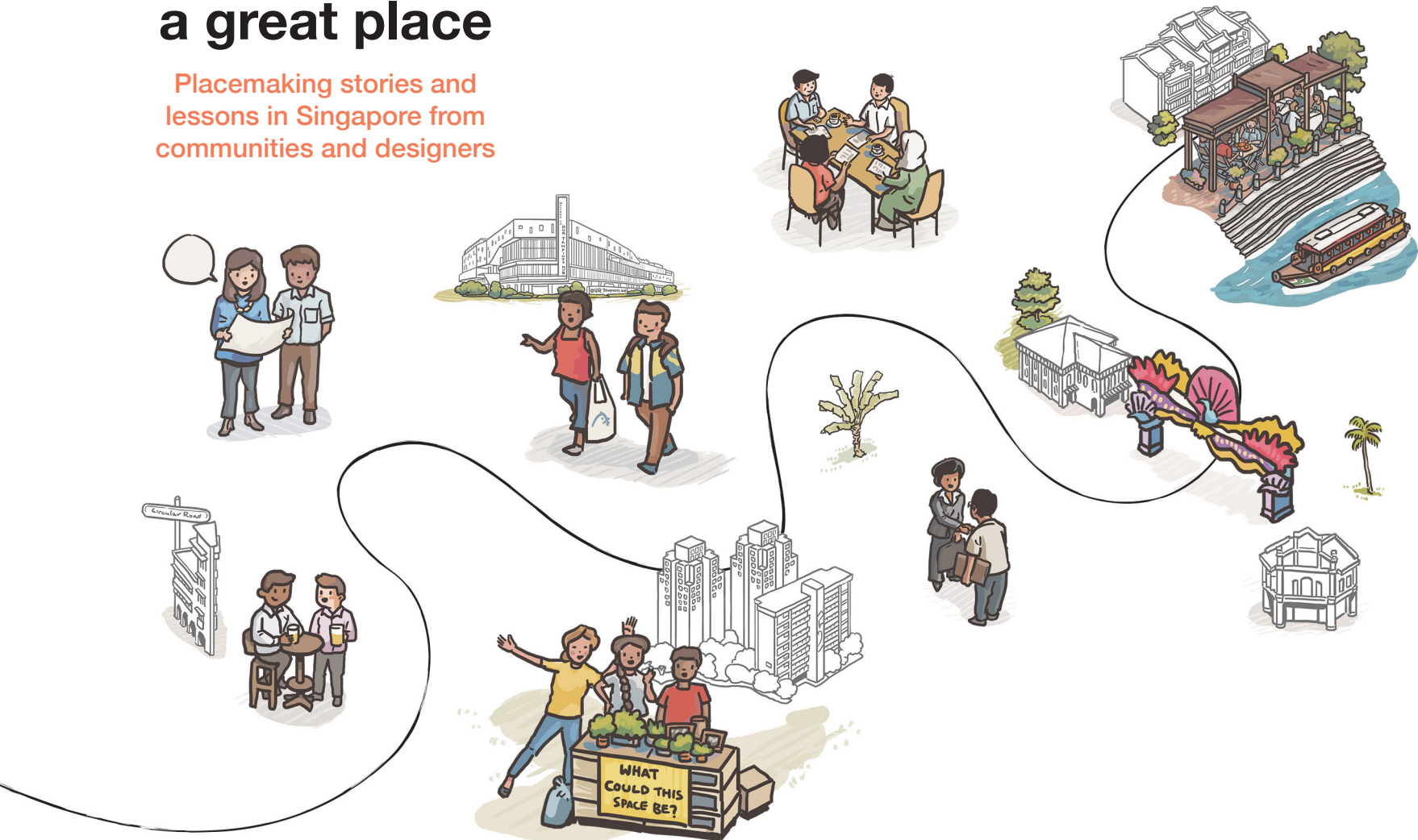


Placemaking stories and lessons in Singapore from communities and designers

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Contents

Foreword 04

Introduction 06
What makes a place special to us? 12
What’s in a place

Understanding terms 16
What makes a great place 32
What is placemaking

Stories and lessons from 34
• Individuals, residents, community groups 74
• Designers, architects, planners 102
• Precinct stakeholders, developers, business/property owners

Acknowledgements and resources 186

Placemaking in Singapore

Beyond our love for our families, friends and neighbours, what is common amongst all of us is our love for our own backyards, our favourite places, that small patch of green or public space in our neighbourhoods that we want to linger longer.

Public spaces and places are like extensions of our living rooms, where we can relax in, spend time with family and friends and use them actively for activities and celebrations as the seasons change.

The planning and design of good public spaces and streets go hand in hand with placemaking. There must be a good understanding of how we can create good spaces at the planning and design stage. Within well-designed spaces, it is equally important for those who inhabit these spaces to make people feel welcomed and find ways to draw people in with interesting activities and events.

Why placemaking is important

The best places are those that possess many different qualities and offer varied experiences. It is the unique blend of social, cultural, and economic qualities that makes a place memorable. And our identity is closely related to where we live, work, and play and where we develop familial, social and community ties. We often introduce ourselves by associating with the place we come from.

Placemaking makes places even better with communities and stakeholders working together to shape and create places that deepen our connection to our city, our identities, our heritage and to each other.

It is heartening to see that placemaking efforts in Singapore have taken root and grown in Singapore over time. Property owners, business operators, residents, community groups, designers, architects and others have worked closely with each other to actively shape and activate places and spaces close to our hearts. Such places range from larger precincts such as Marina Bay, Singapore River, Kampong Gelam, Jurong and others to streets and smaller public spaces, car park lots and even under MRT viaducts across Singapore.

Through just starting small, trial and error and many experiments in carrying out placemaking efforts in different locations and contexts, a strong ecosystem of partnerships and networks have been built amongst different stakeholders.

Such ecosystems have created good relationships and built up strong capabilities that will help us shape and create even richer and more endearing places and spaces that we can call our own. It also strengthens social and economic resilience to enable us to tackle common challenges together.

Inspiration for more possibilities

This book presents a glimpse into the many creative and innovative placemaking efforts and champions in Singapore. It presents stories and lessons from individuals, communities, designers, architects and commercial stakeholders, to serve as a resource guide for those interested in getting started or are continuing efforts in placemaking.

While we have presented stories and lessons from the perspectives of different groups of people, the insights shared are relevant and applicable to everyone. The stories are based on interviews, conversations and collaborations with diverse communities and groups of passionate champions over the years.

There are many more stories and examples that we are not able to cover. But we hope the accomplishments presented in the pages inspire new possibilities and ideas, to spur us on to keep working with each other, to make spaces and places around us our own, to make them a little more delightful, engaging and meaningful over time.

In activating and designing public spaces today and in the future, our ideas and solutions will need to constantly evolve to embrace new challenges, being mindful and purposeful in enabling people to access and enjoy public spaces safely.

I hope you will find this book insightful and useful.

Fun Siew Leng
Chief Urban Designer
Urban Redevelopment Authority

What makes a place special to us

We encounter and experience different places and spaces every day, from the ordinary, to the extraordinary. From the mundane to the magical.

What makes a place special to us? What draws us to a place? What places reflect who we are?

In the Loveable Singapore research project, many Singaporeans share some of the places they love in Singapore. Examples are our hawker centres and wet markets: *“A truly Singaporean place to me would be a hawker centre and a wet market. These are places I’ve never seen anywhere else.”*¹

¹The views on this and the next pages are from Singaporeans as part of the Loveable Singapore research project from 2020 to 2021, led by the DesignSingapore Council (DsG), in partnership with various other government agencies. The project seeks to understand what people love about Singapore and reasons for loving, as well as to uncover opportunities and gaps on how to create a more loveable Singapore. These views were shared through online surveys and focus groups held in 2020, on places that people love in Singapore. They are published with permission from DesignSingapore Council.





"I love the vastness of East Coast Park and how it's also interconnected to other parks. Everyone comes here and do their own thing. They fly kites, karaoke with family, barbeque, set up a hammock and chill. Everyone is here to have a good time."



Image credit: Tan Si Wei

"Marina Barrage offers a view of the Singapore skyline along with lots of greenery. It also has enough space for plenty of activities for family and friends, whether it is kite flying, having a picnic, or playing with water."

Places people love in their neighbourhoods and why

Within neighbourhoods, based on an online survey from March to April 2021 with 2,000 people (from age 16 years old and above), beyond loving places that support practical daily needs, people are drawn to places that allow them to be themselves, to connect with their loved ones and each other and those that give them a greater sense of belonging.

The online survey was part of the Loveable Singapore research project carried out from 2020 to 2021, led by the DesignSingapore Council, in partnership with various government agencies.

²These selected survey responses are published, with permission from the Design Singapore Council.

Selected survey findings on places that people love and why in Singapore neighbourhoods²



What's in a place

Meaning and value of places

What is a place?

A physical space may be defined by the walls and boundaries around it but may or may not be inhabited by people.

A place, on the other hand, is a vessel for collective memories and experiences. People's attachment to places are shaped by their memory of the physical space, what they did there and who they spent their time with.

Places also mean and offer different things for different people. For some, it might be a place to do business. For others, it may be a place to express their creativity, culture, and heritage. It might also be a place for relaxation and recreation, or a place for gathering and social activity.

Familiar and everyday places around our neighbourhoods such as the wet markets, hawker centres, parks and others provide opportunities for chance encounters. These are also places for people to gather and experience their surroundings and moments with each other.

Other examples of public spaces that also shape our experiences are public libraries, museums, cultural and heritage sites, streets and natural open spaces such as beaches and green spaces.

Enhancing the value of places through placemaking

Over the years, placemaking efforts led by public, private and people partnerships have gained momentum and is increasingly recognised as an important part of creating liveable and loveable places.

From 2004, proactive placemaking efforts have contributed to making Marina Bay a people's bay and a favourite destination for both locals and tourists.

Businesses have also come together to enhance areas such as Orchard Road and Chinatown.

Between 2010 and 2014, further close engagements amongst public and private sector stakeholders took place behind the scenes in supporting the formation of place management associations for the Singapore River (set up in 2012) and Kampong Gelam (set up in 2014) precincts.

Initiatives by such dedicated groups have benefitted businesses in these areas, strengthened their unique identities and brought different communities together over time.

From 2017, a more formal place management model was initiated and tested through the pilot Business Improvement District programme, which served to empower businesses and local communities to take on greater ownership in working together to tailor initiatives and enhancements specific to their precincts.

Shaping loveable places over the years: placemaking highlights

There are many everyday places that are well-designed to inspire and draw people in



Examples are wet markets, hawker centres, parks and other neighbourhood spaces

1990s
Chinatown
Little India
Orchard Road

Businesses started coming together to actively shape these areas

Marina Bay

Placemaking efforts from 2004 for Marina Bay have made it a key destination and a memorable bay for everyone



2004

2012
Singapore River One

The place management association, Singapore River One was formed and membership grew from 12 in 2012 to 121 (as of 2020)

12 to 121

Beyond driving initiatives for key precincts and neighbourhoods, efforts also focused on the activation of public spaces and streets to promote interaction and vibrancy. In addition, various ground-up groups have initiated partnerships with communities to co-design, activate and manage community and public spaces.

The placemaking journey in Singapore continues to unfold as communities, stakeholders and champions work together to create engaging, thriving and sustainable places for the future. This can help communities tackle existing and new challenges together.

Shaping loveable places over the years: placemaking highlights at a glance



2013

PubliCity

An early programme started in 2013 to inspire and encourage greater public space activation

60 The number of street activations supported by the Streets for People programme that started in 2015



2014

One Kampong Gelam

The place management association was formed for the Kampong Gelam precinct, initiated by a passionate champion

2015

2017

POPS

The Privately Owned Public Space (POPS) guidelines were released to encourage more well-designed public spaces

Many place management groups continue to work closely, building on their strong networks to tackle challenges together



Image credits: Singapore River One and Marina Central

2020 and
beyond

What makes a great place

The best places are those that possess many different qualities and offer varied experiences. It is the unique blend of social, cultural and economic elements that makes a place memorable.

So, what makes a great place?



Lofty, airy and well-lit spaces are more welcoming and inviting



1 It feels welcoming

A great place is open and inviting. It draws people in with attractive design and landscaping and provides comfortable spaces with ample shade and seating that encourages people to linger.

A variety of seating caters to different users and preferences

2 It is easily accessible

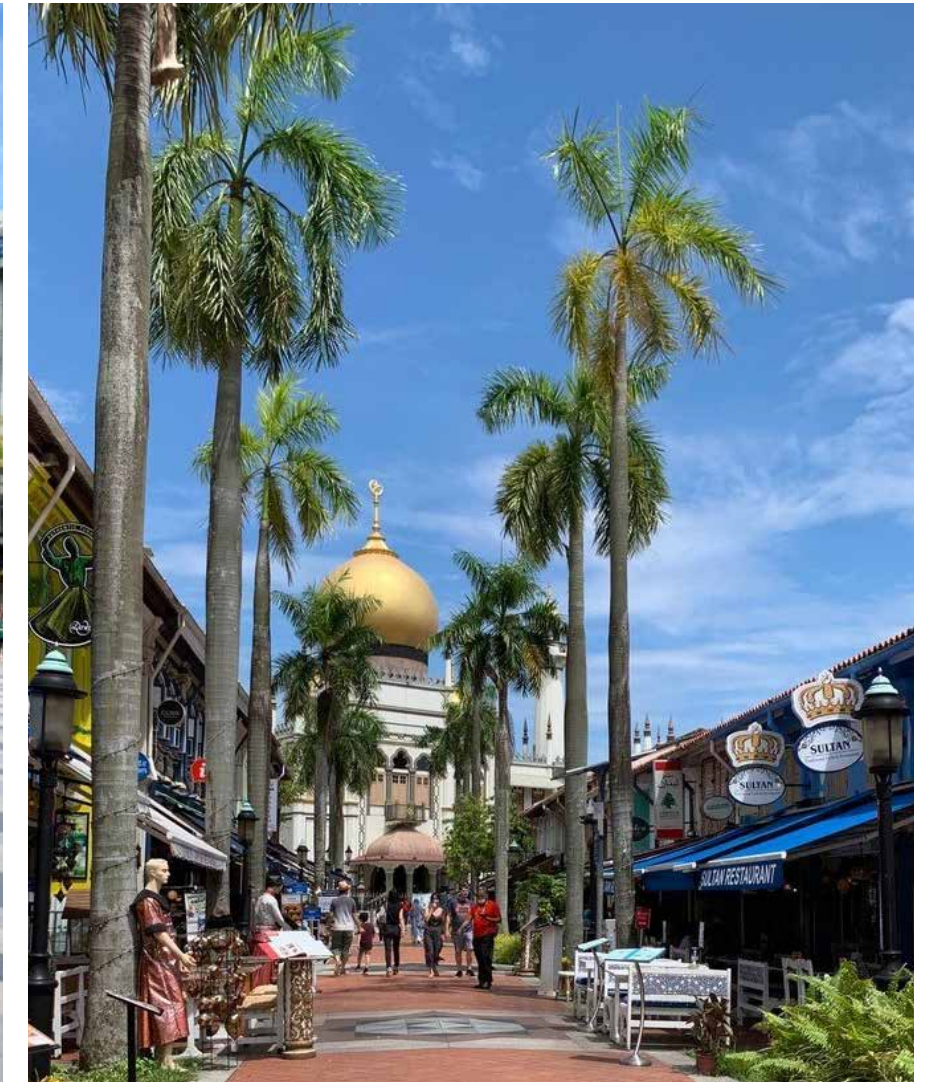
A great place is well-connected to key pedestrian routes and transport nodes and relates well to its surroundings and neighbourhood. It is easy to reach and accessible by people with different mobility needs, allowing different users to experience and enjoy the place.



