

ISSUE 3 • June 2013

# URBAN SOLUTIONS

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INTERVIEW

*Tan Chuan-Jin  
Abang Abdul Wahap*

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CASE STUDY

*Singapore  
Rahat  
European Union*

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ESSAY

*Limin Hee &  
Louisa-May Khoo*

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CITY FOCUS

*Bilbao*

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OPINION

*Carrie Lam  
Susan S. Fainstein*

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SPECIAL FOCUS  
*Public  
Engagement*

A biannual magazine  
published by

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**LiveableCities**  
SINGAPORE

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**URBAN SOLUTIONS** is a biannual magazine published by the Centre for Liveable Cities.

E-version: [www.clc.gov.sg/Publications/urbansolutions.htm](http://www.clc.gov.sg/Publications/urbansolutions.htm)

Set up in 2008 by Singapore's Ministry of National Development (MND) and the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) has as its mission "to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities". CLC's work spans three main areas – Research, Capability Development and Promotions. Through these activities, CLC hopes to provide urban leaders and practitioners with the knowledge and support needed to make our cities better. [www.clc.gov.sg](http://www.clc.gov.sg)



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Cover: "100enIdia" city improvement movement (Pamplona, Colombia, 2012).

Photo courtesy of 100enIdia.

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**ISSN 2301-3540** (print)

**ISSN 2301-3532** (e-version)

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URBAN SOLUTIONS welcomes enquiries, feedback and suggestions from readers.





# From the Executive Director

Public engagement is a pressing issue for cities everywhere. Governments have long consulted and involved citizens in various ways, but engagement has acquired greater urgency because of the rise of social media, smartphone apps, and other information technologies. These allow an unprecedented range of people to share information and collaborate to effect change in the real world. Citizens are now more aware, vocal and demanding, but many also want to contribute to making their homes more liveable and sustainable.

For those of us in the business of making cities better, these are opportunities to do more, and do better, with less. Crowdsourcing, open data and hackathons are among the many exciting concepts that are changing urban governance. For example, Manchester is now trying to crowdfund an urban regeneration project. At the same time, many governments are rightly

concerned about the challenges and that come with greater engagement. Amidst these developments, city governments are asking themselves how they can best engage their citizens, what issues they could anticipate, which strategies they should adopt, and what models they can learn from.

To explore some of these questions, the Centre for Liveable Cities recently conducted a research project in collaboration with our partners, including the cities of New York, Bilbao and Hong Kong. Some of our findings are published as an *Essay* in this issue of **URBAN SOLUTIONS**, which has a special focus on public engagement. Our *Case Study* and *Illustration* sections feature diverse practices from Singapore, Colombia, Israel and Europe, while our *Interview* and *Opinion* pieces carry insights from leading engagement practitioners and

experts. We hope these pages alert you to important trends, equip you with practical knowledge, and inspire you to engage your communities more effectively.

On another note, the Centre for Liveable Cities is pleased to launch this issue of our magazine in conjunction with the fourth annual WORLD CITIES SUMMIT MAYORS FORUM, in June 2013. The forum has become one of the largest and most important gatherings of its kind, and is being held outside of Singapore for the first time this year in the city of Bilbao – the inaugural winner of the LEE KUAN YEW WORLD CITY PRIZE. To mark this occasion, our *City Focus* section looks at Bilbao, and I am sure both our forum participants and magazine readers will learn much from this remarkable city.

Happy reading!

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**Khoo Teng Chye**  
Executive Director  
*Centre for Liveable Cities*

SPECIAL FOCUS

# Public Engagement

**T**his third issue of **URBAN SOLUTIONS** has a special focus on public engagement – a subject of growing importance to city leaders around the world. We feature insights from leading engagement practitioners and scholars, and survey contemporary practices in Singapore, Bilbao (Spain), Hong Kong, Colombia, Kuching (Malaysia), Rahat (Israel), New York City and the European Union.

## Rahat's Participatory Planning



When I first met members of the Bedouin community at Rahat, I was asked, "What did you plan for us?" I answered, "I haven't started to plan. I propose two alternatives: that I will study the place and the community and sit in my office and plan what I think is suitable for you, or that we work together and make this plan in full collaboration."

– Rahat urban planner Amos Brandeis (Israel) (page 32)



## The Limits to Engagement

The hope for citizen participation is that deliberation will lead to compromise and inclusion but sadly, stalemate is the more usual result.

– Harvard University Professor Susan Fainstein (United States) (page 81)



## The Case for Engagement



Rapid communication through a more pervasive media also meant that if the government did not proactively engage, we would soon end up losing the agenda.

– Chief Secretary for Administration Carrie Lam (Hong Kong) (page 77)



## Civil society



The special interest and technical familiarity of civil society groups and professional organisations position them as credible parties in mediating and shaping public opinion in the public engagement process...

[but] these groups need time and opportunities to develop and mature.

– CLC's Limin Hee and Louisa-May Khoo (Singapore) (page 63)



## 100 Urban Interventions in 1 Day

100en1dia is a movement that aims to initiate change through the participation of hundreds of united citizens, each accomplishing the projects and changes they want to see in their city, all on the same day.

– 100en1dia (Colombia) (page 52)

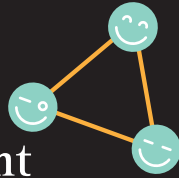


## library@chinatown

A key challenge is to sustain volunteer involvement and motivation, which can never be taken for granted and requires dedicated resources to cultivate.

– National Library Board CEO Elaine Ng (Singapore) (page 43)

## Kuching's Enhancement Plan



We want to get everyone to understand, you are involved now, what is your contribution? We want people to stop pointing fingers and to give us the necessary support.

– Kuching North Mayor Abdul Wahap (Malaysia) (page 18)

## New York's Legislated consultation



Although a statutory process like the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP) could be rigid and dominated by powerful lobbies that may not be representative of general sentiments, it is a transparent system where all parties concerned respect the final decisions made, even if it does not satisfy everyone. ULURP is also strictly time-bound, thus ensuring a consultative process that is finite.

– CLC's Limin Hee and Louisa-May Khoo (Singapore) (page 59)

## Engagement in Singapore



What are the common things we can work on and where are the common areas we can collaborate to do something? There are areas where we can talk to death and never see eye to eye.

– Senior Minister of State for National Development Tan Chuan-Jin (Singapore) (page 10)

## Legitimacy in Hong Kong



Independent parties, such as academics and accredited professional bodies, can help build legitimacy in development proposals. Hong Kong uses them widely, commissioning studies by third parties who are seen as more "neutral", thereby shoring up credibility for proposals.

– CLC's Limin Hee and Louisa-May Khoo (Singapore) (page 61)

## Open data



"Open data" is information that is freely available for anyone to use as they wish... [which] enables the development of useful new services, like smartphone applications, that can improve our quality of life, sustainability and competitiveness.

– Citadel on the Move coordinator Geert Mareels (page 47)



## Community in Bloom



NParks officers engaged the community by listening and connecting... Officers were first friends with members of the community, then government officers.

– National Parks Board Deputy CEO Leong Chee Chiew (Singapore) (page 25)

## Transparency in Bilbao



Transparency is valued highly as a determinant of good governance... The aim is to establish a channel of communication to promote discussions based on accurate facts, thus ensuring useful, rather than misinformed, public debates.

– CLC's Limin Hee and Louisa-May Khoo (Singapore) (page 60)



Senior Minister of State Tan Chuan-Jin at the Bukit Brown cemetery.





# Tan Chuan-Jin

FINDING SPACE  
TO COLLABORATE

Singapore



**S**ingapore's Acting Minister for Manpower, Mr **Tan Chuan-Jin**, is also the Senior Minister of State for National Development, overseeing urban development in the island-state. He spent 24 years in the Singapore Armed Forces before retiring as a Brigadier-General in 2011 to enter politics. Since then, he has been actively engaging civil society, interest groups and the public at large on several hot-button issues. Centre for Liveable Cities Advisor Prof Lily Kong interviewed Mr Tan about public engagement on 7 May.

● **When people think of the army, which you were a part of for many years, they think of its rigid command and control. So where does your belief in engagement come from? Did your experience in the army play a part and how?**

My belief in public engagement comes from my approach to leadership. My starting assumption is that I don't know everything. Whether you're a minister or a commander, people look up to you as though you know the answers, but in fact, everybody is groping. So, you need to engage your team.

With greater engagement, I think you get better clarity. That's what you need from leadership – clarity.

Eventually one person would have to make the call, but it is based on a collective sense of leadership. Through this process of engagement, there's also buy-in from the team.

Ours is a conscript army so most of the men are drafted into national service for a period of time. When it's not your job on the line, there must be a compelling reason to want to do it. In that sense, it is even more critical that you reach out and engage the citizen army.



● **As far as public engagement is concerned, where do you think Singapore now stands?**

I think it varies from topic to topic, group to group. The dialogue between government and NGOs has always been there in various forms, but it is more visible and extensive today. Perhaps the engagement wasn't as much as we would have liked it to be before, so I guess everyone is learning now.

● **What are the engagement lessons gleaned so far from the Rail Corridor<sup>1</sup> and Bukit Brown Cemetery<sup>2</sup> episodes?**

For the Rail Corridor, the Singapore government had been looking at settling the issue for a long time with Malaysia. Because of the sensitivity of negotiations, it was not something that was discussed with the public. I don't think, as a government, you should or can discuss extensively on every issue. So for this issue, we first settled on a package settlement with Malaysia and when the railway land was returned, we decided that would become the starting point for discussion with the public at large.

Of course, some people didn't like that we had returned all the tracks and some bridges, but we went in with a fairly blank slate in terms of what the Rail Corridor would become. We shared perspectives with the public and were willing to hoist new ideas on-board. We very



01

much wanted people to chip in and shape it as much as possible. And that's where we are and it is still evolving.

It's exciting that a lot of people have given their views, and have been actively participating in different ways. Can we incorporate everything? Probably not. But we can distil the spirit behind it and create improvements. I also expect that we would continue to have arguments over what it should be, but let's find a common space where we can build something, and see how it evolves.

As for Bukit Brown, the plan to redevelop the cemetery for housing had been made public for a long time. The main issue was the proposed road through the cemetery to alleviate traffic jams in the area. The public discussion for that began only after the decision to build the road through Bukit Brown was final.



*With greater engagement, I think you get better clarity. That's what you need from leadership – clarity.*

<sup>1</sup> Malaysia's railway network historically extended to a terminus deep inside neighbouring Singapore. Following an agreement to relocate the terminus, most of the lushly overgrown "rail corridor" was handed in 2011 to the Singapore government, which then faced public calls to preserve its natural and cultural heritage.

<sup>2</sup> Singapore's historic Bukit Brown Chinese cemetery is the largest of its kind outside China, with many ornate tombs of important personalities, set in an overgrown quasi-jungle setting. Civil society groups have objected to plans to demolish thousands of graves in order to build a major road through the heart of the cemetery.





02



*I don't think, as a government, you should or can discuss extensively on every issue.*

There were a number of reasons why we could not discuss some of these plans openly. One was that they constituted market-sensitive information that could have an impact on nearby residents' property values.

So that starting point was much more controversial than the Rail Corridor. That's because in the first place, not everyone was convinced that we needed a road. Not everyone was convinced that we should do it there. Heritage buffs asked, "Why don't you just expand Lornie Road [another road in the area]?" But that would impact the nature reserve nearby. So, there are different views. And that, unfortunately, became one big sticking point that never quite went away.

● **There are always trade-offs, but in the case of Bukit Brown, some would say it is heritage – and irreplaceable – while housing is replaceable.**

Philosophically, it's also about our perspective on heritage. The other day I was at Chung Cheng High School, an old school. I asked the students, when the time comes, would they all fight to preserve the building and the answer was yes. But what was there before the school? It could have been somebody's home or some *kampung* [village] that had meaning to a number of people. It could have been ecologically rich. At which point do you draw the line?

I actually agree with most of the things people are saying about how it's our heritage, and once you lose it, you won't get it back. But I'm

01 The Minister taking photos at the rail corridor, with Nature Society members Dr Ho Hua Chew (centre) and Mr Leong Kwok Peng (right).

02 Then Colonel Tan Chuan-Jin with Indonesian Minister for Social Affairs Bachtiar Chamsyah during a post tsunami relief mission in 2005.

03 Mr Tan learning about the historic graves at Bukit Brown cemetery.



03



01

also saddled with the responsibility of figuring out where that balance is. If I only wore one hat and didn't have the responsibilities in urban development and housing, then I could quite imagine I would be championing the heritage issue too. But when I have to weigh the competing demands, I have to decide how best to strike the balance.

