Abstract

In 2013, Singapore witnessed a calamitous night of riots in the public spaces of Little India following a mob reaction to a fatal bus accident involving a migrant worker. Since then, there has been rising anti-foreigner sentiment amongst local residents and this has become most pronounced in public spaces. Low-skilled migrant workers can now easily be identified with certain public spaces around Singapore as they become isolated to parts of the city on their rest day. This paper aims to highlight the lack of democracy and equity in Singapore’s public spaces by evaluating spatial democracy via self-developed ‘checklist’.

The paper draws from popular theories of democracy in political philosophy in order to generate a checklist of criteria that can be applied to public spaces. Each criterion is indicated by one or more points of social observation, intercept survey finding, or statute. An observational study and analysis of two public spaces in Singapore show that both failed to engage a wide variety of cultural practices nor allow for discourse to check authority – primary traits of democratic public spaces. The paper makes suggestions on policies and plans that will democratize the planning and design process in Singapore in order to create democratic public spaces.

Keywords: public space, evaluation, democracy, urban planning, migrant, social observation
Statement of Issue

The issue of inequity in Singapore’s public spaces came to light following the Little India Riot of December 2013. The riot, reportedly a “mob reaction” (Ministry of Home Affairs Singapore, 2014) to a fatal bus accident involving a Tamil worker, involved hundreds of South Asian migrant workers and has resulted in a rising anti-foreigner sentiment amongst local residents in public spaces.

While migrant labor flows to global cities has become a dominant trend, its impacts on public spaces in those cities has not been widely studied. In Asia, the experiences of migrant workers in public spaces have only recently been studied in Hong Kong (Hou, 2010; Law, 2002). An analysis of the use of public spaces by migrant domestic workers in Singapore’s unique autocratic governance structure presents an entirely new perspective on this area of study. The following paper seeks to uncover the state of democracy in public spaces of Singapore, particularly in relation to low-skilled migrant workers, through an evaluation tool created based on tenets of democracy.

Although existing literature by political philosophers such as Jurgen Habermas, Henri Lefebvre, and John Rawls have demonstrated the importance of acknowledging both the abstract and spatial conceptions of the public, there appears to be a gap between the work of political philosophers and urban planners that needs to be reconciled through practical research. This study aims to bridge this gap by evaluating physical public spaces in Singapore in its totality – within its political, social and cultural spheres.

In doing so, the study will introduce a new type of public space evaluation tool that leaders and citizens can use across the world to assess the state of democracy in their public spaces. The study will then suggest planning initiatives that can shape a more democratic public realm for all.

What are public and democratic spaces?

Through the years an ongoing dichotomous understanding of public spaces has developed as political philosophers, on one hand, placed emphasis on the democracy of abstract public spheres with no spatial dimensions while geographers and urbanists continued to offer a conception of public space that is more greatly rooted in place and culture. Although the definitions of public space and the public have not been universal or enduring, there are some commonly accepted notions of public space, including that it is produced “through constant struggles in the past and in the present… for it is by struggling over and within space [abstract or real] that the natures of ‘the public’ and of democracy are defined” (Mitchell, 1995). It would therefore be misguided to invigorate physical public spaces based simply on a study of its physical parameters because just as the city is greater than its built form, public spaces must also be seen in its totality – within its abstract political, social and cultural meanings. In turn, public spaces are also essential to the establishment of democratic politics in cities.

Public spaces have historically been platforms for resistance and protest. When designed and planned appropriately, they can be the most democratic places - cultivating tolerance, encouraging convergence of different people, and allowing critical debate.
Methodology – Making Space for Democracy Checklist

Through a literature review of democratic theory, seven key tenets have been selected that collectively help to shape democracy in public spaces. Although not all of the principles were developed for physical realms, as was the case with Habermas who wrote primarily about democracy in abstract realms, they can easily be adapted to physical public spaces. The following criteria will be referred to as the checklist.

Inspired by the ladder of citizen participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969), the checklist has also been categorized by various tiers of democracy. Each tier progressively advances to higher orders of democratic pursuit, beginning with simple and rational criteria that encourage convergence of individuals to criteria that can increase an individual’s disposition towards others. As part of the research methodology, two public spaces, Dunlop Street and Tanjong Katong Complex, will be analyzed against the checklist. The more criteria met by each public space, the more pronounced democracy can be denoted to exist.