Top: Barrier free spaces are inclusive and welcoming to people with different mobility needs
Bottom: Well-located and attractive wayfinding makes spaces easier to reach



Different colours and tactile features that clearly show level differences on staircases and ramps ensure greater visibility for users



Clear lines of sight and wide pathways make places more accessible and welcoming

Good lighting enables people to safely experience different aspects of the streetscape during both day and night



3 It feels safe and secure

A great place feels safe and secure to walk through and experience with good lighting day and night, and good visibility for public surveillance.

4 It is delightful and engaging

A great place offers a range of interesting and delightful elements that may surprise and excite people, or allow people to quietly contemplate and relax.

Public art such as sculptures and installations can make public spaces more engaging and inviting for everyone



Ample and interesting furniture can draw people closer to places and to each other



Water features such as fountains inject play into our urban spaces



5 It reflects the local identity

A great place reflects and embraces its heritage, culture and identity that developed over time. It feels authentic and relates well to its context in terms of its distinctive natural and urban qualities. It draws from its past and present to bring out the values and essence of the place and people feel connected to it.



Left: Adaptive reuse of conserved buildings provides the preservation of old memories and allows new memories to be built by future generations. Image credit: FARM
Top: Cultural performances that accentuate the heritage of the street adds to the identity of the place
Bottom: Murals add visual interest and tell the story of the place

6 It offers varied memorable experiences

A great place can be programmed to host different activities and offers a multitude of experiences to attract and engage people in the public space.



Public spaces should be appropriately sized to cater for different types of events and activities, and for different groups of people



Flexible open spaces with movable elements allow for changing activities



Play spaces created with the community encourages greater use by the community and sense of ownership of the place
Image credit: HDB



Amenities at public play spaces that are inclusive and welcoming for all
Image credit: National Council of Social Services

7 It is for everyone

A great place should feel inclusive and welcoming for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. It should be a place where we can be ourselves and has something for everyone.

8 It feels like our own

A great place should feel like our home. We feel rooted and strongly connected to it and want to take good care of it. It allows for flexible use of space, and inspires spontaneity and creativity, for people to make the place feel like their own.

*Spaces that allow for flexibility and adaptation for people to make it their own increases the connection and sense of belonging to them
Image credit (top): HDB*



Spaces need not always be carefully curated - those that encourage spontaneous uses offer a sense of freedom, and foster a greater sense of belonging

What is placemaking

Bringing the elements of great places together, placemaking is a way of thinking and a process where communities and stakeholders come together to proactively create, shape and sustain great public places around us, whether it is a park, a street, a small corner, a void deck, an entire neighbourhood or precinct, to benefit the area and communities.

Placemaking objectives and actions vary depending on the qualities and characteristics of places and the people who use them.

It can range from physically improving the area with more benches, shade or wider walkways to adding visual delight such as artwork or water features to public spaces, to activating spaces with events and programmes that benefit the community.

Ultimately, placemaking seeks to deepen our connection to places and to each other. It should ideally be led and driven by local communities and stakeholders who will use and care for these places.



Individuals, residents, community groups

Anyone who resides or works in the vicinity can come forward to activate a public space or street that can benefit the community and neighbourhood, creating new and memorable experiences, shaping individual and collective memories and in turn enhance local identities.



Designers, architects, planners

A well-designed space goes a long way in making people feel comfortable and welcomed. Architects, designers and planners working with communities can help create and shape inclusive spaces for various communities to come together.



Precinct stakeholders, developers, business/property owners

Businesses and developments in a precinct can help shape its sense of place through varied offerings of uses and experiences. Each stakeholder plays an important role in contributing to prioritising and focusing on activities and efforts that best bring out the area's identity, heritage and special qualities.

Stories and lessons

from individuals, residents, community groups

From around 2010, public spaces and streets in Singapore have taken on greater life and meaning as a growing network of active communities and citizens work to shape these together.

From initially showing the possibilities on what we can do with public spaces, to experimenting with simple ideas, efforts have grown and deepened to include repeated space and street activations, some leading to more permanent enhancements.

We present a range of placemaking stories over the years and share some lessons and tips as inspiration for individuals to get started in contributing to shaping public spaces in our neighbourhoods and around us.



It's possible!

“In a dense urban environment, public spaces serve as the most important breathing spaces among crowded buildings and busy roads. They encourage us to pause and enjoy a place, to interact with others, rejuvenate our minds and heighten our spirits.

They are probably what makes us fall in love with a city,” shared Dr Chong Keng Hua on the value of public spaces³. He is the co-founder of COLOURS: Collectively Ours, a design consultancy for collaborative public space design and an Assistant Professor of architecture and sustainable design at the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD).



The first Everton Park back alley activation (above images) and Sean Gwee (image on the right) at the event



³Wee, L. (2017). More public spaces in Singapore getting spruced up. The Straits Times.

Activating the back lane at Everton Park

One example of earlier efforts involved activating a back lane at Everton Park. Marcia Morley, a former URA architect worked with Sean Gwee, a designer and entrepreneur, who started a small group known as Door to Door, made up of volunteers with an interest in public spaces. Such efforts were supported by URA under its public space activation programme⁴.

“There was an initial perception challenge,” said Marcia. “People think that they cannot use space or cannot do things in a space in a certain way.” So earlier efforts were about demonstrating possibilities.

“We were initially activating spaces ourselves. It’s us jumping into the deep end and providing platforms to activate public space, but always trying to get someone from the community to take on the role of managing the space while we’re activating it,” Marcia added.

Sean, together with the Door to Door members, created a carnival-like experience at one of the back lanes in the Everton Park housing estate on 1 May 2015, the Labour Day public holiday. Residents and visitors were so thrilled with this that Sean organised a second run on 20 June 2015.

Henna artists turned passers-by arms into living sketchbooks. Homemade kampung games were being played by giggling kids. Jugglers made clubs and hoops dance acrobatically in the air. All this, said Sean, was set up for under S\$100.

“What we really liked about these street festivals was people weren’t used to these events happening in their alleys,” recalled Sean. “It’s an oh, I didn’t know you could do that kind of thing. Just getting people to think like this was a huge success, to get them to rethink their spaces.”



⁴URA's public space activation programme started from 2013 and remains to date. Its name has changed over the years from PubliCity to Our Favourite Place. Since 2019, it has been known as the Lively Places Programme and is administered in collaboration with the Housing & Development Board. The programme promotes the value of public spaces and encourages communities and individuals to activate spaces and streets to enhance their neighbourhoods. Under the programme, partial funding is provided to cover logistical costs.



“A big hurdle is just overcoming the idea that you can actually take a chance,” said Marcia, reflecting on earlier efforts. “Because Singapore has grown so quickly and has been so successful, the current mindset is you have to be super *kiasu* (Hokkien term meaning ‘afraid to lose out’) and make sure everything will succeed completely.

Hopefully, this mindset can be shifted to something that breeds more proactive, fearless projects, where if you fail, it’s okay, you’ve given it a go.”

Early placemaking efforts at various locations such as Jalan Besar, Waterloo Street and Empress Place. This includes converting the empty space at the URA building entrance into a cosy space for people to gather (image on the left)

Start small

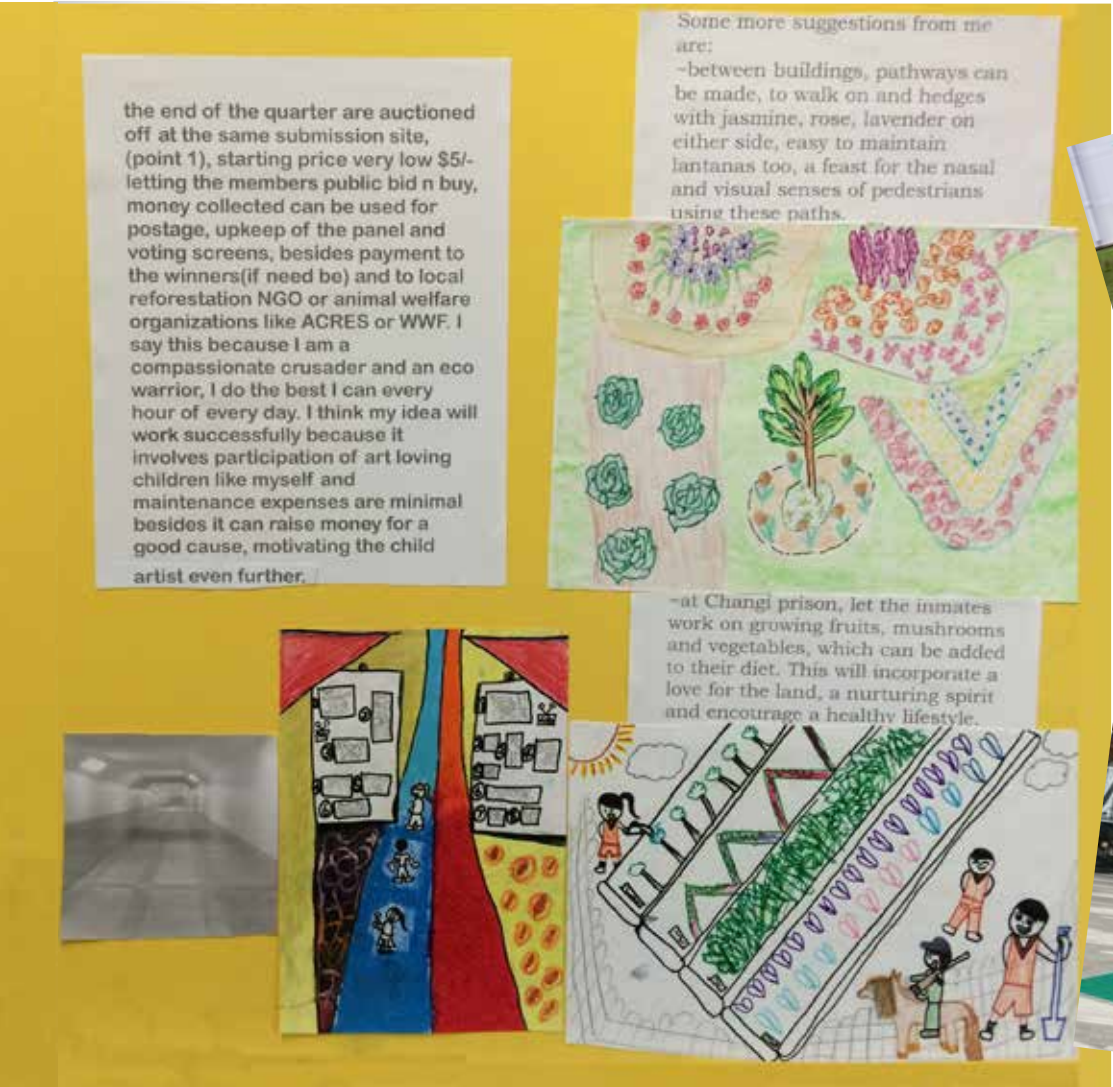
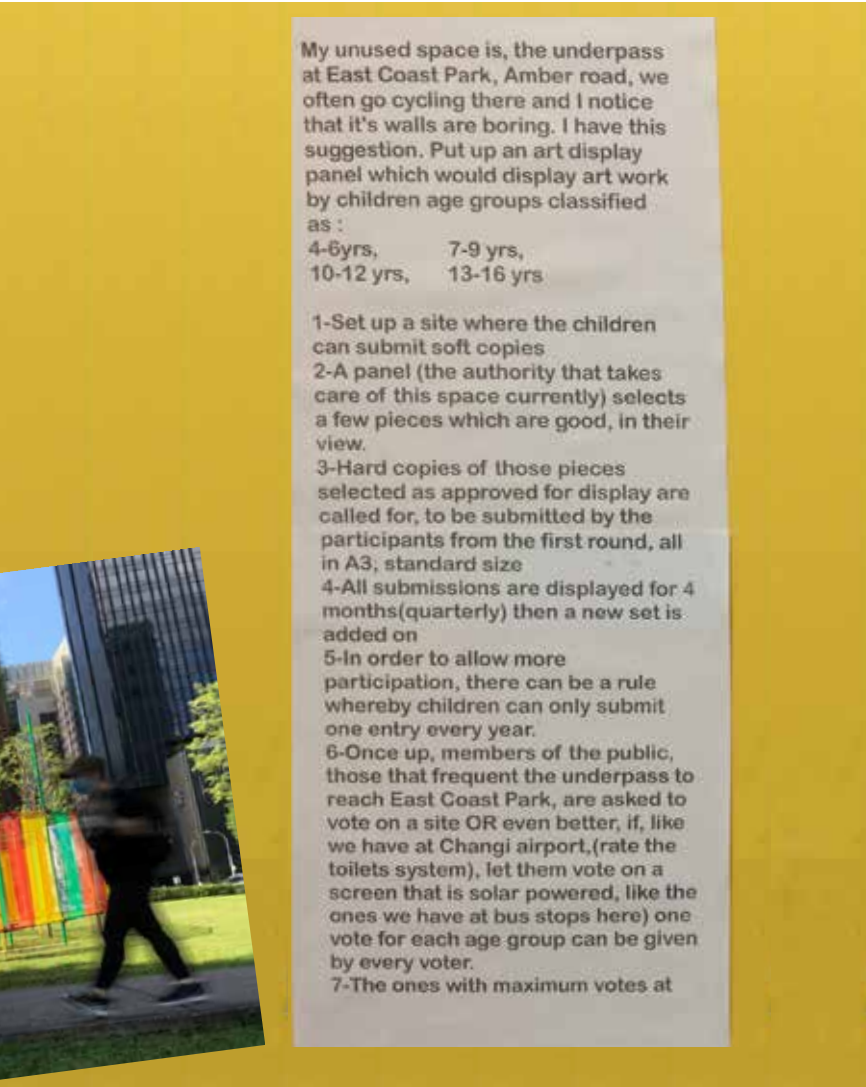
In the spirit of just giving it a go, from 2013 to 2017, three editions of URA's "My Ideas for Public Spaces" competitions generated over 400 ideas from the public. The purpose of these ideas competitions were to invite members of the public to come up with creative ideas to activate and enhance public spaces around Singapore. The competitions also sought to inspire people to want to activate spaces in small and simple ways.

In a separate effort, public participation in Singapore's celebration of the global PARK(ing) Day movement over several years also saw more than 500 car park lots turned into fun spaces for a day.

These initial efforts showed that you just need to begin with a simple idea. You can start small and turn a space into something meaningful that can draw people into a place and bring individuals together.



"A-Maze" installation design by Indra Pramana.
Artworks by Urban Sketchers Singapore



The competition entry (second edition) by Afsheen (image in the middle) and examples of implemented ideas from the various ideas competition editions



"Woody Loopy" installation design by Leeyau Chun Chuan, Lim Wen Bin and See Pin Pin



"ORIGAME" installation



Image credit: Mindy Tan

Art installations in Little India

Various ideas from the ideas competitions were implemented over the years.

