

Reinterpreting the Meaning of the 'Singapore Model': State Capitalism and Urban Planning

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Abstract

For city planners and policymakers in many parts of the world, Singapore has come to embody a model of efficient and growth-oriented urban development. Yet there has been very little research that goes beyond descriptive assessments of urban design and urban policy and understands the political economy that has produced the current system of planning in Singapore. This article explores the role of land acquisition and land management in Singapore's urban development. It argues that Singapore is best understood as a model of urban planning under state capitalism. Drawing largely on academic studies, reports of Singapore government agencies and government-linked corporations, and interviews the article analyzes the mechanisms through which the Singaporean state has used direct involvement in the commercial real-estate market as a powerful tool to gain access to revenue, achieve urban redevelopment objectives and exert powerful influence over the Singaporean society and economy. Through the commercial exploitation of state landholdings and through stakes in state-owned and private enterprises, the Singaporean state has harnessed urban development to an agenda of political hegemony, nation building and economic development within a framework of globalization.

What if planners in (name of your city here) had almost absolute power to shape urban development? What if city authorities owned most of the land in the city and could exploit it for whatever purposes they saw fit, whether building needed public facilities, exerting control over populations through the surveillance and management of urban space, or exploiting the commercial value of land for political ends? What if city authorities exerted not only regulatory control, but also economic control over major corporations, enabling them to directly shape their commercial decisions to cater to political interests? What if the government owned and managed most of the housing, giving it a powerful tool to shape demographic patterns and the neighborhood environment? What ambitions and pretensions would such power fuel? What utopias, or dystopias, would city planners conjure up?

This article argues that the above scenario is precisely the position that planners in Singapore currently enjoy. Singapore's widely heralded achievements in urban planning are frequently perceived to be a consequence of judicious, enlightened and technocratic governance. Yet they take place within a context of state dominance of land, property and the economy that has few parallels elsewhere in the world. In this small city state of 5.5

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million, the government has gained control of about 85% of the land in the country and, in a state that has been ruled since independence by the People's Action Party (PAP), has parlayed this dominance of land to a dominance of economy and politics (Chua, 1997; Han, 2005). The government has generated enormous financial gains through the commercial exploitation of what has emerged as one of the hottest property markets in the world, while simultaneously exerting hegemonic control in the production of urban space. It has built on its domination of urban land to dominate community building as well — today more than 80% of Singaporean citizens live in state-planned, built and regulated new towns. It further directs economic growth and urban development, and reaps political benefits from these processes, through government-linked corporations (GLCs). In 2010 Temasek, a sovereign wealth fund, held about US \$74 billion in assets in Singapore-based companies that had a total capitalization of more than US \$150 billion (Temasek Holdings, 2010). Given that the total capitalization of the Singapore stock market stood at approximately US \$400 billion at the time of this writing, this represents a substantial stake in the economy (ADVFN, 2011). Through the commercial exploitation of landholdings and through stakes in state-owned and private enterprises, the Singaporean state has harnessed urban/national development to an agenda of political hegemony, nation building and economic development within a framework of globalization.

This article analyzes Singapore as a model of urban planning under state capitalism. Ian Bremmer (2010: 5) defined state capitalism as 'a system in which the state functions as the leading economic actor and uses markets primarily for political gain', specifically through state ownership of key corporations. In Singapore, a city state in which urban development is synonymous with national development, the PAP has combined a commercial interest in property development and economic development, actualized through its central role in property markets and the corporate economy, with an interest in maintaining political control through economic development and the hegemonic control of space. The resulting model of urban planning has transformed the nation essentially into one massive mega project — public housing new towns strung like pearls around the island city state, master planned and meticulously designed central business districts (CBDs) and historic districts comprehensively redeveloped as tourism-oriented simulacra. As Chua (1997: 50) argues, Singapore is, perhaps more than any other city on Earth, a 'fully conquered space in the imaginary'.

This understanding of Singapore as a model of urban planning under state capitalism points to a need to fundamentally rethink some presuppositions in theories of the neoliberal turn in urban governance. As such, this article provides support to recent calls to move beyond conventional understandings of 'neoliberalism' as a unitary model of market-oriented regulatory restructuring, and to instead frame 'neoliberalization' as a variegated *process* that manifests in regulatory experimentation in response to context-specific opportunities and constraints to capital accumulation (Brenner *et al.*, 2010). Explorations of the neoliberal turn in urban governance have often focused attention on the social and spatial inequalities engendered by entrepreneurial local politics and the growing role of private sector actors in influencing the direction of urban politics (Hackworth, 2007; Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Macleod and Jones, 2011). Yet the marriage of state and corporate power allows the Singaporean state a capacity to manipulate the production of urban space for purposes of social control and economic development that is not explained by narratives that focus on the corporate capture of the state that emerges from many accounts grounded in the Anglo-American literature on neoliberalization. The central problematic that emerges in the Singaporean case — that of the pressure on the state to foster endless waves of economic growth while carefully managing the social and cultural displacements and civil society mobilizations that result — presents a quite distinct variation from current understandings of the sociospatial dynamics of neoliberal urban politics. As perhaps the most extreme and influential example of urban planning under state capitalism, the Singapore case provides a useful comparative for other countries that evince some arguably similar characteristics, notably China.

The article further argues that it is the dream of absolute planning control and its use towards political ends that lends Singapore such allure as one of the world's most frequently cited 'models' of urban development, particularly for developing country governments. Singapore's achievements are widely cited: a public housing program that has ensured quality housing to almost every citizen; transportation and land use planning that has discouraged car use and provided comprehensive mass transit access; and strategic state intervention aimed at fostering growth in key economic sectors keeping Singaporean companies one step ahead of international competitors. Governments throughout Asia persistently evoke Singapore as a model for effective technocratic planning, environmental sustainability, public housing provision and urban redevelopment (for just a few examples, see Lee, 2000; Nair, 2000; Marshall, 2003; Benjamin, 2008). Indeed, the Singapore government has begun explicitly 'exporting' its model of urban planning. One notable example is the creation of Surbana, an urban planning and design consulting firm that was spun out of the Housing Development Board in 2003, which has expanded to operate in 24 countries. Singaporean state-owned enterprises and private developers in which the government owns a stake are engaged as investors and consultants in dozens of large-scale urban redevelopment projects throughout Asia, as well as a handful in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America (Keppel Land, 2010; Surbana, 2010; CapitaLand, 2011a). Underlying the global desire for the Singapore model is the allure of seizing control of the city in the face of the vagaries of a shifting global economy and, in many countries, the gradual atrophy of state capacity to regulate urban development in the face of proliferating informal economies.