Making Space for Democracy Checklist – the methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eight Key Tenets of Democracy</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Tier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Allows unmediated interaction</td>
<td>High comfort and safety level, group size 1c, wide variety of activities</td>
<td>Tier One: Encourages Convergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Lacks coercion</td>
<td>High comfort and safety level, no presence of police</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Allows dialogue to check power and authority</td>
<td>No presence of police/ surveillance cameras, statutory laws around congregation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Engages wide variety of cultural practices</td>
<td>Variety of countries of origin, ethnicity, and engaged in culture-specific activity</td>
<td>Tier Two: Cultivates Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Creates opportunities for social communion and shared experiences</td>
<td>Group size 1c, variety of countries of origin, ethnicity, and engaged in talking/ and or eating, mixed length of stay in Singapore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Nurture sense of tolerance amongst users</td>
<td>Variety of countries of origin, gender and age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Allows for insurgence</td>
<td>Presence of outlier activities, strong sense of ownership over space</td>
<td>Tier Three: Increase Disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Allows for critical debate to seek consensus or mutual enjoyment</td>
<td>Group size 1c, strong sense of ownership over space, engaged in talking</td>
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In order to analyze the level of democracy in public spaces in Singapore, each criteria established in the checklist must be evaluated against indicators observed in each public space. One or more points of social observation, intercept survey finding, or statute may indicate the occurrence of any single criterion. For example, if a studied public space were to meet CRITERION A, social observation and intercept survey findings would have to point to large group sizes, a mix of activities, and a high level of perceived comfort and safety in the space – characteristics that indicate the space allows for unmediated interaction. A large proportion of group sizes greater than one, measured by mean group size, with a high level of reported comfort and safety in the public space, measured by modal answer ‘Yes I feel comfortable and safe in this public space’ in question 9 of intercept survey (Appendix A), indicate that groups are able to interact through a variety of activities without the fear of being mediated by governing authorities or powerful institutions.

Observational survey + Intercept Survey + Time Lapse videos
Direct observational studies of users on Dunlop Street and Tanjong Katong Complex were conducted over the period of three months (December 2015-February 2016). This entailed taking a detached perspective and being an unobtrusive observer in order to prevent biased observations. Observations of public space users’ actions and movements were noted in diagrams, sketches, and most importantly, quantified via a matrix adapted from the Project for Public Spaces Social Observational Survey (Whyte, 1980). The matrix categorizes public space users by size of group, gender, perceived age, type of activity engaged in, and physical position within each setting.

The intercept surveys that make up a subset of the observation sample were conducted in English, Hindi, and Bahasa on site to gather information from public space users about demographics, perception, and reactions to the level of democracy in the public space. These surveys, based upon Gehl Studio’s Public Life and Urban Justice in NYC’s Plazas intercept survey (2015), were not quantifiably extensive but do provide great insight into the ways in which the selected public spaces were used and how they might be considered democratic.

**Informal Group Discussions**

Language-specific group discussions in languages such as Bahasa were used to retrieve more accurate narratives on the ways that migrant workers are using public spaces and whether they perceive these spaces to be democratic. Discussions in groups of not more than five were suggested by ethnographer and sociologist, Laavanya Kathiravelu (Assoc Prof) (personal interview, October 9, 2015). The small group size enables the skilled interpreter to conduct an effective dialogue with participants without being overwhelmed, while still being able to generate a rich discussion.

**Context – Planning in Singapore**

Singapore has managed to accumulate several layers of meanings, functions, and forms within its built environment in its short history of 190 years (Kiang & Liang, 2009). However, the State has managed to retain considerable control over the planning and design of the city through those years, with little to no room for citizens to engage in the process. However, with changing priorities, the private sector and the general public have slowly gained footing in the realm of planning – closely mirroring the evolution in the Western world, albeit much slower.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) is the national land use planning and conservation authority of Singapore. It is an autonomous agency of the Government that was established by an Act of Parliament and overseen by a government ministry. URA’s mission as the land use planning and conservation authority is to ensure land efficiency through strict land use planning and development control, as well as creating a vibrant and sustainable city in partnership with communities (“Mission”, 2016). However, it was only in the last decade that the authority has decided to explore these partnerships with communities through community planning.

Since the landmark case of the demolition of the Old National Library in 2005 that overlooked public comment and community planning, there has been a shift in the tone of URA in accepting
public input and engaging the community in planning and conservation efforts. The redevelopment of Bukit Brown, a cemetery site, and Rail Corridor, a former rail site, are two examples of progress made by URA in community planning. In both cases, public engagement with affected communities was established early on in order to gather feedback on the needs and concerns surrounding the new developments ("Rail Corridor - REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS", 2016; "The Rail Corridor Roving Exhibition", 2016). Comments from the public made either at public meetings or online through feedback portals were incorporated into design briefs for the Concept Master Plan. Various interests from religious, environmental, and youth groups were represented throughout the process and continue to refine the designs.