We often see progress as regression, i.e., you lose something. But whatever is of sentimental value from the '70s or '60s was itself progress from what was in the '30s, which I'm sure was valued by people of an earlier generation. You have to decide what to keep, what to discard. Twenty or 30 years later, the things we are doing now will be seen as tremendously valuable. And today with better technology, I think we can do a lot more.



*Can we incorporate everything? Probably not. But we can distil the spirit behind it and create improvements.*

● **Would you say that's where the public engagement comes in because there is a need to derive a collective sense of what is meaningful to people?**

In theory, you have that discussion. When you talk about it, you realise there are different starting points and perspectives. What are the common things we can work on and where are the common areas we can collaborate to do something? There are areas where we can talk to death and never see eye to eye. That is the reality of things. So you end up fighting. Or you end up finding a common space to work on – and just accept that there would be differences.





● **In some places, consultation is legislated. What do you think of that in Singapore's context?**

In theory, most people may say, why not, we should. But what does it mean? In some countries, you use the law and that's why you end up with the gridlock that you see. Because it's binding, you have to give due regard to the process. Having it means you could subject yourself to potentially crippling delays, and be held ransom by groups who activate certain clauses.

I won't say I'm against legislation, but I would be wary of legislating for its own sake. For effective



*I actually agree with most of the things people are saying about how it's our heritage, and once you lose it, you won't get it back.*

01 The Minister  
8 observing efforts  
02 to document the  
graves before they  
are demolished.





01

01 Mr Tan posing with two Bukit Brown documentation project field workers.

02 The Minister visiting the former Bukit Timah Railway Station, a conserved site on the rail corridor.



*... at some point you have to make choices and some of these aren't popular, aren't easy.*

governance, you do need more engagement across the board. But I do not believe that it means the same thing for every topic in every area.

The government ought to see engagement as an important process, but it is not a blank cheque to engage to death. As a leader, your job is to create consensus if you can. If not, at some point you have to make choices and some of these aren't popular, aren't easy. If you make mistakes, continue your engagement even after that, because you can refine it, get better. Sometimes you might change because obviously you are not going to get every single thing right all the time. But fearing you're not getting it right shouldn't freeze you from action because I think that is a dereliction of duty.



● **What are some of the lessons about public engagement that you could share with readers of URBAN SOLUTIONS?**

A big part of engagement is about establishing some sense of shared clarity. Trust-building exercises help. I don't think there is a one-size-fits-all approach to every single issue.

What you need is to have a good feel of the ground. That comes from engagement, dialogue, and having a sense of people's needs and concerns. You need to make sense of that and eventually your role is to make decisions in the best interest of the people.

It has to be in the best interest of the people as individuals, and of them as a society. These don't always overlap. You also have to think about the present and the

future. So in a way there are these four factors that inform policy-making. But they don't always add up so the government needs to decide.

You need to frame the dialogue and depending on the space you have, think about how you engage. For e.g., if you're going to build a new nursing home, what is the outcome you expect when you consult?

Perhaps nobody wants it. If you ask, we all like nursing homes – but “not in my backyard”. So in such a context, what does it really mean to consult? Is it consultation, is it engagement, what is it? Once you're clear, you can differentiate the different context and approach it.

At the end of the process, you would need to be able to make decisions. And you should not be paralysed by engagement either just because that's what is happening in some countries. And it's costly – in Hong Kong, for example, it has cost the government billions. I'm not saying minority interests aren't important, but they actually end up costing the taxpayers.

Eventually the society decides what it wants. That is where I think the Singapore government has to learn and I think we are also in the process of grappling with how best to lead and govern in the current space.

02





Mayor Abang Abdul Wahap at a tree planting event.





# Abang Abdul Wahap

## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS IN KUCHING NORTH

Kuching North,  
Malaysia

15

interview

**I**n January 2013, the Mayor of Kuching North in Malaysia, **Datuk Haji Abang Abdul Wahap**, launched a five-year city enhancement plan. Known as CBS, which stands for Clean, Beautiful and Safe, or ‘*Cantik, Bersih dan Selamat*’ in Malay, it aims to make Kuching “the most talked about city in Asia”. Some aspects of this plan were developed when the Mayor and his colleagues attended the TEMASEK FOUNDATION LEADERS IN URBAN GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME (TFLUGP) in June 2012. Prior to his appointment as mayor in 2011, Datuk Haji Abang Abdul Wahap served in public service as a teacher, probationary inspector, Sarawak’s State Deputy Police Commissioner, and Director of Narcotics Crime Investigation Department. Centre for Liveable Cities Deputy Director Julian Goh conducted this interview with the Mayor in Kuching on 28 March.

● **Kuching North City Hall recently launched the CBS Enhancement Plan. Can you tell us what this plan is all about?**

The CBS Enhancement Plan is a road map encouraging people to make Kuching “Clean, Beautiful and Safe”. During TFLUGP, we learned about the need for an action plan to be put up, documented and understood by everyone. We were amazed to know that Singapore has got this Active, Beautiful, Clean (ABC) Waters Programme master plan, and we were thinking we should also have a plan to integrate all our initiatives. While the TFLUGP lectures were

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Population  
200,200

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Land Area  
369.48 square  
kilometres

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going on, my team used to compare notes and say “Why can’t we do this?” or “We have done this.” So there are a lot of things that can be benchmarked. We came up with the CBS catchphrase during our presentation at TFLUGP. After returning to Kuching, we conducted more workshops, and then came up with the CBS documents, including the Key Performance Indicators, or KPIs. One can say that the CBS plan was “Made in Singapore, Born in Kuching”.

For example, one of the plan’s KPIs is to reduce household waste by 50% over five years. People were telling me, “This is a real challenge for you!” Well, I think it is a realistic target because according to a study, 70% of what is thrown out can be recycled and reused. People in Kuching are not yet into the 3 Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), even though we have introduced this for some years now. But if every citizen could embrace that thinking and participate, I think it’s possible to reach our target. So I’m very excited about the prospect of this plan materialising.



One can say that the CBS plan was “Made in Singapore, Born in Kuching”.

● **Community engagement is a key aspect of the CBS Plan. Who are your main stakeholders, and how does the City intend to engage them?**

Basically this enhancement plan has become our bible. We need to explain it to everyone – through roadshows, for example – so that there will be ownership and cooperation. We are looking at the 3 Ps – the people, the public and private sectors. Our main stakeholder is definitely the state government. They have been responsive to our plans.

What is next is really getting the community to understand that they also have a role to play. This is not just about committees; this is about the people themselves. So if our neighbourhood schemes can gather everyone, I don’t mind going there to tell them about this plan, and how it won’t be successful unless they put their heart and soul into it. If everybody understands and does their part, I think getting Kuching to be talked about in 2017 is not impossible.

We would like to be the catalyst. Previously, the City Council would announce a *gotong-royong* (community participation) event, and everybody would come, but just for the T-shirts or the food. At the end, only the staff would be left carrying out the activities. Now, a *gotong-royong* event will mean that the local committee will initiate it while the City Council contributes logistics support, and then we recognise the committee as our partners. Getting the community involved is quite difficult, so once they are with us, we have to show our appreciation. This is important because we have to work hand in hand.

For example, we had been looking after a market at Sungai Maong. As we did not have the manpower to look after it, we outsourced it. But it was always unsatisfactory to the people of Sungai Maong who claimed that the contractor didn’t do the work. So we said to the people: “Okay, you form a company, you do it, and we’ll give the money to you.” That’s what is happening now, and there are no more complaints, and we see the job is satisfactorily done. This is how we would like to get people on to our side.







02

- 01 Citizens are encouraged to recycle, to reduce Kuching's household waste by 50% in five years.
- 02 Mayor Abang Abdul Wahap officiating a partnership with a Chinese community association.

I tell partners that we can't always give money, but we can give support in other ways. If they want to go into a joint venture with us, then yes, we can. Our annual regatta, which takes place the last weekend of February, is a good example. It is going to be on our tourism calendar but it is not funded by us. What we do is forego the revenue from advertising, for instance. We issue a composite licence, just a minimal sum. And then we administer the whole thing. Through smart partnerships, strategic alliances, joint ventures, piggy-backing on each other, that's how we do it.



*Getting the community involved is quite difficult, so once they are with us, we have to show our appreciation.*



01



02

01 Mayor Abang Abdul Wahap at the demolition of a city market.

02 Residents at Sungai Maong were encouraged to form a company to clean their market, which resulted in better work.

03 Sarawak state Chief Minister at the launch of the CBS enhancement plan.

● **Now that the CBS Plan has been launched, what is the next milestone for the project?**

Having everybody understand this plan will take some time. This remains our main task for now. We're going to schools; we're going to talk with the neighbourhoods, and with the private sector. And we will tell them that they can always knock on our door if they have any plans or ideas to improve Kuching.

We want people to adopt our roundabouts. The first roundabout is all lit up at night, which is what we want for every roundabout. But the cost will not be borne by City Hall, but by the private sector instead. That's why we want to get everyone to understand, you are involved now, what is your contribution? We want people to stop pointing fingers and to give us the necessary support.

For example, at our newly launched Orchid Park, we're encouraging schools to attend workshops to learn how to start their own orchid gardens instead of just admiring the orchids at the Park or writing to us to ask for flowers whenever they have a function. Why not get the schools to take it upon themselves to grow them? Having flowers at school creates a good ambience and lets the children gain a love for nature.



*...smart partnerships, strategic alliances, joint ventures, piggy-backing on each other, that's how we do it.*

Now we are seriously thinking of having our own swimming pool. This is a project I will try to launch before my term is over. Why? Because we want to make the place beautiful and vibrant. Because there will be spin-offs: with people learning to swim, we can encourage competitions among schools, and perhaps we can have festivities with other water sports, like water polo.

Pandelela Rinong is the first female Malaysian Olympic medallist (Bronze medal for 2012 Olympics 10m diving event), and she comes from Sarawak. So perhaps we will, with the swimming pool, have more Pandelelas. But as we may not have the funds, we have got in touch with various companies, to see if they can come up with the funding on a Build, Lease and Transfer basis. This has not been done before by the council, but I am confident. This is where we want to involve the private sector, in smart partnerships.





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● **What are Kuching North’s strengths, and what are the main challenges you face as the Mayor?**

I want to say that I’ve got a very good team. They are forward-looking; they don’t only give me support, but also ideas for the betterment of the city. That’s how the CBS Plan came about. The other strength is that in Kuching, generally people are friendly. Also, we have a very supportive state government that insists that we do things for the people, such as facilitating economic development.

The main challenges? When I first came to City Hall, I found it’s about trying to change mindsets. Some people are so in their comfort zone that when you do

something new, there may be resistance initially. But eventually they do it, when they understand it’s for the betterment of everybody.

The other challenge is that, along the way, there may be some fine-tuning to be done. That’s because we specifically mentioned in our plan that where targets are concerned, they remain as figures subject to quarterly reviews, to ensure that we are realistic in our approach and to get feedback from the community on whether we’re doing the right thing.

But I can sense that with the way we’re going forward now, with our zone officers reaching out to the community and with the community coming onboard through Facebook, for example, we will be able to get there – to make Kuching the most talked about Asian city by 2017.

○○  
*That’s why we want to get everyone to understand, you are involved now, what is your contribution?*



01 Mayor Abang Abdul Wahap with a cat, the symbol of Kuching city.

02 The Mayor with participants at Kuching's annual regatta.



*Some people are so in their comfort zone that when you do something new, there may be resistance initially.*

● **What is one unique thing about your city that most people will be surprised to know about, and why?**

I'd say the thing about Kuching, to me, is the name itself. Because *kucing* means "cat". That's why Kuching is referred to as Cat City. People even say if you don't take a photograph with the statue of the *kucing* when you are in Kuching, then you have not been to Kuching! That's also why we have the cat museum. How did Kuching get its name? There is no actual documentation on that. I used to joke that when James Brooke [the British colonial "Rajah of Sarawak"] came, he saw many stray cats and when he asked about the place, he was simply told "*kucing*". So he said, "This town is Kuching."



● **URBAN SOLUTIONS** is aimed at urban leaders and experts. If there is one message you can give to aspiring city leaders, what would it be?

Come up with a plan that can work, that everybody will accept. Do not be afraid that it has not been done elsewhere. Try new things. And one must also bear in mind that something can be good for some other places, but can't always be wholly adopted; there must be customisation and flexibility. But you cannot just think of a plan. You've got to have the facts and figures too. But then again, do not be afraid about having all these things, just move ahead.