Yet the emulation of Singapore most frequently occurs in cities that do not share the state capitalist framework for planning. Consequently, many of the critical aspects of the Singapore model — the pervasive political control of a one-party state, the employment of redistributive mechanisms to build a coherent social contract around this one-party rule, and the capacity of the state to engage in comprehensive urban/national master planning — are absent. This observation leads to two arguments concerning the adoption of the Singapore model that I will return to later in the article. The first is that the adoption of the Singapore model has generally been based on the fallacy that it is fundamentally a model of urban design, architecture and infrastructure development, which can be achieved simply by gaining control of a piece of land and redeveloping it in the Singapore mold. In fact, I will argue, it has been the capacity of the Singaporean state to revolutionize the terms of urban citizenship through its dominance of land and economy that marks the Singapore model as distinct. In the absence of such capacity, efforts to acquire land and redevelop sections of cities to look like Singapore may result in social conflict. Second, I argue that the Singapore model embodies its own contradictions, which are quite distinct from the better understood contradictions faced by neoliberal urban regimes in which there is a clearer public–private division of labor. Specifically, it is premised on carefully managed efforts to channel civic engagement in directions that are favorable to continued PAP control, and the dominance of the state's role in shaping urban form. While such social and political hegemony may appeal to governments that are struggling to meet development objectives, it also entails substantial risks, most specifically, the risk of stripping citizenship of any substantive meaning and thereby alienating citizens.

The article begins by reviewing the characteristics of Singapore's model of urban planning under state capitalism. It then discusses the distinct form of urban politics that emerges in this model, before concluding with some comments on the implications of this analysis for the adoption of the Singapore model elsewhere.

State capitalism and urban planning in Singapore

There has been surprisingly little scholarly attention to the relationship between the state and the real-estate market in Singapore's remarkable transformation. A notable exception

is an insightful article by Haila (2000), who characterizes Singapore and Hong Kong as 'property states'. The main evidence she mobilizes to support this assertion is the predominant position of transnational property companies in their economies — in Singapore's case, Keppel Corporation and DBS Land are two that she expounds on at some length. She argues that, through these companies, 'real estate has an important role in the functioning of the whole economy', and provides 'substantial revenue for governments and wealth for individuals' (Haila, 2000: 2241). While drawing on her fundamental insight, I argue that Haila understates her case by largely overlooking the role of the dominant player in the commercial property market — the Singaporean state itself. In fact, Singapore is truly a property state inasmuch as the model of governance and economic development rests solidly on the state's dominance of property markets and its embrace of a commercial model of state-driven real-estate development. It is this function of the state as the preeminent market player, in the property sector and other sectors, that leads me to characterize Singapore's model as one of urban planning under state capitalism.

Analyzing Singapore as a variant of state capitalism is helpful because it breaks down the dichotomy between the function of public policy and the operations of the market economy, and draws attention to the Singaporean state's embrace of a role in the commercial property market as a tool for economic development and political control. The term state capitalism has a long and varied lineage, but has reemerged in popularity with the publication of Ian Bremmer's (2010) book *The End of the Free Market: Who Wins the War between States and Corporations*. Bremmer's (*ibid.*: 52) thesis is that, in an era of intense international competition for investment and economic opportunity, some states have come to see markets 'primarily as a tool that serves national interests, or at least those of ruling elites, rather than an engine of opportunity for the individual'. These states have subsequently sought to harness the power of markets through a variety of means — Bremmer emphasizes nationally owned oil and gas corporations, other state-owned enterprises, state support for privately owned critical companies (what Bremmer refers to as 'national champions') that rely on government patronage and sovereign wealth funds. Bremmer's primary concern is with authoritarian governments that have exploited commercial control of natural resource and energy companies to prop up their government through populist programs, to provide them leverage in forwarding their foreign policy agendas and to line the pockets of their leaders.

This article takes a very different standpoint on the implications of state capitalism, as the model embraced by Singapore is dramatically different from that of Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and other largely resource-dependent states. Singapore has no significant natural resources to exploit, besides its location at the critical Straits of Singapore, through which about a quarter of global shipping passes. Instead, it has sought to use its control of the economy to gradually increase Singapore's capture of value added in the process of production, moving from an initial focus on labor-intensive manufacturing to more automated manufacturing, and more recently shifting towards finance and business services, research and development, and tourism. The state's primary means for achieving these goals have been its ability to discipline the workforce and to create spaces for new economic activities — export processing zones, high-rise office districts, shopping and entertainment districts, research parks, and historic districts oriented towards tourism. While the state's stake in a variety of sectors — financial, manufacturing, shipping — has been important, control of the real-estate market has also been critical to achieving these goals. Particularly as Singapore has emerged as a financial center and has sought to position itself as a leading 'global city' in Asia, it has turned to the creation of spaces for 'command and control' functions (business services and corporate headquarters), high-tech research and development, and spaces of consumption that cater to 'creative class' workers as central strategies in economic development.

The fact that real estate is a key sector through which the state controls the economy leads to a fundamentally different model of state capitalism than is witnessed in resource-dependent countries. This is true for two reasons. First, the state's role in

real-estate markets provides it with an unusual degree of control of urban space, and a tendency to view urban form through an instrumentalist lens, that is, as a tool in achieving state objectives. Hence the shaping of urban space becomes a fundamental element in nation building and social and political engineering. Second, while the value of natural resources are dependent on factors largely beyond the control of states (i.e. global supply and demand), the value of Singaporean real estate is contingent largely on the government's ability to foster a never ending wave of innovation in the economy and in the real-estate products it has to offer. Hence the state finds itself drawn into the ceaseless battle of the capitalist economy to reinvent itself, embodying within its own urban redevelopment actions the process of 'creative destruction' described by Schumpeter. As I will argue below, Singapore's model of state capitalism, far from being a tool for patronage in which the state uses its wealth in an effort to buy off the population and keep the forces of historic social and political change at bay, has instead witnessed dynamic state efforts to create and maintain a holistic model for state legitimation through interventions in the built environment, social control, controlled mobilizations of civil society, economic growth and wealth distribution.

The critical element in the emergence of the Singapore model is the state's dominance in land market. This dominance is a product of a concerted state effort to gain control of land use in the period after the country emerged as an independent nation, and particularly since the annulment of its abortive effort to join the federation of Malaya in 1965. The central piece of legislation that enabled this dominance was the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) of 1966, which provided the government with broad powers to acquire land (with as little as 7 days' notice to landowners that the land has been gazetted), clear it, and utilize it or alienate it to private developers (Han, 2005). Prices were set at terms that were very favorable to the government — one analysis conducted in 1979 and 1980, for example, placed the compensation provided in many instances at 'less than 20 percent of the value claimed by the owners and assessed by chartered land valuers' (Castells *et al.*, 1990: 269). In all, state ownership of land rose from about 31% in 1949 to slightly less than half before the enactment of the LAA to 80% in 1992 (Han, 2005). This percentage has continued to rise modestly as the government has undertaken land reclamation, hoping to expand the city state's land area from its original amount of 587 km² to an eventual goal of 743 km² (Marshall, 2003).