One of them were designs submitted by Indonesian Chinese exhibition designer Marthalia Budiman in the 2015 competition. She is a Singapore permanent resident.

On her many visits to Little India, she noticed that the area could get quite crowded especially on the weekends but there were not many public spaces dedicated for people to rest or to gather. “I wanted to transform some of the abandoned or forgotten spaces there into something more positive and functional for the community,” she recalled⁵.

Thus, she thought of creating umbrella trees to provide shade and seats for those seeking a respite from the sun. Their vibrant colours also reflect the many facets of Indian culture.

Five of these two-storey high tree-like installations were placed temporarily at an unused open space at Hindoo Road from 2016 to 2017.

Another seven life-sized fibreglass cows were also placed at Clive Street, a five-minute walk away from Hindoo Road. Marthalia’s design of these cows were inspired by the history and culture of Little India, which is known for its cattle trading in the 1800s.

These two sets of installations were funded by the Singapore Tourism Board and Little India Shopkeepers & Heritage Association (LISHA), which has been leading placemaking efforts for the area since 2006.

The response to these installations had been positive. Many could be found stopping to rest or even do yoga. LISHA also organised several Deepavali celebrations at these places.

The cows at Clive Street are still standing there to this day.



Ideas submitted by Marthalia in the 2015 ideas competition (images on the left) and actual implementation of the umbrella and cows installations at Hindoo Road and Clive Street respectively (images on left page and above).

⁵Marthalia Budiman's story and quotes shared here have been extracted and adapted from the article, Wee, Lea. (2017). Shades of fun in public spaces, Brolly boost in Little India. The Straits Times, 6-7.



Artwork under the Ang Mo Kio viaduct

Another idea implemented came from Taiwan-born interior designer, Zoe Lin (she is in the photo on the left), who is a Singapore permanent resident. She submitted her idea in the 2015 competition.

She came up with this while she was living in the Ang Mo Kio housing estate from 2014 to 2015 and regularly walked along the MRT viaduct.

“It was a busy place. There were elderly people reading newspapers on benches, people rushing to work and others jogging. It was also a beautiful space with greenery nearby. I thought to myself that more could be done to the space to engage people using it,” recalled Zoe⁶.

So, she thought of the idea of creating colourful works of art on some of the pillars of this viaduct to provide passers-by with positive and encouraging messages.

Three pillars along this viaduct were selected to feature Zoe’s artworks which showed bottles inspired by well-known children’s stories such as Alice in Wonderland, Jack and the Beanstalk and The Crow and The Pitcher.

“I wanted to tell people not to give up hope when they are faced with difficulties. One day, the sun will be out, and they can be strong again like the magic bean (in the Jack in the Beanstalk story),” shared Zoe.

She spent three days to create the artworks, with the help of three URA staff. She did not spend any money on the project except to invest in a tablet for her drawings.

⁶Zoe Lin’s story and quotes shared here have been extracted and adapted from the article, Wee, Lea. (2017). Shades of fun in public spaces, Ang Mo Kio’s bottled messages. The Straits Times, 6-7.



PARK(ing) Day

From viaducts to car park lots, Singapore’s participation in the global PARK(ing) Day movement initially started with four curbside parking lots along Circuit Road in 2013.

Dr Chong Keng Hua from COLOURS worked with Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) students, placemaking group, Participate in Design, and local architectural firm, ReallyArchitecture (re:ACT), to turn the four lots into artificially turfed spaces framed by plants and signages for two days.

The effort sought to raise awareness on the need for safer streets. The converted lots served as community gardens and a safe zone for pedestrians to cross Circuit Road.

Seeing the potential to inspire more ground-up interest for the public to try their hand at activating spaces in small car park lots for a day, URA organised PARK(ing) Day in Singapore annually every September from 2014 to 2018. From 2016, SUTD partnered URA to co-organise the event before taking over to lead and sustain PARK(ing) Day efforts from 2019.

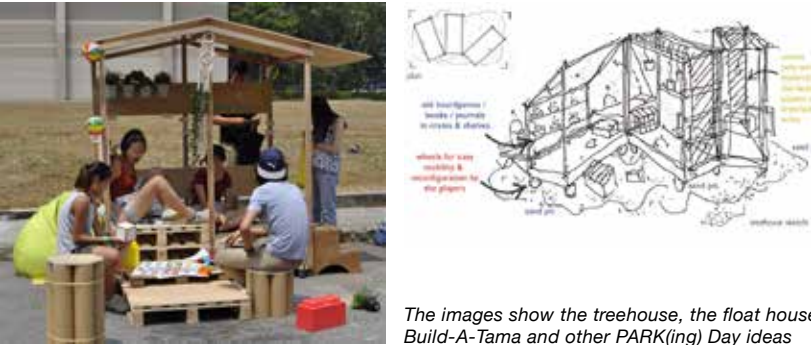


Some fun ideas

Check out some interesting and quirky PARK(ing) Day ideas across different editions.

A treehouse for play

Joy Heng, a student from Yale-NUS, participated in PARK(ing) Day 2014 as a volunteer. Inspired from this, she enlisted the help of two of her friends to form a team for the 2019 edition⁷. Interested to explore the idea of play spaces, the team came up with the idea of creating a treehouse filled with various local games. The treehouse was constructed at the Yale-NUS fabrication studio. It was envisioned as an urban playhouse for all, with its use shaped by the player’s imagination.



⁷Arslan, B. (2019). Yale-NUS students bring parking lots to life on PARK(ing) Day.
⁸URA. (2018). Car park lots turn into interactive spaces on PARK(ing) Day 2018.
⁹URA. (2016). 78 parking lots become ‘PARKs’ this Friday.



Build your own

“We wanted to give people a chance to build their vision of the Singapore cityscape. I think this will help people connect with their city and rethink their role in it,” shared Hann Danish⁸, one of the five students from Pioneer Junior College, who designed the Build-A-Tama – colourful egg cartons for people to try making buildings.



The float house

Fiona Tan and Dawn Lim, both designers, created a “fun facts” machine filled with colourful floats with small cards attached to the ends. The cards featured fun facts about Singapore’s history, local food and architecture. “We have always been interested in the novel ways in which small scale community art and architectural projects can encourage public participation, engage people and revitalise public spaces,” they shared⁹.



Ping pong and pianos

Arising from these temporary experiments were two ideas that took off. Ping pong tables and pianos were set-up at car park lots at PARK(ing) day editions that took place in 2014 and 2015.

Inspired by the positive public responses, the groups went on to set up more ping pong tables and pianos at various public spaces around Singapore.

Calling their initiative, KamPONG, local environmental company, Innoverde, saw this as a way to celebrate the kampung spirit with a friendly game of ping pong.

During the i Light Marina Bay festival at the Marina Bay promenade in March 2016, over 25,000 people stopped to play ping pong, based on Innoverde's count. The tables were also set up at other locations such as Asia Square, Raffles Place, and the Civic District.

The other group, Play it Forward, started in 2015 to activate public spaces by making used pianos accessible to the public.

“At the start, the public needed some encouragement to overcome their apprehension of playing music in public. Once we started to play, many gradually warmed up to the idea.

We were so happy to see complete strangers coming together and bonding over music. And to see that our pianos are able to meet the needs of a diverse group of people, ranging from children who absolutely enjoy playing in public, to adults simply looking for a quiet place to play,” said Yan Chang, one of its co-founders and a URA architect. The two other founders are his friends, Billy Soh and Jean Hair.

To date, the pianos are still located at 11 public spaces across Singapore and have become a familiar fixture.



Yarn bombing

Beyond fixtures that we can add to public spaces, art or something as whimsical as a yarn bomb can pique our curiosity in a place.

“A yarn bomb could transform an ordinary seat into an artwork, and by letting it infiltrate public spaces, this breaks the stereotype and Singaporean mindset that art should be planned and confined to art galleries,” said Kelly Lim, a freelance graphic designer who has been knitting for decades.

“People are often curious about what I do because the spontaneous creations capture their attention. Whether good or bad, it evokes feelings in them because it changes a monotonous space that they see every day.”

Kelly was exposed to knitting when she was just seven, crocheting with her mum, before learning to knit properly from a book.

Later, she discovered the world of yarn bombing online. Fascinated by the colourful displays of knitted and crocheted yarn installations on public streets, and especially trees and lampposts overseas, she could not resist trying the unique form of street art herself.

She has placed her creations temporarily on various public statues in the past. And she created special ones for one of the editions of the Car-Free Sunday SG in 2016.

She was also involved in the creation of a knit sculpture called Wonderbrain, as part of the National University of Singapore’s Arts Festival in 2016, that roped in senior citizens. The effort sought to inspire a love for knitting and to connect different generations of people together.

“During the Wonderbrain project, I especially enjoyed working with the aunties over the two months because they were incredibly chatty, and we could freely exchange knitting information and skills.

Working in a community, the focus was no longer on the final product but how much fun the process of creating it was,” recalled Kelly.



Kelly Lim at one of her yarn bomb creations at the 2016 Car-Free Sunday SG event (image on left page) and creating Wonderbrain with participants as part of the National University of Singapore’s 2016 Art Festival (images above). Image credits: Kelly Lim

Activating streets for people

In addition to activating individual public spaces in different parts of Singapore, efforts also spilled over onto streets and roads.

Closing and activating streets has become a very familiar feature in our urban scape. In fact, many of us are likely to have fond memories of street festivals.

Such street activations and car-free zones enable us to not only experience a more intimate street atmosphere, it also creates spill-over spaces for business and social activities and interactions and makes our streets more vibrant and inviting.

URA had initially worked closely with stakeholders to pilot car-free zones at Club Street, Ann Siang Hill, Ann Siang Road, Haji Lane and Circular Road in 2013 to test the viability of such road closures and to show their possibilities and potential benefits for business and property owners, residents and visitors. These car-free zones saw the roads closed to cars and other motorised vehicles for certain hours during the weekends.

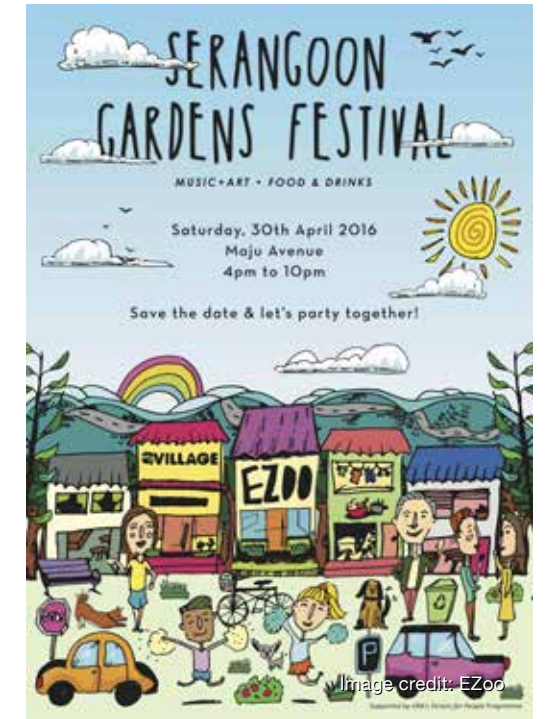
Such efforts showed the value and delight created by car-free zones. Behind the scenes, URA worked closely with stakeholders to actively address logistics and other details so that everyone could enjoy such closed roads safely and with minimal inconvenience to office workers and residents.

Since these early efforts, the number of such car-free zones had grown over time to other areas such as Little India and Kampong Gelam and various stakeholder groups had gone on to manage these on their own.



From 2015 onwards, URA's Streets for People programme¹⁰ further encouraged and supported more individuals and community groups to activate streets on a temporary basis. To date, over 60 street activations have been organised up to early 2020.

¹⁰The Streets for People initiative has been subsumed under the Lively Places Programme from 2019 onwards.



Examples of street activations at Maju Avenue (Serangoon Gardens), Cantonment Close and Jalan Kuning (Chip Bee Garden)

Keong Saik

One of the key champions was Lorenzo Petrillo, who organised 11 street festival editions at Keong Saik and Jiak Chuan Roads, together with his team from LOPELAB, from 2016 to 2019.

An interior designer, Lorenzo started his career in Italy designing for esterni, an agency that develops cultural projects for public spaces including the Public Design Festival. He has designed screenings, pop-up bars and foosball tables on wheels for public spaces.

In Singapore, he started LOPELAB, a design consultancy agency focused on redesigning public spaces by marrying urban structures and social ideas.

On why he has done this so many times, he shared: “Besides the fact that this is my neighbourhood – I work and spend more than 12 hours here some days – this street is the perfect mix of modernity and heritage, of history and culture, of young people, older people, local businesses, and fine dining restaurants. I also like the architecture and colours of the many shophouses.”

His many street closures helped to raise greater awareness and interest on the importance and value of such efforts. His various editions also attracted more sponsorships and created a wider range of programming and activities.

“In my experience, what public events do is not only transform a public space and show how to enjoy it in a different way, but also get people to socialise,” said Lorenzo.

In fact, his efforts have brought the businesses of Keong Saik together. “I’m excited because some of the other stakeholders want to do stuff too, asking can I do a bakery class? Another lady wants to do a workshop on cutting clothes. An Indian restaurant will bring Bollywood dancers. So, you see how all these cultures come together.”



Lorenzo at one of the street activations at Keong Saik Road (above top right) and the various activities



Geylang, Pisang and Wanton Doodles

Three other champions reflect on their street activations in 2016.

Cai Yinzhou
Founder
Geylang Adventures

What does Geylang Adventures do?

Yinzhou: We strive to debunk stereotypes about Geylang and create learning journeys and educational programmes for different organisations to find out more about the community.

Tell us more about your street activation in 2016.

Yinzhou: We tried to make meaningful use of the back-alley space in Geylang in December 2015 which had activities such as an art studio and food truck on site and we did this because we wanted to share this with the community.

The event was open to anyone and everyone, and more than 70 migrant workers had come to mingle with Singaporeans.



Ejan A Rahman
Director
We Experiment

What is The Lab SG?

Ejan: The Lab SG is a Halal cafe under the umbrella of We Experiment Pte Ltd, which is run by myself and my husband, Luke, for the love of great food, good coffee and good vibes. Our slogan is “We Experiment”; we strive to create quirky food and beverage items.

Tell us more about your street activation in 2016.

Ejan: We worked closely with URA under the Streets For People programme and managed to close the road at Jalan Pisang for the event in March 2016. We collaborated with Samantha Lo for an event called Barter Market, a collective effort by local makers, craftsmen, artists, musicians and other skilled individuals.

Based on the concept of sustainability, the Barter Market sought to encourage a more human bonding experience as well as a possibility of an organically progressive society, one that recognised and supported each other regardless of background.



Mas Shafreen
Illustrator
Wanton Doodle

Who is Wanton Doodle?

Mas: I’m a corporate cog by day, illustrator by night, with the dark eye circles to prove it. My illustrations are inspired by doodles borne out of sheer boredom, the desire to stay awake during meetings and the compulsion to expend office supplies.