This shift in tone and approach at URA however has not been sufficient. Smaller planning decisions continue to be prescribed by the authority with little to no community engagement and many demographic groups continue to be excluded from these decisions – the migrant population being one despite their growth in numbers and their direct contributions to the construction of the city. With rapid rates of in-migration and heavy reliance on foreign labor in the last decade, global cities like Singapore need to consider another layer of meaning, form and function of public spaces that is being constructed by migrant workers.

Who are Singapore’s migrant workers?

Given the small population of Singapore, last estimated at 5.4 million (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2015), the nation-state has come to be dependent on an influx of foreign labor for a variety of industries. According to Jolovan Wham, the executive director of the Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics, male migrant workers, along with “female migrant workers … already make up nearly one-fifth of the total population” (Kirk, 2015), the claim supported by The Population Brief 2015 released by the National Population and Talent Division of the Prime Minister’s Office.

Although those entering the country for the purposes of work vary by levels of education and skill, the following research will narrow its focus on semi-skilled work permit holders who work in sectors like construction and domestic work. The term ‘migrant workers’ will henceforth refer to these work permit holders whose living conditions, lifestyles, and most importantly, use of public spaces are highly restricted.

Male migrant workers predominantly come from approved source countries including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and China. They are employed in construction, manufacturing, marine, process, and service sectors and are subject to very strict regulations. Although they are allowed to be employed in Singapore for anywhere between 10 and 22 years, they are not permitted to bring family members over with them at any time.

Female migrant workers, on the other hand, come from approved source countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. Unlike male migrant workers, however, women are not prescribed a limit on the number of years in which they are allowed to work in Singapore. By requirement, female migrant workers live at their employer’s residential address and this may range from public housing flats to large single-family homes in middle- income to high-income neighborhoods. Given that they live within their employers
homes, their private living spaces are of better quality than that of their male counterparts who, as we will discover, are subject to poorer living conditions.

**Private Spaces for Migrant Workers**

In 2015, the Ministry of Manpower performed more than 2,600 housing inspections and took enforcement action against more than 2,100 employers who were warned or charged in court for not complying with standards of employee living quarters ("Migrant workers' dormitory under investigation after distress call", 2016).

Employers are required to provide workers with what is deemed as ‘acceptable housing’, however, many circumvent the regulations by offering employees the lowest cost housing options – purpose-built dormitories and temporary housing quarters on construction sites. Purpose-built dormitories are usually managed and leased by the Building and Construction Authority (BCA). These are characteristically located far from the city center, on the periphery of residential neighborhoods, where land is cheapest (Fordyce, D., personal interview, December 21, 2015). On the weekends, shuttle buses hired by employers often provide migrant workers transportation to areas like Little India, Orchard Road or Marina Bay, and therefore have a strong impact on the types of public spaces frequented by migrant workers (Fordyce, D., personal interview, December 21, 2015).

Employers pay no more than $200 per month per employee for such dormitories, less than half the cost of housing employees in HDB apartments, or public housing (Fordyce, D., personal interview, December 21, 2015) – the most common residence for local Singaporeans. Ten to twelve men are often housed in each dormitory room measuring no more than 25 square meters (Glennie, 2015), below the internationally-recognized floor area per person minimum standards for developed countries of 20+ square meters (United Nations Population Division, n.d.) and the intuitive standard of one person per room (Econometrica, Inc., 2007).

**Migrant Workers in Public Spaces**

The gender classification given by work permit requirements necessarily impacts the interaction between work permit holders of opposing genders in Singapore. While female work permit holders are employed in domestic work, their male counterparts are engaged in other manual labor work. Their interactions have therefore involuntarily been limited to designated recreation hours, or ‘off days’. As such, the work permit regulations also directly affect the way in which public spaces host unmediated interactions and create opportunities for social communion given that many migrant workers do not share common recreation times nor equal access to public spaces given financial limitations or limited time for travel. These recreation hours, which typically involves one mandatory rest day for every 7-day period, are agreed upon by each employer and employee, as mandated under work permit conditions set out by the Ministry of Manpower ("Rest days and well-being for foreign domestic worker", 2016).