Its dominance of the land market allows the state to undertake the dual function of the city state's arbiter of planning norms and its largest land speculator, as it derives a significant amount of revenue from the auctioning of leases on state-owned land to private sector actors. Two entities play central roles in capitalizing on the value of state landholdings. The Singapore Land Authority (SLA), a statutory board, manages state land and auctions land leases to private and public sector developers (SLA, 2011). The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), a statutory board under the Ministry of National Development, acts as a land sales agent and as the country's land use planning and conservation authority (URA, 2008). It develops and enforces concept plans, master plans and urban design plans. In this capacity it has become a major mechanism through which the Singaporean state has sought to exploit the potential of real-estate markets as a tool for realizing the potential for economic growth and for generating revenue. As such, it has been critical to the PAP's efforts to position Singapore in the global economy through major urban redevelopment initiatives. In recent years these initiatives have included the development of a new downtown to be built on 372 ha of reclaimed land located immediately to the east of the current CBD (Marshall, 2003). Other initiatives include a high-profile Marina Bay Sands casino project, and a number of historic preservation and tourism-oriented projects. Primarily through land leases and sales of the SLA and the URA, the Singaporean government generated about S \$27 billion in revenue from 2006 to 2008.¹ It generated an additional S \$2.2 billion from rentals and S \$7.4

1 On 7 June 2011 the exchange rate stood at S \$1.23 to US \$1.

billion from property tax (Ministry of Finance, 2006; 2007; 2008). The government's revenue from land sales was three times greater than the revenue of CapitalLand, the country's largest property company and its second largest company overall. The total of more than S \$36 billion from these three sources constituted more than a fifth of the national budget during this period.

The Singaporean government also has a direct stake in the commercial property market through its government-linked companies. The government holds shares in these companies, mostly through its sovereign wealth fund Temasek Holdings, and they play a significant role in Singapore's economy. At the time of writing, through Temasek, the government had a 40% stake in CapitalLand, the largest property company and the second largest company on the Singapore Stock Exchange, and a 21% stake in the Keppel Corporation, the eighth largest company, which in turn owned a majority stake in Keppel Land, the second largest property company in Singapore (Temasek Holdings, 2009; Singapore Exchange, 2010).² CapitalLand has a substantial portfolio of office, residential, industrial and leisure properties in Singapore and more than 20 other countries. It has 6 million ft² of commercial and industrial space in Singapore, making it one of the city state's largest landlords (CapitalLand, 2011b).

Nevertheless, its role in private sector-driven real-estate development still only skims the surface of the Singaporean government's power over the property market. Perhaps its most significant role in molding the form of the city state is in the dominant role it plays in the residential market through the Housing Development Board's (HDB) development of public housing. Established in 1960, the HDB is a statutory board under the Ministry of National Development. Its public housing system houses about 80% of Singapore residents in 23 master planned townships encircling the island (HDB, 2010b). Initially tasked with developing rental housing for the indigent, since 1964 its mission has shifted to the development of homeownership in the townships. Today 95% of its units are owned by their inhabitants, with the remainder consisting of rental housing for the poor that is mostly occupied by older single people. The HDB has also injected market conditions into the system by allowing the buying and selling of the units under regulated conditions (with government capturing a portion of windfall profits through a levy on profits above a certain amount). It has also encouraged a steady increase in values of units by consistently upgrading the conditions of the housing, most recently through the physical upgrading of older townships through the Neighborhood Improvement Programme and the Home Improvement Programme, both initiated in 2007 (HDB, 2010a).

The result of the public housing program, the focus on homeownership and the persistent efforts to upgrade the physical conditions of the new towns has been the development of a nearly universal culture of homeownership among Singaporean citizens. There is also a strong perceived tie between economic wellbeing and the maintenance of the planned order of the new towns that has maintained citizens' commitment to the HDB's goals as the consistent rise in property values have constituted a significant source of wealth generation. These initiatives have fostered a strong sense of allegiance among many to the PAP regime, as housing has become 'a covenant between the people and the government in Singapore: a promise of continually upgrading housing units and environment in exchange for political support' (Chua, 1997: xi). Even as inequality has risen and wages of lower-income Singaporeans have stagnated in recent years, the affordability of housing and the opportunity to realize profits from its improvement has contributed to a continued (although weakened) sense of shared prosperity.

The critical mechanism for financing homeownership in the townships is the Central Provident Fund (CPF), a compulsory savings and social security program that 'constitutes the bulk of national capital formation' (Chua, 1997: 21). At the time of

2 In mid-2011, CapitalLand and Keppel Land respectively had market capitalizations of approximately S \$13 billion and S \$6.5 billion.

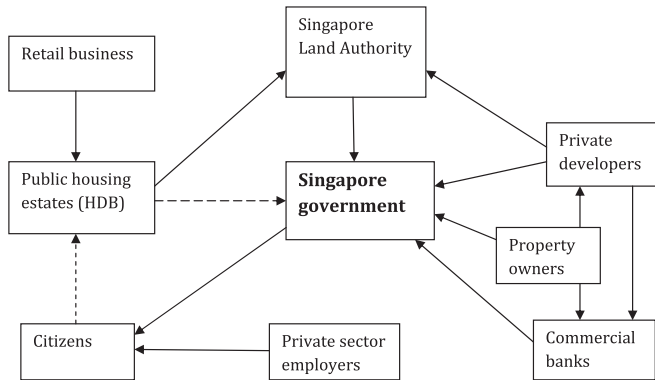


Figure 1 Singapore's model of urban planning under state capitalism

writing, the combined contributions from employers and employees below the age of 50 amount to 35% of an individual's salary, but in the history of the program they have reached as high as 50% (Castells *et al.*, 1990; CPF Board, 2010). While it was originally conceived as a mechanism for social security and national savings, beginning in 1968, individuals were able to use a portion of their CPF contributions to pay for the mortgages on the public housing flats with no deduction in their disposable income. The immediate result was a dramatic shift away from applications to rent and towards applications to buy flats, with the latter figure increasing from 2,384 in 1967 to 20,598 in 1970 (Castells *et al.*, 1990). This mechanism created a massive market for public housing flats, allowing cost recovery by channeling money that would have gone to corporate profits and the private development industry through the HDB, which employed it to build housing and infrastructure. It should be noted that the HDB has other substantial sources of revenue, including rents paid by retail businesses operating in the townships and parking fees, which amounted to S \$1.25 billion in the 2007–08 fiscal year (HDB, 2008). While the government maintains to this day that public housing flats are heavily 'subsidized' based on the fact that their prices are far below those on the private market (for example, four-bedroom flats in the townships were selling for between S \$135,000 and S \$259,000 in 2008), the actual economics of public housing is difficult to ascertain due to the opacity of the HDB's accounting techniques (HDB, 2008). Most notably, accounting does not account for the substantially discounted rate at which the agency acquires land, leading to widespread allegations that the HDB is actually operating at a profit (Castells *et al.*, 1990).

