

Deciding Together: Citizen Participation in planning the Neighbourhood Improvement in Seoul and Singapore*

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Cities in East Asia are faced with growing social, economic and environmental risks. National and local governments are, hence, looking for novel policies that could improve the long-term capacity of cities to address these risks more comprehensively and effectively. Citizen participation and neighbourhood improvement are both considered playing a key role in building more inclusive and sustainable cities. This article compares the transformation of Samdeok Maeul in Seoul and Tampines in Singapore to better understand the importance of citizen participation in planning the neighbourhood improvement, and its consequences on urban development in general. Both cases represent a similar shift from previous state-led towards participatory planning. The research follows a case-oriented qualitative approach. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with major stakeholders, participant observation, expert workshops, and review of secondary resources. The research findings suggest that in both cases the residents were able to affect neighbourhood improvement through community engagement in the planning process. At the same time, the research findings imply that the state remains largely in control over the process, which indicates the challenges that need to be considered in order to empower communities in Seoul and Singapore in the long run.

Keywords citizen participation, community engagement, living environment, neighbourhood improvement, urban planning

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I. Introduction

Cities in East Asia are amongst the world's largest and fastest growing urban agglomerations. Decades of rapid economic growth and endless urban expansion, under a long arm of the developmental state, however, did not improve the quality of life for everyone. Moreover, cities in East Asia became some of the world's most vulnerable urban areas for environmental disasters (UN-HABITAT, 2015; Miller and Douglass, 2016). Environmental problems along with the recent economic slowdown, surging unemployment and negative demographic trends, pose serious challenges for their future. National and local governments are, hence, looking for policies that could improve the sustainability of cities and increase their capacity to address these challenges more comprehensively and effectively. At the same time, citizens, civic groups and civil society organizations became more vocal in expressing and struggling for their rights to the city (Danieri and Douglass, 2008; Goh and Bunnell, 2013; Douglass, 2014). As a result, new multi-faceted forms of urban governance are emerging across East Asia, challenging established relations between the state and civil society. This points towards an ongoing restructuring of the state-civil society relations, and to consequent transition from developmental urbanization towards what could be seen as post-developmental urbanization (Cho and Križnik, 2017; Doucette and Park, 2018).

Citizen participation can play a crucial role in building more inclusive and sustainable cities. Involvement of residents in decision making is recognized as an important instrument to improve the living environment in localities, as well as to strengthen local autonomy (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Callahan, 2007; Ledwith, 2011; Gilchrist and Taylor, 2016). Citizen participation is considered the cornerstone of a more effective and responsive urban governance as well as of localized social sustainability agenda (Manzi et al.,

2010). Civil society in East Asia, however, used to have comparatively weak autonomy in relation to the state, which led to limited citizen participation in the past (Ooi, 2009; Read, 2012). In this regard, citizen participation does not have a long tradition when compared to the Global North. While the specific historical relations between the state and civil society in East Asia are well acknowledged, their consequences for urban development have been less examined, particularly from a comparative cross-cultural perspective (Doucette and Park, 2018; Shin, 2018). The importance of understanding the consequences of state–civil society relations for urban development, in general, seems even more urgent, given the recent surge of citizen participation in shaping the living environment in cities across East Asia (Cho, 2017; Cho and Križnik, 2017; Hou, 2017; Ng, 2017; Kim and Križnik, 2018).

This article tries to fill this gap by comparing two reportedly successful cases of neighbourhood improvement to better understand the importance of citizen participation in urban planning, and its consequences on urban development in general. It focuses on Seoul in South Korea (hereafter Korea) and Singapore as two leading cities in East Asia, successfully promoting and supporting citizen participation in diverse areas of urban life. The similarities between both cities extend to colonial urbanization under Japanese and British imperial rule, respectively, as well as to rapid economic growth and urban development under nationalist authoritarian regimes from the 1960s on (Watson, 2011). Their urban development used to be instrumentalized for the economic advancement of Korea and Singapore, for the strengthening of their national security, and for the legitimation of developmental state (Castells, 1992; Kim and Choe, 1997; Perry, Koh and Yeoh, 1997).

These similarities resulted not only in similar patterns of developmental urbanization but also shaped historical state–civil society relations. Autonomous civil society in Korea and Singapore used to be comparatively

weak, depending on the strong state, which controlled, co-opted and often suppressed grassroots mobilization (Ganesan, 2002; Koh and Ooi, 2004; Noh and Tumin, 2008; Ooi, 2009; Jeong, 2012; Kim and Lee, 2015; Kim, 2017; Kim and Jeong, 2017). In consequence, the strong state managed neighbourhood improvement in Seoul and Singapore in the past with little or no meaningful citizen participation (Ooi and Hee, 2002; Ho, 2009; Cho and Križnik, 2017). In both cities, citizen participation recently gained importance as “one of the most impactful platforms with which to involve communities in shaping their built environments” (CLC and SI, 2017: 87). Seoul and Singapore in this regard exemplify an ongoing transition from previously exclusive towards inclusive forms of urban governance (Cho, 2017; Cho and Križnik, 2017; Cho et al., 2017; Wolfram, 2018). Yet in contrast to Singapore, where growing citizen participation is largely facilitated by the state, Korea has a long history of grassroots mobilization, which directly affected state involvement. Without the historical legacy of civic struggles, the recent surge of citizen participation in Seoul would not be possible (Kim and Križnik, 2018).