How do you think initiatives like Streets For People help create a culture?

Mas: We call ourselves white space bandits, as we take over walls and transform them from something bland to fun. Likewise, I’m a strong advocate of communities taking control of spaces from the ground-up. If you want to do something, do it, don’t complain!

What we as Band of Doodlers (a group I started) do too is encourage co-creation and interaction with the community through art. For example, we leave empty spaces such as speech bubbles in some doodles, inviting the public to participate and get emotionally connected to the art.

There’s that community-centric element that ultimately promotes active citizenry as more feel inspired to step up and express themselves.



More walkable and delightful streets

From temporary street activations, individuals and stakeholders have also contributed towards more permanent enhancements such as creating more walkable and delightful streets in the city centre.

Examples of these enhancements are designing quirky and delightful public benches along wider sidewalks at Queen and Bencoolen Streets and the pedestrianisation of Armenian Street.

Queen and Bencoolen Streets

In 2014 and 2017, URA and other government agencies such as the National Heritage Board and Land Transport Authority, collaborated with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) students to paint and design new public benches on the wider sidewalks along Queen and Bencoolen Streets.

These were part of the larger efforts to create more walkable streets in the Bras Basah Bugis area that included widening the sidewalks and reducing the road lanes, for example.

These public benches made it more enjoyable to walk around the area, which has evolved into a vibrant art, heritage and learning enclave from the 1990s.



Image credit: Mindy Tan



Image credit: NAFA

Waterloo Street



Waterloo Street will become even more pedestrian-friendly in future, with more spaces for people and events, increased shade and greenery, and better connectivity to the nearby MRT Stations.

These ideas to make Waterloo Street more walkable were developed together with stakeholders such as the arts groups and residents in the area.

Armenian Street pedestrianisation

One meaningful outcome because of active individuals and stakeholders was the Armenian Street pedestrianisation.

The street used to be a four-lane road that had not been heavily used for some time. Over time, it had been turned into a lively street in the evenings, filled with temporary activities and events organised by stakeholders such as the Peranakan Museum, that is managed by the National Heritage Board.

The stakeholders at first saw the potential for road dieting to widen the previously narrow sidewalks. From 2015 to 2018, stakeholders along the street and various government agencies (URA, National Parks Board) explored possibilities and options, leading to the eventual permanent pedestrianisation in 2019.

Today, the street has been transformed into a delightful urban park in the heart of the city for people to relax in and for potential activities in future.



Armenian Street from August 2018 to August 2019, transforming from a road to a permanent pedestrian space



Getting started

For those interested in getting started to activate a space/place or to do something to shape spaces around you, here are 10 things to think about:

1 You can start it

Anyone, whether resident or stakeholder, in any area can propose activating a space or street or can contribute to shaping spaces around them.

2 Do it almost anywhere

You can propose activating a space and place in a wide variety of locations across Singapore. The images show examples of the different spaces and streets that have been activated.



Image credit: LOPELAB





Image credit: Ng Peng Lay



3 Understand the place

Take some time to understand the place and space you are keen to activate. Where is this located? What is its relationship to the surrounding uses and place/space? Who are the people living here or using the place/space?

4 Determine what to do and why

Do it to benefit the community and to enhance and add to the place. How can your activity and action bring out the best qualities of the place/space and engage people? The images show examples of enhancements, activities and things to do and see in spaces and streets that have brought people together.



Image credit: Participate in Design

5 Start small

If it is your first time, begin with a simple and small idea first that you can implement easily; you can tap on your personal passion and interest to spark off ideas for the community.

6 Get support

Identify other passionate and interested individuals, friends to join, to give support or help you realise your idea. Also, get the buy-in of other stakeholders. The images show examples of competition ideas that were tested on smaller spaces first and were implemented with the help of many people.

Find out and seek the necessary permissions from the authorities and/or venue owners to implement your ideas. You can research and check if there are any support schemes or grants to help realise your ideas. For community-driven placemaking projects, you may refer to the Lively Places Programme to see if your project qualifies for funding. There may also be other programmes and funds from other public agencies (such as STB, NAC, NHB), depending on the nature of your ideas.



The above posters show proposals submitted by Leeyau Chun Chuan (Loopy Fruity) and Tek Swee Lang (ORIGAME) in URA's ideas competition



7 Don't give up

Keep on experimenting and trying new ideas.

8 Be mindful about public safety

Consider how people can use and access spaces safely.

9 Do it again

Learn from past attempts or other people's efforts and try it again next time; consider maintenance for long-term efforts.

10 Stay curious

Walk around and take the time to explore your neighbourhood and spaces around you. You may just be inspired with fresh ideas and find new opportunities to play your part in shaping spaces around you.



For people to enjoy public spaces safely at Marina Bay, simple stickers and installations were developed



Lively Places Programme

The Lively Places Programme is a joint initiative by the Housing & Development Board (HDB) and URA to support community-led efforts in enlivening Singapore's public spaces. Under this programme, you can organise activities in public spaces and streets that bring communities together or create installations that enliven our public spaces.

For more information about the Lively Places Programme
<https://www.hdb.gov.sg/LivelyPlacesProg>



The projects supported by the Lively Places Programme, from left, the Hall of Fame (image credit: One Kampong Gelam), Pets Park @ Segar Gardens (Image credit: Holland Bukit Panjang Town Council), Void Deck 3.0 (Image credit: HDB) and SG Community Green Hub (Image credit: HDB)



Check out some of the initiatives by residents in activating and enhancing spaces in their neighbourhoods, supported by the Lively Places Programme.

Pets Park @ Segar Gardens

When : 2020
Residents : Raymond Ang, Singh Pramod Doodhnath, Steven Kee, Sun Lei, Michael Lai, David Tan
Location : Open lawn in front of Segar Gardens' multi-storey carpark
What : The team of residents created a mini pet park out of a small piece of empty land to promote and encourage responsible pet ownership and gracious behaviours amongst pet owners and to also bring people together in the neighbourhood.

Void Deck 3.0

When : 2020
Residents : Law Kai Xiang, Chew Keng Onn, Lee Jun Yao Francis Lee, Alvin Soh Wei Jie, Feng Wei Han
Location : 846 Tampines Street 82 void deck
What : The students of National University of Singapore wanted to explore the use of technology in revitalising the void deck spaces of public housing estate blocks. Partnering with the Tampines Ville Residents Committee, they created a high-tech gaming and gathering spot. The team also developed "Food Grab", a motion sensing game to promote healthy living and foster intergenerational bonding.

5G Community Green Hub

When : 2021
Residents : Julie Lim, Lynda Lee, Deepti Rajan, Judy Toh, Morris Gabriel
Location : 112 Bishan Street 12
What : The team sought to build five themed gardens as part of contributing to a greener neighbourhood. So far, two gardens have been completed, involving over 200 residents and students. Edible vegetables such as *xiao bai cai* and *kai lan* were planted.

Yesterday Once More

When : 2021
Residents : Daryl Tan, Soh Li Ting, Michael Tan, Daphne Goh, Jackson Ong
Location : 857 Tampines block void deck
What : The team introduced and created a lively play area at the void deck featuring interactive murals that show traditional childhood games such as hopscotch, five stones, skipping ropes and *chapteh*.

Hall Of Fame

When : 2021
Stakeholders : One Kampong Gelam
Location : Bali Lane, Ophir Road
Supported by : STB, URA, LTA, GS Engineering & Construction Corporation, Blu Jaz Cafe
What : 17 local muralists contributed to enhancing Kampong Gelam's vibrancy by transforming construction hoardings into a massive canvas for street art, spanning nearly 240 metres. The hoardings were erected around the construction sites for the North-South Corridor along Bali Lane and Ophir Road.

Stories and lessons

from designers, architects, planners

A good public space, whether it is within a building or in between buildings and along streets, begins with how well it caters to public life.

Over the years, architects, designers, planners and others are increasingly focusing on and shaping the public realm, designing and curating public spaces for rest, activity, spontaneity and connection.

The small details matter. A small step may make it harder for a space to have barrier-free access. Lack of shade or seating will make public spaces less attractive. The way seating is arranged can also influence the way people use and enjoy the space.

The design of spaces should create opportunities for chance encounters and social interactions. For example, having intimate public spaces that encourage you to stop to chat with a neighbour, courtyards with playgrounds where children can play with each other or the neighbourhood street that is lined with a variety of uses such as mini-marts, bakeries, childcare centres where people can pause to converse when they bump into familiar faces as they go about their daily chores.



When designing such spaces, it is important to consider the social and emotional connections we want people to feel with the space, as well as the aspirations of the community, involving them through dialogue and participation.

We present a range of spaces that have been designed and created with the community and stakeholders, with some key insights and lessons.

The urban park space at Guoco Tower is designed for communities to gather. Image credit: GuocoLand

Spaces for social interactions: Hello Neighbour@Tampines



One of the engagement sessions as part of the Hello Neighbour@Tampines project. Image credit: HDB

The Hello Neighbour@Tampines project¹¹ explored how good community space designs could encourage greater social interactions.

A range of community spaces were co-created with residents in Tampines, as part of a larger research study from 2012 to 2014. It was initiated and led by the Housing & Development Board (HDB), together with the National University of Singapore (NUS), to review and distil good neighbourhood designs that could facilitate community bonding.

In the first phase, 2,000 residents were engaged through focus group discussions, site observations and a survey. The survey revealed that residents who frequently used the amenities in their precinct registered a stronger sense of community. Casual exchanges at neighbourhood spaces such as lift lobbies and walkways could also help to deepen neighbourly relations. Nine key strategies and six design typologies to enhance community bonding were subsequently formulated based on the findings.

In its second phase, two design concepts were piloted in Tampines. One was the idea of a social linkway that explored integrating support facilities and functions along popular pedestrian paths to increase the chances of interaction between residents. This was based on the insight that neighbours tended to meet and interact incidentally in unplanned places such as lift lobbies and linkways.

The research also highlighted the importance of providing a one-stop community hub that could accommodate community activities and support ground-up initiatives. This led to the neighbourhood incubator idea.

Design process

To test out the two ideas, the HDB-NUS team worked with the Town Council and other government agencies and engaged over 1,800 Tampines residents through pop-up engagement booths, interactive boards, focus group discussions and design workshops.

These helped to shed light on how the existing spaces were used, what social functions could be incorporated and how they could be better designed to foster greater use and social interaction.

Residents were invited to co-create the social linkway at Tampines Central Blocks 830 to 863, which was made up of four segments — Green Link, Play Link, Learning Link and Art Link. At the Green Link, volunteers came together to grow plants on a trellis, while at the Art Link, residents helped to paint wall murals and art banners.

At Block 857, the neighbourhood incubator was designed as a multi-functional space. Equipped with movable stools, it could be easily converted to host community workshops or get-togethers such as potluck sessions and flea markets.

The project also included a “Friends of Tampines” volunteer programme, where residents could sign up for roles such as community designers and space activators.

¹¹Information and insights on the project are adapted from Pang, A. (2017). Planning for communities, lessons from Seoul and Singapore, Hello Neighbour: Social Linkway and Neighbourhood Incubator Project. Centre for Liveable Cities, Singapore and the Seoul Institute, 160-165.

Impact and future spaces

When these new spaces were implemented and available from end 2015, there was an average of almost 200 unique visitors per day as recorded over a two-month period.

More than one in three of the resident visitors interacted with their neighbours, during which they spent an average of 13 minutes per day in these new spaces.

In particular, the converted void deck of Block 839, with its community café and library, attracted some 55 residents each day, each staying an average of 20 minutes at the cafe to mingle with their neighbours. The converted space also saw more ground-up initiatives organised by residents, such as potluck sessions and cooking classes.

The neighbourhood incubator at Tampines Central has since become a conducive space for residents to meet and bond over community activities such as baking and balloon sculpting, which used to be held in enclosed spaces.

Now more visible, the activities have also attracted greater participation from residents nearby, sparking conversations among passers-by.

The insights from the engagement process and the design interventions in Tampines have contributed to design strategies and participatory models for future housing town upgrading projects, in designing and adapting spaces that foster greater social interactions.



Residents planting on the trellises (above) and painting the art banners (image on the right page) for the Green and Art Links. Image credits: HDB





Design for diversity: Our Tampines Hub

Our Tampines Hub (OTH) has inspired a new kind of community space that not only co-locates a diverse range of facilities and optimises resources for greater synergy, it is also a space that is designed and shaped with and for the residents themselves.

Opened in 2017, it is an integrated community and lifestyle hub at the town level that caters to the evolving lifestyle needs of over 220,000 residents living in Tampines and in the surrounding neighbourhoods in eastern Singapore.

With a site area of 5.7 hectares and gross floor area of 120,000 square metres, OTH brings together more than 30 community, sports, cultural, civic and lifestyle facilities. Through integrated programming, OTH complements the People's Association's community facilities in the area as it functions as a one-stop service hub for government and other municipal services.

Designed and delivered by DP Architects for the People's Association (PA), the development of OTH was guided by three principles: resident-centricity, synergistic organisation of resources and infrastructure, and encouraging community ownership through resident engagement.

Design reflecting community interests

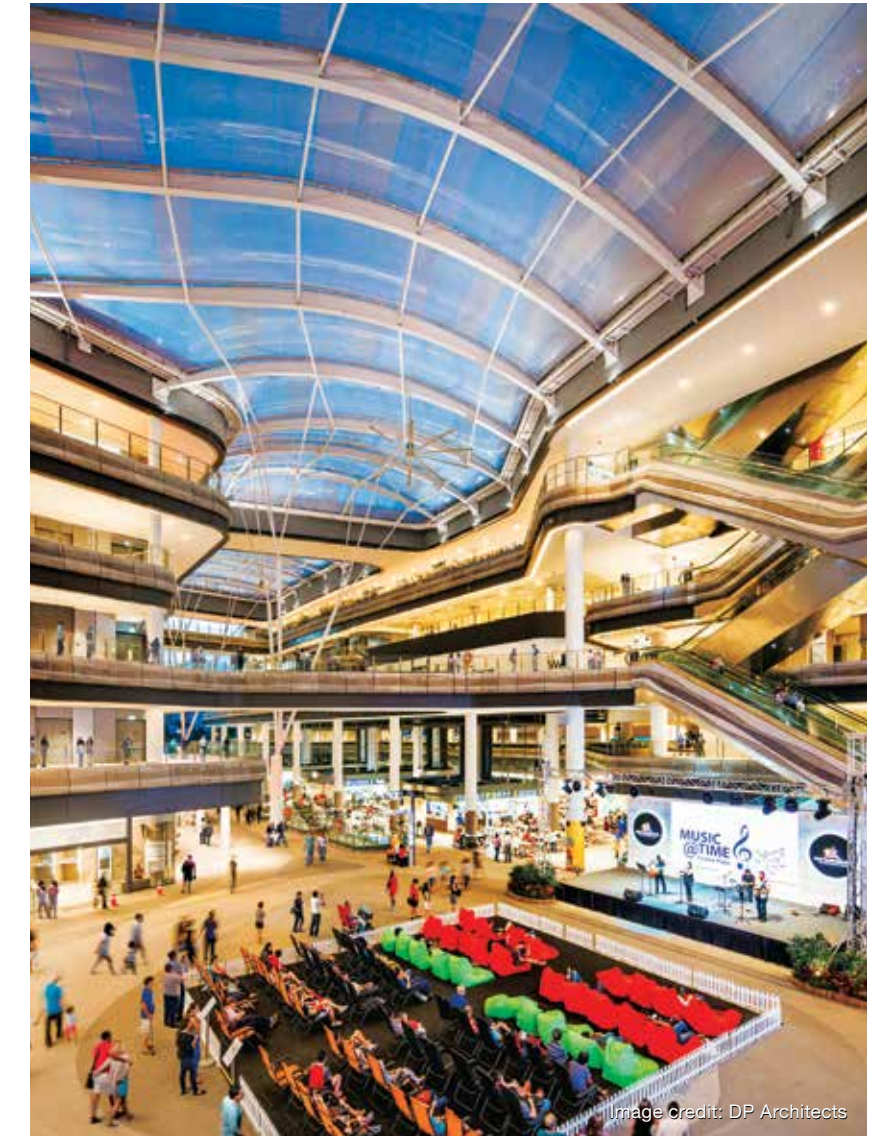
The feedback and suggestions during the design process helped to shape the development of OTH around community needs and interests. For example, feedback revealed that residents did not want a strong commercial mall presence. To facilitate recreational jogging, they also preferred a rubberised track and distance markings over a standard competitive running track. This, in part, led to the conception of a ground level imbued with accessible community facilities and a town square which could double up as a sports field. An elevated running track was later creatively integrated into the public walkway on level five of the development.