In summary, as represented in Figure 1, through its interventions in the real-estate market the Singaporean government has created a system in which it is able to capitalize financially on one of the most dynamic real-estate markets in the world. Through the sale of land leases, and through a significant stake in major developers, the state has a direct stake in profits from the property market. Through the development of the new towns and the CPF the state finances its own dominance of the housing market and the built environment essentially through mandatory contributions from the private sector. The new towns, each of which contain major retail centers with shopping malls, grocery and department stores, restaurants and hawker stalls, provide opportunities for the leasing of commercial space that provide additional revenue. The Singaporean government also holds stakes in construction and real-estate financing through its investments in the financial services industry, including a 28% stake in DBS Bank, the largest bank in the country, which was originally formed as a development bank by the Singaporean government (Temasek Holdings, 2010). In sum, the Singaporean state has placed itself at the center of several streams of revenue from real-estate development, which provides it the financial wherewithal to pursue its own objectives by plowing that revenue back into urban redevelopment.

These mechanisms have allowed the Singaporean government to exert a degree of control over the built environment that has few if any parallels in the contemporary world. In contrast to other cases of the neoliberalization of urban governance, in which state actors have pursued economic growth through market-oriented reforms that enable corporate-sponsored urban redevelopment, in Singapore state corporations, statutory boards and other public authorities have captured the value created by economic growth to empower the state and build its political legitimacy. The state has used its control over urban space to provide universal access to high-quality housing and deliver on a promise of access to economic opportunity and material enrichment. Its control of the built fabric of the city provides the PAP an uncommonly firm hand on the rudder as it endeavors to steer the Singaporean economy through the shifting currents of the global economy.

Yet, as will be detailed in the next section, this model entails its own contradictions. Theories of neoliberalization and urban politics have generally focused attention on the social, spatial and political inequalities engendered by entrepreneurial local politics and the growing role of private sector actors in influencing the direction of urban politics. As a result there has been a particular focus on dynamics of displacement, eviction and the exclusions fostered by the commodification of urban space in cities that have embraced growth through neoliberal globalization (Smith, 2002; Hackworth, 2007). These analyses resonate with aspects of the Singapore experience, and particularly the experiences of migrant worker communities, yet there are also distinct contradictions that emerge from the fusion of state and market imperatives in shaping urban development. On the one hand, the state capitalist model provides the Singaporean state with a powerful tool for managing the sociospatial inequalities of the market-oriented growth paradigm, as it enables the state to channel some of the surplus generated by growth towards social needs. Yet the marriage of state and corporate imperatives places the state under unique pressures, as the need to constantly reengineer definitions of citizenship and nationhood to meet the shifting demands of the global economy raise constant questions of identity, the relative importance of political and social rights, and the terms of civic engagement. These contradictions have become apparent in recent years, as the PAP has sought to foster social and cultural conditions conducive to a creative, knowledge-based economy, even as it has sought to reinforce its political and social control. This has led to a spate of new efforts by the PAP to engage citizens in governance and define a distinct and vibrant Singaporean culture without compromising the overriding goal of PAP political control. The following section examines the particular form of urban politics that emerges from these dynamics.

The politics of planning under state capitalism: constructing the 'heartland', aspiring to 'global city' status

Singapore's model of urban planning under state capitalism is rooted in the state's obsessive focus on security and control. Through its dominance of the private sector and real-estate development the state seeks to gain control over the country's economic future. Through its public housing program it seeks to manipulate the political geography of the country, and to dominate civil society. Through its ability to dictate urban form it seeks to exert hegemony over the definition of nationhood and citizenship, particularly through the construction of the new towns, which are often referred to in PAP pronouncements as Singapore's 'heartland'. Through the form of the new towns, and policies that govern them, the state seeks to define a set of cultural values that ostensibly define a 'heartland' identity, which it in turn defines as the moral core of the national identity.

Inasmuch as the degree of state effort to control civil society and the market are exaggerated, this is due to the exaggerated sense of crisis in which the city state emerged as an independent nation. Soon after the PAP came to power in 1959, it quickly sought

entry into the newly independent Federation of Malaya, fearful that a tiny island state with a population of 800,000 could not survive without the resources and trade provided by its much larger neighbor, which had been the foundation of its economy from its very beginnings. Indeed, between 1950 and 1960, two-thirds of Singapore's value of exports was rubber from Malaya and Indonesia (Trocki, 2006: 162). Much of its freshwater has historically come from the Malay peninsula (an issue that continues to be a focus of tension to this day), as did much of the food Singapore consumed. When the merger with Malaya was annulled in 1965, Singapore found itself cut off from its economic hinterland and squeezed on either side by hostile neighbors, Malaya and Indonesia, both much larger, predominantly Muslim countries which were suspicious of Singapore's relations with their powerful ethnically Chinese minorities. In addition to these external threats, the PAP, which was largely composed of an ethnically Chinese English-speaking minority, faced challenges to its political leadership internally from Chinese-speaking business interests, and a Communist party with strong roots in the country's labor unions. Social unrest between the country's Malay and Chinese populations, and among a Chinese population fragmented by class and dialect, threatened political fractiousness and violence (Trocki, 2006). The PAP's brand of state building was forged in this perception of impending economic collapse, regional threats and internal strife.

Scholars point to a number of factors that enabled the PAP to assert political dominance in Singapore and steer the country towards prosperity — notably Lee Kuan Yew's success in gradually marginalizing the left and disciplining the unions, and its timely turn towards export-oriented industrialization (Rodan, 1991). Yet it was arguably the PAP's recognition of the ways that issues of land use crystallized many of the challenges that it faced that enabled it to foster a model of social and political hegemony rooted in the reformulation of the terms of citizenship. Without meticulous control of its scarce land resources, the city-state faced the peril of simply running out of space for critical investments in infrastructure, and thereby losing control of its economic destiny. Its modest water resources (concentrated in reservoirs at the center of the island) faced rapid destruction if development was not carefully controlled. The congested neighborhoods and poorly serviced villages in which most residents lived were potential seedbeds of social dissent and mobilization by the PAP's political rivals. In the absence of any natural resource base whatsoever, the deployment of its scarce land resources was critical to its economic fortunes.

The PAP began its efforts to exert control over the country's development trajectory early in its rule. The country had inherited a 1955 master plan, drawn up under the guidance of the British colonial government, which was founded in British traditions of town planning (Dale, 1999). Under the plan, the island nation was divided into central city, town and rural areas, and the central function of planning was to control the spread of development through regulatory tools in widespread use in the West at the time (Chua, 1997; Dale, 1999). Sprawl was to be avoided through the implementation of a green belt. Roads were to extend outwards from the CBD radially, and density in the core was to be dealt with through the planned decentralization of residents of congested central city areas and the development of three new towns. In 1963 a team of UN advisors, headed by Charles Abrams, Susumi Kobe and Otto Koenigsberger, conducted a study that offered a dramatically different vision for Singapore's development. Starting from a critique that the 1955 plan was 'intended for a medium-sized town with a rural hinterland, not a plan for a metropolis', the UN team sought to directly confront a future of rapid growth and economic change in the context of land scarcity (Abrams *et al.*, 1987: 89). They developed a vision of what they termed 'Ring City Singapore', a ring of transportation infrastructure (roads, rail) circling the island, studded with master planned, integrated new towns of populations ranging from 110,000 to 383,000. Rather than *ad hoc* and regulatory approaches, the team recommended a planning system focused on state-guided, master planned development. The UN report apparently suited the nascent government of Singapore's ambitions for growth and nation building, for its influence on the planning system that evolved is readily apparent.