The article is organized into six sections. After the introduction, the review section provides a basic explanatory framework for understanding citizen participation in urban planning. The following section describes the research approach and methodology. The case study section provides the historical background of neighbourhood improvement in Seoul and Singapore, as well as the details about the two case studies. Citizen participation in neighbourhood improvement of Samdeok Maeul and Tampines is compared in the following section, while the final section presents overall research findings, brings conclusion and discusses the research limitations.

II. Review

Citizen participation, in general, refers to the involvement of citizens and civic groups in planning as well as decision making on equal foot with other stakeholders (Callahan, 2007). It is not to be mixed up with political participation or broader civic engagement. Different socio-economic, cultural and political changes, including democratization and decentralization of decision making, expansion of civil rights, increasingly vocal grassroots and stronger civil society organizations contributed to the growing citizen participation in decision making after the 1960s. Against this backdrop, bureaucratized planning system, incapable of adequately addressing mounting urban problems of the time, also began to recognize that involvement of diverse social groups can contribute not only to the quality of planning and its outcomes but also to representativeness and legitimacy of planning (Davidoff, 1965; Sanoff, 2000). Early advocacy planning, nevertheless, faced a strong opposition from the public institutions and experts, which tried to keep a grip over decision making. This resulted in significant differences regarding the level of citizen participation, ranging from what Arnstein (1969: 217) called “manipulation [...] of powerless citizens” to “citizen control” of the planning process and its outcomes. While she was clear about its importance, Arnstein (1969: 224) also warned that citizen participation could become an instrument of social control rather than empowerment, if participants are not given “sufficient dollar resources to succeed.”

Lacking resource allocation to support citizen participation is not the only difficulty in this regard. Many studies discussed the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation from angles of different stakeholders. In general, citizen participation allows stakeholders to learn from each other, improve their capacity and skills to collaborate, build trust among

them, and to break potential gridlocks in the planning and implementation process (Innes and Booher, 2004; Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Callahan, 2007; Križnik, 2018b). Citizens can effectively inform others about problems and opportunities in their living environment (Day, 2006), while the public institutions can benefit from a better-informed planning process, allocate resources more efficiently, build strategic coalitions and avoid or reduce litigation and management costs (Sanoff, 2000; Margerum, 2002; Irvin and Stansbury, 2004). On the other hand, citizen participation can be time-consuming. Citizens who are not used to taking part in planning can also find it very demanding, and begin to question its necessity when no tangible results are delivered (Botes and Rensburg, 2000). In the case of poor representativeness, the results of citizen participation can be influenced by interest groups. Moreover, potentially bad decisions, resulting from the long participatory process, are difficult to reverse, which may backfire on the state. In this way, the state can lose not only control over planning but also its legitimacy among citizens (Križnik, 2018a).

Citizen participation in itself does not guarantee a successful outcome for different parties involved. A number of studies tried to identify what contributes to successful citizen participation in planning (Callahan, 2007). Irvin and Stansbury (2004) agree that adequate financial resources are essential to support regular meetings of representative groups of stakeholders in the potentially long participatory process. Moreover, they argue that such engagement should include “a transparent decision-making process to build trust among the participants, clear authority in decision making, [and] competent and unbiased group facilitators” (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004: 61). However, even in such case, the effectiveness of citizen participation eventually depends on particular local socio-economic, cultural and institutional contexts, “which suggests the need for considerable variation in strategy” (Sanoff, 2000: 7).

For its impact on improving social interaction and trust, as well as for strengthening of confidence in public institutions, citizen participation is widely considered to play an essential role in building socially more inclusive and sustainable cities (Day, 2006; Callahan, 2007; Dempsey et al., 2011; Wolfram, 2018). It is recognized as one of the “core concepts and guiding principles for a localized social sustainability agenda” (Manzi et al., 2010: 18). Citizen participation is, therefore, increasingly related to the transformation of deprived urban areas, by which cities try to maintain and improve their social and territorial cohesion (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011; Cho and Križnik, 2017; Križnik, 2018a). Residents play a more central role in planning the neighbourhood improvement, which is expected to not only improve the planning process and its outcomes but also to build organizational capacity, to advance skills, and to improve the confidence of the residents to take part in planning and decision making.

Citizen participation is considered a part of broader community engagement, which aims to strengthen social relationship networks in localities, to empower residents for self-management of communities, and to expand local autonomy in cities (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011; Ledwith, 2011; Gilchrist and Taylor, 2016). Although citizen participation is expected to help communities in identifying and addressing problems in their immediate living environment, a question remains to what extent residents can develop their own agendas through participatory planning. Moreover, Callahan (2007: 1179) questions “how much participation is enough” to effectively implement these agendas in practice. Both questions seem to be essentially tied to the level of state involvement in community engagement. Somerville (2016: 92) suggests that citizen participation does not always result in community empowerment, but can instead constitute communities as “collectively governable subjects.” Although the state seemingly delegates power to communities and individuals, this can in practice result

in “further erosion of rights in favour of responsibilities,” as well as expand state control over resources and society (Ledwith, 2011: 23). In this sense, citizen participation should also be observed as an instrument of neoliberal governmentality (Day, 2006; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014).

The review shows that citizen participation has become widely practised in planning, although its aims and outcomes are contested. On the one hand, community engagement is expected to empower the residents, while on the other hand, it can also be an instrument of social control. The following sections compare Seoul and Singapore so as to better understand the consequences of citizen participation in planning the neighbourhood improvement.