Public engagement also revealed that residents valued the ability to move around easily with different mobile options. OTH was thus designed with a highly porous ground floor, facilitating various forms of mobility, with much more bicycle parking provisions than originally planned for, reinforcing Tampines' identity as Singapore's first cycling town.

A shaded and sheltered pedestrian street (Festive Walk) also runs eastwards and westwards through the heart of the hub, connecting residents from Tampines Central to and from the Central Park, weaving greater vibrancy and life to the locale.

Design process

Seah Chee Huang, Chief Executive Officer, DP Architects, reflects on the design approach and the value of co-designing this unique space with the community.



What was the community engagement approach for the design of Our Tampines Hub (OTH)¹² ?

Chee Huang: We adopted a “five-E” participatory design process of engagement, enrichment, empathy, empowerment, and evaluation.

For engagement, from the conception till completion of the development, the team with PA and the co-located stakeholders created a two-way exchange process to regularly update the Tampines residents, including possible temporary inconveniences to project and programme updates. We met with residents to explain the values that OTH could bring in terms of facilities, programmes, and in turn, the richness it could bring to their way of life.

We also established a variety of channels to reach out to as many of the residents of Tampines as possible. Our outreach was done across a spectrum of levels and scales: from roadshows, newsletters, social media channels and websites, to block parties and even floor parties, particularly in areas more directly affected by the construction.

The second “E” — enrichment — was about enhancing value through quality exchange of information, knowledge, and experience. A recurrent piece of feedback we received from different groups of residents was that they did not want to see yet another shopping mall. As a result, we modified our zoning to create more inclusive and accessible programmes on the first storey. A larger portion of the first and second storey spaces was also set aside as community spaces with less commercialised activities.

The third “E” was empathy. It was through such engagements that we learnt to be more conscious of the daily needs of

the community and share trade-offs in more depth. This was particularly challenging because Tampines has a huge community. The engagements worked both ways to better empathise with residents’ hopes and planners’ dilemma, by extending a listening ear and providing different lens to collectively work out trade-offs given the site conditions or project constraints.

The fourth, “E”, empowerment was about instilling ownership. By encouraging deeper and continual community participation, residents are encouraged to co-create and take on active roles as stewards of spaces in OTH so that they can develop stronger sense of ownership and hence greater cohesion.

Finally, the last E is emphasising the importance of periodic evaluation and re-engagement. This involves the process of taking stock of outcomes and recalibrating actions. With projects of this nature that revolve around the everyday lives of a community, there will never be a perfect or one-size-fits-all solution or design. Rather, there will be parts that will evolve with aspirations of the community.

Hence, it is key for us and the stakeholders to constantly evaluate evidence-based decisions made with the community in relation to the intended outcomes, and together work out how we can refine and better improve the next steps.

What does community ownership and co-creation mean to you?

Chee Huang: Community ownership is about empowering the residents to be accountable and responsible for decisions made. That means the residents are the stewards who take charge of what they have. For this to be successful, the idea of ownership must come together with co-creation, where we collaborate with others to create something synergistic and enhance the value of product or service created.

Co-creation also requires alignment. It involves a group working together towards a shared vision and goal. The aim is to turn “ego” to “eco”, through a process of collaborative innovation, to generate constructive discussion and to jointly set clear priorities and work towards collective success. Such active exchanges and participation also help to instil ownership.

In the context of OTH, this enhanced experience of belonging, be it in the design of the building, spaces or activities planned, connects the residents with the outcomes through the co-creation process. With that, it fosters a stronger sense of stewardship: for the residents to extend care not only when using but also in maintaining the spaces and facilities, to collectively develop the most sustainable way for the development to grow and enrich the everyday lives of the community.



The various spaces within One Tampines Hub to cater for diverse activities and groups of people. Image credits: DP Architects

¹²The questions and responses are adapted from Pang, A. (2017). Planning for communities, lessons from Seoul and Singapore, Interview with Seah Chee Huang, Director, DP Architects Pte Ltd, lead architect for Our Tampines Hub, Singapore. Centre for Liveable Cities, Singapore and the Seoul Institute, 138-140.

**Hack our play:
St James' Church Kindergarten
revamped play space**

The design and development of the revamped play space at the Gilstead Road campus of the St James' Church Kindergarten has opened a new lens on how shaping play spaces with the community can further enrich play experiences and learning for children.

Completed in 2017, it took eight months and involved more than 400 people, including children, parents, educators, and designers, who were engaged throughout the design process.

This was part of the "Hack Our Play" initiative by philanthropic organisation Lien Foundation and was led by the non-profit design group Participate in Design (P!D), in collaboration with St. James' Church Kindergarten, with the aim of exploring the value and impact of creating such community-designed and built playgrounds.

¹³Information and insights on the design process are adapted from Berting, N. (2020). The city at eye level Asia, let's hack our play. Stipo, 238-243.

Design process¹³

To gain a deeper understanding of educators, children and parents' needs, challenges and opportunities, the design team held engagement activities that involved conversations amongst the different groups.

The team also organised a one-day pop-up to understand what people liked and didn't like in play spaces and site visits to observe and understand the existing playground form and space in Singapore.

Children and parents from the kindergarten had the chance to identify what they valued most in a play environment. The children preferred spaces that let them play comfortably in groups or alone. They loved colours and wanted to have the freedom to choose what and how to play. They also wished for spaces where they could indulge in their fantasies and imagination.

Parents wanted a balance of natural and man-made elements, as well as sensory stimulation areas that were safe yet challenging. They also appreciated the inclusion of comfortable spaces for them to rest.

With these considerations in mind, the team designed the play space to evolve into what the children wanted it to be. The mix of fixed structures and loose elements provided a variety of play and rest spaces for children and accompanying adults.

The design included inputs from experts, including architects, designers, playground suppliers and early childhood educators on technical and safety aspects and how to encourage different types of play behaviour.



The various activities during the design process and completed playground
Image credits: Participate in Design



Image credit: Participate in Design

In contributing to the development of the play space, different groups and volunteers were also roped in to help build the various components of the play space by painting tyres, decorating barrels, pots, and pans, and doing some planting.

For more information about the project, go to www.hackourplay.org

Why play is important

This experience has shown the importance of play for children's learning and how a well-designed play space contributes to this.

P!D shares that through continuous play and learning by doing, children can:

- 1 Develop creative thinking and hands-on construction as they explore play possibilities with structures and materials not commonly found in regular playgrounds.
- 2 Learn to construct, deconstruct, reconstruct, solve problems, and take ownership of the play space.
- 3 Foster the skills of collaboration as they co-create with peers and subsequent users of the space.
- 4 Learn about the impermanence of life/situations/materials as the play space keeps changing and materials respond to wear and tear.
- 5 Gain skills to adapt to today's speed of change and disruption, as well as skills for the future.

Other community-built playgrounds: Adventure Playground @ Canberra



Image credit: HDB

Another community-built playground is in Sembawang Close that opened in 2018. This was part of the Housing & Development Board's Build-A-Playground initiative.

The design of the over 180 square metre playground at Sembawang Close, located next to Block 334, involved 2,000 people engaged through design workshops, roadshows and surveys over four years. A build day was organised for residents to build and install the playground together.

Its design of a *kelong-treehouse* themed space was a result of ideas and suggestions from both young and old, paying tribute to Sembawang's past that used to have fishing villages and responding to the children's desire for a fun treehouse.

More of such community-built playgrounds are expected to be developed in the coming years.

Adapt the void deck: TOUCHpoint@AMK 433

The adaptation and redesign of the void deck space at block 433, Ang Mo Kio Avenue into a community hub called TOUCHpoint@AMK 433, has shown that a simple public space can help bring the community together in meaningful ways.

Completed in 2019 and designed by design consultancy, COLOURS: Collectively Ours, together with Freight Architects, for the TOUCH Community Services (TOUCH), the revamped space offers interest-based activities and opportunities for exercise and rehabilitation for seniors.

TOUCH is a non-profit charity organisation. The new space is part of its efforts to better support seniors on their various needs and interests in their neighbourhood. The project is funded by Lien Foundation and CapitaLand Hope Foundation. It is also a realised prototype of COLOURS' design project as part of "Second Beginnings" that explores design typologies to transform underutilised spaces into useful spaces for seniors.

This 450 square metre community hub houses a day rehabilitation centre and runs the Lien Foundation's Gym Tonic, a customised strength-training programme for seniors. There is also a community health post where nurses from the National Healthcare Group can monitor residents' health and refer them for treatment.

Design process

The design process involved the engagement of more than 200 residents in over four workshops, conducted by TOUCH and COLOURS. The process included exercises that enabled residents to share their needs and ideas for their neighbourhood and to identify the advantages and disadvantages of locating this community hub in different potential locations.

In addition, a physical model was created based on one of the locations and brought around the neighbourhood, for residents to share their views further. When the design was conceptualised, residents were engaged again and were invited to explore how they could also participate directly in shaping the spaces.

The final design introduced a new sheltered drop off for the entire Block 433 which the residents did not have before. The drop off point had a new public space where residents could relax in.

There was a seamless integration of indoor and outdoor spaces and with its surroundings, reflecting the residents' feedback to have a good blend of indoor and outdoor spaces. Several car park lots nearby were also converted into a fenceless community garden.

Within the new spaces in the void deck, there were moveable furniture (tables, chairs and mobile pantry) available for people to make the spaces their own. The common activity area could either be fully opened or partially enclosed, to allow for different functions and uses or to cope with more extreme weather.

Most of the void deck space remains open, retaining its visibility and transparency, while welcoming all residents to continue using the space as part of their everyday life.



The TOUCHpoint@AMK 433, showing the adapted void deck space and its various spaces. Image credits: Oddinary Studio

Reflections

Reflecting on designing spaces with the community, Co-Founder of COLOURS, Dr Chong Keng Hua shares some key learnings¹⁴:

- 1 Don't hurry, be patient, progress incrementally.
- 2 Focus on developing and shaping programmes and places as both are equally important.
- 3 Work with stakeholders in the community across organisations and agencies.
- 4 Engage community designers as professionals, not just as volunteers or advisors.
- 5 Be bold, take some risks, don't be paralysed by key performance indicators.

Elements that TOUCHpoint@AMK 433 promotes



Image credit: COLOURS



The common activity area can be either fully opened or partially enclosed, to allow for different functions and activities. Image credit: Ordinary Studio

¹⁴Chong, KH. (2021). Empowering stakeholders to make places great. URA placemaking webinar.

The design strategies for TOUCHpoint@AMK433

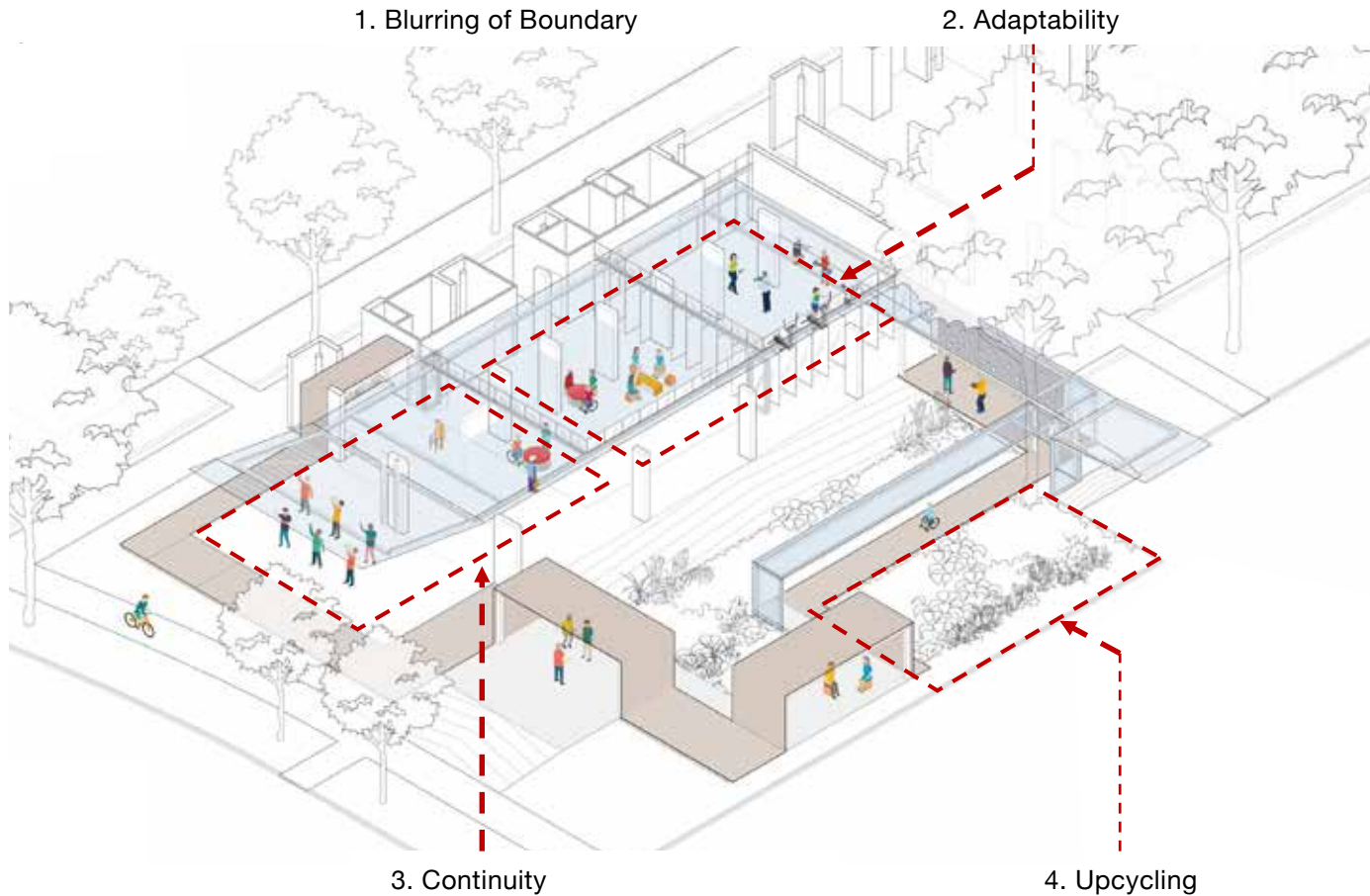


Image credit: COLOURS

Age-friendly neighbourhoods: seminal study and design prototypes

A seminal research study from 2017 to 2019 has reaffirmed how diverse our neighbourhoods and communities are and that we need to take the time to further understand these diversities to better adapt neighbourhood spaces to meet different needs.