The 'Ring City' model emerged as a central element of the PAP's framework for intervening in the built environment that complemented many aspects of its effort to seize control of the larger society. In the 1960s and 1970s, as the PAP pursued a strategy of industrialization through alliances with transnational corporations, it formulated a political and policy agenda centered on reengineering class relations and reproducing low-cost labor (Tremewan, 1994). During this period the PAP brought the unions under state control, demobilized civil society through cooptation and repression, and pursued an economic policy rooted in the supremacy of GLCs (Trocki, 2006). It also asserted control over class formation and the reproduction of low-cost industrial labor power through the exercise of state control over the educational system and through the creation of the public housing program (Tremewan, 1994). What the 'Ring City' model added was control of the space of the neighborhood and household through the development of the new towns, a powerful tool in shaping the terms of citizenship. Singapore's ambitions in asserting such control are not unique. As Appadurai (1996: 190) argued, in the minds of leaders of nation-building states, 'neighborhoods exist principally to incubate and reproduce compliant national citizens — and not for the production of local subjects'. Appadurai (1996: 190) continues:

Neighborhoods as social formations represent anxieties for the nation-state, as they usually contain large or residual spaces where the techniques of nationhood (birth control, linguistic uniformity, economic discipline, communications efficiency, and political loyalty) are likely to be either weak or contested . . . Neighborhoods are not dispensable, even if they are potentially treacherous.

The development of master planned new towns provided the Singaporean state an opportunity to systematically control for such threats by embedding the social ideology propagated by the state in the built form of the city. It also allowed the state an opportunity to foster a new social contract based on the enactment of a universal elevation of living standards through a state-sponsored housing and neighborhood development. To borrow Trocki's (2006: 138) argument, the PAP's urban planning agenda sought nothing less than to enact a cultural revolution of ambition similar to Mao Zedong's, only this revolution was to be bourgeois rather than proletarian, and '[r]ather than mobilizing the masses, Lee [Kuan Yew] and the PAP worked to immobilize them'. This goal has certainly never been fully realized, for mobilizations of civil society have shown some resilience in countering state narratives. Nevertheless, the Singaporean state's capacity to contain such efforts with limited recourse to overt coercion has few parallels.

While new town master planning as a model of social control has been attempted elsewhere, the success of these efforts have often foundered on popular distrust and disobedience of state social agendas (Holston, 1989). However, there are two aspects of the Singapore model of new town development that have enabled the Singaporean state greater success in its goals of social control. The first is the deliberate strategy of state-controlled commodification of housing in the new towns, and the active use of housing policy to promote a gradual appreciation of housing prices. The result has been that homeowners in the new towns have a powerful interest in the maintenance of planned order, hence combining pervasive state surveillance and control with self-policing among residents interested in maximizing property values. As Chua (1997: 136) notes, the potential for residents of public housing to realize profits from the increased value of flats 'intensifie[s] their ideological and material commitment to the system as a whole'. In addition to its implications for support for the PAP, this also facilitates the policing and maintenance of the new towns.

The second notable aspect of the public housing program is that it has essentially created a system in which there is near universal access to high-quality and affordable housing. Along with persistent economic growth and subsequent climbing wages, this has fostered a society in which, despite having the highest Gini coefficient in Asia, the

vast majority of citizens belong to the consumer class (Chua, 2011).³ Indeed, as Singapore has positioned itself as a central shopping destination for consumers in Southeast Asia, consumerism and the culture of shopping has become a central facet of the Singaporean identity (Chua, 2003). So central has the provision of wealth and social security through housing been to the state's legitimacy that the state essentially guarantees housing for all. Practically, this has meant the provision of subsidies for low-income purchasers of flats, and for the very poor (mostly older people) the provision of deeply subsidized rental housing (Chua, 1997). The result is that the new towns have become the bedrock of the PAP's claims to political legitimacy, and has provided fodder for its claims to be the arbiter of social norms and national identity.

Through the formation of policies concerning new town development — regarding their purchase and use, and through changes in their design — the government is engaged in a constant process of reengineering politics, society, culture and identity (Goh, 2005). It has sought to define a core national identity even as it seeks to globalize the Singaporean economy by making the city state more cosmopolitan. Hence the PAP leadership has framed the new towns as 'heartland' bastions of 'Asian values' in the face of perceived threats from the diffusion of Western culture, which the leadership views as individualistic and nihilistic and therefore not conducive to the achievement of the collective goal of national advancement (Kong and Yeoh, 2003). Yet the term 'heartland' also (unintentionally) evokes the PAP's historically uneasy relationship with the country's various ethnic and linguistic groups, and the tensions inherent in its effort to nudge the population towards adapting to the country's global orientation and to the use of English as the national lingua franca. In recent years the PAP has posited the increasing sense of division between 'heartlanders' in the new towns and 'cosmopolitans' — the growing professional class whose orientations are to the global economy and global culture — as a social challenge (Yeoh, 2004). Hence the coherence and unity of this heartland culture must be continually and carefully cultivated.

Perhaps the most persistent goal of the PAP's machinations in the new towns has been the integration of the city state's ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay and Indian, who represent about 77%, 14% and 8% of citizens, respectively) and an elimination of spaces marked by the identity of any one group. This policy of integration was pursued in the formation of the national housing program — as communities were razed, those displaced were carefully distributed within public housing developments to avoid the formation of ethnic concentrations. Through the operations of the market, however, ethnic concentrations began to reemerge in the 1980s, prompting the PAP leadership to decry this trend as inimical to the 'long-term stability of our nation' (Dhanalban, quoted in Trocki, 2006: 147). The response was the implementation in 1989 of the Ethnic Integration Policy, which imposed restrictions on the sales of flats to ensure racial balance (Soh and Yuen, 2011). While ostensibly motivated by a desire to prevent ethnic conflict and promote multiracialism (a persistent trope in Singapore politics), integration is also effective in obviating the creation of voting blocks of the two main minority groups, or of speakers of any one Chinese dialect (Castells *et al.*, 1990; Kong and Yeoh, 2003). In fact, integration based on race, class, linguistic group and income has been very effective in diffusing political opposition. While non-PAP parties have consistently garnered in the range of 30–40% of the vote during elections, prior to 2011 they had never held more than three seats in parliament (the 2011 elections saw a sea change in Singaporean politics as opposition parties won an unprecedented 6 of 87 seats) (Europa Publications, 2009).⁴

3 According to a study conducted by the HDB the median household income in the new towns was S \$40,000, which equated to slightly less than US \$30,000 at the exchange rates prevailing at the time of this writing (HDB, 2005a).

4 The PAP has used other tactics to suppress votes for opposition parties, including dominance of the media and consistent use of libel suits as a means to silence opposition critics.