**Life and Regulations in Singapore Public Spaces**
In addition to the leisure time restrictions, other laws and regulations also govern the ways in which public spaces can be used by the migrant worker population, or any other member of public. Although many of the nation’s laws were inherited from British laws during the time of the colonial rule, today the state continues to reject liberal democratic values (Mutalib, H., 2000). Laws restricting the freedom of speech and expression in public spaces are justified by claims that they are intended to prohibit speech that may cause disharmony within Singapore's multiracial and multi-religious society (Singapore Constitution Part IV Article 14). The Democracy Index, an index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit based on indicators like political culture, ranks Singapore 74th out of 167 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016), earning the nation the title of “flawed democracy”.

**The Public Order Act**

A major regulation affecting the use of public spaces is the Public Order Act enacted in 2009. The act aims to “regulate assemblies and processions in public places, to provide powers necessary for preserving public order and the safety of individuals at special event areas, to supplement other laws relating to the preservation and maintenance of public order in public places” (Singapore Statutes Online, 2012), including the Public Nuisance Act. Enforced by the Singapore Police Force, the Act can only be circumvented through a strict permitting process, regardless of the number of people involved.

The imprecise language in the Act necessarily includes a vast range of activities that normally occur in public spaces in Western cities and gives authorities the administrative discretion required to minimize civic participation, political activity or debate. Political rallies, social demonstrations and other gatherings that allow critical debate and opportunities for social communion that have become synonymous with public spaces in the US and Europe are instead punishable under the Act. If a group of migrant workers from the same country wishes to celebrate their independence day in a public space in Singapore, they would have to go through a permitting process with the police in order to avoid committing an offence under the Public Order Act – even if the gathering was organized for a small number of four to five people.

In order to engage in discourse to check powers and authority or to critically debate to seek consensus or communicate and share experiences, migrant workers and other public space users should be able to congregate in groups of more than one and hold talks and meetings without running the risk of potentially committing offences.

**Liquor Control Bill**

In January 2015, a Liquor Control Bill was passed to introduce measures to control the supply of take-away liquor and more importantly, the consumption of liquor in public places. Under the law, drinking is banned in all public places from the hours of 10:30pm to 7:00am (Singapore Statutes Online, 2015). While the restriction will apply to all public spaces to avoid displacement of problems from one area to another, ‘liquor control zones’ have been designated in Little India and Geylang, and are subject to stricter policing and surveillance practices. Such zones were claimed to be areas where significant risk of public disorder associated with excessive drinking is anticipated (Lim, 2015).
Furthermore, public drinking is banned from 7:00am on Saturday to 7:00am on Monday, and from 7pm on the eve of a public holiday to 7am after the holiday in Liquor Control Zones (Singapore Statutes Online, 2015) – a suspiciously close relation to the leisure hours that migrant workers are afforded weekly under the work permit conditions.

Given that the Public Order Act and Liquor Control Bill will have most impact on the use of public spaces in Geylang and Little India, two sites within these zones were selected to conduct observation studies and administer intercept surveys in order to record and analyze the ways in which migrant workers use public spaces and to assess the current state of democracy in the city.

Main Findings

**Dunlop Street**
Closely situated to the city center, Dunlop Street is a one-way road connecting Jalan Besar to Serangoon Road. It is now a pedestrianized alley parallel to the site of the December 2013 riots of Little India (Figure 1). The alley is lined on both sides by two-storey shophouses, selling textiles, traditional Indian food and drinks, and calling cards.

![Site 1: Dunlop Street](image1)

Figure 1 Dunlop Street Public Space Study Area (Left); Little India Liquor Control Zone (Right)

On the afternoons of Sunday December 20, 2015 and Sunday January 17, 2016, 30-minute social observations were conducted at Dunlop Street and 70 intercept surveys were conducted per session. The data collected pointed to the types of users of the public space including age, nationality, gender and activities engaged in, as well as their perceptions of safety, comfort, and ownership, over the spaces.

The results of the observation and intercept surveys revealed that the main users of Dunlop Street were male. 90 percent of intercept survey responses who typically visited and used the space
with at least one other person were male. An average group size of 2.02, strongly points to users sharing their experience of the space with someone else (CRITERION E).

The modal activities in the space were therefore necessary or functional activities (Gehl, 2011). These refer to activities that are more or less compulsory (Carmona, 2003) and errand-like, such as travelling to places or shopping for basic goods and necessities. Other popular reported activities that users were engaged in at Dunlop Street fell into the categories of optional and social. Optional activities are those participated in “if there is a wish to do so and if time and place make it possible” (Carmona, 2003). Meanwhile, social activities depend on the presence of others in the public space, such as conversing, discussing or any other types of communal activities. These observations were further supported by intercept survey findings that showed ‘shopping for groceries’ as the mode activity, often accompanied by ‘meeting friends’ and ‘eating’.