III. Methodology

Walliman (2006) recognizes case-oriented qualitative research approach as an appropriate approach for cross-cultural studies, aiming to understand the particular historical and cultural specificities of selected cases. Several qualitative research methods were, therefore, combined and triangulated in this research to gain greater insight into the empirical reality.¹ Primary data were collected through site visits, participant observation, and exploratory and in-depth semi-structured interviews with residents, members and activists of civil society organizations, experts, and public officials, who represent the major stakeholder groups in the neighbourhood improvement. Thirty-seven individuals were interviewed in Seoul and Singapore from

¹ This article draws on research projects, which the authors conducted between 2014 and 2018.

Table 1 Stakeholder groups represented in the interviews

Samdeok Maeul, Seoul		Tampines, Singapore	
Ref.	Stakeholder groups	Ref.	Stakeholder groups
S1	resident	T1	resident
S2	resident	T2	resident (2x)
S3	resident	T3	resident (2x)
S4	resident	T4	resident (2x)
S5	activist	T5	activist
S6	activist	T6	activist
S7	activist	T7	activist
S8	expert	T8	expert
S9	expert	T9	expert
S10	expert	T10	expert
S11	expert	T11	expert
S12	expert	T12	public official
S13	public official	T13	public official
S14	public official (2x)	T14	public official
S15	public official	T15	public official (3x)
S16	public official		

2017 to 2018 (Table 1).² Interviews included standardized and open-ended questions, which strengthened the consistency of comparison across stakeholder groups and sites on the one hand, and allowed flexibility in exploring the specificity of a particular case on the other hand (Walliman, 2006). Moreover, the authors conducted numerous site visits as well as attended workshops and meetings with the residents to directly observe the community engagement in neighbourhood improvement, and its consequences on everyday life. The interviews and participant observation were comple-

² Thirty-one interviews are referred to as S1–S16 (Samdeok Maeul, Seoul) and T1–T15 (Tampines, Singapore). See Wolfram (2018) for a similar approach.

mented and contextualized with an analysis of secondary data, including literature on citizen participation, urban planning and policy documents in both cities. The research also included two expert workshops in Seoul and Singapore in late 2017 to address the cultural bias in understanding, comparing, and assessing the primary data, which is considered to be a major difficulty in cross-cultural studies such as this one (Hantrais and Mangen, 1996).

The review of secondary sources showed that significant innovations in urban planning and urban governance are taking place in Seoul and Singapore. Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) and Singapore Government are increasingly recognizing the importance of citizen participation for building a socially more inclusive city (SMG, 2015; HDB, 2016; URA, 2016; CLC and SI, 2017; HDB, 2018a). Citizen participation is considered an integral part of neighbourhood improvement, which aims to improve the quality of the living environment, and at the same time to strengthen local autonomy in both cities (Cho, 2017; Cho and Križnik, 2017; Cho et al., 2017; Kim, 2017; Kim and Križnik, 2018; Wolfram, 2018). A case of reportedly successful neighbourhood improvement was selected in each city to better understand the shift from top-down towards more inclusive urban planning and urban governance in Seoul and Singapore.

Residential Environment Management Project (REMP) in Samdeok Maeul in Seoul and Hello Neighbour! (HN!) project in Tampines in Singapore were selected as cases of recent neighbourhood improvement, with a focus on the planning process (Seongbuk-gu, 2015a, 2015b; HDB, 2018a, 2018b). These two cases were not chosen for similarities in their planning approach or institutional frameworks. Moreover, both cases differ considerably concerning historical, socio-economic, urban and cultural contexts. Samdeok Maeul and Tampines can nevertheless be considered successful examples of growing citizen participation in neighbourhood improvement, based on partnerships between public and civil stakeholders (Maeng, 2015;

Cho, 2016; Lee, 2016; Kim and Križnik, 2018; Križnik, 2018b). In this sense, both cases seem to depart from the earlier top-down approaches to neighbourhood improvement. It is this similar relationship between REMP and HN! on the one hand, and earlier approaches to neighbourhood improvement on the other hand that methodologically underpin comparison of Samdeok Maeul and Tampines in this article. The next section overviews the history of neighbourhood improvement in both cities and discusses the selected cases.

IV. Case study: Seoul and Singapore

1. Neighbourhood improvement in Seoul and Singapore

Seoul and Singapore experienced far-reaching social changes over the past decades. In 2015, Seoul had 10,331,847 and Singapore 5,535,002 residents respectively, which is about three times more than they had in 1960 (Table 2). It is not surprising that the early neighbourhood improvement in Seoul and Singapore was focused on the housing provision for the rapidly growing urban population. Housing provision also had an important role in legitimizing both authoritarian regimes (Chua, 1997; Kim and Yoon, 2003; Watson, 2011). Each regime, nevertheless, approached housing provision in a different way. In Korea, the state turned to the market and colluded with large construction corporations, which were expected to address the housing shortage. Contrary to that, the state in Singapore provided public housing through the Housing and Development Board (HDB) (Park, 1998; Ha, 2013). Both approaches seem to have succeeded in addressing the housing shortage. While housing was available for only a half of the Seoul's population in 1980, the housing supply reached 77.4%

Table 2 Population growth in Seoul and Singapore

	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	2015
Seoul	3,470,880	6,889,740	9,645,932	10,595,943	10,297,004	10,331,847
Singapore	1,886,900	2,262,600	2,735,957	3,524,506	4,265,762	5,535,002

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore (2015), SMG (2017)

in 2000 (Ha, 2007). In 2014, the housing supply reached 97.9% (SMG, 2017). The housing supply in Singapore reached 100% already in the late 1980s (Park, 1998).