The elimination of ethnic, linguistic or other identity-based claims to space has also been achieved through the design of the new towns, which have developed around the central principal of neutralizing urban space through the elimination of social claims to space outside of those mandated by the plan. The design of the new towns has followed a fairly uniform set of standards that are intended to foster generic daily social interaction while discouraging uses or activities that are burdened with cultural or political meaning. This is achieved through a focus on creating spaces between and underneath buildings that are designed to be limited to a narrow range of uses. 'Neighborhoods' or 'estates' are divided into precincts:

A precinct is a cluster of blocks that is a central open space with common facilities. This grouping together of several blocks creates an identifiable housing community and a sense of belonging among residents. It encourages them to interact with their neighbors through the use of common facilities such as a car park, a drop-off porch, precinct pavilion and play facilities (HDB, 2005b: 1).

Perhaps the most important venues for social interaction within the new towns are the tellingly named 'void decks' — the open-air spaces underneath the high-rise apartment blocks that are available by reservation for social functions (funeral rites, parties, weddings, ceremonies) as well as provision of services (sundry goods kiosks, police posts) (Goh, 2005). Void decks are deliberately left spare and unornamented save for a few pieces of concrete or metal furniture, a measure intended to purge these spaces of any social or political references and to prevent their appropriation by any particular group.

A notable and highly tangible aspect of the new towns that also emerges from this urge to control the uses of space through design is the rejection of the street as a space for social interaction, recreation, commerce or indeed for any use other than motorized transportation. Streets in the new towns are generally devoid of social or economic functions, as institutional and commercial uses are taken off the street and placed in self-contained malls, and shopping and hawker centers. The street apparently presents a form of public space that, in the eyes of the HDB, is too difficult to control and too open to appropriation.

The net effect of the design scheme of the new towns is to facilitate informal and spontaneous encounters in public space, thereby providing for community and sociability, while allowing 'no permanent record of popular expression, no articulation of particular voices such as the contribution of local troupes, artists, historical memories or individual personalities to the constructed environment' that might interrupt state narratives of nationalism and progress, and potentially sow seeds of dissent (Goh, 2003: 63). Yet one result is that the existing public spaces have apparently held little appeal for residents. The HDB has persistently expressed concern about the lack of community interaction within the estates, and regularly conducts research on social networking and neighboring behavior within the new towns, using its findings to tweak the design schema to increase use of public space. These efforts have been manifest in revisions intended to create clearer precincts within the developments with more clearly delineated boundaries, and in the provision of public facilities like playgrounds with smaller catchment areas to enhance their role in promoting neighboring behavior (Ling and Tan, 1992).

Social engineering within the 'heartlands' extends to more intimate aspects of family relations, and into individual behavior. In the interest of supporting purported 'Asian values', for example, a number of measures have emphasized support for the institution of the 'traditional' nuclear family as well as the extended family. Men aged up to 35 years and women aged up to 30 years are ineligible to purchase an HDB flat unless they are married, a measure that obviously restricts access by 'non-traditional' families such as unmarried couples, gay or straight, and singles to this important social benefit (Phua and Yeoh, 1998). To encourage the continued strength of filial relations, the HDB has

provided a variety of incentives to encourage children to live closer to their parents, including subsidies and priority to new public housing applicants who do so (Chua, 1997: 141–2).

The public housing system also helps to reinforce state narratives of the imperative of hard work as it provides a particular form of social welfare system which creates a mechanism to ensure that one can never fall too far, while also creating incentives to remain employed. This system has evolved deliberately as a measure to prevent the perceived indolence that emerges in systems that provide welfare cash payments. Hence, while there is no system of income transfer to the poor or unemployment insurance, unemployed flat owners may be able to negotiate stay on mortgage payments, and the government has at various junctures announced moratoria on mortgage payments during periods of economic downturn and high unemployment (Chua, 1997). Given the dominance of the public housing market, such measures provide a powerful means to deal with the social impact of economic downturns, and also to manage the impact of fluctuations in the economy and financial markets on the built environment of the city. They also provide a particular balance of carrot and stick for Singaporean citizens as they weigh the terms of their engagement in the workforce. While they are guaranteed a solid roof over their heads, they may go hungry or go without adequate healthcare if they do not continue to maximize their income-earning potential.⁵

Hence, the new towns represent an effort to achieve multiple goals — the reproduction of a workforce for global economic competition, the creation of a national identity, the maintenance of political control, regulation of the impacts of the built environment of the national economy — all while expunging ‘from its definition of the national community the riskier and potentially destabilizing values and influences of globalization’ (Goh, 2005: 93). When combined with the better known aspects of Singapore’s ‘nanny state’ — the strict regulations controlling public speech, public behavior, the press, and various other aspects of individual and group expression — the net effect is a system that provides powerful incentives to hew to the social norms and economic behaviors favored by the PAP’s ruling class. These behaviors include a willingness to work hard, and to not question the conditions of work, while also remaining true to a set of ‘Asian’ values defined as deference to authority, filial piety, and adherence to ‘traditional’ notions of family and community.

The second goal that the Singaporean state’s dominance of the real-estate industry has allowed it to achieve is that it has provided a powerful tool for engineering the country’s economy. Like a sailboat tacking in the shifting squall of the global economy, Singapore has consistently sought to reinvent its economy in response to perceived opportunities for growth. In doing so it has proven quite reflective, modeling itself on the latest shifts in technology as well as the latest trends in urban planning, policy and design. Particularly since the mid- to late 1980s, Singapore has sought to position itself as a major financial, business service and entertainment center in Southeast Asia. The change has attended a new emphasis on competing with other major global cities in glitz and grandeur, and on fostering the cultural economies that planners perceive as necessary to attracting and retaining the kind of workforce needed for a knowledge-oriented economy. There has been a shift away from the prior obsession with creating a ‘clean, orderly, if somewhat antiseptic environment’, towards a new emphasis on creating aesthetic and iconic urban landscapes that draw on Singapore’s environmental and historical inheritance, as well as its capacity to master plan overwhelming skylines (Yeoh, 2005: 950). The model of planning under state capitalism has proven critical to this agenda.

Perhaps its most ambitious current initiative is the new downtown, which is being developed on 372 ha of reclaimed land immediately adjacent to the existing CBD (Marshall, 2003). Envisioned in the URA’s 1991 concept plan, which was a major

5 A commonly heard complaint among lower-income Singaporeans is that one can afford to die in the city state, but one cannot afford to get sick.



Figure 2 Void Deck, Senkang New Town (photo by the author, 2010)

statement of Singapore's intentions for economic, social and physical development as it transitioned towards its role as a major financial, trade and entertainment center, this initiative seeks to reinvent the already iconic, dense and high-rise Singapore skyline by creating a city that is 'many times denser and taller' than the existing CBD (URA, 1991; Marshall, 2003: 156). Block sizes and public parks represent an equal departure from past practice. Given the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and create a new center for Singapore's earnest effort to enter the top echelons of the global city league table, the design response has been to focus on an iconic skyline and an emulation of dynamic public spaces witnessed elsewhere. As Marshall (2003: 158) states in his critique of the new downtown, the design is:

replete with images of other 'world cities,' and Battery Park in New York City features heavily in the image gallery. It is clear from these images that the planners are seeking a highly cultivated environment. It is a vision that displays a complete order, where the architecture is controlled and ordered. The landscape too is polite and trimmed, where Boston Commons is provided as an example of living next to nature.