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*...with our zone officers reaching out to the community and with the community coming onboard through Facebook, for example, we will be able to get there...*



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# Community in Bloom

Singapore



## GIVING CITIZEN GARDENERS ROOM TO GROW

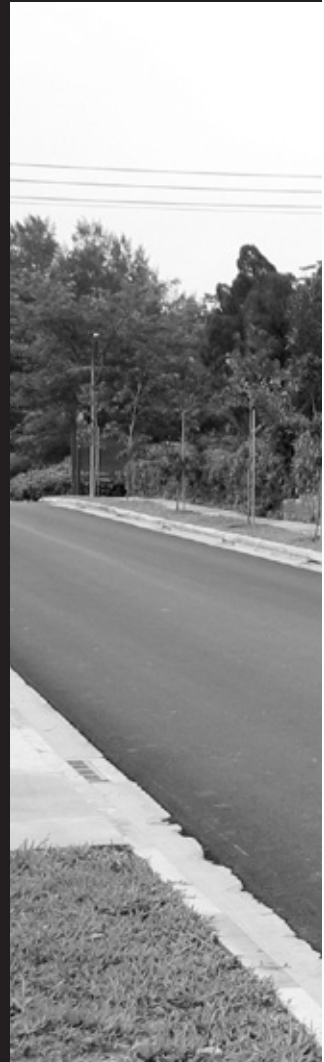
**S**ingapore's Community in Bloom (CIB) programme is giving its residents living in a highly compact city the space to nurture green fingers. The National Parks Board (NParks), which changed its approach from a top-down to a more bottom-up one centred on people, is seeing the fruits of its labour in the form of improved connectedness between the government and the citizens, and a stronger sense of community.

### The Challenge

As a result of Singapore's efforts from the 1960s, in planting trees and developing parks in the city, the city-state is known globally as a Garden City. In 2004, the Garden City Action Committee – set up to oversee policies and activities for greening the island – decided it was critical to include the people in the government's gardening efforts so that Singapore's greenery developments may be sustained. Historically, there had been a lack of citizen involvement in this area as the government had carried out the greening campaign in a mostly top-down manner. The Committee concluded that a strong partnership between the people and the private and public sectors was vital to sustaining Singapore's greenery developments and the creation of a gardening culture. This would not only help bolster the greening of the city, but also give a sense of ownership and belonging to the people.

<sup>01</sup> Empty grass verges in Mayfair Park estate, before their Community in Bloom project.

<sup>01</sup>





Around the same time as the Committee's recommendations, citizens had begun to express interest in getting involved in the greening process, but did not have a platform to do so. Residents of Mayfair Park Estate, for instance, took the initiative to approach NParks for tips on landscaping

their roadside verges. Although the residents had almost no knowledge of gardening, they were passionate about wanting to create their garden landscapes.

In response to these two catalysts, NParks began to create a system to implement communal gardens, a first involving the community.





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## The Solution

Following the Mayfair Park Estate residents' request, NParks officers provided horticultural tips and befriended the residents in the process. The more consultative, less prescriptive approach was a paradigm shift in the method of engagement. This evolved into a community gardening initiative and gave birth to the Community In Bloom (CIB) programme a year later, set up to promote a gardening culture and a greater sense of civic ownership and participation.

NParks then sought to galvanise the support of partners from all walks of life – estate managers, mayors, teachers, grassroots activists, librarians and local gardening groups. Together with those who had already come on board, NParks established collaboration frameworks and guidelines to make it easier for groups to set up community gardens within their neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces. To provide knowledge and information on gardening to the community, talks were held in libraries in collaboration with the National Library Board.

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- 01 A Community In Bloom staff member helping a resident identify problems with her community garden plants.
- 02 Mayfair Park residents collaborating to turn their roadside verges into gardens.
- 03 A Community In Bloom volunteer demonstrating how to reuse plastic bottles as garden ornaments.

For communities wanting to start a CIB garden, NParks proposes a three-step approach: gather like-minded participants in the neighbourhood, school or organisation; approach the respective Residents’ Committee, Neighbourhood Committee or head of the school or organisation to secure support; and contact NParks to help determine a good gardening site and plan the garden layout, “download” basic gardening tips, and link up with other gardening groups.

Beyond offering these basic setting-up steps, NParks officers advised potential gardeners on how to sustain their gardens in the long run. They also guided gardeners to make proper plans for their gardens, such as raising funds, organising

activities to maintain interest and recruiting new gardeners. Officers also advised gardeners to include non-gardeners in the harvests and gardening activities so as to create a more cohesive community.

More importantly, NParks officers engaged the community by listening and connecting – with both gardeners and non-gardeners. Officers were first friends with members of the community, then government officers. They had to be positive despite obstacles and complaints, and be flexible in their dealings with the people.



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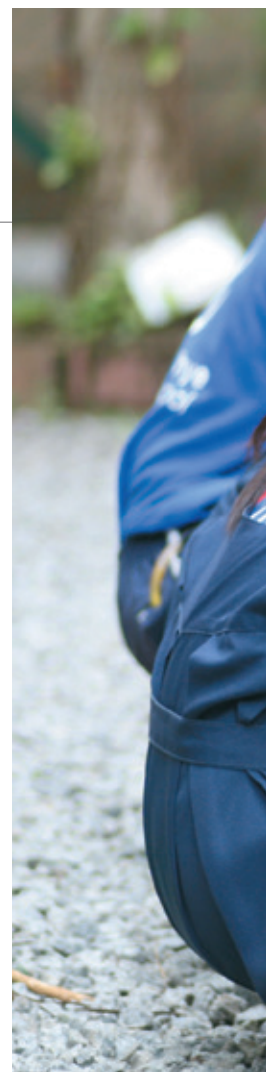
As the number of CIB gardens grew and the programme became more established, NParks worked with community gardeners to revitalise existing CIB gardens by improving residents' gardening skills through training. CIB Awards were also given out to recognise exemplary CIB gardens publicly and to further motivate the gardeners.

When the programme started out, sustaining residents' interest was challenging. However, the creation of the CIB Awards ignited a spirit of friendly competition among residents, resulting in an improved quantity and quality of gardens in the public housing estates. Through showcasing the flourishing gardens, potential gardeners also saw all that was possible in community gardening, discovered how skilful gardening was done, and recognised the benefits that could be reaped in community gardening. This peer-to-peer approach worked better than NParks telling or showing the gardeners what to do.

## The Outcome

Since the launch of CIB in 2005, over 600 community gardens have been started in housing estates, schools, charities, factories and places of worship. Some 20,000 residents across all age, social and ethnic groups, have become gardeners. At a societal level, the gardens have fostered community bonding among the various groups.

The CIB programme has also grown a network of partners supporting a promising gardening culture. Hundreds of them have helped to spread the word as appointed CIB Ambassadors to mentor children from kindergartens and schools in gardening, and to help seed new gardens. Corporations, too, are contributing to the Garden City Fund to help start CIB gardens in orphanages, reformative homes and special needs institutions.







- 01 A Community In Bloom staff member promoting gardening to residents at a roadshow.
- 02 Teck Whye Primary School students gardening after school hours in their award-winning school garden.
- 03 Students of Regent Secondary School at work in their garden.

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The CIB programme has contributed to Singapore's civic society scene by marking a shift from a top-down, hierarchical approach to nurturing the Garden City, to one that is bottom-up and people-centred, allowing people to take responsibility over their own environment, projects and gardens. This worked towards improved connectedness between the government and the citizens. Such civic engagement, which would bring Singapore closer towards nation-building and nationhood, is what NParks had hoped for when the CIB programme was first implemented. Over the next few years, NParks hopes to nurture 1,000 CIB gardening groups with many more thousands of gardeners.

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In 2011, the government announced a plan to transform Singapore from a “Garden City” to a “City in a Garden” – one that is immersed in nature. This will entail a stronger focus on sustainability, conservation of biodiversity and community engagement. This means that the thousands of CIB gardeners, along with their friends, neighbours and co-workers, will help write the next chapter of Singapore’s greening campaign towards the City in a Garden vision.

01 Students and nearby residents working together on Jurong Primary School’s award-winning gardens.



**Dr Leong Chee Chiew** is Singapore’s Commissioner of Parks and Recreation, and concurrently the Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Professional Development and Services Cluster) of the National Parks Board. He chairs the Singapore Landscape Industry Council, the Heritage Trees Panel, the Workforce Safety and Health (Landscape) Sub-Committee, and co-chairs the inter-ministry Technical Committee on Coastal and Marine Environment. Dr Leong is a Board Member of Singapore Garden City Private Limited, and the Garden City Fund. He is also a member of the Centre for Liveable Cities Panel of Experts.

# Rahat

## PARTICIPATORY PLANNING FOR A BEDOUIN CITY



Rahat, Israel

**T**he Rahat project is a radical, award-winning plan for the largest Bedouin city in the world. The city – formerly planned along tribal lines – was reorganised as a unified city in a planning and implementation process that has spanned 13 years so far. A highly participatory process enabled city planners to respond to the needs and aspirations of the residents, resulting in a city where indigenous people of different tribes, in transition from a nomadic lifestyle to permanent settlement, have a sense of ownership.



### The Challenge

Today, some 200,000 Muslim Bedouins live in southern Israel's Negev Desert. As the historically nomadic people began settling, seven permanent settlements were developed in the 1970s. One of them, Rahat, is probably the largest Bedouin city in the world with 55,000 residents. Its population is estimated to double by 2025.

Rahat's original urban planning was a product of its time. The city was divided into 33 neighbourhoods – one for each tribe – making it difficult to develop common services and social integration. This led to a situation





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where some neighbourhoods faced a shortage of land for development, while others had underused pockets of land. In the absence of available land, some residents built illegally in public spaces, which affected the quality of life, while others erected temporary dwellings outside the city boundaries, obstructing future developments. For example, 400 families settled in Rahat South, where we were planning, and arrangements had to be made to resettle them before development could begin.

The city had not seen any major development in decades. The growing strain on Rahat, together with the development of modern

Jewish communities in the area, among other factors, led to increased tensions and a sense of deprivation among the Bedouins. When Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was elected in 2001, he approved the investment of substantial public funds towards Rahat's development. As a resident of the Negev, he understood the distress of residents and also saw the importance of developing Rahat in a way that promoted co-existence among the Jews and Muslims in the area. This was the basis for the development of our urban plans for the city.

01 Temporary dwellings outside Rahat, 2004.

02 Temporary structures in front of older city buildings.



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## The Solution

The Rahat project is a rare case of a large-scale plan, with an ongoing and continuous process, from planning to implementation and construction.

When I first met members of the Bedouin community at Rahat, I was asked, “What did you plan for us?” I answered, “I haven’t started to plan. I propose two alternatives: that I will study the place and the community and sit in my office and plan what I think is suitable for you, or that we work together and make this plan in full collaboration.” A community leader said: “This is the first time we were ever asked how we want our children to live. We can’t let this opportunity go.” He implored the community to collaborate fully with us. This meeting set the direction of how we would work with the Bedouins for the 13 years since then. A participative process helped us to gain their trust and gave them a sense of ownership. To understand

their needs and aspirations, we met public representatives, tribes, families and students. As we couldn’t meet women because of religious reasons, we arranged to meet local students (boys and girls aged 17 to 18) to hear the views of the younger generation, including women. In fact these young people were the prime audience of the Rahat project as they will live in the new neighbourhoods.

Since 1999, a methodic and integrative planning process with the collaboration of dozens of stakeholders, was carried out, from coming up with the structural urban plan for the city’s extension by 12,000 housing units, developed at the scale of 1:10,000, through outline schemes for 7,000 housing units at the scale of 1:1,250, up to detailed construction plans (scale 1:10), the completion of public infrastructure and the construction of houses on the ground.

01 Then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (with microphone) at a cornerstone laying event, 2004.

02 Reviewing plans with members of the Bedouin community.

03 South Rahat plan, with “green fingers” extending into residential areas.





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01 Planning workshops with local residents and professionals.

02 Members of the Bedouin community building their own homes, 2012.





While previous plans were tribal-based, the new plans emphasised the creation of one unified city, that had general public facilities at its core, and “green fingers” that extend outwards to the residential fabric.

As a result of our extensive dialogues, we found significant gaps between the desires of the older and younger generations, the men and the women, and among the different tribes – there was a scale ranging from conservative to modern views. Therefore we had to plan a huge variety of urban patterns and housing models that would allow a suitable solution for each tribe and family.

Hence, for the first time in a Bedouin settlement, new typologies of housing were introduced. Nine different housing models were designed, to meet the different desires, family sizes, housing mix range and economic capabilities, while meeting the average density that was given in the master plan. The models include special single family units with a “Shig” (men’s social club) or a guest unit, single unit lots, semi-detached, row housing, and shared apartment houses of three to four floors, and up to six floors, with or without a commercial front. Residents who purchased the plots were responsible for the construction.