Differences in approaching housing provision and neighbourhood improvement in Seoul and Singapore had quite different social consequences. Singapore has one of the most successful public housing programmes worldwide, providing affordable housing to more than 80% of Singaporeans (Chua, 2014). In Seoul, the majority of housing is private, with only 6.5% of the population living in public housing (CLC and SI, 2017). The housing market in Seoul is speculative with limited access to affordable housing for low- and many middle-income households, which contributes to growing social polarization in the city. Contrary to that, public housing in Singapore significantly contributed to social cohesion in the city (Chua, 2011; Ha, 2013; Shin and Kim, 2016; Cho and Križnik, 2017).

Neighbourhood improvement in Seoul and Singapore was initially focused on the demolition of shantytowns and construction of new apartment complexes. Shantytowns in Seoul were home to about a third of all households in the 1970s (Kim and Yoon, 2003; Moberand, 2008). After a limited success of public initiatives to tackle the housing problem, the state turned towards the market and introduced the Joint Redevelopment Project in 1983, which became the major neighbourhood improvement approach over the next decades (Park, 1998; Shin and Kim, 2016). The project was based on a partnership between private landowners and construction companies,

which took most of its benefits. Small landowners and tenants, to the contrary, often had to face forceful evictions and displacement with little or no compensations (Shin and Kim, 2016; Shin, 2018). In 2002, SMG introduced New Town Development Project as a more comprehensive approach to neighbourhood improvement. In practice, however, it also resulted in a massive displacement of residents, demolition of traditional residential areas, decline of productive and social networks, and in social conflicts. In this sense, this project was not different from the past (Križnik, 2018a). Its negative social consequences, along with the economic slowdown in the late 2000s, contributed to a shift in neighbourhood improvement in Seoul, which focused away from urban redevelopment towards urban regeneration of deprived residential areas, including Liveable Town-Making Pilot Project in 2008 and Seoul Human Town Project in 2010 (Cho and Križnik, 2017).

Contrary to Seoul, the state played a crucial role in tackling the rampant housing shortages and deprived residential areas in Singapore since the early 1960s. This resulted in a top-down approach in the planning of the HDB estates, giving rise to orderly and tractable neighbourhood improvement within public apartment complexes (Hee and Heng, 2004; Hee, 2009). In the 1970s, precincts were introduced as an instrument of encouraging social interaction among residents (Hee and Heng, 2004; Hee, 2009). Since the 1990s, HDB introduced diverse neighbourhood improvement programmes for ageing housing complexes, which included the Main Upgrading Programme, Interim Upgrading Programme and Home Improvement Programme (Fernandez, 2011; HDB, 2014). The government's attempt to provide better quality housing in the 1990s has been recognized as its effort to meet the increasingly higher aspirations of Singaporeans (Perry, Kong and Yeoh, 1997), but also to maintain political legitimacy (Teo and Kong, 1997).

Initially, there was little citizen participation in planning of the HDB public housing estates (Ooi and Shaw, 2004). In the 1970s, however, HDB came to realize that public housing should follow logic more than politics and greater incorporation of citizens' views was not only needed but also helped improve public housing. It was realized that a sense of belonging to the estate could be achieved through active participation, especially through activities of various grassroots initiatives. However, the state still had strong control over citizen participation through neighbourhood organizations. Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCC) were first created in 1965 and have become the leading neighbourhood organization in Singapore. Residents' Committees (RCs) were established in 1978 to ameliorate the impact of dislocation, to improve HDB estates, to organize residents' activities and to promote neighbourliness. In 1989, Town Councils (TCs) were created to enhance local governance and self-sufficiency. Yet the impact of such highly institutionalized citizen participation on the neighbourhood improvement has been minimal (Douglass and Friedmann, 1998).

In Seoul, little attention was initially placed on citizen participation. Tenants notably were excluded from urban redevelopment, which led to urban poor and anti-eviction movements during the 1970s and 1980s (Mobrand, 2008; Kim and Lee, 2015). These social movements can be seen as autonomous grassroots attempts to address negative consequences of speculative urban development, to protect housing rights of urban poor and to improve the living environment in deprived residential areas (Cho, 1998; Shin, 2018). During the 1990s, community movements started to emerge in better-off residential areas, where they aimed to address the provision of affordable child care, education, welfare and health, protect the environment and local culture, build new communal spaces, etc. (Jeong, 2012; Kim, 2012). Yet it was not until the late 1990s that the state began to support community movements and citizen participation in general.

During the 2000s the latter became increasingly institutionalized in the form of partnerships between the state and civil society (Kim, 2017). In contrast to Singapore, citizen participation in Seoul was institutionalized comparatively late. Diverse community movements, nevertheless, have historically contributed to neighbourhood improvement in the city and to the emergence of more inclusive urban governance (Kim and Križnik, 2018).

Citizen participation in Seoul and Singapore has considerably expanded during the 2010s, which affected neighbourhood improvement in both cities. SMG introduced new urban regeneration approaches with an aim to address social, economic, and environmental problems in deprived residential areas in a more comprehensive way (SMG, 2013). At the same time, SMG (2015: 240) recognized the importance of community building to address mounting social and economic problems “by making the neighbourhood community the centre of its policymaking.” In 2012, REMP was introduced as a new urban regeneration approach, aiming to improve the living environment in low-rise residential areas with substandard infrastructure and social amenities, to provide support for the renovation of individual houses, and to strengthen community activities in localities (Kim, 2018). Citizen participation became an integral part of community building, which required the residents in urban regeneration areas to take part in the planning, implementation and management (Maeng, 2016). For this purpose, residents had to establish the Resident Community Steering Committee (RCSC), take part in community workshops and public presentations, manage and implement support programmes and funds, and to take care of communal facilities (Kim and Križnik, 2018).

