

which represented a typical Singapore approach based on governmental initiation and planning. The optimistic scenario of continuous economic growth and city development through building Singapore as a 21st century global business centre is now in question. Development has slowed since the economic downturn in 2001, making the future scenario pessimistic and unpredictable. The issues faced in Singapore downtown (the physical core of the island city and the concentration of capital flows, information exchange and decision-making) can be regarded as the tip of the iceberg of the city's economic future. Through the examination of urban design policies and proposals, this chapter discusses how downtown Singapore has been transformed in a specific historical context of building a modern city-state, and how the future downtown urban forms are envisioned to respond to the recent challenges in global competitiveness and sustainable urban development.

Functional divide: decentralized new towns and the downtown central business district

What shapes Singapore's urban landscape and downtown urban form today? What are the urban concepts behind the planning and downtown urban design policy, which initiated and then constituted the radical urban transformation over 30–40 years? In 1959, Singapore established her own self-government. The 1958 Statutory Master Plan, a colonial product based on the concept of Singapore as a middle-size town surrounded by countryside, was replaced in 1963 by a new vision of decentralized 'ring development', which was drafted by a UN team in a report 'Growth and Urban Renewal' (Abrams *et al.*, 1963) (Figure 9.1). Although the spatial scale is much smaller, some believe that the ring development in the UN team's Singapore Master Plan gained their inspiration from the ring of cities and green heart concepts of Randstad metropolitan area in Holland (see Koolhaas, 1995; Tan, 1999).

The policy of decentralizing population growth through the ring pattern was clearly set in the island-wide concept plan in 1971 (Tan, 1999). The ring pattern decisively influenced the geometry of the urban transport systems such as rapid transit and expressways, and the water resource planning through the protection of the central water catchment's and green areas in the centre of the island. Under the ring development policy, the spatial effects of decentralization and centralized revitalization

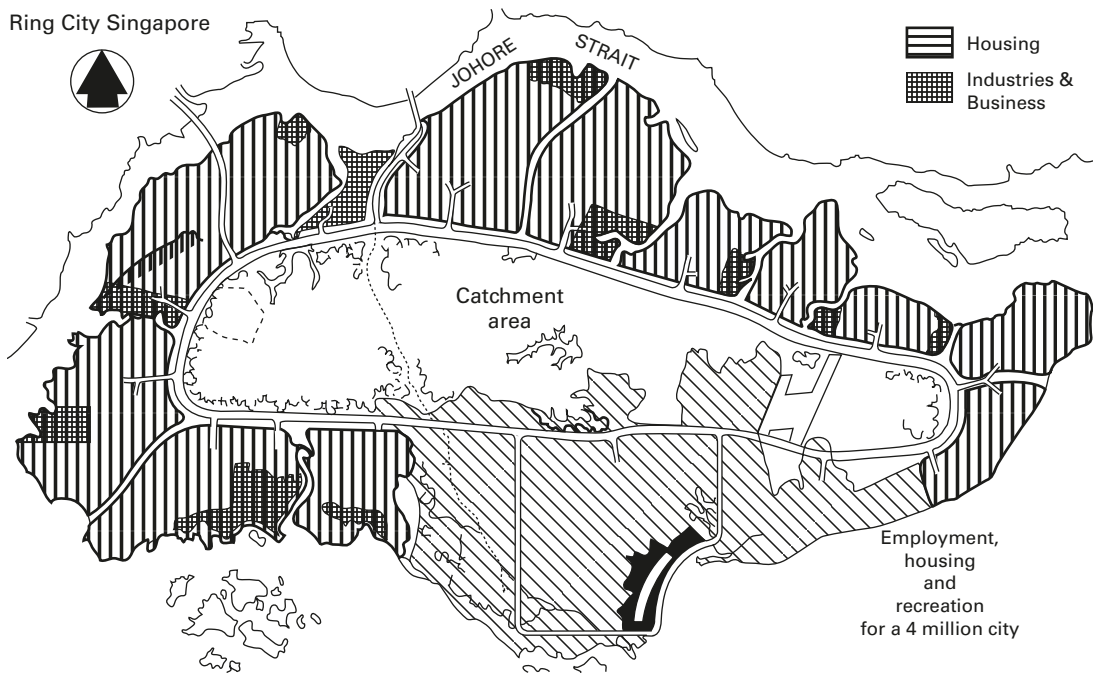


Figure 9.1
The Singapore 'ring
development' plan (after
Abrams *et al.*, 1963).

coexisted. The development of public housing and new towns along the ring corridors and at the outer fringes of the city paralleled the revitalization of the central city area and the relocation of existing inhabitants.

The government through its Housing Development Board (HDB), a public housing planning, design, construction and management entity, determined the urban landscape of decentralized new towns in Singapore. To date, more than 80% of the population inhabit the 20 decentralized new towns, which are 10–15 km away from the city centre and occupy more than 160 km² or a quarter of the land area of the whole island (Singapore URA, 1991; Koolhaas, 1995; Malone-Lee *et al.*, 2001).

Simultaneously, business activities were highly centralized at the nodal centre of the ring city. From the late 1960s, the Singapore central business district (CBD) and financial centre 'Golden Shoe' were rapidly developed along the waterfront and Shenton Way under the urban renewal programme (Figure 9.2). Almost 3 million m² of downtown office space was formed over the subsequent four decades. The CBD became a financial centre where most of the headquarters' offices, major local and international banks, stock brokers' companies, law firms, accountants and management consultants are rooted, including