The apparent ambition is to create a visual impact similar to that of the Pudong district in Shanghai, yet also to draw on the design elements of other well known examples of urbanism.

What makes Singapore distinct in its pursuit of an iconic downtown landscape is precisely its model of state capitalism, and specifically the way its dominance of the land market allows the state to shape spatial development while staying true to the demands of the market. Through its land-leasing program, the Singaporean government is able to dictate precisely what parcels are developed in what ways, when and by whom. Its ownership of the land allows it to dictate densities, uses, urban design standards and other aspects of development in precise terms to create the desired functional and aesthetic effect (URA, 1995). Moreover, the state's control of land in the entire area allows it to manipulate the laws of the market to produce desired outcomes, both for



Figure 3 Playground, Clementi New Town (photo by the author, 2010)

economic growth and for functioning of the land market overall. Such was the case in the development of the Marina Bay Sands, a massive casino development in the new downtown area. Designed by Moshie Safdie and built by the Las Vegas Sands Corporation, it officially opened in 2011. Viewing this development as a critical linchpin in its redevelopment agenda, and a major statement of the architectural and the functional direction of the city state, the government departed from normal procedures and set a fixed price for the land rather than auctioning it to the highest bidder (Lee, 2010). It focused its decision instead on other criteria: vetting the profile and quality of the tenant of the site; reviewing and negotiating the mix of uses they proposed; and most importantly, developing a set of design standards and a review process that was certain to produce an iconic structure, a landmark for the entire city. Indeed, the unusual design — a 340 m long, surfboard-shaped ‘SkyPark’, cantilevered over three 57-storey structures — makes a dramatic visual impact on visitors entering the downtown area from Changi International Airport (Figure 4). The Marina Bay Sands development is emblematic of the lengths the government is willing to go to in pursuing growth. It had long forbidden gambling as a threat to moral order, a practice that was only changed after longtime casino opponent Lee Kuan Yew came to view the Marina Bay development as necessary to Singapore’s effort to shake its image of sterility and fully realize its potential as a tourism and knowledge industry center.

Planning has also aggressively pushed the envelope in creating spaces for technological innovation in an effort to establish Singapore as a center for growing economic sectors, pursuing this strategy through the creation of new spaces of production as well as new lifestyle-oriented spaces. One notable initiative has been the development of one-north (a reference to Singapore’s location 1 degree north of the equator), a 200 ha technopole that is intended to act as an incubator for the development of ICT (information and communications technology), biomedical and media industries. The project started in earnest in late 2000 when the Jurong Town Corporation — a state-run developer of industrial estates — was appointed the master developer. The two phases completed to date are called Biopolis and Fusionopolis (Wong and Bunnell,



Figure 4 Marina Bay Sands: Iconic Casino Development in New Downtown Area (photo by the author, 2010)

2006). In line with the focus on fostering creative industries, the planning effort has focused on creating creative spaces — the master plan, done in part by Pritzker Prize winner Zaha Hadid, emphasizes aesthetic spaces that are intended to breed innovation by encouraging social interaction. Wong and Bunnell (2006: 77) describe how the government's investment in the technopole itself has been accompanied by the reinvention of nearby residential and business communities developed by the Jurong Town Corporation and the HDB as 'little bohemias' where, in the words of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, 'creative people can do odd things'. That the development of the project and the transformation of the entire fabric of the surrounding area were accomplished in the space of a few years is testament to how nimble the government's domination of real-estate markets and land renders it.

Yet another significant focus of the government's urban redevelopment agenda has been the development of the cultural economy in Singapore. This strategy has included two distinct components. The first is the development of entertainment complexes intended to attract major international acts and compete with venues in other global cities for attention — the most notable example is Esplanades Theaters on the Bay, built at a cost of more than US \$500 million (Yeoh, 2005). The second is the redevelopment of what remains of the historic districts of Singapore, notably the 'Chinatown' area and Kampong Glam, a historically Malay part of the city. Here again, the heavy hand of the state has driven the conceptualization of heritage and cultural meaning, often in ways that produce a rather cleansed and commercial rendering of community.

As should be apparent from the preceding discussion, while the state capitalist model of urban planning provides the Singaporean state tremendous power, it also creates thorny contradictions. While more conventional 'entrepreneurial' governments face public criticism and opposition for favoring downtown interests over the interests of neighborhoods, in Singapore the state itself embodies downtown/corporate interests. As the Singaporean economy has globalized, social inequality has emerged as a growing challenge as economic transformation has benefited an educated elite, the state and the

ruling class within the PAP while lower-class Singaporeans have seen their real wages stagnate (Soh and Yuen, 2011). Likewise, state capitalism places unusual demands on the state in managing the contradictions between its role in the economy and its pursuit of other state goals of social and political control. A notable contemporary example is the contradiction between the state's efforts to use its control of urban space to nurture compliant national citizens, and its desire to create the sense of edginess and diversity that it believes is necessary to create a knowledge-driven economy.

The PAP's efforts to create a knowledge economy through its interventions in the built environment has been paralleled by its efforts to seek new ways to engage citizens in governance without losing control of political narratives. The PAP has increasingly understood that it cannot hope to manage a highly educated, knowledge-based workforce through paternalism and repression. This realization comes in part in response to the increased restiveness of civil society which has seen increased mobilization around a number of issues: a conservationist movement has had some success in raising questions on environmental issues, most notably in the development of the island of Pulau Ubin; a movement has emerged focusing on highlighting the difficult conditions experienced by migrant workers; the Association of Muslim Professionals has highlighted the political and social inequalities experienced by the country's Malay population; and Singaporean theater has in recent years addressed sensitive social and cultural issues (Chong, 2005; Lee, 2005). Cognizant of this growing mobilization and of the PAP's own need to draw on the capacities of the country's knowledge economy workers in building its vision of culture and knowledge-led urban development, the PAP has made some steps towards opening channels for civil society participation, and has articulated the concept of 'active citizenship' (Rodan, 2003: 507):

The concept was highlighted in the government's [1999] Singapore vision statement. However, it was not encouraging citizens to take more direct political responsibility and action. Rather, the essence of 'active citizenship' is the idea that civic groups combine in a 'positive and co-operative way' with the private and public sectors to assist in the improvement and implementation of public policy. It is intended to shore up state-guided consensus building. Indeed, Prime Minister Goh warned at the time that this was not an invitation for a free-for-all debate and those who sought to wrest control from the ruling party could expect 'an extremely robust' response.