In Singapore, there were deliberations among policymakers to readdress community engagement in neighbourhood improvement (Cho, 2017). In this context, the Remaking our Heartlands (ROH) initiative was introduced in 2007 to take on a more comprehensive approach to neighbourhood

improvement. In conjunction with ROH, the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (NRP) was introduced in response to the feedback, received from residents, for a more active consultation on the neighbourhood improvement as one of the key initiatives to revive middle-aged towns, with some form of community engagement (Cho, 2017). However, due to the predominantly top-down approach, there were limits in the NRP to promote more citizen participation (Cho and Križnik, 2017). Subsequently, HDB initiated the BOND (Building Our Neighbourhood's Dream) project in 2013 to expand community engagement (Cho, 2017). Although the BOND programme was considered a benchmark for citizen participation, its success was limited due to the difficulties in getting residents to take part in the planning process, and due to lack of knowledge and exposure to participatory planning (Cho, 2017). Subsequently, in an attempt to develop a participatory mechanism for Singapore's unique context, HDB and the National University of Singapore (NUS) have looked at possibilities to adopt a participatory approach to neighbourhood improvement of HDB estates, through a new HN! pilot project (Cho, 2016, 2017; Cho and Križnik, 2017).

The state in Seoul and Singapore aimed to actively involve citizens in decision making in various areas of urban life, including planning of neighbourhood improvement (SMG, 2013, 2015; HDB, 2016, 2018a, 2018b). In this sense, neighbourhood improvement in both cities reveals a transition from an earlier state-led towards a more inclusive and participatory approach. While this transition towards citizen participation in neighbourhood improvement has been acknowledged, there are also concerns about whether the state in practice continues to dominate planning and decision making (Cho and Križnik, 2017; Kim and Cho, 2017; Kim and Križnik, 2018). This suggests that more attention needs to be placed on the practices and consequences of citizen participation in urban planning. Following is the comparison of Samdeok Maeul and Tampines to better understand these

consequences.

2. Seoul: Residential Environment Management Project in Samdeok Maeul

Samdeok Maeul is a neighbourhood in the Seongbuk-gu district in the Northern Seoul. In 2014, it had 178 households and 446 residents, most of them living in relatively well-maintained single- or multi-family houses (Seongbuk-gu, 2015a: 32). Despite its small size and good quality of living environment, Samdeok Maeul was not equipped with appropriate infrastructure and social amenities, and lacked strong social relationship networks among the residents (Kim, 2018; S3; S4). Moreover, the neighbourhood was designated for an urban redevelopment in the past, which would have demolished the entire neighbourhood to make way for a new residential complex. Such transformation eventually never took place, which contributed to a gradual decline of property values in the neighbourhood. For this reason, the landowners asked SMG to cancel the designation and tried to find an alternative to improve the living environment and their properties (S8). Samdeok Maeul was selected for REMP in 2013, which was to improve the existing and to provide new infrastructure and social amenities, to support the renovation of individual houses, and to strengthen the eroded social relationship networks (Križnik, 2018b).

The planning process started at the end of 2013. Citizen participation was from the beginning considered the key to successful improvement of living environment and community building in Samdeok Maeul (Seongbuk-gu, 2015a). Various engagement methods were used to support collaboration between public, private and civic stakeholders in preparing and implementing the master plan (Table 3). Public officials and experts surveyed the residents twice to collect their opinions and get to know the



Source: Nanumgwamirae, Seoul

Figure 1 Community workshop in Samdeok Maeul, Seoul

everyday life in the neighbourhood. Moreover, nine community workshops were held with the residents from February to June 2014 to discuss the problems, potentials and future of the neighbourhood (Figure 1). Particular attention was placed on safety, building regulations as well as on design and management of the new community centre, which was considered the key for successful neighbourhood improvement. The residents and experts also visited three community centres in Seoul (Seongbuk-gu, 2015b). The local government organized two public presentations, where the residents were first informed about the background and aims of REMP, and then discussed the master plan. The number of attendees varied between eleven and thirty-four per event. It is estimated that around 170 participants took part in community workshops and presentations (Seongbuk-gu, 2015a: 200–220). During this process, neighbourhood newspaper and social media were also regularly used to engage the residents who could not take part in decision making (Nanumgwamirae, 2015; S5).

The residents agreed on the master plan in July 2014. After additional consultations, SMG passed an official bill to confirm the master plan a year later. The master plan provided different measures, addressing improvement of infrastructure, safety and communal space, including the installation of new street lights, CCTV, stairs, street pavement, provision of parking and pocket parks, as well as reconstruction of a residential building into a new community centre (Seongbuk-gu, 2015a: 233). Moreover, the master plan provided guidelines and incentives for the renovation of private houses. The implementation of REMP started in September 2016 and was completed by October 2017, when the Samdeok Maeul Community Centre opened. The REMP also required residents to establish an RC as part of the “community activation policy,” which was to ensure citizen participation in planning, and to strengthen social relationship networks among them (Maeng, 2016: 3). Samdeok Maeul RC was established in May 2014 and authorized to be a permanent RSCS in February 2015 (Seongbuk-gu, 2015a: 57). From 2014 to 2017, its members participated in more than 70 different meetings to discuss diverse issues related to planning, community activities and support programmes, as well as management of the community centre (Kim and Križnik, 2018).