The Rahat plan is sensitive to the unique cultural and social values of the Bedouins. For instance, particularly large residential units were also planned to accommodate large family sizes due to the phenomenon of polygamy in the Bedouin community. We also addressed the need to maintain women’s modesty by creating distance between housing and commercial, religious and educational spaces. High fences were permitted to be built to separate residential apartments from streets and neighbouring lots.

Following a successful process of collaboration with the community and stakeholders, the plans were approved in a record time, in full consensus.



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## The Outcome

The Bedouins began building the first houses in the new neighbourhoods in 2011, and hundreds of families have already moved into their new homes. Over 95% of the plots are already purchased and new neighbourhoods are being planned.

The most important outcome of this project was for us to see, during our recent site visits, thrilled Bedouins who love the place, are proud of their new neighbourhoods and feel ownership of the project.

The project is considered a success story and has been studied widely by government agencies, municipalities and planners. Rahat serves as a model for other Bedouin town plans in Israel with regard to its planning process, the plans created and the implementation. In fact, a new town we recently planned for 20,000 inhabitants was modelled partly after Rahat.





The project received international recognition of the highest level when we won the ISOCARP (International Society of City and Regional Planners) Award for Excellence in 2011. The project, which was relatively unknown in Israel, received a lot of publicity following the prize. I was also personally invited to meet President Shimon Peres where I told him more about the project and its future challenges. He was enthusiastic and suggested ideas and ways to further develop Rahat.

The Rahat project demonstrates how powerful planning can become a tool to promote co-existence of communities while working in mutual trust and collaboration with indigenous people to develop hope and a better life for them.

Global lessons can be learned, as many aspects of the plan, including trust building, people's participation, equal planning standards for minorities and dealing with large and very complex projects, are relevant for many other parts of the world.

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<sup>01</sup> Newly built homes in the planned extension to Rahat, 2011.



**Amos Brandeis** is an architect and urban planner. He is the owner and manager of a planning practice since 1994 ([www.restorationplanning.com](http://www.restorationplanning.com)) and former Chairman of Israel Planners Association (2006–2012). He has been engaged as a consultant, speaker and workshop leader in many countries over five continents. Mr Brandeis has been awarded over 15 prizes in the course of his career and studies including the “2003 International Riverprize” for the Alexander River Restoration Project, a unique collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians, to restore a polluted cross-border river.

# *library@chinatown*

*BY THE PEOPLE,  
FOR THE PEOPLE*

**L**ibrary@chinatown, Singapore's newest library, is the result of collaboration between the people, public and private sectors. Managed and run by volunteers, the library was set up not only to provide book-lending services. But rather, beyond that, it is a bold attempt to reimagine a library's role as a public learning space, strengthening the sense of community in Singapore.

## The Challenge

Singapore's first library was a private enterprise, started in 1823 for the English-literate elite. It began to serve the public only in 1953, when the colonial government accepted a challenge by local philanthropist Lee Kong Chian to match a substantial donation he made, so as to establish a free public library, with collections in the main local languages – English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

This new National Library reached out to users in creative ways under the directorship of Ms Hedwig Anuar from the 1960s. A Mobile Library Service was launched, and the first library van was bought







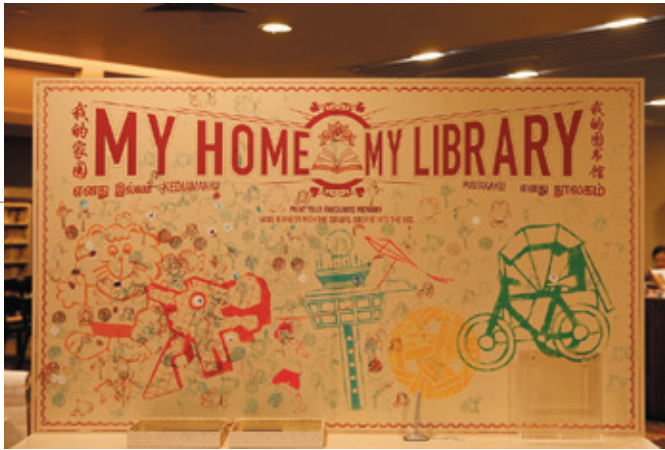
with donations from UNESCO. Another initiative was *Our Library*, a weekly radio programme, and an early example of librarians leveraging “new” media. These efforts were well received by Singapore’s rural and urban communities, in the context of a youthful society with low literacy levels.

Singapore has experienced tremendous social and economic progress since the 1960s, and people began to spend more time elsewhere, like the cinemas and malls. A survey in the early 1990s showed the public felt the library’s collection, services and facilities lacked accessibility and comprehensiveness, and only 12% visited a library in a year. Soon after this, the management of libraries was reorganised under a new National Library Board (NLB), in 1995.

NLB’s journey has involved much experimentation and evolution. At a basic level, we look at the accessibility, quality and range of collections and experiences we provide. Our increasingly diverse society has varied needs, and we have tried to address these, such as through themed libraries. But finite resources mean we could never address every segment, and we must consider how to sustain our efforts, in terms of energy, ideas and funding. More broadly, as people increasingly turn to mediums that are more individualistic, and perhaps less civic, our challenge is to continue to add value as a community learning space. How can libraries mitigate this by strengthening a sense of community in Singapore?



01 Traditionally, library visitors relied on professional librarians to use library services.



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## The Solution

In 1996, NLB launched the first libraries to be located in shopping malls, as part of efforts to get closer to our users. In 1999, we launched *library@orchard*, our first “niche” library aimed at youth and located in a mall on Singapore’s premier shopping street. It successfully transformed the image of libraries, partly thanks to programmes co-developed by its volunteers.

These and other experiments laid the groundwork for *library@chinatown*, our first themed library on Chinese arts and culture, located

in the heart of Singapore’s historic Chinatown district. For the first time, a commercial organisation – property developer CP1 Pte Ltd, owner of Chinatown Point Retail – approached us to develop a library in its mall, Chinatown Point. NLB shared its library development know-how, and CP1 sponsored the rental and development costs, covering the design, construction, IT, equipment and collection.

NLB next sought to engage new partners to sustain this library. Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple agreed to sponsor the library’s operating costs, including the periodic refreshing of the collection, organising programmes, utilities and site maintenance.



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NLB then appointed an advisory panel of 12 experts, comprising leading members of the Chinese education, arts, media and business communities. They helped define our target audience, which they felt should include children. Unlike our other niche libraries, such as *library@orchard* and *library@esplanade*, *library@chinatown* has a children's collection to promote the transmission of Chinese culture to the next generation, and to encourage grandparents to bond with their grandchildren at the library. The panel then helped define the collection's scope and subject areas, and recommend titles. An important idea from the panel was to collect books on how Chinese and other cultures influenced each other. The library carries titles on the Straits Chinese – overseas Chinese who interacted over centuries with Malays to form a hybrid culture. It also carries

Malay and Tamil translations of Chinese literature. Finally, the panel was instrumental in developing the Chinese name of the library – 唐城图书馆.

A critical part of our engagement work involves our volunteers. NLB launched its Friends of the Library volunteer programme in 2001, and this really took off in 2005 when we enlarged their scope of work to better harness volunteers' diverse strengths. Volunteering opportunities now include conducting storytelling and craft programmes for children, running book clubs, managing events, library user education, customer service, IT-based activities and collection maintenance. Unlike previously, when volunteers had a supporting role, *library@chinatown* volunteers now perform major library operations functions that are normally handled by NLB staff and third party vendors.

- 01 Exhibition panel at *library@chinatown*.
- 02 Visitors in the adult collection section.
- 03 Signs encourage self-reliance and civic mindedness.



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In the same vein of engaging users and volunteers, in *library@chinatown's* volunteer-driven model, core library functions are spearheaded by Volunteer Service Leaders (VSLs), and supplemented by Volunteer Service Supporters (VSSes), who are all passionate about the library's theme of Chinese arts and culture. In this two-tier set-up, VSLs are trained to oversee the daily operations and take the lead in ensuring that crucial back-end processes, front-end maintenance of the collection, and support for programmes are accomplished by VSSes. VSLs also recruit new volunteers, manage the volunteer



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roster, and advocate graciousness and good library etiquette amongst users as the library's custodians and ambassadors. As a result, NLB's staff deployment is kept to a minimum and focused on guiding and growing the pool of volunteers, while providing basic administrative oversight and accountability.

In part, this achievement builds on our past efforts to automate our processes and educate users to be more independent, by using our Bookdrops, self-check and enquiry stations, and the "Cybrarian" remote enquiry kiosk, which lets users consult library staff stationed in our customer contact centre.

A key challenge is to sustain volunteer involvement and motivation, which can never be taken for granted and requires dedicated resources to cultivate. NLB shows appreciation to VSLs and VSSes by providing non-cash benefits such as appreciation lunches, or special previews of library exhibitions and programmes.

NLB also partners the community in other ways. For example, we have collaborated with Rediffusion, a local private radio service with a history of programming in Chinese dialects, to secure free access to old and new Rediffusion radio programmes, as well as Rediffusion-led activities at [library@chinatown](mailto:library@chinatown).

- 01 Volunteers are easily identified by their uniforms.
- 02 Visitors browsing electronic and hardcopy newspapers.
- 03 A volunteer re-shelving books, traditionally a basic function of library staff.

## The Outcome

As a small niche library, *library@chinatown* has a healthy start-up collection of 30,000 items, comprising books, magazines and audio visual materials about Chinese arts and culture. In the two months since its opening on 31 January 2013, some 100,000 people had visited *library@chinatown*. In comparison, the average visitorship at *library@esplanade*, a similar set-up, in the same period was about 64,000. A range of programmes has been conducted so far, on subjects like Chinese chess, couplet writing and calligraphy.



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These facts and figures are a result of how we at NLB have traditionally measured our performance – through loans, visitorship, enquiries, collection size, customer satisfaction – all of which are output-driven and dependent on staffing and resources dedicated to delivering library services to the public. But with the inversion of the people-institution power relationship, this raises the question of the relevance of these indicators in measuring our long-term work in promoting learning, building social reliance and cultivating graciousness among Singaporeans.



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**Elaine Ng** is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Library Board (NLB) of Singapore. As CEO of NLB, Mrs Ng oversees the strategic development of the National Library Singapore, the network of 25 public libraries in Singapore and the National Archives of Singapore. She has more than 20 years of experience in the public sector, covering a wide range of portfolios, ranging from policy development to research and corporate governance. Prior to joining the NLB in April 2011, she was the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the National Heritage Board (NHB) where she was responsible for overseeing heritage development. Mrs Ng holds a Master of Arts (English) from the University of Cambridge, UK, and a Master of Arts in Politics from Brandeis University, USA.

At *library@chinatown*, we try to communicate the unique nature of our community-driven library to users. A slight decline in service quality compared with regular libraries was to be expected, but this has been manageable so far. Indeed, we are encouraged that patrons generally accept this and have been more forgiving. With no librarians to intervene on proper usage of the library or to be a point of authority on library collections and services, users of the *library@chinatown* would only have themselves and the shared values of the community to sustain their library experience.

- 01 This niche library attracts volunteers with an interest in Chinese arts and culture.
- 02 Children at a storytelling session.
- 03 Visitors browsing books in the adult collection section.

# Citadel ON THE MOVE

**C**itadel on the Move is a European Commission-funded project that is empowering citizens across Europe to use open data to create “smart”, innovative mobile applications that can be used in the region to improve lives. It is even starting to attract cities outside Europe, that are interested in this platform to share open data.

## The Challenge

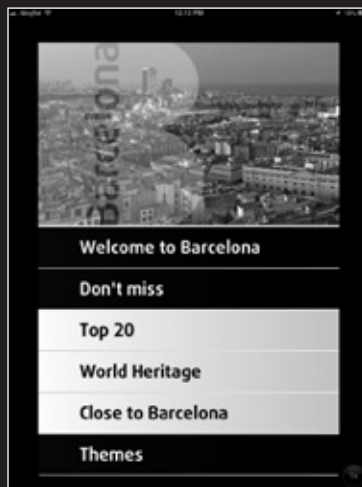
The current era of austerity is placing increasing pressure on governments everywhere to do more with less, particularly at the local level.

The near ubiquity of “smart” devices – such as smartphones and tablets – presents a potential key to address this challenge. These mobile devices provide European citizens on the move with access to data over the Internet and the resulting potential to access any service, anywhere.

The larger cities are often strong enough to have their own mobile applications (also known as apps) built. But smaller cities and villages don’t have the resources to follow. For the citizens, this often means they have to download the same kind of applications for every city they want to visit. And the market for application developers is limited to the cities they can sell them to.



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There is a need for common standards or approaches to make it easier to tap open data from various sources and transform it into a publicly useable format.