At Dunlop Street, men were observed standing and people-watching, or standing and talking with friends or fellow groups of migrant workers, with shopping bags in their hands. This is highly likely due to the abundance of grocery stores on Dunlop Street and neighboring alleys selling products from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Figure 1). Given that the users of the space were largely from India (64.3 percent) and Bangladesh (21.4 percent), this would appear to be the main attraction of the area.

Given the context of the Little India riots, it was not surprising that two surveillance cameras at either end of the alley were noted by observers (Figure 2). Despite this, users of the space reported high levels of comfort and safety, with many claiming in focus group discussions that in general, “Singapore is safe”. 100 percent of respondents to the intercept surveys reported feeling safe and comfortable, and 50 percent of visitors were recurrent visitors, coming to Dunlop Street at least “every few months”. This recurrence further supports the level of comfort and familiarity felt by users of the public space. However 90 percent of respondents of the survey were male and this may have strongly biased the responses. While feelings of comfort and safety may indicate an absence of coercion (CRITERION B) in Dunlop Street, the presence of surveillance cameras does inhibit, to a great extent, the free discourse to check powers and to partake in insurgent activities as given by CRITERION G and H. These cameras are accompanied by Singapore Police signage explicitly reminding public space users that the area is under camera surveillance. These signs, like other municipal signage, are translated in the mother tongue languages spoken by local Singaporeans – Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil – but not in Bengali or Hindi, the commonly spoken languages of Indian and Bangladeshi migrants.

The intercept survey as well as additional remarks noted by observers during survey sessions point to a small percentage of local Singaporeans using Dunlop Street as a public space. Only 14.3 percent of intercept survey respondents were Singaporeans. Given this data, there appears to be a small mix of cultural backgrounds between users of the space, which point to a low likelihood of engagement of a wide variety of cultural practices in Dunlop Street (CRITERION D). This trait combined with a predominantly male demographic group aged around 29 with only secondary school education, creates a group of public space users who are less than diverse. Without a larger mix of users, a sense of tolerance against different users may be hard to cultivate in the space (CRITERION F). The similar users are instead more likely to discuss
shared experiences in the communal setting rather than critically debate current issues that would require multiple viewpoints and opinions (CRITERION H).

The most important finding from the intercept surveys showed that while over 82 percent reported feeling like they owned the space, the rest of the respondents felt uncertain or that they did “not really” own the space. Of these, a significant 80 percent were Singaporeans. Given that the retail mix in Dunlop Street is strongly targeted at South Asian migrants, Singaporeans may not feel like they belong in the space given the shortage of amenities relevant to their lifestyles.

Finally, this lack of co-mingling between local Singaporeans and migrant workers in the space might greatly affect the democracy of Dunlop Street. Critical debates would be impossible to engage in given the lack of diversity in cultural and educational backgrounds (more than 50 percent of the users of Dunlop Street hold only secondary school education, as expected from the types of employment engaged by Indian and Bangladeshi migrants in Singapore).

**Tanjong Katong Complex**

Situated in the southeastern neighborhood known as Geylang, Tanjong Katong Complex is a shopping mall that features stores and services that appeal mostly to domestic foreign workers from Indonesia. 30-minute social observations and intercept surveys were conducted at the open field and plaza, on the southern and eastern borders of the shopping mall (Figure 2) on the afternoons of Sunday, December 20, 2015 and Sunday, January 17, 2016.

**Site 2: Tanjong Katong Complex**

The results of the observation and intercept surveys revealed that the main users of Tanjong Katong Complex were female – 100 percent of intercept survey responses despite random selection. They typically visited and used the public space outside the shopping complex with at
least one other person as indicated by a modal group size of 2. This points to the ability of users to engage in unmediated interaction with someone else within the space (CRITERIA A and E). In fact, group sizes in Tanjong Katong Complex were reported as big as groups of 12, further supporting the availability of opportunities to freely interact. Unlike Dunlop Street, Tanjong Katong Complex users were more engaged in optional and social activities, rather than necessary activities. Users were largely static in terms of movement; in fact many were laying down on picnic mats under the trees.

Meeting friends was the primary purpose of visits to Tanjong Katong Complex, according to the intercept survey. More than 75 percent of respondents reported visiting strictly to “Meet Friends”. This aligns with the modal activity observed, “Talking”, in large groups, which might also indicate possible opportunities for critical debate to seek consensus of mutual understanding (CRITERION H). The modal social activity of users of the public space indicate high levels of social communion, shared experiences, and some exchange of culture through food (CRITERION E). The women, mostly from Indonesia (74.3 percent), were observed passing around containers of food between groups. Furthermore, two women who were surveyed were selling traditional Indonesian food at affordable prices that is otherwise difficult to procure in Singapore.