The key mechanism through which the PAP has contained the influence of civil society is by strictly policing the line between political and non-political forms of citizen involvement. A key piece of legislation that has enabled the state to accomplish this is the Societies Act, which states that political activities can only be undertaken by political parties, and that civil society organizations cannot partake in political activities (Rodan, 2009). When organizations move beyond activities like organizing communal or charitable events in support of government policy, and make any motions towards overt criticism of the state or of public policy, the law requires them to register as political organizations, thus subjecting them to the regulations on such organizations and placing them within the PAP-dominated political sphere. As Rodan (2003: 518) further argues with reference to the PAP's strategies towards controlling expressions of dissent in cyberspace, the legal and administrative controls have the intention of 'restricting political engagement and competition to within a narrow sphere of party politics and/or formally registered and tightly regulated political discussion groups, and ensuring that links between opposition parties and social groups cannot take root'. As Chua (2003: 36) concludes, 'until the political sphere is democratized through competitive politics, all civil society activities will exist at the suffering of the politically hegemonic PAP government'.

Nevertheless, an increasingly informed and highly educated population, with access to a broad range of information via the web, has raised new electoral challenges for the PAP. This was particularly evident in the 2011 general elections, in which increasingly pointed expressions of dissent over questions of the distribution of the benefits of

economic growth, government transparency and immigration led to an unprecedented 39% of the popular vote going to opposition parties (Chong, 2012). While this resulted in only six seats going to the opposition, the excitement of the resulting political commentary reveals that it nonetheless stoked the imaginations of many regarding the possibilities for political change. While any such change would be complicated by the extensive mechanisms for social and political control that the PAP exercises through its control over the built environment and the economy, the fact of such imaginings speaks to the resilience of Singapore's civil society despite all of the compromise and threat.

Conclusion: how do we interpret the meaning of the 'Singapore model'?

A central contention of this article has been that the Singapore model of urban development has often been misunderstood in theories of neoliberalization and urban governance. In efforts to fit Singapore into prevailing narratives of the sublimation of the state to the agenda of global corporate power, Singapore has been characterized by some scholars as an example of the use of coercive power by an authoritarian state to discipline labor in the interests of global capital (see Harvey, 2005 for one example of such a treatment). Yet such an interpretation disregards the ways that the PAP has deployed state control of the corporate economy as a tool to build hegemonic power over the economy and social life. In doing so, this interpretation fails to elucidate how and why the Singapore model creates very different sociospatial outcomes from those witnessed in other instances of the neoliberalization of the state. Particularly as the Singaporean state has attempted to position itself as a global leader in economic activities that place a heavy premium on the production of premium real estate — including finance and producer services, entertainment and tourism, and research and development — the PAP has increasingly sought to shore up its legitimacy by using real-estate surpluses to provide social goods. Understanding the politics of urban planning under state capitalism thus helps to interpret how what appear as exceptions to neoliberalism (to borrow a phrase from Ong, 2008), such as the predominance of public housing, in fact are co-constitutive with the process of neoliberalization of the Singaporean political economy.

Interpretation of the politics of urban planning in Singapore through the prism of state capitalism also helps us to understand the uses and misuses of Singapore as an important model for urban development. Singapore's success as a model of state assertion of control over urban space lends it tremendous global appeal, but its particular appeal is to countries of the global South. Often faced with daunting challenges — budget constraints, failures of political will, bureaucratic inefficiency, lack of political legitimacy, and the predominance of extra-legal appropriations of urban space — governments have increasingly turned to Singapore as a model for gaining control of their own destinies. This appeal has allowed Singapore to capitalize on its renown by exporting its model. Table 1 lists some Singaporean government-linked and state-owned corporations that have begun to engage directly in consulting and real-estate development internationally.

Yet the lessons that the Singapore model imparts are less about the effective application of state police power or administrative or regulatory efficiency than about the centrality of control of land, and the power of the state capitalist model of marriage of state and corporate interests in urban development in achieving control in urban redevelopment processes. It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt to develop a detailed critique of the actual adoptions of this model in the diverse settings where such adoptions have taken place. However, it is worth briefly making two points that might act as a bridge between the analysis in this article and future studies that examine actual applications of the Singapore model.

The first point is that both the actual emulations of the Singapore model, and the critiques of these efforts, have too often been based on the fallacious notion that the

Table 1 Presence of Singapore companies in international real estate and architectural and urban planning consulting

Name	Designation	Range of Projects	Countries of Operation
Surbana	Government-linked corporation	Township development, fund management, planning and design consultancy, site supervision, facilities management	Presence in more than a dozen countries in Asia, the Middle East and Africa
Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE)	Statutory board (under the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)	Urban planning consulting, environmental services, education, enterprise development, eGovernment services, public services reform	Presence in about two dozen countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa
Keppel Land	Government-linked corporation	Property development, real estate consulting and investment	Presence in more than 35 countries in Asia, North America, Europe, the Middle East and Australia
CapitaLand	Government-linked corporation	Residential, commercial, retail, serviced residences, integrated development, Financial services, REIT	Presence in more than two dozen countries in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and the former Soviet Union
Changi Airport Group	State-owned company	Joint partnership and investment (including in aerotropolis), airport operations management, airport consultancy projects	Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Russia, China, India, Italy, Jordan, Rwanda, Uganda, Philippines, Fiji

Sources: Changi Airports International (2010); Keppel Land (2010); Surbana (2010); CapitaLand (2011a); Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (2013).

Singapore model is fundamentally either about urban design, architecture and infrastructure provision, or about the application of 'good governance' towards the realization of urban design, architectural and infrastructural transformation. When applied to practice, this understanding of the model has often resulted in government efforts to simply clear land for the development of infrastructure and real estate 'megaprojects' either by government or private developers. Indeed, this 'state-sponsored land seizure' model has sometimes been actively promoted or abetted by the entities listed in Table 1. The error of this interpretation, however, is that it separates the physical manifestation of Singapore's urban transformation from the elements that have defined its realization and its meaning — the interlinked relationship between changes to the built form of the city, nation building, social and economic change, and citizenship. When the creation of spectacular urban spaces is separated from the distinctly Singaporean tactics of citizen construction — predominant ownership of commodity housing, the culture of consumerism, state guidance of economic and social life — this narrow interpretation of the Singapore model is likely to end up constituting a simple effort of the state to grab land in the interests of itself and its cronies. While Singapore's urban planning framework is a recipe for building state hegemony, this narrow interpretation of the Singapore model as one of simply seizing control of land to enact a physical transformation is a recipe for deepening social inequality and conflict.

The second point is that, if the Singapore model is adopted in a form that is truer to the original, then it involves a particular set of decisions about the meaning and objectives of citizenship and nationhood. While many of Singapore's achievements in the areas of economic growth and provision of basic needs have been laudable, the consequences of the means through which these achievements have been realized raise pressing questions. Singapore's transformation has been premised on the following: the subjugation and co-optation of civil society to the interests of the state; the severe curtailment of alternative claims to urban space outside of the state and the corporate economy; the imposition of a comprehensive regime of state social control; the assertion of state hegemony in determining the aesthetic and functional form of the city; and the bending of the meaning of history and culture to the interests of the state. It is imperative that states, and even more importantly citizens, fully understand what they are asking for in their yearning for the Singapore model.

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