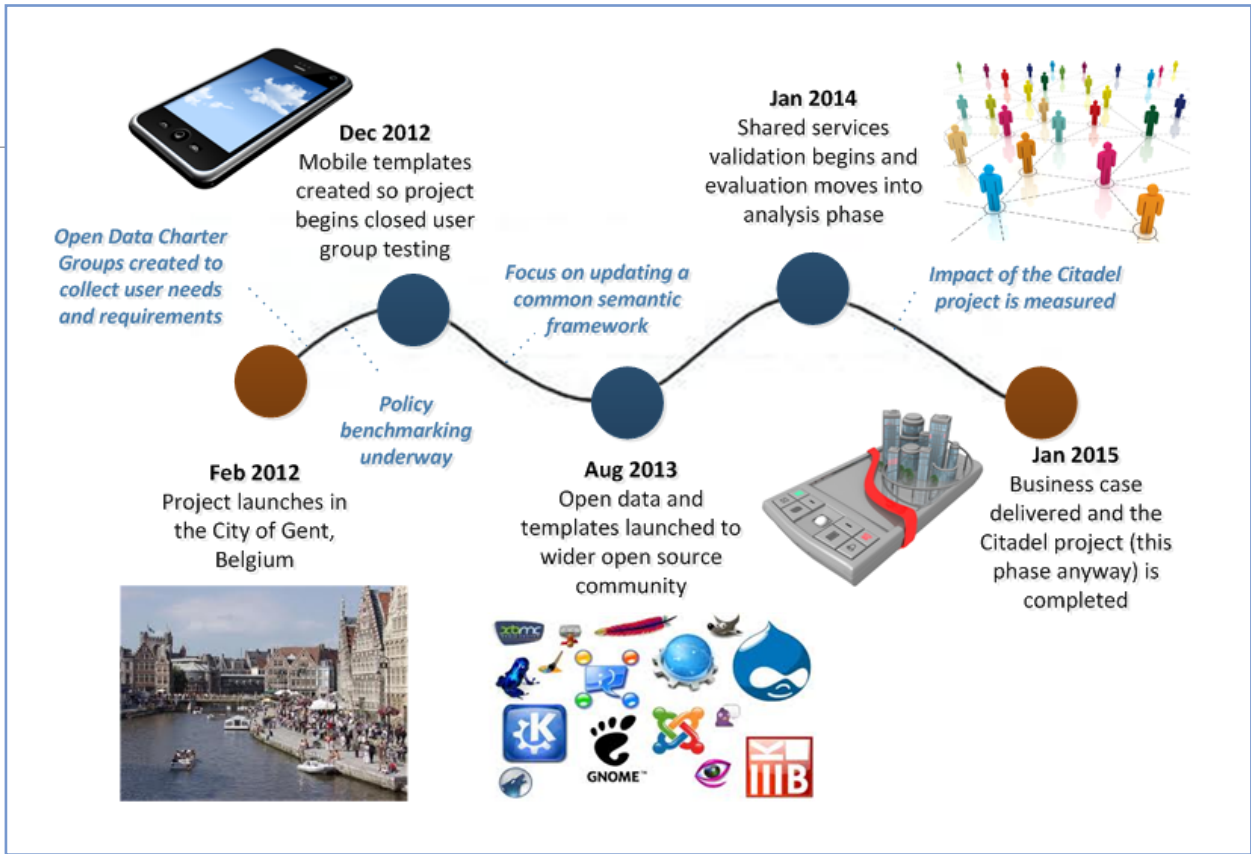
“Open data” is information that is freely available for anyone to use as they wish, for private or commercial purposes, without copyrights, licenses, patents or other restrictions. In the context of government, this refers to data

that does not compromise privacy or security, especially machine-readable datasets like traffic or crime statistics. Open data enables the development of useful new services, like smartphone applications, that can improve our quality of life, sustainability and competitiveness.

Even if local governments have heard about open data, many – particularly at the smaller, local level – do not know how to begin in terms of making the information it holds available to citizens.

Citadel on the Move aims to make it easier for cities, application developers and citizens to make use of the potential of mobile apps based on open data.

- 01 GuidePal, a free tourist guide to Stockholm.
- 02 Official Barcelona city tourism smartphone app.
- 03 This commercial firm has several mobile apps for London.



## The Solution

Citadel on the Move aims to address these challenges by making it possible for local governments across Europe, regardless of their size or resources, to combine access to open data and mobile technologies to create “smart”, innovative citizen-generated services that can be used across Europe.

Citadel on the Move is based on three key principles: citizens as developers; common approaches to standards; and open data for universal participation.

Citadel on the Move seeks to address this challenge by helping local governments to provide citizens with new tools to become developers and create public value

themselves. Citadel will enable mobile applications to be potentially designed by the same people who will use them, rather than devised in far-away research laboratories.

Standards help to ensure interoperability, making sure goods and services can flow effectively between companies or across national borders.

Rather than approach open data standards used by governments in terms of a narrowly predefined way of doing something, it is more useful to think of standards in terms of defining a “path” towards a specific objective – in this case the seamless interoperability between datasets.



Citadel on the Move does not advocate conformity to any single standard for publishing open data because, should standards then change, this would place undue burden on cities. In short, we offer a step-by-step approach to make cities “standards aware” and ensure that they take the most appropriate and cost-effective actions in publishing their open data.

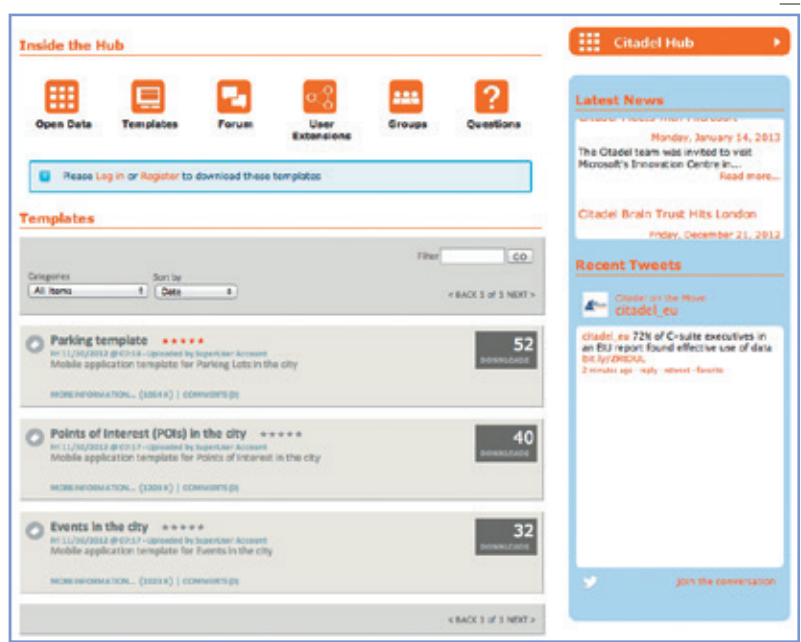
Under this scenario, Citadel understands standards as common approaches to the publication of data sets that enable citizens to use the same methods to access data from different sources, secure in the knowledge that the data will interact with each other. The current online open data ecosystem is a fragmented variety of tools, interfaces and toolkits, mostly designed for use in silos, i.e., with a specific data set or application. We overcome this challenge through creating online tools and services for publishing and using open public data which are not specific to either a given

dataset or a given application. This approach is considered a “Commons”: a collection of re-usable items that “belong” to the community and can be “used” by any section of the community, i.e., facilitating universal participation.

Our Open Data Commons (ODC) approach is intended to benefit both local government data providers and citizen application developers by providing a shared resource centre for linking “citizens-developers” to available open datasets and facilitating the collection and take-up of APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) and SDKs (Software Development Kits) to build mobile application templates and apps.

- 01 Key dates for the Citadel on the Move project.
- 02 Citadel on the Move screenshot.

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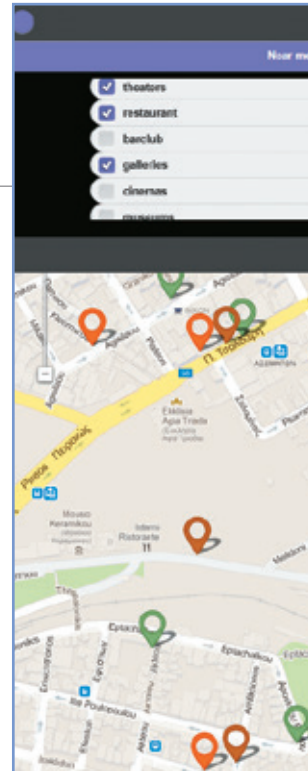


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## The Outcome

In the project a number of “templates” have been built that can be used as building blocks for mobile apps. A template is a working mobile web application that is optimised for mobile devices but also accessible by a desktop web browser. The mobile application templates developed will have to be able to consume data coming from diverse sources and produced in various formats. Citadel has so far created templates for developers to create apps to help users locate empty parking lots, be alerted to ongoing or upcoming events, or to search for “points of interest” (POI) in a city. For instance, a “near me” switch enables a citizen to locate a specific POI using geo-referenced data.

Currently, four participating cities (Manchester in the United Kingdom, Issy-les-Moulineaux

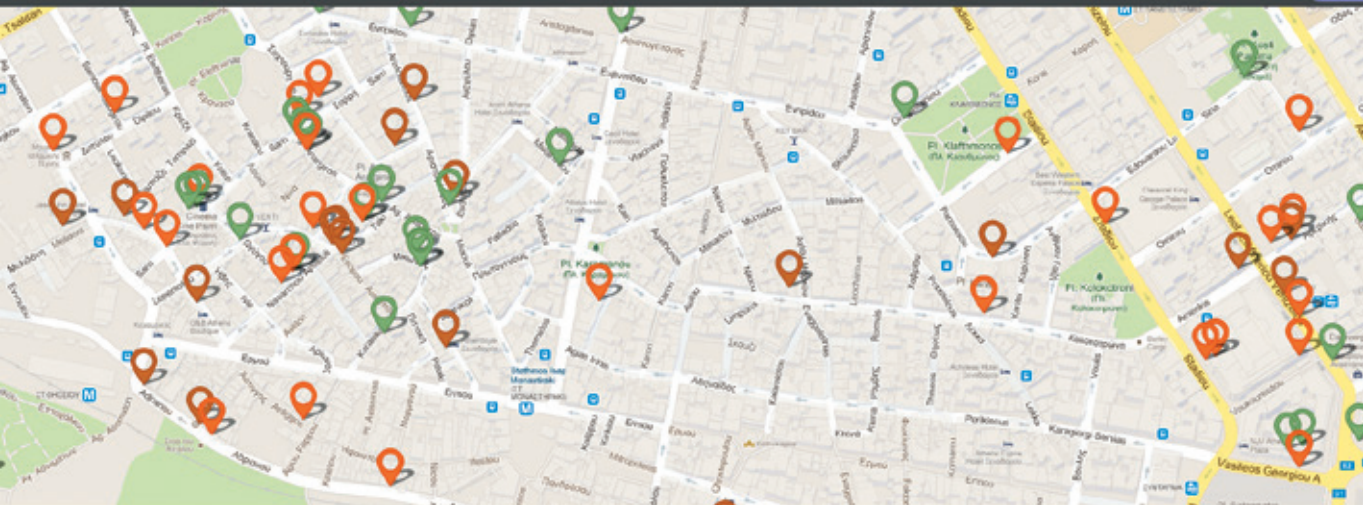


02

in France, Athens in Greece and Ghent in Belgium) are using these templates to build applications that can be used in the other cities. It is now fairly straightforward to make a custom app that taps open data. But each of the pilot cities has specific needs so the different templates serve as building blocks for more complex applications.

For instance, Ghent aims to reduce traffic in the city centre. To solve this problem, a citizen developer in Ghent could combine the events template with the parking template to provide an overview of all available parking lots in the vicinity of an event. This would greatly reduce the time needed to find an appropriate parking spot, which in turn would reduce carbon emissions in the city centre.





The project has also been opened to new cities that can make use of the templates or the applications. A small village that publishes its data with respect to the Citadel standard should be able to use the mobile apps built by a city or developer. Even cities outside Europe could be interested in joining and there has already been some interest from the United States and New Zealand.

Local governments must not remain content to merely unleash innovation in their own backyard. Rather than forcing developers to adapt applications on a city-by-city basis, local governments should adopt shared semantic standards for opening data that enable mobile apps to consume POI data from diverse sources and work anytime, anywhere.

Citadel on the Move seeks to promote a comprehensive new approach to help European cities work together in a smarter and more open manner. In so doing, Citadel seeks nothing less than to advance European integration through digitisation, particularly through the creation of “smart” mobile services that can potentially be shared and used anywhere.