The ‘illegal’ activity is clearly an outlier action given the strict regulations around touting in public spaces in Singapore, indicating some level of insurgence (CRITERION G) at Tanjong Katong Complex. Other outlier and illegal activities that were observed included an older woman standing under the shade of a tree selling calling cards illegally to the Indonesian migrants and a man begging and soliciting money from migrants – also an offence under the Public Order and Nuisance Act. In order to be formal and legal, these activities would have required submitting applications for a wide range of permits and licenses from various agencies such as the National Environment Agency or the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore and even then, work permit holders would not have even been eligible to apply for the required permits given their migrant status. Having to engage in activities that are deemed illegal might explain the high percentage of users who felt like they did not own the public space. Of the 58.6 percent who did not claim to own the public space, 80.5 percent were Indonesians.

Without the presence of police patrolling and under the comfort of shade, it is clear that users of Tanjong Katong Complex were in a favorable environment devoid of outright coercion by authorities (CRITERION B). There were, however, two surveillance cameras within the study area despite being located just outside the liquor control zone designated by the Liquor Control Bill (Figure 2). Like Dunlop Street, these surveillance cameras, accompanied by large Singapore Police signs, diminish the ability of public space users to check powers through discourse (CRITERION C) for fear of being monitored and recorded.

Regardless, intercept surveys showed that Tanjong Katong Complex users admitted feeling safe and comfortable (84.3 percent) like those in Dunlop Street. Both study areas converge to point at an overall high level of safety of public spaces in Singapore, perhaps attributable to the numerous laws and regulations that prevent disorder and nuisance uses of public spaces such as littering and vagrancy.
Unfortunately, there is also only a small mix of nationalities and cultures amongst users of Tanjong Katong Complex (CRITERION D). Intercept surveys revealed a large majority being Indonesian (74.3 percent), with Singaporeans and Bengals making up the rest of the users. The poor mix of cultural backgrounds of users therefore results in the inability of the space to cultivate tolerance amongst different users of the space (CRITERION F) since there are barely any divergent practices amongst the Indonesian domestic workers. Instead, they are more likely to share experiences in such a social communion setting (CRITERION E) – stories about the families they work for and the children they are looking after are common conversation topics brought to light in the informal discussions with survey respondents.

Finally, convenience appears to be a key factor for recurrent visits to the public space in Geylang. Anecdotally, many of the Indonesian domestic workers, in conversation, mentioned the convenience of several mosques in the area as being a factor for their choice of using Tanjong Katong Complex every other weekend. The Muslim women spend weekend mornings and afternoons in the public space and therefore need to carry out their prayers over the course of the day. In addition, given the proximity of Tanjong Katong Complex to Paya Lebar MRT Station and Eunos Bus Interchange, which offer several train and bus lines servicing all parts of the island, it is not surprising that everyone using the public space conveniently arrived by public transit. The users of the space spend an average of 31-60 minutes to travel to Tanjong Katong Complex. They live in neighborhoods all over Singapore ranging from high-income neighborhoods such as Bukit Timah (dominated by large single family homes), to primarily public housing neighborhoods such as Sengkang.

Without available census statistics, only anecdotal information provided through informal discussions with survey respondents suggested the various levels of income of the employers of these migrant workers. Their verbal description of housing type, street names, and occupation of employers were key in highlighting the wide range of housing and work experiences that the Indonesian domestic migrants were experiencing in Singapore. The different work experiences enhance the sharing of experiences (CRITERION E) amongst users of Tanjong Katong Complex.

Dunlop Street and Tanjong Katong Complex, public spaces predominantly used by migrant workers, fall short of meeting all criteria on the checklist. Both sites showed a good mix of activities, high levels of safety and comfort, and big group sizes, indicating that there is a level of unmediated interaction (CRITERION A) and an absence of coercion (CRITERION B), however, the ability to engage in a discourse to check powers within the public spaces is still very difficult given the placement of prominent surveillance cameras by the police. Combined with strict regulations under the Public Order Act, the high levels of policing necessarily exclude any activity from being engaged in that may resemble a critical debate that checks the governing powers and authorities.