The study¹⁵ brought together researchers, architects and policy makers from health and planning & design fields, delving deeper into understanding the influence and impact of the built environment on seniors' social, physical and mental health, especially those who are aged 55 and above.

It was led by Dr Belinda Yuen, who is the Research Director and Programme Lead of the Lee Li Ming Programme in Ageing Urbanism at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design.

What was unique about the study was its use of mixed methodologies, that included surveys and walk-along interviews, community design workshops, and the prototyping of design interventions in three neighbourhoods in Singapore: Hong Kah North, MacPherson, and Toa Payoh West.

In all, more than 1,400 seniors aged 55 and above were engaged. The research process sought to understand the seniors' diverse neighbourhood experiences, their lifestyle and mobility patterns, their overall health and wellbeing and the influence of the built spaces on their day-to-day activities and lives. This provided evidence-based insights from the perspectives of seniors themselves in shaping age-friendly neighbourhoods.

Following the research phase, three architectural firms then built upon the research and developed design strategies for three neighbourhoods.

Design process¹⁶

As part of the prototyping process, the architectural design firms conducted a series of community design workshops with seniors at Hong Kah North, MacPherson, and Toa Payoh West. The firms sought to understand the seniors' everyday perceptions and routines in the neighbourhoods, the areas of improvement, as well as co-design ideas and solutions to address them. The workshops also served to validate certain key design ideas and assumptions made.

Based on the inputs from the seniors as well as in-depth studies of the neighbourhoods' attributes and spaces, the firms then developed temporary design interventions which were tailored to the specific site contexts. These interventions were then evaluated in terms of their effects on seniors' well-being through surveys and onsite observations.

Walking around confidently

For Hong Kah North, one of the concerns raised was the seniors' fear of falling, as highlighted through the survey and focus group discussions. "In spite of this fear, we noticed many preferred taking a less safer route along the main road as compared to the path through the flats.

This was because the pathways along the void deck spaces looked monotonous to them. After a while, they may not be sure of where they were," shared Cerina Niken Rani Anggraini, Vice President from CPG Consultants (CPG), who focused on this neighbourhood with her team.



Temporary wayfinding prototypes were tested on site by CPG as part of the study
Image credits: Innovative planning & design of age-friendly neighbourhoods study



CPG worked with the Town Council to create temporary distinct motifs along the pillars of the sheltered walkway and void deck spaces at Block 338, Bukit Batok Street 34.

"The motifs offered an added level of interest moving from point A to B, which was sheltered and connected. The senior residents who were visually impaired also found the motifs helpful in enabling them to walk along the paths more confidently," said CPG architect, Doreen Koh.

"Being able to walk safely and with ease around the neighbourhood is critical for seniors as it gives them a greater sense of independence. This mobility is important in not just accessing nearby essential amenities but other spaces as well," Cerina added.

¹⁵The study, "Innovative Planning & Design of Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Singapore" is led by SUTD and is joined by Geriatric Education & Research Institute, CPG Consultants, Lekker Architects, and Tierra Design Studio. The government agency collaborators are Urban Redevelopment Authority, Housing & Development Board, Building & Construction Authority, Agency for Integrated Care and the Ministry of Health. The research is supported by the Singapore Ministry of National Development (MND) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) under the Land and Liveability National Innovation Challenge (L2NIC) Research Programme Award No. L2NICTDFI-2017-2. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the interviewees, and do not reflect the views of MND and NRF, as well as URA, other agencies and research partners involved in the study.

¹⁶Quotes and insights on the study are adapted from Tng, S. (2021). Shaping age-friendly neighbourhoods. URA (Skyline Issue 14).



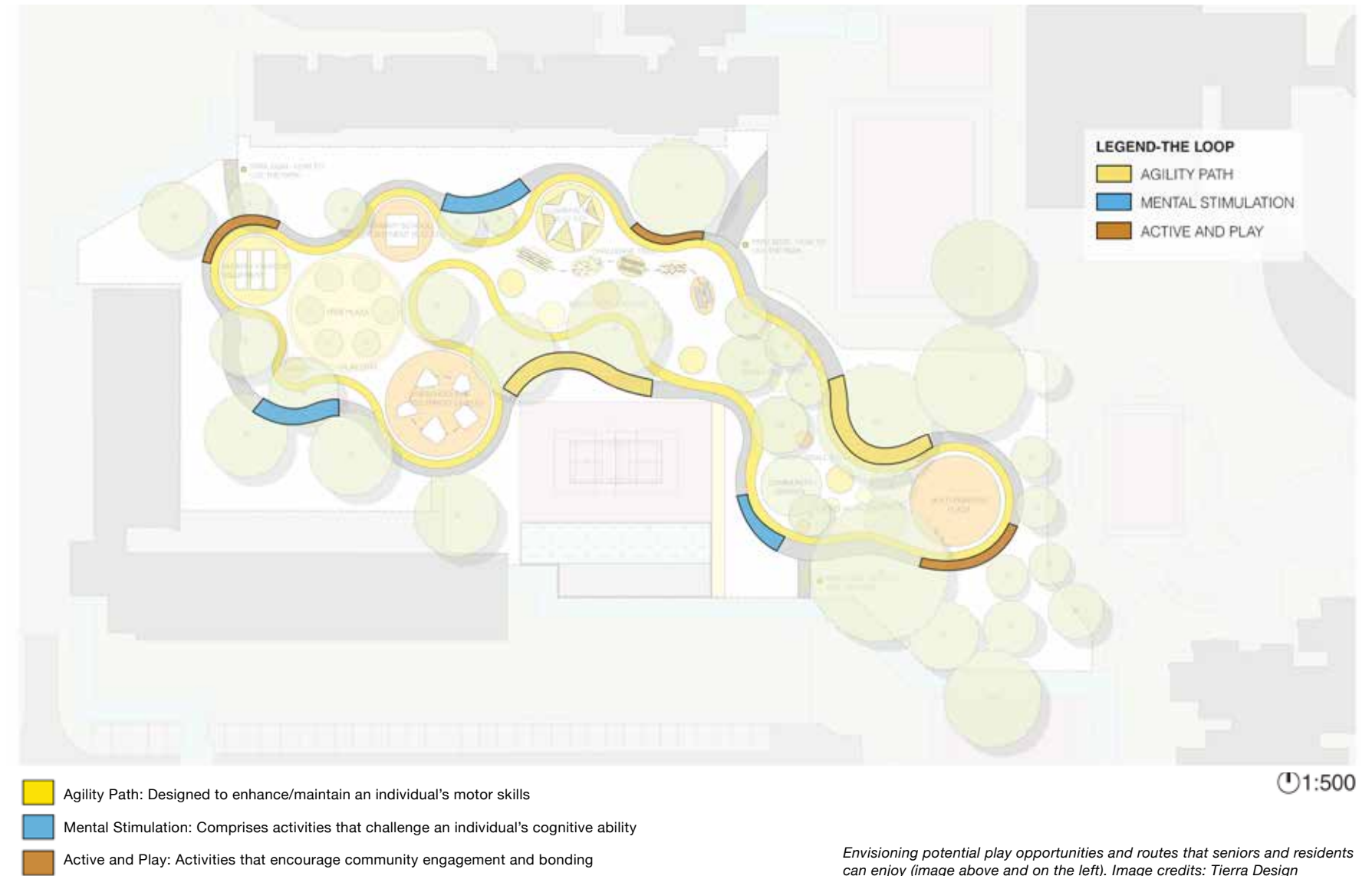
Coming out to play

In making the environment more engaging for seniors, Tierra Design Studio proposed a series of simple exercises and activities that could be designed and encouraged along daily routes, to create more opportunities for seniors, children and everyone else to have fun and a sense of play.

Such exercises and activities are also helpful to keep minds and senses stimulated, especially for those with dementia and cognitive

impairment; Toa Payoh West has a higher percentage of older persons with these conditions.

Beyond the exercises and activities proposed, Tierra also suggested improving the walkability of key routes such as the pathway between Braddell MRT Station and the wet market, and creating destination points of interest along the way.



Envisioning potential play opportunities and routes that seniors and residents can enjoy (image above and on the left). Image credits: Tierra Design

Fostering social interactions



Image credit: Lekker Architects

For the MacPherson neighbourhood that Ong Ker-Shing, Co-Founder of Lekker Architects and her team focused on, they were interested in further understanding the more intangible aspect of physical spaces.

“What really came out quite strongly in our interactions with the senior residents was how they paid close attention to social cues, encounters and interactions when they accessed physical spaces,” she shared.

“They were conscious about how they interact with younger people and others in the neighbourhood. Something as simple as a seating arrangement could hinder or foster interactions.

For example, some of the seniors shared with us that when they sat at a round table, they wondered if a younger person may

feel comfortable sitting with them. They didn’t want to feel like an imposition. Perhaps this perspective may be specific to this generation of older persons. Everyone interprets and responds to their social settings and physical spaces differently.”

Given that MacPherson has a higher proportion of seniors living alone and could feel more isolated if they did not feel like they could interact comfortably within their estate, Lekker Architects created a physical mobile *kopitiam* (coffee shop) to see if this could facilitate meaningful interactions.

They placed these at two locations for a few weekends. Volunteers and the community came forward to manage these. “The *kopitiam* culture took over. The culture of sharing tables with strangers prevailed. If there was coffee or tea, an older person felt more comfortable sharing the table with a young family because there was something to do. It broke the ice,” said Ker-Shing.

“More than just having a place to relax in or having coffee and tea with others, the *kopitiam* offered something familiar but was also a bit unexpected. And it was mobile. If something was there every day, it would not be something to look forward to.”

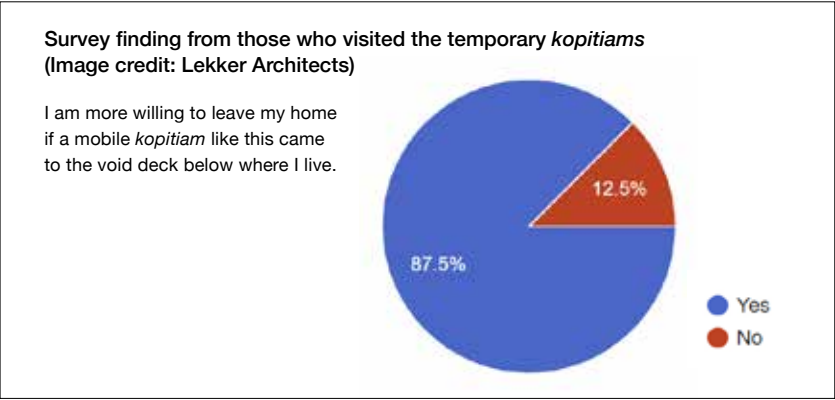


Image credit: Lekker Architects

Connecting people and spaces

The study resulted in the development of an environmental audit toolkit as well as a set of planning and design considerations that could be used to build on current efforts to further understand the diversities in neighbourhoods and prioritise potential areas for improvements.

Since the completion of the study, there has already been interest from Town Councils and others to use the toolkit to understand their neighbourhoods.

Belinda emphasised that the guidelines were not meant to be prescriptive as these cannot cater for every possible situation. “What we want to do is to create an awareness of the diversities in neighbourhoods. We provide the guiding principles and toolkit for anyone, from architect to community, to use these to understand the contexts of their neighbourhoods and people, to develop suitable solutions.”

Reflections

In shaping age-friendly neighbourhoods, one conclusion from the study stands out: it is important to understand and reflect the voice and needs of seniors and others in the community.

“We need to put in the time and effort to listen to the seniors’ and other stakeholders’ concerns, to really get to understand the rationale and source of their preferences or frustrations so that solutions can address their needs,” said Doreen.

For Ker-Shing, she saw the value of community buy-in and participation: “The community leaders and volunteers who helped to manage the *kopitiam* really made a difference in creating the right atmosphere and connecting people. Some of them already knew the seniors and could greet them by their names.”

Going further on how more can embrace and “own” spaces in our neighbourhoods, Ker-Shing said: “We like to label spaces. This is an exercise corner. That is a playground. Kids will be in the playground for two minutes and then they would go to the exercise corner.

People don’t necessarily respond to labelled spaces. It is a mindset thing. It is about allowing people to use things how they want versus how we think they should use. It is about designing for a certain amount of ‘misuse’, to allow for different interpretations.”

Franklin Po, Co-Founder of Tierra added: “It’s not about introducing fancy, shiny new things. We need to find more opportunities to curate and design spaces that are already highly accessible. Those that are along daily routes for example. We need to think about how to connect people to spaces and vice versa.

In Toa Payoh West, we saw many little gardens that were adopted by people. Some of them put up handwritten signs that said, ‘please don’t steal my plants.’ This is what I truly enjoy about neighbourhoods. As designers, we need to remember these little things and find ways to create spaces that can be spontaneously adopted by the community.”



Various spaces in Toa Payoh West where the seniors have made these their own

From design-led to place-led: reflections from Shophouse & Co



Shaping the public realm in Singapore has shifted from a more design-led approach to a more place-led focus over the years.

Efforts have gained momentum as designers, architects, planners, and others are increasingly working closely with the community to create a strong and engaging public realm.

Stella Gwee, Co-Founder and Director of Shophouse & Co, a placemaking consultancy, reflects on the larger efforts and ecosystems, for designers, citizens, and others to continue to work together to design thriving and vibrant public spaces and environments¹⁷.

Shophouse & Co has been around from 2013. Share with us on one of your placemaking projects.

Stella: One of our projects, *Podscape*, was carried out in 2020 and in March 2021. It sought to foster a sense of community and a sense of

place through the shared experience of recording and preserving the memories and stories of the neighbourhood.

Designed as a travelling mobile recording booth and a podcast to collect sounds and stories of different neighbourhoods in Singapore, we brought the first season out to Bukit Panjang and to Pasir Ris in 2021. Sound artists were involved to create soundscapes of Bukit Panjang and Pasir Ris, inspired by the stories, and sounds of the neighbourhoods.

I recall seeing an elderly lady who was initially apprehensive to share her story. However, when she heard the soundscape of an old cinema that used to be in Bukit Panjang, she was visibly moved and shared personal stories of her late husband bringing her on movie dates before they got married. After the wedding, they decided to live in Bukit Panjang, and it has been her first and only home since.

She went on to share other interesting bits of information of her neighbourhood, simply because she is the community expert. These stories are authentic and the local relationships with our neighbours and businesses are what make us a more resilient and caring community.

Projects like *Podscape* not only spark a new appreciation of the sounds and stories of our neighbourhoods, but also enable artists to make art while they engage with the community.