### Geert Mareels

holds master degrees in Administrative Management and in Political Science. He worked in the Belgium Office for Overseas Social Security from 1988 to 1994 before becoming Chief of Staff to three different ministers from 1995 till 2004. Since October 2004, he has led CORVE, the eGovernment service of the Flemish Region in Belgium. Mr Mareels is also a member of the Flemish Privacy Commission. Since 2011 he has been the coordinator of the Citadel on the Move project that involves partners from the UK, France, Greece, Portugal and Flanders.

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- 01 Athens is one of four cities now participating in Citadel on the Move.
  - 02 Screenshot showing Points of Interest on a map of Athens, Greece.

# 100

## *Urban Interventions in 1 Day*

**1** 00en1dia is a movement that aims to initiate change through the participation of hundreds of united citizens, each accomplishing the projects and changes they want to see in their city, all on the same day. This social movement, originating from Bogotá, Colombia, holds workshops for over two months prior to the big day in order to develop each of the ideas the participants have. The team behind it is a group of citizens who met through their common interest of creating a better place to live. Popular projects include pedestrianising streets, creating bicycle lanes, urban gardening, public art, as well as installations and events.

Pasto







Chinú



Bogotá



The inaugural 100en1dia was launched in Bogotá in 2012 and achieved national recognition, which then led to the participation of other Colombian cities such as Pasto and Pamplona. In 2013, Chinú was the first city to continue with the movement just as San Jose, Costa Rica was the first one to do it internationally. The second 100en1dia in Bogota took place on 27<sup>th</sup> April this year. It will be followed by Cali, and then by Copenhagen, Denmark and Cape Town, South Africa.



Cali







Pamplona



# *Engaging communities*

## *LESSONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD*

**C**itizens around the world are increasingly vocal about how their cities should be run or developed. They are also more willing to play an active role in partnering the public and private sectors in development projects. So how are cities tapping this opportunity? The **Centre for Liveable Cities** recently embarked on a research project jointly with Singapore's **Urban Redevelopment Authority** and other agencies under the Ministry of National Development to learn from other cities' experiences in engaging communities. This essay shares some of the findings.

Singapore's limited land resources mean that new developments often present significant trade-offs, sometimes affecting heritage sites, recreational spaces, green sanctuaries and familiar places. This has generated debates about what the right balance between maintaining quality of life and the pursuit of economic growth should be. These trade-offs are not new. People, however, are no longer content to be passive consumers of the outcomes of development decisions. There is growing interest in the rationale behind the decisions made, and mounting pressure to open up opportunities for greater public involvement in the decision-making process.





Hitherto, the approach has been for the government to take decisions in the best interest of the population. This model has worked well for Singapore over the last half century – quickly and effectively transforming Singapore from a squatter-lined colony into a modern metropolis. But rooting a people to their country does mean giving them

greater scope and empowerment to influence the changes in their environment.

There is therefore a need for effective public engagement. Here are some observations of the different approaches to public engagement undertaken in Hong Kong, New York City and Bilbao.

01 Bilbao officials consult citizens in different ways, such as these group discussions.



### **Learning to Engage Early in Hong Kong**

Like Singapore, Hong Kong's key challenge is land scarcity. Particularly since the 1970s, reclamation has proceeded at a rapid pace to support Hong Kong's fast-growing economy. Appalled at the speed of reclamation, the Legislative Council passed the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance in 1997, stating a presumption against reclamation at Victoria Harbour.

Reclamation plans at Victoria Harbour were first mentioned in the 1985 planning strategy. By the mid-1990s, reclamation for the early phases of Central and Wan Chai waterfronts was almost complete. Although objections to the reclamation from the public had



*Although not legislated, public engagement has since become an integral component of policy-making in Hong Kong.*

been received, the government proceeded with the reclamation, while making efforts to reduce the amount of reclamation. Nonetheless, this did not appease the public and a civic group, The Society for the Protection of the Harbour, lodged a judicial review against the government's reclamation plan at Wan Chai (Phase II). In 2004, the Town Planning Board was ordered by the Court to review the reclamation plans at Wan Chai. Invoking the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance, the Court noted that reclamation at Victoria Harbour could be justified only if it served an "overriding public need" that is both "compelling and present" and cannot be accommodated by a "reasonable alternative".

The case marked a watershed in the relationship between state and civil society in Hong Kong. It led to an extensive public engagement approach, with the government soliciting public views much earlier than before, during the planning and policy formulation stages. Although not legislated, public engagement has since become an integral component of policy-making in Hong Kong.

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### Consultation is a Must in New York City

New York City has a legislated time-bound consultative process for development projects. Development proposals that require rezoning are subjected to the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP), which takes seven months. Within this time, the views of the Community Board, the Borough President, the City Planning Council and the Mayor are taken into account.

In addition, as part of the ULURP application, developers are required to submit an Environmental Impact Assessment for their proposal. Drawing up this Assessment during this pre-ULURP phase can at times be tedious and protracted, particularly if the proposed development is challenged by the community and interest groups. As such, developers can be tempted to circumvent the ULURP process altogether.

One such example is the Atlantic Yards development, a US\$4.9 billion project to build Barclays Center Basketball Arena and 16 residential and office buildings in the gentrifying Park Slope area. Citing eminent domain (government's power to take over private property for public use) and the use of state land, the Mayor's Office signed an agreement for the project to proceed under a state review process, bypassing ULURP. Nonetheless, the concerns of the residents and the stakeholders still had to be addressed through various means, such as, community benefit agreements.

So although a statutory process like ULURP could be rigid and dominated by powerful lobbies that may not be representative of general sentiments, it is a transparent system where all parties concerned respect the final decisions made, even if it does not satisfy everyone. ULURP is also strictly time-bound, thus ensuring a consultative process that is finite.

<sup>01</sup> Hong Kong's Society for the Protection of the Harbour successfully lodged a judicial review against government reclamation plans.

<sup>02</sup> New York City pedestrianised Broadway by first securing public buy-in for a larger "Sustainable Streets" initiative.



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### Hearing From All in Bilbao

The Spanish city of Bilbao does not have a legislated system of public engagement, but is firmly committed to civic participation as part of good governance. Bilbao’s engagement approach is to be “as mainstream as possible” and not be limited to minority groups with the loudest voices. Bilbao tries to do this by getting its officials to “walk the street” to identify first-hand the issues of concern to the public, as well as be savvy with the mass media and online social networks as means of communication. Surveys on both qualitative and quantitative issues are also carried out at least

once a year to identify what people want, what they are unhappy with, as well as the service gaps and areas for improvement. Survey data then becomes a good resource to distil the needs and views of the “silent majority”, which could be used to counter the views of interest groups, if necessary.

In addition, transparency is valued highly as a determinant of good governance and Bilbao places great emphasis on facilitating public access to information that affects the town, local districts and one’s immediate neighbourhood. The aim is to establish a channel of communication to promote discussions based on accurate facts, thus ensuring useful, rather than misinformed, public debates.

01 The Mayor of Bilbao (second from right) meets with citizens to share information and better understand their views.

02 The success of New York’s High Line was due to a vibrant civic culture and the individuals and groups that advocated it effectively.







*Survey data then becomes a good resource to distil the needs and views of the “silent majority”, which could be used to counter the views of interest groups, if necessary.*

### **Tapping Platforms and Partners**

Institutions can provide useful platforms for constructive discussions between the public, private and people sectors. The Association for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao (BM-30), for instance, is an apolitical think tank that brings together members of the government, professional, business and people sectors to network, exchange views and debate on issues of the day. Similarly, the Kaleidos. red Foundation (Bilbao) is a network that lends its expertise to local districts on governance matters relating to social capital development, open governance, relational administration and citizen participation.

Independent parties, such as academics and accredited professional bodies, can help build legitimacy in development proposals. Hong Kong uses them widely, commissioning studies by third parties who are seen as more “neutral”, thereby shoring up credibility for proposals. Task groups and committees are also often specifically set up to build consensus, brainstorm solutions and iron out implementation details for projects. The Harbourfront Commission is one such example, and is the go-to agency for all development proposals related to Victoria Harbour. It is chaired by an independent, respected member of the community, and vice-chaired by a high-ranking government official (the Secretary of Development) to give impetus to pushing advocated ideas through.

A vibrant civil society can play a big role in galvanising projects for the greater good of the community. The Friends of the High Line (FHL), an interest group with influential members from New York society, played a leading role in pushing the High Line project, which sought to conserve a disused railway track and turn it into a park. The group lobbied for political support and rallied the wider public through events such as an ideas competition and an exhibition. The FHL also managed to garner support from the business community as well as philanthropic individuals and organisations to provide the funding essential for the High Line’s success.

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*The Friends of the High Line (FHL), an interest group with influential members from New York society, played a leading role in pushing the High Line project...*

### **Frame the Engagement**

The way in which public engagement is pitched oftentimes influences the success of the engagement process. For instance, the High Line project was framed as economic revitalisation rather than conservation, with the abandoned elevated rail-line cast as the centrepiece for new commercial and residential developments along the western edge of Chelsea.

Similarly, the proposal to pedestrianise Broadway was publicised as being part of New York City’s “Sustainable Streets” initiative. A key tenet of the “Sustainable Streets” initiative was that streets were public spaces not just for cars but also bicyclists and pedestrians. Having given their buy-in on this bigger picture of developing “sustainable streets”, people found it harder to disagree

with the specific proposal to pedestrianise Broadway. First announced as a pilot in February 2009, the pedestrianised Broadway became a permanent feature of the city’s landscape a year later. A mid-term evaluation report suggested positive implications for public health, safety (meaning more “eyes” on the street), retail sales (as pedestrian density translates to higher expenditures per capita) and general urban liveability.

These international examples provide the following useful lessons for Singapore and other cities that are keen to enhance their public engagement processes.

01 Workshops like this are one of the ways Bilbao engages its people.



### **Lesson 1: Lead by Example**

Public engagement does not displace the need for leadership. In fact, leaders are looked towards to set the tenor, direction and boundaries of public engagement for the rest of the governance apparatus.

Fundamentally, government has to come across as sincere, open-minded and willing to modify plans when there are good reasons to do so. This requires a change in mindset starting from the highest level, on the definition of effectiveness to one that is more people-centred rather than time-centred, with concomitant financial and human resources dedicated to the implementation of public engagement processes.

### **Lesson 2: Cultivate Good Relations**

The special interest and technical familiarity of civil society groups and professional organisations position them as credible parties in mediating and shaping public opinion in the public engagement process. The history of public engagement in these three cities surveyed, however, indicates that these groups need time and opportunities to develop and mature. A good understanding of the diverse stakeholder groups concerned in a particular development project can generate win-win outcomes that connect the parties involved emotively – not just to meet rational goals. It is thus important to develop positive relations with various stakeholder groups, NGOs and the media on a regular basis.



*...government has to come across as sincere, open-minded and willing to modify plans when there are good reasons to do so. This requires a change in mindset starting from the highest level, on the definition of effectiveness to one that is more people-centred rather than time-centred...*



*The history of public engagement in these three cities surveyed, however, indicates that these (civil society) groups need time and opportunities to develop and mature.*

### **Lesson 3: Clarify Engagement Goals and Mechanics**

It is important to be clear about the reasons for engaging the community, as well as the extent to which the population at large needs to be involved, and the key stakeholders involved. Building legitimacy and garnering buy-in for policy decisions is not so much about more engagement, but better engagement.

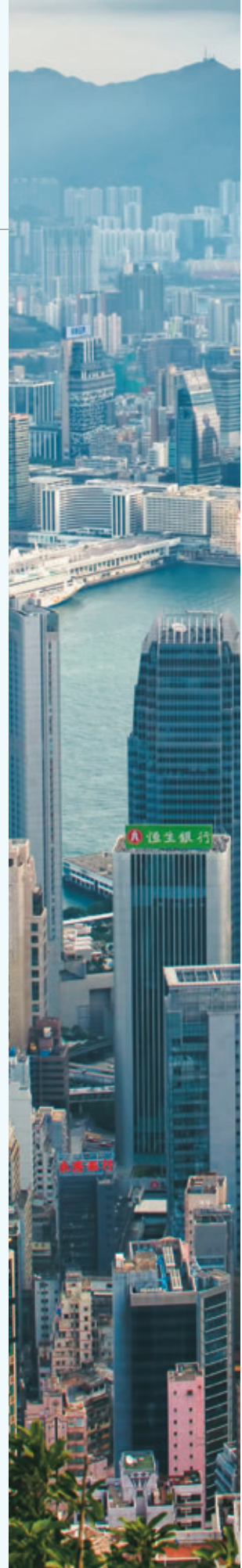
A firm grasp of the mechanics (the how-to's) of engagement is also crucial in determining a successful engagement process. This includes the way the engagement is framed and pitched, and the strategic use of data and survey material that could highlight “silent” majority views while countering the more vocal minority voices, thereby enabling a more balanced understanding of the issues at play.