The findings also highlight an evident lack of diversity in users that prevents any engagement of a wide variety of cultural practices. This clear clustering of migrants from similar home countries resembles the ethnic succession theory (White, 1984), which claims that ethnic and racial groups entering a new country or city tend to live together. However, in the case of Singapore, migrants congregate in similar public spaces rather than residential neighborhoods given that their housing
is determined by work permit regulations. The clear scarcity of local Singaporeans using either of the sites highlight a key issue facing the state of democracy in public spaces – segregation.

Although the issue of segregation has increasingly become prominent in research around the housing of migrant workers in Singapore, no one has yet raised the issue in the context of public spaces. The research findings therefore call for policies and plans that will reduce segregation of migrant workers in the public realm in order to be able to nurture a sense of tolerance (CRITERION F), create opportunities for critical debate (CRITERION H) amongst a wide variety of community members – both local and foreign (CRITERION D) – and that will check powers of the state and its authorities (CRITERION C).

Recommendations

The study has shown that at present public spaces in Singapore are only successful in encouraging convergence of certain groups of the population, allowing them to interact in an unmediated environment (CRITERION A) without any coercive forces (CRITERION B). The recommendations presented here therefore aim to address other criteria in the checklist that were not met. In order to attain the higher tiers of public space democracy and overcome the existing limitations, Singapore will not only need to democratize its planning process but also acknowledge migrant workers as a part of the public that it serves and plans with. The existing efforts of URA to engage in community planning needs to further expand to include migrant workers in the planning process, and collaborating with grassroots migrant organizations is an easy and quick way to achieve this.

The following recommendations collectively aim to create more robust forms of participation and accountability for the migrant population. They range from wide-scale plans and policies that create avenues of communication and information sharing of city plans and design proposals, between authorities and migrant populations, to smaller-scale programs that raise awareness around migrant workers’ housing and employment issues in public spaces. Local migrant organizations can play a key role in supporting all of the following recommendations given their established research and communications capacities, relationships with the Ministry of Manpower, other similar organizations, and the respective home embassies of migrant workers.

Create a citywide plan for social and intercultural coexistence in public spaces

The plan would consist of mechanisms and actions that allow for the integration of migrant workers in public spaces in Singapore and would be carried out through inter-agency cooperation. Modeled after The Madrid Plan (Dirección General de Inmigración y Cooperación al Desarrollo and Área de Gobierno de Familia y Servicios Sociales, n.d.), the citywide social and intercultural coexistence plan would promote intercultural knowledge between migrant worker populations and Singaporeans by allowing them to use public spaces such as Tanjong Katong Complex plaza and Dunlop Street to celebrate traditional cultural events together and to host intercultural public meetings. This would require extensive cooperation of grassroots migrant organizations, Ministry of Manpower, and local leaders from community development councils ("About Community Development Council", 2016).
Outreach programs in public spaces that are aimed at promoting neighborly coexistence

The Madrid Plan enabled public spaces in over 21 districts across the city to be activated by programs designed to stimulate immigrant and local population engagement. Today, over 50 city outreach organizers are active in the city’s parks and squares, promoting activities “aimed at promoting neighborly co-existence” ("From Public Space to Common Ground | Cities of Migration", 2011). These public spaces have become meeting points where members of the community, regardless of their origins, can get to know each other and participate and converse on matters affecting them (Dirección General de Inmigración y Cooperación al Desarrollo Área de Gobierno de Familia y Servicios Sociales, 2016). The outreach team is therefore multidisciplinary, multicultural and trained to work with communities of many origins.

In Singapore, the Ministry of Manpower would be best positioned to collaborate closely with grassroots cultural organizations such as the Indonesian Family Network to organize and implement similar outreach programs. While the grassroots organizations would have an already well-established and well-respected relationship with migrant worker populations, the Ministry of Manpower would have the resources, funding, and capacity to organize large-scale events. These outreach programs conducted in public spaces and in a wide range of neighborhoods must also be carried out in close cooperation with local residents. Locals are a key resource in carrying out the active integration and intercultural coexistence on which the plan is based. In order to do so, local Community Development Councils would also have to be engaged in the process.

In particular, outward celebrations and open showcase of culture in a public space can be powerful in promoting acceptance and understanding. In Madrid alone, for example, hundreds of activities already take place annually inviting thousands of participants from both immigrant and local populations to become familiar with each other, and to familiarize themselves with foreign etiquette and culture.