Citizen participation was not easy to achieve, particularly since the residents had little experience with community engagement in the past (S3; S7; S13). For this reason, Nanumgwamirae, an NGO with a long experience in community activism, was involved in REMP to mediate between the residents, experts and public institutions. Moreover, the Jeongneung Social Welfare Centre also supported community engagement through diverse community programmes (Nanumgwamirae, 2015; Lee, 2016). The intermediary role of both organizations was of key importance for successful citizen participation. As a result of these efforts, the residents started to organize their own communal activities (Kim, 2018; Križnik, 2018b). Along with the

improved infrastructure and new social amenities, these residents-led activities substantially contributed to successful neighbourhood improvement in Samdeok Maeul (Maeng, 2015; Lee, 2016; Naneumgwamirae, 2016). Yet the planning and implementation of REMP took place under a strong state involvement with often little space for autonomous community engagement. This led to occasional conflicts among the residents, and to conflicts between them and the state (S2; S4; S13; S15). Moreover, communal activities in Samdeok Maeul continue to depend on the state support (S1; S4; S13), which calls for a more critical assessment of citizen participation in planning the neighbourhood improvement (Kim and Križnik, 2018).

3. Singapore: Hello Neighbour! in Tampines

Tampines is one of the largest HDB towns, located in the East Region of Singapore, and is estimated to have had 261,230 residents in 2015, with most of them living in public housing (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2015). Tampines Central, a district of Tampines, was selected as the site for the HN! pilot project, owing to its existing infrastructure, as well as the involvement of several key partners in the community (Cho, 2016). The project site included Tampines Ville, Tampines Parkview, and Tampines Palmwalk, and is flanked by Tampines Streets 82, 83, and Avenues 3 and 5, located at Tampines Central area that consists of block 830–863 with an estimated number of 5,000 households. The size of the site was also regarded as appropriate for meaningful engagement (Cho, 2016). In addition to the HDB and the local community in Tampines, the NUS experts collaborated closely with other stakeholders, including the Tampines TC and the chairpersons of the local RCs. The People's Association Tampines Central constituency office was also involved in the project as a member of the working committee that consisted of key stakeholders, who steered the



Source: National University of Singapore; Housing and Development Board, Singapore

Figure 2 Citizen participation in Tampines, Singapore

direction of the project.

The engagement methods adopted in the HN! allowed a series of collective inquiries and experimentation, followed by continuous reflection and evaluation to refine the planning. Several site visits were conducted in July and August 2014 by the NUS experts to observe and experience the daily life of the residents, map their meeting places, build relationships with the local stakeholders, and locate possible sites for intervention. Formal interviews were conducted in August 2014 with various local stakeholders, such as leaders and members of grassroots organizations and representatives from the HDB and TC, to better understand the current level of community participation in the neighbourhood. Methods of community participation were investigated through stakeholders' conversations, while challenges and motivations for participation were identified in the Singaporean context with respect to HDB neighbourhood planning. Creative community engagement methods were experimented throughout the process, generating positive reports about the increased use of the newly created communal spaces as a result (T2; T3; T15). By reviewing

the current planning and proposing participatory approaches that may be effective in the public housing context, the new scheme aimed to offer insights into ways to increase the involvement of communities and shared stakeholderhood in the planning of neighbourhood improvement (Cho, 2016, 2017; Cho and Križnik, 2017).

In the stakeholder workshop held in August 2014, various issues were discussed, including each stakeholder's definition of successful community participation; their main takeaways from this pilot project; the community's assets, issues, and concerns, and the role and contribution of each stakeholder in the project. Several community outreach events and pop-up booths with questionnaires were organized during September and October 2014 aimed at reaching out to a larger community that might not participate in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and the design workshop. Three pop-up events were held to display the project and its progress, and to seek residents' feedback. They were held in public spaces such as void decks, green open spaces, and hard courts within the neighbourhood. The pop-up events took place at different times of the day on both weekdays and weekends, to tap on different pedestrian flow, as well as residents of different demographic groups in order to reach as many residents as possible. One FGD was conducted in September 2014 to better understand the neighbourhood as well as its residents' daily activities, gathering spots, nodes, landmarks, and their thoughts on the quality of the current neighbourhood amenities. Residents shared the types of locations where they meet their neighbours. Another design workshop was conducted in October 2014 to engage the residents in visualizing their ideas and aspirations for constructing the proposed design typologies (Figure 2). Potential participants were recruited through posters that the RCs distributed via their notice boards and websites, grassroots leaders, and during the community outreach events and pop-up booths.

In total, 1,462 residents out of about 15,000 participated in the engagement process during 2014–2015, including reaching out through social media and website, holding stakeholders’ workshop, three pop-up events, FGD, design workshop, installing interactive boards for everyday communication, establishing a volunteer programme, and conducting co-creation events with residents and stakeholders (CSAC, 2015). Throughout the process, more than 130 surveys have been completed, and the subsequent qualitative analysis revealed more insights regarding the success of engagement process, residents’ satisfaction and social implications on the use of implemented public amenities (CSAC, 2015). Co-creation activities aimed to involve the residents in the actual construction of the two design typologies. During the co-creation events, residents participated in activities such as painting and creating community arts with artists. The outcomes of this project can be seen as two-fold. One relates to the effectiveness of the typologies in encouraging deeper social interaction amongst residents. The other relates to the success of the co-creation and engagement process, i.e. whether the engagement methods and channels used have an impact on enhancing the residents’ sense of identity and ownership. The project has generated positive outcomes, such as more bottom-up initiatives organized by the residents, increased use of newly created communal spaces, and stronger social relationship networks taking place at these spaces (T2; T3; T8; T12; T13; T15).