To facilitate constructive public debate, transparency of information should be commended as a cornerstone of good governance. In an era of social media where opinions abound, ready access to information allows engagement to proceed based on available facts.

### **Lesson 4: Recognise Local Contexts and Capabilities**

The effectiveness of any public engagement approach is highly dependent on the political and cultural milieus of the country, and the readiness and maturity of their civil society to propose ideas and responsibly see them through. The success of the High Line development in New York, for instance, is very much due to vibrant civic culture and the passion and vision of individuals who had the tenacity and connections to push the project through.

<sup>01</sup> Hong Kong's Harbourfront Commission is chaired by an independent, respected member of the community, and vice-chaired by a high-ranking official to help push ideas through.







## Conclusion

Public engagement has become a key ingredient for effective governance. Yet, its success is very much dependent on the crafting of innovative ideas that bring together the diverse opinions of the many interest groups with the strategic needs of society, and ultimately, the resolve to translate these ideas into realisable solutions – implemented in a timeframe that still upholds the credibility of the government to deliver the goods.



**Limin Hee** is a Deputy Director at the Centre for Liveable Cities, where she oversees research. Prior to joining the Centre, she taught at the Department of Architecture at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Her research is focused on sustainability in architecture and future cities. Limin has published widely, including her book, *Future Asian Space* (NUS Press, 2012). She obtained her Doctor of Design from Harvard University in 2005, and her professional degree in architecture from NUS.

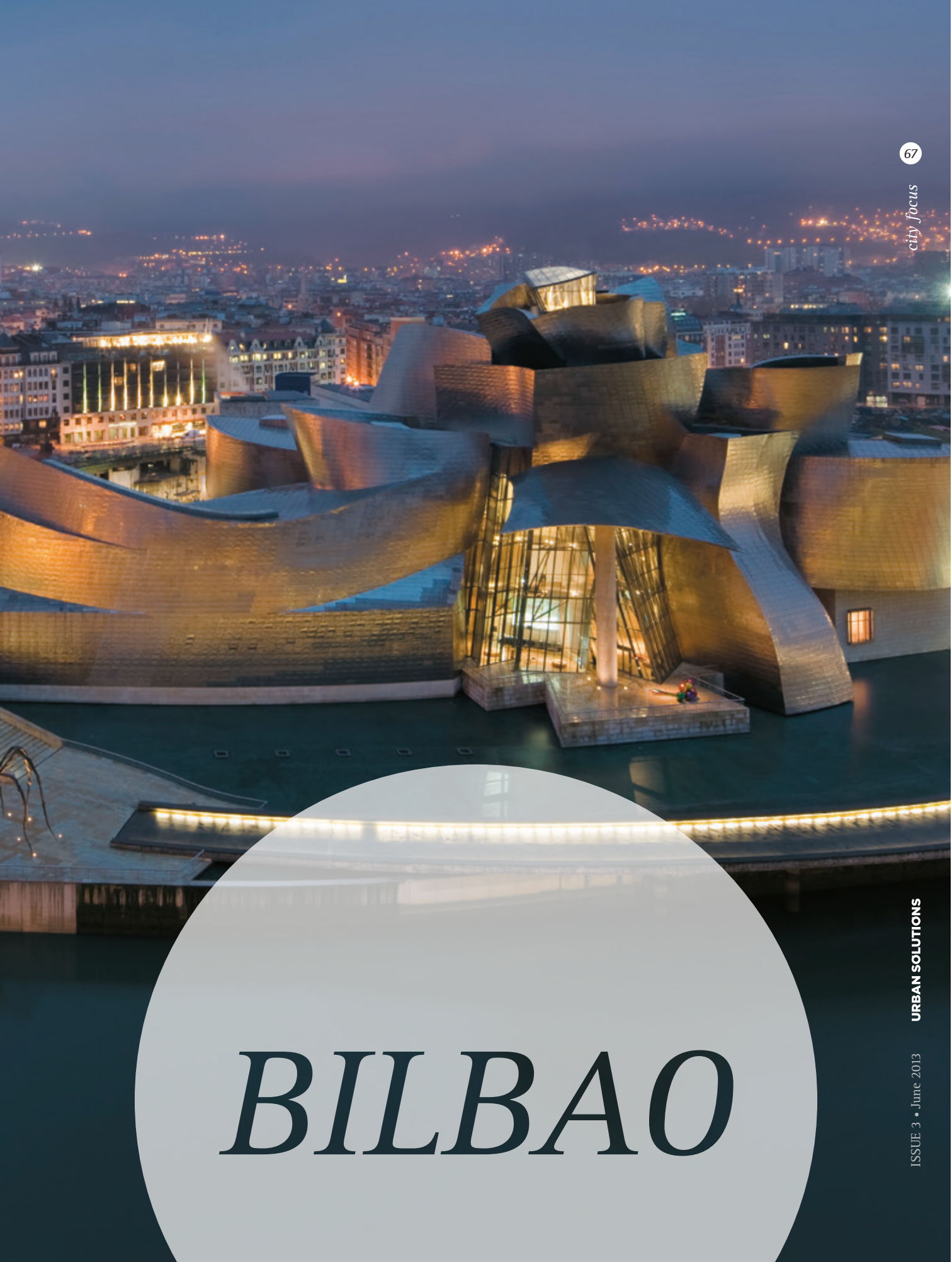


An urban planner by training, **Louisa-May Khoo** worked with the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore and was then seconded to the Ministry of National Development as Assistant Director, overseeing residential and industrial land-use policies, Singapore's Concept Plan (2001) and Master Plan (2003). She is currently a Research Associate (Adjunct) with the Centre for Liveable Cities, where she co-authored *Housing: Turning Squatters into Stakeholders*, part of the Centre's SINGAPORE URBAN SYSTEMS STUDIES BOOKLET SERIES.



The Guggenheim Museum on the banks of the Nervión River is at the heart of Bilbao's regeneration.





# *BILBAO*



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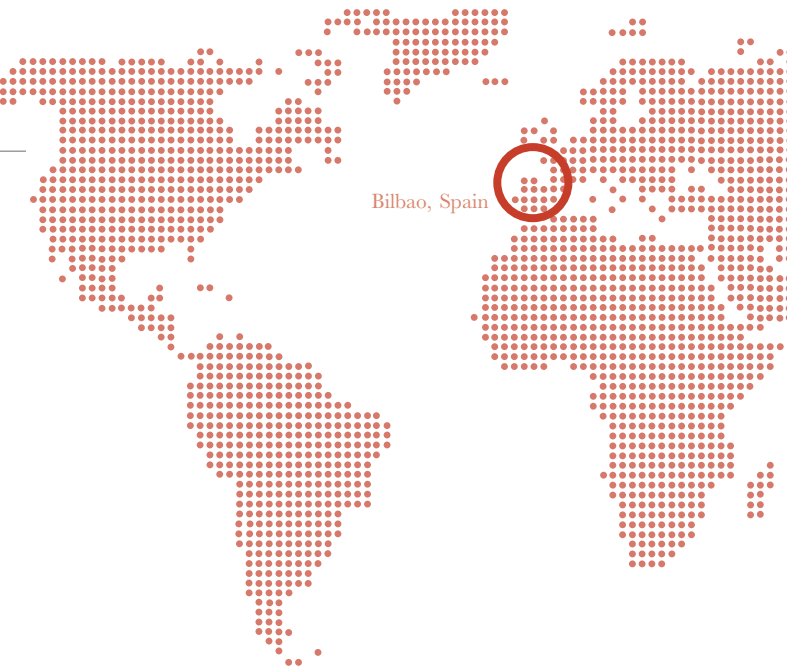


01 Ships in Bilbao's port, its gateway to the world.

02 Historically, steel and shipbuilding industries made the city wealthy.

03 Bilbao struggled with declining heavy industries in the 1980s.





Bilbao, Spain



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**B**ilbao lies in the north of Spain. It is the capital city of Vizcaya, one of the three provinces that make up the autonomous community of the Basque Country. The Nervión River, which flows through Bilbao, empties into the Bay of Biscay where it is known as the Estuary of Bilbao.

In this issue of **URBAN SOLUTIONS**, Bilbao Mayor **Iñaki Azkuna** reflects on the importance of the Nervión River and its estuary in the city's reinvention. Mayor Azkuna has been credited with the city's transformation from a declining industrial city to an international arts hub since he took office in 1999.

Bilbao is a city that tells its own story if you just walk along the estuary, which is a clear reflection of our past and future. The estuary is the big umbilical cord that links Bilbao with the rest of the world. The iron we exported and the ships left from there; it was the door to wealth and progress. But the estuary was also the sewer of the city and the cause of many floods that devastated Bilbao in the last centuries.

In August this year, it will be 30 years since the last floods, which were probably the most devastating of all times. They occurred at a time when Bilbao was in the midst of an economic and social crisis: the steel and shipbuilding industries that had turned Bilbao into the spearhead of Spanish industry during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were collapsing. The floods of 1983 made us start from the very beginning as both city and society.

Once a model industrial city forged by its iron, steel, machine engineering and shipbuilding industries, Bilbao had to start a new chapter in its history; through a new city approach that has become an international role model of good city practices.





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### **Starting All Over Again**

The first thing we did was to start the environmental recovery of the estuary. For the last 25 years, around 600 million euros have been invested in water treatment plants and collectors for the treatment of the wastewater and sewage of the whole metropolitan area, allowing the estuary to have some aquatic life brought back to it.

This was followed by other projects centred along the river and the estuary, such as the construction of the metro (designed by Lord Norman Foster) that ran along the Nervión River, the commissioning of the Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum, and later on, the conversion of the huge industrial “cemetery” of Abandoibarra into a beautiful promenade along the river banks by the architect Cesar Pelli. It is now lined with vegetation, art and architectural milestones such as the Euskalduna Palace and the Hotel Sheraton designed by Ricardo Legorreta. The latter was undertaken in collaboration with the Bilbao Ria 2000 Company,







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a non-profit entity set up in 1992 by the Basque and Spanish administrations to lead the urban transformation of Bilbao.

The aim was to turn a post-industrial city into a new urban place adapted to human needs while being economically and environmentally sustainable. We wanted to build a strong tertiary sector and new infrastructure and equipment that would better the quality of life of citizens and visitors.

- 01 Waterways were cleaned to improve quality of life and biodiversity.
- 02 Bilbao has focussed on the needs of its people, of all ages.
- 03 Major architectural projects were central to the city's regeneration.









## The Spirit of Bilbao

The reconstruction of Bilbao was massive – as was the number of international prizes that the City obtained, thanks to the urban transformation process. Awards like the LEE KUAN YEW WORLD CITY PRIZE from Singapore are universal acknowledgement of the huge collective effort made by the people of Bilbao in order for it to rise from its industrial ashes.

I am among those who think that the main characters of the transformation are the population of Bilbao, apart from the vision and leadership coordinated among all the institutions: City Council and Regional Government, Ministry of Development, Renfe railway company, Port of Bilbao, etc.

It is also true that in Bilbao we have the advantage of our innovative tradition, the same that made us create the first set of commercial rules for traders and merchants, or

import from England that curious sport called football, that has been and will be a cause of happiness and sadness.

Being entrepreneurial and innovative by nature, Bilbao is today a city full of life and potential. We have good gastronomy, culture and leisure, and adequate infrastructures; and above all, we have a society open to the world that supports tolerance, plurality and solidarity.

Fortunately last year the City Council was able to pay off its long-term debt that amounted to 200 million euros in 1999.

There is no miraculous formula for this. The recipe is not to spend beyond our means but to take advantage of good times to pay old debts, prioritise the expenditure, and avoid wasting money in unnecessary and superfluous expenses. In other words, expend money taking into account the income.

This is the formula that we have applied in the Council during all these years, the same that helped us win the 2011 European Public Sector Award for Economic Stringency and Strategic Budgets, given by The European Institute of the Public Sector.



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01 Bilbao's residents have a strong entrepreneurial tradition.

02 Bilbao now enjoys quality dining and leisure options.

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### Looking Into the Future

At this point, our priority is to create wealth and work, so everyone can have a decent and respectable life. In order to do so, the City Council is promoting real and rigorous measures that will help us boost the economy and start writing a new chapter in the history of our society.



This new chapter of our history will be mostly about the new knowledge district of Zorrotzaurre, the peninsula of the Nervión River. It will be linked to the new economic model, based on talent, creativity, knowledge and new technologies, in a region with a strong industrial tradition.