What do you think is the state of placemaking in Singapore now?

Stella: I would say, the general understanding of placemaking in Singapore has reached a wider audience and our agencies have also helped to grow this industry.

City agencies have a greater understanding in the various roles and scopes of work required in the interdisciplinary environment as well as the objectives and outcome expected.

Singapore has gained momentum in shifting the emphasis from a “design-led” approach to a “place-led” approach that puts the community at the core of the projects.



The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the important role of placemaking. What are your thoughts on this?

Stella: 200 per cent agreeable! The pandemic has brought unprecedented changes to lives globally. It has exposed many areas of need within our cities.

While the problems we face might be global in scale, the solutions can be found on a local level.

For us at Shophouse & Co, we believe strongly that our focus should be on hyper-local communities, economies, and a strong sense of place in a neighbourhood.

How can placemaking help small local businesses in neighbourhoods be community nodes? As people begin to discover more about their city, wouldn't this be the best opportunity to engage with the community in their own neighbourhood and build connections? Social isolation, equitable communities, sustainability; issues faced today could lead to a movement where everyone is able to come to a safe space provided by placemaking, so that ideas and actions can happen from the ground up.

Placemaking can build momentum and vibrancy for a sustained effort because the communities find themselves able to shape their city. This empowers them and fuels them with a renewed energy to build stronger connections in precincts and neighbourhoods. So, it is a very exciting time to be in this space, to witness this social transformation and we truly believe that the future is local.

Moving forward, what more can we do for placemaking and what should we focus on?

Stella: I think we should leverage the space and time that pandemic has offered to slow down. It isn't a bad thing since we can rethink how we can build a city we want to grow old in. We should take this opportunity to reflect and be more mindful in remaking the city in the “new normal”.

How can we create a better future and lead happier and healthier lives? How can we encourage social transformation and empower citizens to build better cities together? How can we allow our local businesses to thrive? I think more can be done with placemaking if there is a continued discussion and conversation between city agencies, private sector and intermediaries like ourselves.

Because our work is closely knitted to socially driven objectives, the expectation sometimes lands directly on communities to deliver such “community” projects. As practitioners, we felt that might be too much for community to take on, without the training and time. It might also be a little overwhelming for the community to see through.

Each of us in the placemaking eco-system has a part to play – stakeholders, communities, and governing agencies – and it requires a systemic thinking and collaboration from different partners to participate in cross-collaborative, interdisciplinary conversations to build the energy and movement.

¹⁷The questions and responses are adapted from Low, SP. (2021). Placemaking special: Shophouse & Co believes more can be done for Singapore's scene. d+a Design and Architecture Magazine.

Stories and lessons

from precinct stakeholders, developers, business/property owners

Beyond a single public space or street, our experience and memories of larger neighbourhoods and precincts are often more multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

We are drawn to places and areas for many reasons. It could be the beautiful environment and attractive public spaces the place has. It could be a great place to shop, eat, with good lifestyle attractions or be an engaging place to hang out with friends and families. It could be the rich heritage and stories that the place offers. It could be the friendly communities that make you feel welcome, the fun activities you could indulge in, or surprising and interesting aspects that you could experience, enticing you to keep going back to a place again and again.

Creating and sustaining thriving and relevant places over time has become critical and essential for cities not only in creating memorable destinations and contributing to our personal and collective identities, but also helps to build stronger social ties and economic resilience.

It takes a whole community to manage and curate distinctive places. Over the years, communities and stakeholders in key areas have come together to proactively shape favourite places that are close to our hearts. Beyond just placemaking, which is the process of proactively managing a place to make it better, many have adopted a broader strategy of place management when it comes to precincts.



Place management is a coordinated, area-based, multi-stakeholder approach to improving precincts (through placemaking, place marketing and place maintenance, etc.) and making them more attractive for the benefit of visitors and businesses.

Earlier concerted place management efforts in the 1990s started with areas such as Chinatown, Orchard Road and Little India. From 2000, efforts gained momentum, extending to other areas such as Marina Bay, Singapore River, Kampong Gelam, and more recently, Tanjong Pagar and Jurong. Place management can also be seen at various town centres in local neighbourhoods and spaces within and around shopping malls.

Such place management efforts have helped to activate and promote local areas and improve their physical realm. It has also enhanced the area's heritage, identity, and culture and built up good social networks that have seen stakeholders and communities support each other in tackling common issues together.

To further empower businesses and local communities to take on greater ownership and co-develop solutions tailored for their precincts, the pilot Business Improvement District (BID) programme was introduced in 2017, encouraging communities to pool resources together to proactively drive place management initiatives in their precincts.

We feature the place management efforts in various precincts and areas in Singapore to serve as inspiration and to offer insights for continued collective efforts and partnerships.

About the Business Improvement District (BID): six things to know

- 1 It is a business-led and-funded body formed where major stakeholders come together to invest in and drive improvements and initiatives for a specific area or precinct.
- 2 It is established and run independently by the private sector, funded by mandatory fees from property owners and/or businesses in the area.
- 3 It offers greater certainty in funding and commitment from stakeholders to actively manage an area or precinct.
- 4 This model and approach started in the United States and Canada in the 1970s. There are many BIDs in cities around the world today.
- 5 The pilot BID programme initiated in Singapore in 2017 enables the Government to assess the feasibility of the BID model and the possible enactment of legislation in future to support this. Application to join the pilot BID programme has closed.
- 6 Since 2017, several pilot BIDs have been formed in areas such as Singapore River, Tanjong Pagar, Marina Bay, Marina Centre and Raffles Place, with more to follow.

Marina Bay

Marina Bay is a 360-hectare live-work-play extension of the Central Business District that has developed its own distinct identity; one that is often associated with its 3.5 kilometre expansive waterfront strung with a necklace of public attractions. It is a result of decades of long-term planning and meticulous implementation with plans initiated from the 1970s. It is a people's bay, with something for everyone and continues to evolve with new developments and sustained efforts to draw people in.

Making it a people's bay

In shaping it to become a people's bay, place management played a critical role early on. In 2004, URA was appointed to coordinate development plans and lead place management efforts. While the bay's distinctive skyline and promenade took shape, URA began efforts in parallel, focusing on building up its identity and brand, actively marketing and positioning it internationally and locally as a key destination.

In tandem with efforts to create and manage a well-designed public realm around the bay, sustained activities and programming all year round made the bay come alive.

It has become a key location for national celebrations such as the National Day Parade, the Marina Bay Singapore Countdown on New Year's Eve, and i Light Singapore, a sustainable light festival. In addition, businesses and communities have organised and hosted a range of events around the bay, such as water activities (dragon boat races, sailing, dining cruises), marathons, outdoor art installations, festive bazaars and charity events.

The waterfront promenade and its various public spaces have also become a favourite place for people to cycle, jog and hang out with family and friends regularly.



1977: Land reclamation at Marina Bay



1986: Building of infrastructure

From 1970s till today: Marina Bay milestones at a glance

While place management in Marina Bay started with the Government taking the lead, over the years, stakeholders have started to play a more active role.

Some highlights that have shaped the bay's physical environment:

1970s: Initial plans

The idea of creating a new inland bay (Marina Bay today) was mooted when drawing up plans to extend the Central Business District to support the future growth of Singapore as a business and financial hub.

Land reclamation was carried out in phases in the mid-1970s and 1990s to the current profile of Marina Bay today. Various benchmarking studies were also carried out to determine the size and shape of the bay, with the intent of creating an attractive urban waterfront in the heart of the city.

1983: Earlier plans considered for Marina Bay

Renowned architects, Kenzo Tange and I. M. Pei, were commissioned to draw up Master Plans for Marina Bay. While the plans for Marina Bay have been revised over time, some of the key concepts and guiding principles of I. M. Pei's plan were adopted, for example, the gridiron road network, the parcellation and the creation of two promontory sites where one has been developed into the ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands.

1998: Building sustainable infrastructure

Marina Bay is supported by innovative sustainable infrastructure such as the Common Services Tunnel, first announced in 1998. A system of purpose-built underground tunnels that houses and distributes essential utilities to all developments in Marina Bay, it began operations in 2007. Other infrastructure in the area includes the District Cooling System, a centralised cooling system around the bay.

2000-2002: Initial attractions and skyline

Marina Centre, the first major development in Marina Bay, was completed in 2000, which consists of Suntec City, Marina Square and Millenia Walk, providing a wide variety of uses such as office, retail and hotels to the area. The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and the new Merlion Park also added richer cultural and historical elements to the Marina Bay skyline.

2006-2009: The skyline taking shape

The bay had begun to take shape. The world’s first floating stage, the Float at Marina Bay, hosted the National Day Parade for the first time in 2007. Marina Barrage, Singapore’s first reservoir in the city and the Singapore Flyer, the world’s tallest observation wheel, opened in 2008.

2010: Distinctive skyline and promenade completed

This was a landmark year for Marina Bay where many key public infrastructure of its distinctive skyline were completed, such as The Helix pedestrian bridge and the Bayfront vehicular bridge linking Marina Bay to Marina Centre. The 3.5 kilometre continuous waterfront promenade around the bay connecting the attractions and open spaces was also completed.

2012 and beyond: The bay continues evolving

Other landmarks opened, such as the Gardens by the Bay, Marina Bay Financial Centre, and the Jubilee Bridge that linked the Esplanade Theatre and the Merlion. The bay continues to evolve with more mixed-use developments.



2004: Completion of Marina Centre and Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay



2009: The building of new attractions around the bay



2010: The completion of the distinctive skyline and promenade



2018: The evolving Marina Bay

Examples of place management efforts for the bay:

2003: Marina Bay Business Association

The Baywatch Association, later renamed Marina Bay Business Association, was formed to promote the welfare of businesses in the area. The group organised various events and activities for the area. It has since disbanded.

2004: Championing the bay

URA was appointed the development agency for Marina Bay to champion, coordinate development efforts, support and drive place management efforts for the area.

Earlier efforts helped to build Marina Bay’s distinctive identity as a bay for all people, to explore, exchange and entertain. URA reached out to businesses and stakeholders to support place management efforts.

2005-2008: Seeding signature events

Efforts were made for the bay to be a key location for national celebrations and signature events, such as the Marina Bay Singapore Countdown initiated in 2005 and the Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix introduced in 2008.

2010: Sustained activities around the bay

Adding to the signature events, i Light Singapore was introduced. It was Asia’s first ever sustainable light festival. This and a variety of other activities around the bay organised by different businesses and groups each year and the activation of public spaces help to sustain interest and excitement around the bay.

2020: Pilot BIDs

Two organisations, Marina Bay Alliance and Marina Central, were formed as pilots under the BID programme introduced in 2017. Both groups have stepped forward to lead place management efforts at two key areas of the bay.

Designing an attractive environment

People have come to love the bay for how comfortable and welcoming it feels. Some go to the bay to relax in different public spaces with family and friends, to shop, visit attractions, to jog or cycle, enjoy waterfront views or take in the night scene and more. But it was not an easy feat building a new precinct from scratch and creating its distinctive identity as a people's bay.

Conscious efforts were made to consider people at the heart of planning. Planners ensured that the waterfront, parks and open spaces are kept accessible to the public and this resulted in the success of Marina Bay where people from all walks of life gather to enjoy.



Creating a distinctive skyline

Building heights step down towards the waterfront and key open spaces to create a more intimate scale at the waterfront, as well as to optimise views towards the waterfront, creating the three-dimensional “stepped” skyline profile that we see today.

Retaining historic waterfront and key landmarks

Parts of the waterfront and key landmarks such as the former Clifford Pier, Customs House and Change Alley are conserved and re-adapted to continue to celebrate our waterfront heritage and inject new life into the bay area.

Lighting up the bay

The Night Lighting Master Plan drawn up for the area has helped to light up the buildings to create a dynamic night-time skyline and a new dimension for people to view and experience the bay.

Enhancing connectivity

The extensive road and rail network with six MRT Stations ensures good access to Marina Bay from all over the island. Well-connected pedestrian and cycling pathways enable one to move around within the area easily.



Safeguarding views and access to the water

Through-block links at buildings such as One Fullerton, OUE Bayfront and Marina Bay Sands provide visual and physical access to the water, enabling all to enjoy the wonderful waterfront views.



Providing a variety of public spaces and amenities

The wide variety of public and open spaces with seating, shade and tiered steps as well as the breeze shelters and public art along the promenade invite people to linger longer.



Image credit: Fullerton Heritage



Creating a necklace of attractions and curating activities all year round

The bay has continuously attracted people to it in part due to the critical mass of attractions planned around the bay, from the Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay to the ArtScience Museum. It was a deliberate decision to anchor the waterfront with public-oriented attractions to give the bay back to the people.

Many of these attractions have contributed to the vibrancy of the area and generated street level activities. These attractions offer changing exhibits and programming that entice people to visit the bay frequently.

In addition, the public open spaces around the waterfront are created to allow for a wide range of activities and events that can be brought to the bay to make the bay interesting and surprising. In 2010, as the infrastructure was just completed around the bay, many people were unaware of the new waterfront promenade and hence, URA lined up a series of events to introduce and promote Marina Bay as the new focal point for Singaporeans and visitors.

Themed “Marina Bay Invitations 2010”, the programmes featured something for everyone – from performing and visual arts events, to sporting and cultural activities and included the two signature events – Marina Bay Singapore Countdown 2010 and i Light Marina Bay 2010. This showcased the many possibilities around the bay and reinforced Marina Bay’s identity as a people’s bay.

Over time, as more people and event organisers become aware of the public spaces around the bay, different businesses and groups also started bringing in programmes and activations to cater to different groups and interests, ranging from kite festivals to carnivals, pop-up markets and movie nights.



ArtScience Museum. Image credit: Marina Bay Sands



Spectra - Marina Bay Sands. Image credit: Visual Media, Marina Bay Sands



Red Dot Design Museum



Image credit: Leo Meng Tsan



Image credit: CT-Art



Merlion Park



Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay



Image credit: POSB



Activating and enlivening the waters

With the large waterbody in Marina Bay as one of its unique draws, it offers opportunities to create new water experiences. A variety of water sporting activities and other programmes over the years have brought people closer to the water.

Water sporting events

Exciting water activities have added more sparkle and fun to the bay. The annual DBS Marina Regatta held at Marina Bay and others like the international Extreme Sailing Series have brought the waters to life.

Sailing at the bay

The Singapore Sailing Federation has proactively created opportunities for people and the community to try sailing at Marina Bay. The Federation actively works with other stakeholders and corporate partners to organise sailing events and offer free sailing try-outs for the public.

Water spectacle

People can enjoy a free nightly outdoor light and water show in front of the Marina Bay Sands Event Plaza, which has become a favourite visual spectacle for many.

Water transport

As an alternative form of transport, one can get to Marina Bay, Singapore River, Marina Channel and Kallang Basin easily through sight-seeing cruises as well as water taxi services around the bay.

New water experiences

With the bay and its waterfront as an iconic backdrop, the water taxi operators have introduced thematic boats and dining cruises for more unique experiences on the water. Some of the options include donut-shaped boats for people to enjoy private dining onboard and small group parties on customised vessels.