V. Discussion

Citizen participation in shaping the living environment in Seoul and Singapore has significantly expanded over the past years (Cho, 2016, 2017; Cho and Križnik, 2017; CLC and SI, 2017; Kim and Križnik, 2018). This seems also to

be the case in planning the neighbourhood improvement in both cities. The state tried to involve residents in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines, along with other stakeholders from the early stages of REMP and HN!. Although Samdeok Maeul and Tampines have different historical, socio-economic, urban, cultural and political contexts, REMP and HN! were based on similar engagement methods. These included extensive surveys and interviews with the residents, numerous outreach activities and public presentations, use of local media, and a number of community workshops (Table 3). Various outreach events such as pop-up booths were extensively used in Tampines, while in Samdeok Maeul the residents learned from the experiences of other community centres in Seoul (Seongbuk-gu, 2015b; Cho, 2016). Apart from being based on citizen participation, REMP and HN! also share similarities in approaching neighbourhood improvement by focusing on the provision of new communal facilities, which the experts and public officials considered key for strengthening social relationship networks and improving the living environment (S8; S9; S16; T8; T12; T13). For these reasons, the main outcomes of neighbourhood improvement in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines are somewhat similar (Table 3).

Residents also recognized the importance of communal facilities for improving relations with their neighbours, and for engaging in communal activities on a daily and weekly basis (S1; S2; T1; T2; T3; T4). This shows that the improvement of the most proximate spaces, which the residents are familiar with, is important for successful citizen involvement (Sanoff, 2000; Day, 2006). Contrary to HN!, where existing communal spaces were remodelled and improved, REMP was focused on the reconstruction of an old residential building into a new community centre. This costly and consequently slow implementation seemed to have negatively affected citizen participation in Samdeok Maeul, and to have contributed to conflicts between the residents and local government according to the

interviewees (S4; S13; S15). In Tampines, no significant conflicts existed that could potentially slow down the planning and implementation process, as there was a strong commitment and support throughout the process from most of the stakeholders, including the government agencies, NUS experts, grassroots leaders and organizations, and residents. This resulted in visible results soon enough to help in sustaining community engagement in Tampines (T12; T13; T15).

Comparison of citizen participation in planning the neighbourhood improvement in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines also reveals important differences regarding their planning approaches and institutional frameworks. HN! was planned as a pilot project, which was to develop a participatory mechanism that could encourage stronger social cohesion and community bonding through community engagement (T12; T13; T15). It was launched in line with Singapore's recent evolving approaches to neighbourhood planning, such as ROH initiative, NRP, and BOND. On the contrary, REMP was based on an amended national law and a new municipal ordinance, which were introduced about two years before Samdeok Maeul was selected for the neighbourhood improvement (Maeng, 2016). This well-established institutional framework was, at the same time, a result of long experience with community-based urban regeneration among experts and civil society, which dates back to the early 2000s (Cho and Križnik, 2017; Kim, 2017; S9; S10). In Singapore, such experiences are comparatively new (T6; T8; T9; T11; T14). The relationship between the state and civil society in Singapore has started to change since the 1990s, but there was still little room for community participation since civic involvement has been officially implemented through local grassroots organizations in a formal and institutionalized manner (Cho and Križnik, 2017). Although an appropriate institutional framework does not necessarily lead towards successful citizen participation, it is considered instrumental for the state in steering the

planning process towards the desired goal (Callahan, 2007). However, the research findings do not reveal a significant difference between both cases in this regard. Despite the lack of well-established institutional framework, HN! was swiftly implemented in accordance with the project's aims.

This could be partly attributed to the strong political support for HN! in Singapore (Cho, 2017; T8). Singapore's current political atmosphere shows greater support for community participation, especially in terms of designing and organizing neighbourhoods, and HN! was launched in line with this evolving approach to neighbourhood planning (Cho, 2017). At the same time, successful citizen participation in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines was possible largely due to the active involvement of intermediary organizations in the neighbourhood improvement. Nanumgwamirae and Jeongneung Social Welfare Centre supported community engagement from the very beginning when the residents had little organizational capacity and experiences with citizen participation (Lee, 2016; Kim, 2018). Although the NUS experts could not be considered an intermediary organization, their involvement was equally important in facilitating citizen participation in Tampines (Cho, 2016). Moreover, Nanumgwamirae and NUS experts were also instrumental in supporting diverse resident-led activities, apart from those formally required through REMP and HN!. The residents were clearly aware of the impact that these community facilitators had on community engagement (S1; S2; T2; T3). In this regard, the research shows that it is not only the institutional framework but also the presence of community facilitators, which is important for the implementation of effective and meaningful citizen participation (Sanoff, 2000). This seems to have been successfully achieved in both cases (S8; S13; T12; T13; T15). At the same time, the NUS experts could rely on already established community organizations with active community leaders (Table 3; T8). No comparable community organizations existed in Samdeok Maeul before REMP (Kim,

2018). Consequently, the newly established Samdeok Maeul RCSC lacked organizational capacity and a strong community leader (S15). According to the interviews with community activists, this seems to have slowed down community engagement in Samdeok Maeul (S5; S7).

Although active citizen participation in planning the neighbourhood improvement was achieved in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines, the research also reveals that the state was largely in control of the planning process (S11; S15; T8). In Samdeok Maeul, the planning took less than ten months, which is fast, considering that community engagement often needs time to build trust among the stakeholders (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Callahan, 2007). Moreover, the residents had no previous experience with planning or community building. Some of them described frequent community workshops and RC meetings as demanding and even questioned their necessity (S2; S3). This comes as no surprise, considering a number of different support programmes, which the residents had to manage in Samdeok Maeul (Table 3). The residents had little possibility to affect the direction of these programmes, although they were able to discuss their details and implementation. A public official was highly critical about this, claiming that the local government was more concerned about timely planning and implementation of urban regeneration than about a meaningful community engagement (S15). These findings point towards what Kim and Cho (2017) recognized as limitations of the current urban regeneration approaches in Seoul in expanding community empowerment.