Born in 1943, **Iñaki Azkuna** studied Medicine at university, specialising in Radiology and Cardiology. He started his political career in 1982 as the Director of the Basque Government's Hospitals, and was elected the Mayor of Bilbao in 1999. Under his leadership, Bilbao underwent considerable regeneration. It received the LEE KUAN YEW WORLD CITY PRIZE in 2010, and was featured as an example of good urban practices at the Shanghai World Expo. The French government has made Iñaki Azkuna a Knight of the Legion of Honour, and he was also named the best City Mayor 2012 by the World City Mayor Foundation.

In this change, it is necessary to claim once more the values that have always guided us, such as honesty, solidarity, compromise and the capacity to gather the will of the people. In fact, those values are the ones that give us the strength to fight and hope for a better future.

And, as always, we are looking to the estuary, an eternal reflection of our past and our future.

- 01 Bilbao's key qualities include tolerance, solidarity and plurality.
- 02 The city's spirit is seen in its entrepreneurial, innovative and football-loving citizens.
- 03 Bilbao's past and future are linked by its ancient waterway and enduring values.



**C**arrie Lam argues that successful civic engagement can build trust in government and remove citizens' sense of remoteness from policy formulation – factors that are often the causes of social tension. For this to happen, governments must be highly committed to engage, and have the patience and stamina to allow engagement processes to play out. Mrs Lam is the Chief Secretary for Administration in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government. She joined the Administrative Service in 1980 and served in various positions, including Director of Social Welfare, Permanent Secretary for Planning and Lands and Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs, before resigning from the civil service in July 2007 to take up a political appointment as the Secretary for Development.



# *The Case for PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT*

*by Carrie Lam*

Given the growing emphasis on transparency and accountability, the HKSAR Government in recent years has been under pressure to adopt a new approach to policy-making – one which attaches greater importance to citizen involvement. Consulting the public only when government solutions are formulated is no longer viable or adequate.

Apart from making the government accountable to the people, there is a much stronger case for civic engagement because of the high degree of autonomy guaranteed under the One Country, Two Systems principle since Hong Kong's reunification with the Mainland of China. We have witnessed the emergence of many more civic organisations focusing on different aspects of life and operating on a wide spectrum of social strengths, with some being more action-oriented while others are research-based. Rapid

communication through a more pervasive media also meant that if the government did not proactively engage, we would soon end up losing the agenda. The lack of effective intermediaries between government and citizens, such as political parties, has also given rise to a greater need for the government to take the lead in engaging with the people. Several high-profile and successful cases of people power at work are indeed timely reminders of the case for civic engagement.

Given Hong Kong's tight land situation (some 60% of our 1,100 square kilometres of land are preserved as country parks, wetlands, etc. for public enjoyment), development and conservation are sensitive issues that could easily cause a major public row if not

handled properly. In recent years, there were widespread social movements relating to harbour reclamation, heritage conservation and major infrastructure. How to strike the needed balance for progressive development – one which meets Hong Kong’s economic, housing and social needs while respecting sustainability and conservation – was a major challenge in my five-year tenure as Secretary for Development in the Third Term of the HKSAR Government. As the Chief Secretary for Administration in the Fourth Term of the HKSAR Government overseeing a much wider policy portfolio, such tasks are even more daunting.

The challenge of civic engagement lies in finding new ways of encouraging citizens to be meaningfully involved in public policy-making, and play a role in the institutions and processes through which decisions affecting their lives are made.

Traditionally, we consulted people through the Legislative Council, the District Councils, Area Committees, relevant government advisory bodies and professional groups. But these institutions may not provide

us with a comprehensive coverage of stakeholders, let alone the public at large. We have thus moved on to creating task-based interactive groups to help identify the areas for change and the options to choose from and, ultimately, build consensus.

For example, in the early 2000s, a civic organisation successfully initiated a judicial challenge against the HKSAR Government on its harbour reclamation works, which had strained relations between the government and the public considerably. This prompted a group of academics and professionals to form a group to facilitate dialogue between the parties. This eventually led to the formation of the Harbourfront Enhancement Committee to provide a forum for rational discussion and to build partnership. This was succeeded by a high-level Harbourfront Commission with the Secretary for Development as vice-chairman. After several years of consensus building, the Commission recommended the establishment of a statutory Harbourfront



*Consulting the public only when government solutions are formulated is no longer viable or adequate.*





*Accommodation of advocacy-based civic groups helps build trust and removes that sense of remoteness from policy formulation – both of which are often the cause of social tension.*

Authority in Hong Kong to advise the HKSAR Government on the holistic and strategic development of the Victoria harbourfront and its associated water-land interface, play an advocacy role and promote Harbour Planning Principles and Guidelines. The proposed Authority would also implement projects in a holistic manner – from planning, design, development, to operation and management. This was readily welcomed by the government.

It is worth noting that at every stage of the Commission's existence, leaders of civic organisations, including the one which took the government to court, were represented. Accommodation of advocacy-based civic groups helps build trust and removes that sense of remoteness from policy formulation – both of which are often the causes of social tension.

Urban regeneration was another concern. In a city like Hong Kong where old buildings (and we have 4,000 buildings over 50 years of age, many of which are not adequately maintained) have to give way to new ones to improve living conditions and optimise land use potential, compensation, rehousing and clearance are ready candidates for social tension. In response to changing community sentiments towards urban renewal, a two-year,

three-stage (namely, envisioning, public engagement and consensus building) public engagement process was initiated in mid-2008, leading to a new urban renewal strategy promulgated in February 2011, entitled "People First – a district-based and public participatory approach to urban renewal". Innovative compensation options like "flat for flat" and "demand-led" redevelopment initiated by the owners of old buildings were embedded in the new strategy, taking account of views expressed during the civic engagement.

The two exercises above share some common success factors. They include a high level of commitment from the government to engage; an open mind in stressing that there are no "no-go" areas; daring to appoint independent critics to task-based committees; allowing sufficient time to go through the engagement with little rush; and finally, patience and stamina.

Looking ahead, civic engagement is by itself not a panacea for effective governance. The real test lies in implementation. Governments have to continuously look for ways and means to strengthen their ability to execute the outcome of civic engagement, and to create opportunities for citizen participation in some of those policy solutions.

# The Limits to *PUBLIC* *ENGAGEMENT*

by Susan S. Fainstein

**S**usan S. Fainstein argues that civic participation – while possessing the potential to make policy-making more responsive to citizens’ needs – can undermine inclusivity. Professor Fainstein, who has taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) as well as at Columbia and Rutgers universities, focuses on planning theory, urban redevelopment and comparative public policy in her research. In her latest book, *The Just City*, she argues that urban policy should be valued according to its contribution to justice rather than competitiveness. She is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Harvard GSD and a visiting professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

The call for civic engagement in policy-making, or citizen participation, is a political demand that evokes powerful feelings. Its intent is to create a form of strong democracy that empowers citizens to shape policy directly rather than through the actions of their elected representatives. According to its supporters, citizen participation in the decision-making process produces more informed decisions and confers legitimacy on the final outcome. My purpose is not to dispute these claims – citizen participation in many contexts is indeed desirable. At the same time its proponents often exaggerate its benefits, assuming that the results of participation will be fairer than if policy remains the realm of bureaucrats and politicians. Unfortunately, even though participation potentially makes policy-making more responsive



to the needs of citizens, it has weaknesses that can undermine its inclusivity and effectiveness.

At the neighbourhood level “NIMBY” – i.e., not in my backyard – reactions of residents to proposed changes in their area comprise the most commonly cited drawback of allowing citizens to influence policy decisions. In cases where new projects will almost certainly not produce benefits for a neighbourhood, even if they are justifiable from a city-wide perspective, responses are virtually always antagonistic. By now the examples of neighbourhood opposition to locally unwanted land uses like group homes, halfway houses, garbage incinerators, etc., are legendary. Even day-care centres and housing for the elderly can provoke negative responses. In Singapore, housing for foreign workers causes sharp protests even while citizens depend on these workers for a vast range of services. The hope for citizen participation is that deliberation will lead to compromise and inclusion but sadly, stalemate is the more usual result.





*In Singapore, housing for foreign workers causes sharp protests even while citizens depend on these workers for a vast range of services.*

Neighbourhood participation offers the hope of overcoming some of the disabilities of centralised government. Many have argued that centralised, professionalised urban bureaucracies take on a life of their own, becoming increasingly insulated from their environment. The public feels dissatisfaction with the rigidities of government run by "experts" who owe their allegiances to functionally demarcated bureaucracies rather than geographically defined units. Calls for the democratisation of bureaucratic decision-making arise in response to two perceptions: that "street-level bureaucrats" – first defined by political scientist Michael Lipsky in 1969 as "men and women, who in their face-to-face encounters with citizens 'represent' government to the people" – including planners and service providers, make decisions affecting urban residents without regard to their knowledge, opinions and interests; and that public agency staff come out of different social backgrounds from those affected by their decisions.

Experts, on the other hand, fear that citizen activists lack the necessary knowledge for wise decision-making, are parochial in their interests, and are likely to exclude minority groups and the poor. Typically citizen participants are well educated and middle-class, not necessarily so different from the experts they are challenging – in fact, demands for participation often emanate from a perception by members of the public that they have as much claim to knowledge as the supposed experts. Neither group, however, may be very representative of poor and minority groups. For example, middle-class participants may be passionate about historic preservation but concern themselves little with the housing problems of the poor, and, as mentioned above, care even less about shelter and recreation for foreign workers.

Discussions among political theorists that focus on "deliberative democracy" – which involves decision-making based on discussion that is undistorted by the unequal power relations of various groups – fail to indicate how differences of wealth and power can be overcome.



The tension between democracy and justice raises difficult problems for these theorists, since after deliberation people may still make choices that are harmful to themselves or to minorities. There is an assumption that processes with unjust consequences must not have been genuinely open or participants were inadequately informed. Just procedures are expected to produce just results; if unjust results have been produced, then the process must have been subjected to distortion. This presents a problem of circularity or infinite regress. Analytically, separation of the terms democracy and equity (or justice) allows process and outcome to be used as separate evaluative standards.


Civic engagement raises problems of which citizens to involve. Even when they are not biased towards middle-class interests, neighbourhood institutions do not reliably produce effective representation. Self-appointed leaders may alienate other potential contributors and lack the legitimacy conferred by elections. Neighbourhoods are limited in their human resources. Some neighbourhoods simply lack the leadership cadre and institutions necessary to articulate the interests of residents.

The small size of the neighbourhood presents planners and community groups with economic, political, and logistical difficulties. First, neighbourhoods are not economic units in their own right. The

creation of many small programmes tailored to individual neighbourhood needs necessarily sacrifices the economies of scale characteristic of centrally administered programmes. Of even greater consequence, growth and investment in neighbourhoods is largely a function of forces beyond the control of any given neighbourhood and may depend on city-wide or national factors. While neighbourhoods may be appropriate units for fostering the face-to-face, continuous relations that are a prerequisite of strong democracy, they are insufficiently large to address metropolitan issues; developing inclusive mechanisms for metropolitan-wide participation, however, is extremely difficult. Although electronic communication now makes it possible to engage a broad public, without energetic effort to bring non-citizens and minority groups into the discussion, participation is likely to involve only a limited segment of the population.

Despite these liabilities, citizen participation offers the potential to overcome the disabilities of centralised planning and administration, as well as a forum in which disagreements can be negotiated. These benefits are quite real and of value to ordinary citizens. It is important, however, for practitioners to develop strategies which build on these strengths while addressing neighbourhood planning's core weaknesses – parochialism, representation and scale.

○○  
*...middle-class participants may be passionate about historic preservation but concern themselves little with the housing problems of the poor...*



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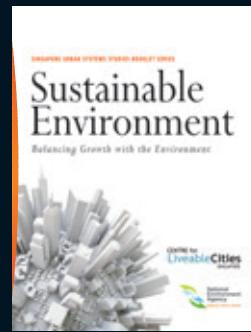
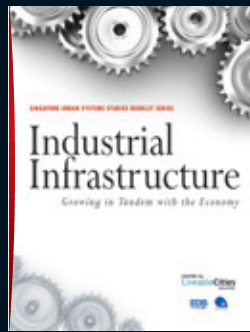
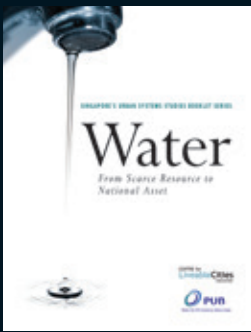
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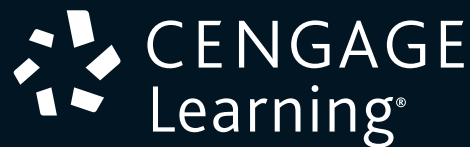
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