHONG Tze Chien	Company Director	The Finger Players
16.	Dr CHU Chu Yuan	Senior Manager (Archive, Library & Research)	Singapore Art Museum

17.	Ms CHUA Ai Liang	Director (Arts & Communities)	National Arts Council
18.	Mr Steven GOH	Executive Director	Orchard Road Business Association
19.	Ms GOH Yee Lee	Senior Place Manager (Place Management Department/ Conservation and Urban Design Group)	Urban Redevelopment Authority
20.	Ms Stella GWEE	Director	The Shophouse & Co Group Pte Ltd
21.	Ms HAN Minli	Director	Hansfort Investment Pte Ltd
22.	Ms HAN Sai Por	Sculptor	Sculpture Society (Singapore)
23.	Ms Desirene HO	Assistant Chief Executive Officer	Arts House Limited
24.	Mr Louis Ho	Curator	Singapore Art Museum
25.	Mr Evangeliss HWONG	Centre Manager (Place Management)	Arts House Limited
26.	Ms Shirley KHNG	Manager (Programmes)	Singapore Art Museum

27.	Mr KHOR Kok Wah	Senior Director (Sector Development (Literary Arts))	National Arts Council
28.	Mr KOH Buck Song	Writer and Consultant	-
29.	Ms Gwen LEE	Co-Founder	DECK and Singapore International Photography Festival
30.	Mr Michael LEE	Contemporary Artist	
31.	Mr Casey LIM	Executive Director	Centre 42
32.	Ms Juliana LIM	Arts Enthusiast and Volunteer	-
33.	Mr Kenneth LIM	Director (Cultural Precincts Development)	Singapore Tourism Board
34.	Ms Vanessa LIM	Student Faculty for the Creative Industries	LASALLE College of the Arts
35.	Ms LIN Yanling	Senior Place Manager (Place Management Department/ Conservation and Urban Design Group)	Urban Redevelopment Authority

36.	Dr Susie LINGHAM	Director	Singapore Art Museum
37.	Mr Danny LOONG	Co-Founder and Chief Creative Director	Timbre Group Pte Ltd
38.	Ms Carmen LOW	Co-Founder	Lepark Singapore
39.	Ms Wendy MACK	Exhibition Officer	Private Museum
40.	Ms MAZLIANAH Mahat	Manager (Programmes)	Singapore Art Museum
41.	Mr MOHAMMED HELMI Yusof	Arts Correspondent <i>(The Business Times)</i>	Singapore Press Holdings
42.	Ms NGIAM Su-Lin	Co-Founder and Director	ArtsWok Collaborative
43.	Ms Eunice POH	Assistant Manager (Programmes)	Singapore Art Museum
44.	Ms Natalie TAN	Senior Manager (Place Making/ Aliwal Arts Centre)	Arts House Limited
45.	Mr Paul TAN	Deputy Chief Executive Officer	National Arts Council
46.	Ms TAN Shir Ee	Head (Programmes)	Singapore Art Museum

47.	Ms TAN Siok Sun	Special Advisor (Office of the President)	Singapore Management University
48.	Ms Angelita TEO	Director	National Museum of Singapore
49.	Ms Joyce TOH	Senior Curator	Singapore Art Museum
50.	Mr Leng TSHUA	Chief Executive Officer	Singapore Art Museum
51.	Mr Jason WEE	Founder, Artist and Writer	Grey Projects

**Institute of Policy Studies**

52.	Mr ARUN Mahizhnan	Special Research Adviser	Institute of Policy Studies
53.	Mr Shawn CHUA	Project Manager	Institute of Policy Studies
54.	Ms Jacqueline LIU	Research Assistant	Institute of Policy Studies