Best Practice: Public Art Programs

In Hong Kong, public art programs jointly produced by grassroots Filipino migrant organizations and local art organization Para Site have been successful in raising awareness around the human rights and housing issues facing migrant workers there, as well as imparting arts and cultural skills to migrant workers. In Singapore, URA would have to work closely with the National Arts Council (NAC), a government-linked organization overseeing the promotion of art appreciation in Singapore, in order to successfully manage and promote such a public art program. The Arts For All program at NAC, which aims to “reach different places and segments of society through the arts” ("Arts for All", 2016), already organizes a range of arts-based activities in collaboration with local artists and community partners annually.

The Place Management Department (PMD) at URA was very recently formed with the aim of making local places “more vibrant and attractive to users, and to work closely with stakeholders to shape the individual precincts into distinctive destinations” (“Making our Public Spaces a Fun Place to Live, Work and Play”, 2016). An e-mail interview with Jason Chen, Director of Place Management at URA, revealed that the department currently only oversees the place
management efforts in downtown and Central Business District areas. Unfortunately, PMD is not currently expansive enough in its efforts to activate public spaces beyond these neighborhoods. However, Chen claims, “Where stakeholders show their passion and commitment, [the department is] prepared to partner with them to achieve the desired outcomes”. Given that the department already “actively engages with communities and stakeholders through workshops, seminars, and focus group meetings” (Chen, J., E-mail Interview. December 3, 2014), it only needs to expand efforts specifically to the migrant worker population and to other areas most frequented by migrant workers such as Geylang and Little India.

Although there have been previous arts programs designed with and around migrant workers in Singapore, such efforts have ceased speculatively due to lack of publicity and support from public authorities. Establishing a citywide plan for social and intercultural coexistence in public spaces supported by inter-agency cooperation should allow for such public art programs to run sustainably and thereby creating organic meeting points in which local Singaporeans and migrant workers can interact and participate and converse on matters that affect both groups.

**Best Practice: Integration Workshops**

In Kerpen, Germany, as part of public outreach to develop integration strategies with migrants, integration workshops were launched and carried out by community-level policymakers in decision-making positions ("Integration Workshops for Inclusive Cities | Cities of Migration", 2009). The integration workshop, as part of the citywide plan for social and intercultural coexistence in public spaces, would instead engage both local Singaporeans and migrant workers to participate in activities that evaluate the city’s existing conditions – particularly its plans and forthcoming developments – and assess prevailing attitudes towards public spaces. The workshops in Kerpen, Germany proved to offer great insight and awareness of the situation in the city, informed by various opinions of migrants from across the world, as well as local Germans. It has also been reported to help break down barriers between the two groups and has brought both people and institutions closer together (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2011).

**Multi-lingual public planning meetings, design charrettes, integration workshops**

Finally, in order to increase participation and the effectiveness of integration workshops, and all other outreach programs and events that fall under the citywide plan for social and intercultural coexistence in public spaces, communication and publicity should be translated into the native languages of migrant workers. This might include Hindi – the language of India, Bahasa – the language of Indonesia, and Bengali – the language of Bangladesh. Pre-existing efforts by the Urban Redevelopment Authority to engage the community in planning and design decisions can be better democratized by also appealing to and engaging the migrant worker population. Public exhibitions of design proposals and plans, for example, can feature translated text in the above-mentioned languages, especially if it applies to developments and plans in areas frequented by migrant workers.

These meetings, workshops, and exhibitions must also be sited in locations accessible to migrant workers in order to effectively integrate their opinions into city plans and decisions. Dunlop Street and Tanjong Katong Complex are two obvious sites of intervention that will reach great numbers of migrant workers given that the majority of users are from India and Indonesia,
respectively. While the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore has organized a number of similar sessions out in public spaces to engage communities in local plans and designs (“The Rail Corridor Roving Exhibition”, 2016), it has not yet successfully targeted its engagement work at migrant workers.

**Moving forward from the checklist – Limitations of the Study**

Although the checklist was created to evaluate public spaces in Singapore, the tool is innately universal and should be a tool for other communities and cities around the world to meaningfully evaluate public spaces by considering the true tenets of democracy. A ‘democratic evaluation’ of a public space, as shown above, can inform future planning processes and policies, or serve as an advocacy tool for community groups and local leaders to seek funding and resources to enhance public spaces that are undemocratic.

In fact, across the world, data is already being collected via existing social observation matrices and intercept surveys and should be further utilized to measure the state of democracy in these public spaces. It is a timely tool that will alter the way in which planners and architects think about the livability of the public realm for all citizens.

At this time, however, the checklist has not been developed to suggest what design elements of public spaces can impact the various tiers of democracy. Further research should be conducted to investigate the relationship between the design of public spaces and democracy so that capital improvements, along with planning policy and process adjustments, may be made to increase democracy in our public spaces.