In Tampines, state involvement was stronger and more focused, which has contributed to a better collaboration of a large number of stakeholders. HN! was initiated as a pilot project by HDB, and with the strong state support and commitment, there was less conflict throughout the process, when compared to Samdeok Maeul. However, the biggest challenge was the residents' commitment and attitude towards participation (T12; T13).

Table 3 Neighbourhood improvement in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines

	Samdeok Maeul, Seoul	Tampines, Singapore
Site characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-rise residential area • Insufficient urban infrastructure • Lack of social amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HDB residential area • Good basic infrastructure • Lack of social amenities
Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Environment Management Project • Associated projects (Seoul Energy-independent Maeul Building Project, Seoul Neighbourhood Community Project, Seongbuk-gu Community Building Project) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hello Neighbour! Pilot Project
Planning period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 2013 - July 2014 • Plan confirmed in June 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 2014 - April 2015
Legal and policy base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement Decree and the Act on the Improvement of Urban Areas and Residential Environments • Seoul Metropolitan Government Ordinance on the Improvement of Urban Areas and Residential Environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot project within NRP
Project aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban regeneration • Improvement of infrastructure and communal facilities • Improvement of individual houses • Strengthening of social relationship networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood improvement • Provision of new communal facilities • Improvement of community bonding
Public institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seoul Urban Regeneration Headquarter, Department of Residential Environment Improvement • Seongbuk-gu Neighbourhood Regeneration Planning Department, Division of Urban Regeneration and Design • Jeongneung Social Welfare Center, Local Organization Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HDB • People's Association • Tampines TC
Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PMA Engineering • Nanumgwamirae 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NUS
Community organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samdeok RC (~2014)/RCSC (2015~) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tampines Ville RC • Tampines Parkview RC • Tampines Palmwalk RC
Resident involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 170 participants (out of 446) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,462 participants (out of about 15,000)

Table 3 Neighbourhood improvement in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines (continued)

	Samdeok Maeul, Seoul	Tampines, Singapore
Community engagement methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys and interviews • Public presentations and consultations • Community workshops • Field trips • Local newspaper and social media • Resident-led activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community workshops • Outreach events • Pop-up booths with questionnaires • Focus group discussion • Resident-led activities
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved infrastructure and safety • New community centre • Stronger social relationship networks • New communal activities • Place attachment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved public space • New communal facilities • Stronger social relationship networks • New communal activities • Place attachment

The research findings show that it was challenging to persuade residents to participate, initiate and sustain communal activities at new spaces, as the residents are generally not accustomed to participation. Considering that community participation in Singapore's context has been largely led by the state, it would require time to change this mindset, as some of the interviewees were of the opinion that their impact on decision making is limited, and that the state will adequately take care of the neighbourhood (T1; T4; T8; T9). Residents did not see the need to participate in solving neighbourhood issues and, therefore, the level of engagement was significantly low (Cho et al., 2017). However, as Hollnsteiner (1976) argues, this may cause apathy, as well as lack of interest and initiative among citizens to take on larger roles beyond their daily matter, which is not conducive for community empowerment.

VI. Conclusion

The comparison of citizen participation in Samdeok Maeul in Seoul and Tampines in Singapore shows that the state involved the residents in neighbourhood improvement from the early stage of the planning process. The residents decided together with the state about the neighbourhood improvement and actively shaped their living environment. Throughout the process, the residents improved their skills to collaborate with one other, mostly with public stakeholders. In this way, the neighbourhood improvement opened opportunities for building new social relationship networks among the residents, and strengthened their confidence in public institutions. At the same time, the research findings show that community engagement took place under the strong guidance of the state, and continues to depend on public support significantly. Although the residents affected a number of decisions, they were unable to challenge the aims and course of the planning process substantially. Using formal and informal channels of influence, the state steered the planning process to meet the desired ends. In Samdeok Maeul, this occasionally resulted in conflicts between the residents and the public institutions. In Tampines, bureaucratic agendas that often set up tangible expectations during a fixed time period may have hindered a potentially more organic participatory process. Moreover, not everyone in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines was involved in the planning process, which questions its representativeness. In this regard, more attention should be placed on reaching and engaging diverse stakeholders in the future, including hard-to-reach social groups or those with traditionally low involvement profiles, which would allow residents to contribute to neighbourhood improvement in their own way beyond formal requirements. The research findings also emphasize an important role of community facilitators in community engagement.

Citizen participation in Samdeok Maeul and Tampines indicates that new multi-faceted forms of urban governance are emerging in Seoul and Singapore, based on partnerships between the state and citizens. In this regard, both cases significantly differ from the state-led or market-driven approaches of the past. The state, however, remains in control over citizen participation, which suggests that the legacy of a strong state is still present in urban planning. The long arm of the state affects not only its sustainability but also indicates the challenges to expand citizen participation in Seoul and Singapore in the future. Moreover, the state involvement could limit prospects of sustainable urbanization in Seoul and Singapore, if community empowerment is considered one of its key components. This article, however, offers only a limited view, focused in particular on citizen participation in planning the neighbourhood improvement. Follow-up research would have to provide a more comprehensive explanatory framework, including the evolving socio-political and cultural contexts of state–civil society relations in Seoul and Singapore, to better understand the growing role of citizens in shaping their living environment in cities across East Asia.

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