Establishing the bay as a key venue for signature events

As a fresh new precinct unknown to locals and the international community, much of the earlier place management effort was to increase top-of-the-mind awareness of Marina Bay and to build the world-class branding of the area. This was achieved through curating signature events that resonate with the place and attract international and local interest, such as the Marina Bay Singapore Countdown and the Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix.

With its iconic skyline and dramatic backdrop, Marina Bay has become a popular venue for many other national celebrations and signature events over the years. This has reinforced the bay's importance and identity as a people's bay. The many events at the bay have captured people's hearts and imagination.

Marina Bay Singapore Countdown

The traditional Singapore annual countdown for the New Year was the first signature event to be held at Marina Bay from 2005. It has since grown to become a key event that bring up to 500,000 people together to usher in the New Year in a big way, with an exciting line-up of programmes and firework displays each year.

Community participation has been a major aspect of the countdown event. For some years, Singaporeans penned their hopes for the New Year on wishing spheres that were presented in the water. The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre also worked with social service organisations and educational institutions to produce creative light projections on The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, the ArtScience Museum and the Merlion as part of the "Build a Dream" and "Share the Moment" campaigns during the countdown event.



Image credit: Gin Tay

National Day Parade

The bay's panoramic waterfront set against the city skyline offers a unique backdrop to host the National Day Parade and other major events.

The Float at Marina Bay, a temporary platform, was initially created to host National Day Parades from 2007 while the National Stadium (now part of the Singapore Sports Hub) underwent redevelopment.

Since then, the bay has hosted 10 editions of the National Day Parade. It has also been the venue for other large-scale events such as the inaugural 2010 Summer Youth Olympics, Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix and the River Hongbao.

One of the largest floating platforms in the world, it has brought people even closer to the water and the city, with more dynamic experiences that combine air, land and sea elements.

As announced in 2017, the venue will be redeveloped into a permanent space named NS Square. In addition to serving as the primary venue for the National Day Parade and passing out parade ceremonies for full-time National Servicemen, the venue will also host other major events and community activities.

It will also serve as a key public space and be part of the continuous waterfront loop around the bay. It will house a water sports centre, a swimming pool and a National Service-themed gallery.



The past and future National Day Parades. Image credits: NDP 2007 EXCO (top) and MINDEF and MND (bottom)



Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix

Marina Bay became the venue for the first ever night race for Formula 1 held since 2008.

From 2008 to 2019, according to the Singapore Tourism Board, the race attracted over 550,000 international visitors to Singapore and generated about S\$1.5 billion in tourism receipts. With over 930 million international broadcast viewers tuned in to the night race, the event has reinforced Marina Bay as an iconic destination.

In addition to the race, the Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix has distinguished itself further as one that is not just about the sport, but also offers a strong line-up of concerts, entertainment, and lifestyle offerings both within the circuit park and throughout the city.



The various programmes and activities during the Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix
Image credits: Singapore GP Pte Ltd

Spotlight – Creating a signature event unique to Marina Bay

i Light Singapore

Adding to the signature events at the bay, i Light Singapore, formerly known as i Light Marina Bay, was curated and initiated in 2010 as one of the anchor events to celebrate the completion of major developments around the bay. Positioned as Asia’s first sustainable light festival, the sustainability message underlying

Over 430,000
visitors



2010: Asia’s first sustainable light art festival

The first edition presented 25 light art installations around the promenade over three weeks and sought to promote the use of energy-efficient lighting. It enabled people to enjoy the bay in a new light. Key stakeholders around the bay such as Marina Bay Sands and The Fullerton Heritage have contributed to the festival through sponsorship, and the projection mapping on the ArtScience Museum’s façade has been an iconic feature of the festival since 2012.



2016: From biennial to annual

Building on the success of the first three biennale editions (2010, 2012, 2014), the festival was then held annually from 2016 onwards. Besides the artworks, the public could participate in fringe activities such as art bazaars, craft workshops and guided tours. Complementary initiatives such as the “Switch Off, Turn Up” campaign and i Light Symposium also inspired more active conversations on environmental sustainability and raised awareness on sustainable practices.



2017: Local artists gain international exposure

As a platform for local artists, i Light Marina Bay helped local artists gain international exposure. Moonflower, by local artist Lee Yu Qin, was subsequently featured at international night festivals such as Scottsdale Canal Convergence, Amsterdam Light Festival and Bella Skyway Festival, as part of a collaboration and exchange programme between i Light Marina Bay and other festivals abroad.

the festival is well-aligned with Marina Bay’s position as a sustainable urban district. The event was also conceived to take full advantage of the cooler weather in the evenings to bring people out to enjoy the bay. Since then, the event has lighted up the bay in different ways and has become a key attraction that many look forward to each year.

Over 3 million
visitors



2018: Extended to Esplanade Park

For the first time, the festival location went beyond the Marina Bay area to include the Esplanade Park to further widen its reach and impact. The 2018 edition also saw more youth participation, featuring artworks of six student groups from five schools.



2019: Anchor for Singapore Bicentennial

As an anchor event for the Singapore Bicentennial commemoration in 2019, i Light Marina Bay was renamed i Light Singapore. The festival was presented at more locations such as the Civic District, Singapore River, and the Raffles Terrace at Fort Canning Park, as these areas were an important part of Singapore’s history. The light works in these locations helped to create greater awareness about Singapore’s story.



Beyond 2019: More to come

i Light Singapore will continue at the bay. The public can look forward to more exciting sustainable light installations and programmes.

What people love about Marina Bay

Over the years, many have shared their love for the bay with posts on social media and online blogs about the area.

Five URA youth volunteers and aspiring photographers (from left to right: Diane Lee, Lian Kok Hai, Zhang Shijie, Austin Law and Eric Teo) have captured the beauty of the bay and stories around it in a photography exhibition presented at The URA Centre from February to April 2021.

See some of their works here and reflections about the bay from Singaporeans, curated by the photographers.



"I'm already 75 years old and I've been painting for over 50 years. Here you have a bit of everything, you have people, Marina Bay, Esplanade, and Marina Bay Sands as well. They form a very iconic part of Singapore. So, there's no other better place for painting than this bay area."

ONG KIM SENG
WATERCOLOURIST



"Marina Bay is a great place for cyclists because of the beautiful scenery and greenery, with access to Gardens by the Bay. We especially enjoyed the Car-Free Weekends, where roads were closed (temporarily) for cycling and there were many activities!"

LESLIE TOH AND FRIENDS
AVID CYCLISTS



"My mission is to make people happy. People like my bicycle and I'm happy to take photos with them. I've been doing this for the last six years, cycling to Gardens by the Bay, Singapore River, sometimes Clarke Quay and eventually stopping at the Merlion. This place is Singapore's most attractive place, it symbolises Singapore."

SHAWN ANG
"SINGAPORE COWBOY"

"She's two this year, and the boy is turning four this month. We brought the kids here because it is somewhere outdoors and safe to play. The kids can have a breather and there's lots of space to run around. We also go to the playground at the Esplanade Park sometimes. Play helps with their creativity and innovation, through play they learn."

KLYS TSAI AND FAMILY



"I brought the kids here because this place is very well connected. You can walk along the bay, across nice bridges to visit different attractions. Very kids friendly too because of the amount of space for them to run about. Now that the kids are older, they can start to experience and recognise the attractions for themselves."

PHILIP TAN AND FAMILY



"Marina Bay continues to flourish into the haven for enthusiasts of all sorts. To me, what gives meaning to a place is the people and their shared memories. And this is what I wish to capture in photography."

LIAN KOK HAI
PHOTOGRAPHER



"From eating seafood at Marina South as a kid, to watching the National Day Parade at The Float, you could say I grew up alongside Marina Bay. It's an unbelievable privilege to capture the stories that make Marina Bay special, a place that holds a special place in my heart."

ERIC TEO
PHOTOGRAPHER



“For Marina Bay, placemaking can help build a connection with its community to mean something more than simply a place of work or residence. We can improve infrastructure, enhance urban design, inject creativity and ultimately bring more people to our neighbourhood.”

Wang Renyi, Director, Marina Bay Alliance¹⁸

Placemaking today and beyond: stakeholders’ efforts

The first stakeholder-led place management organisation in the Marina Bay area was the Baywatch Association, also known as Marina Bay Business Association (MBBA), comprising of City Link Mall, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Marina Bay Sands, Marina Square, Millenia Walk, Marina Bay Link Mall, Raffles City Shopping Centre, Singapore Flyer, Suntec City Mall and The Fullerton Heritage. However, due to several challenges such as the lack of focus due to the large geographical spread of the stakeholders and limited funding, the group disbanded after a few years.

While URA continues its role as the lead public agency to drive place management efforts in Marina Bay, stakeholders saw the opportunity to work together again to shape and enhance the bay when the pilot BID programme was launched in 2017. Learning from their past experience, they took the time to define the boundary to focus their attention on, build consensus and formulated a four-year business plan to help them realise their vision for the precinct. This led to the formation of two pilot BIDs, i.e. Marina Bay Alliance and Marina Central, in 2020.



Various initiatives by Marina Bay Alliance, such as the Marina Bay Singapore Countdown 2020 celebration at the Lawn, the Marina Bay Active and the Marina Bay ARToday
Image credits: Marina Bay Alliance



To learn more about Marina Bay Alliance, click the link below, <https://marinabayalliance.com/> or scan the QR code



Marina Bay Alliance

One of their earlier efforts was the activation of The Lawn at Marina Bay, a key public space in the precinct, with interesting activities for families and friends while picnicking and awaiting the fireworks display, in support of the Marina Bay Singapore Countdown 2020. This was the first time that The Lawn was activated during the year-end celebration, which served as a great vantage point for the public to soak in the atmosphere and welcome the New Year.

The group profiled many eateries in Marina Bay through a series of marketing videos and promotions to attract families and visitors to the area as part of their joint marketing efforts since 2020. They also organised regular exercise classes for office workers and residents as part of Marina Bay Active, a health and wellness programme in 2021.

This was later expanded to include Marina Bay Active Kids Edition where a series of fun and action-packed outdoor activities were introduced specially for families with kids. Through this family-centric edition, Marina Bay Alliance engaged more residents in the community while attracting more visitors back to the precinct over the weekends to enjoy the public spaces.

To encourage the public to have a better appreciation of the iconic city skyline and unique art sculptures in Marina Bay, Marina Bay Alliance also rolled out a series of complimentary Marina Bay themed art trails and workshops around the precinct, such as sketching and water colouring. Named as Marina Bay ARToday, this popular programme has attracted different groups of visitors to explore the area and be inspired by the beauty of the precinct.

¹⁸From the d+a issue feature in March 2021, “The More We Get Together”, on placemaking efforts in various precincts including Marina Bay.

Marina Central

Some of its early efforts in 2020 included supporting its tenants by promoting food deliveries, takeaways and dine-in, and introducing precinct vouchers to encourage spending within the various developments. The precinct vouchers were well-received, driving footfall and sales to the precinct.

In conjunction with the festive season, and to celebrate the launch of Marina Central, all buildings in the precinct also programmed their building lights to Marina Central's signature teal colour for a month from mid-November to mid-December 2020.

Through the various initiatives, the group has built a closer working relationship with each other and has been working collectively to further enhance the precinct.

In 2021, Marina Central also partnered with the Singapore Tourism Board and the arts group, Arts Outreach, to present a roving art exhibition titled *Art Encounters: Into Softer Worlds*, which included a range of art activities to draw people to the area.

Map showing the stakeholders within the pilot BID

- A** Marina Square
Marina Centre Holdings Pte Ltd
- B** Millenia Singapore
Pontiac Land Group
- C** South Beach Singapore
South Beach Consortium Pte Ltd
- D** Suntec City
Suntec REIT
- Community Partners**
- E** Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay
The Esplanade Co. Ltd.



Follow the Marina Central pilot BID on their www.facebook.com/marinacentralsg/ and www.instagram.com/marinacentralsg/ for more updates on their initiatives



Various initiatives by Marina Central, such as the art exhibition by Arts Outreach (Image credit: Colin Wan/ Arts Outreach Singapore), the festive teal light up, the precinct's thermal bags as well as the precinct vouchers (Image credits: Marina Central)

Singapore River

Once the centre of entrepot trade in the 19th century, Singapore River has evolved into a popular lifestyle destination filled with hotels, shops, restaurants, and riverfront housing. Following the river clean up that was completed in 1987, many of the dilapidated shophouses and warehouses were restored and re-adapted for new uses such as restaurants and cafes, offices and residences.

By 2000, the transformation was almost complete and today the three distinct quays showcase diverse and differentiated offerings.

Boat Quay, located next to the Central Business District, is home to waterfront dining establishments and is known for its signature skyline scene of conserved shophouses along the river, set against the backdrop of skyscrapers.

The middle zone - Clarke Quay, is bustling with nightlife and entertainment. Further upstream - Robertson Quay has a different vibe with riverfront housing and hotels.



Image credit: Singapore River One

Shaping a well-designed destination

The Singapore River Concept Plan (1985) and Development Guide Plan (1994) provided the foundations for the transformation of the river precinct, which continues to be guided by the Singapore River urban design guidelines and plans today.

The following are some examples of design considerations and elements that have contributed to the river's beautiful waterfront and streetscape.

More information on the Singapore River's urban design guidelines can be found here:

<https://www.ur.gov.sg/Corporate/Guidelines/Urban-Design/Singapore-River>



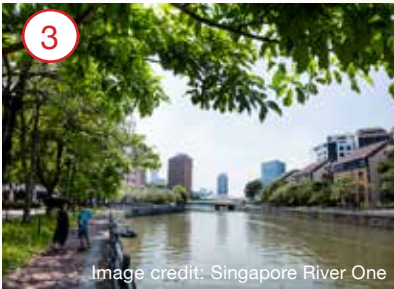
Keeping the low-rise character of buildings along the river

People can enjoy and experience the river's unique historic character at a more intimate, pedestrian-friendly scale. New buildings fronting the river are kept to a maximum height of four storeys to be compatible in scale with the existing low-rise shophouses and warehouses, while non-river fronting developments can be built up to a height of 10 storeys.



Enjoying delightful public spaces

Various public spaces along the river invite people to linger, admire and engage with the various public art, sculptures, murals and quirky benches that add more charm to the precinct



Moving around easily across banks

People can stroll along the river and across the banks easily with its six-kilometre long and 15-metre wide waterfront promenade that includes nine pedestrian bridges and underpasses. Nodal points along the river allow people to linger longer to savour quiet moments throughout the precinct.



Experiencing a variety of activities and celebrating the river's heritage

The river precinct has come to be a place where people can live, work and others visit, shop, dine or enjoy the night life – all in a historic river setting with its wide variety of uses and activities.



Walking comfortably with shade and colour

Walking around is more comfortable with a tree-lined promenade that is designed to accentuate the different characters of its quays. Specific species of trees selected provide shade and add more pop and colour to the area.



Accessing the waterfront

One can access the waterfront directly along the historic river steps of Clarke Quay or via a network of pedestrian malls. Through-block links, required of developments, provide views of the river and easy access to the waterfront.

Finding the right approach¹⁹

For the Singapore River to continue to stay relevant and draw people to it, there was a need to find new ways of managing and shaping its offerings and identity.

One of the key challenges of sustaining the precinct as a major destination was a lack of synergistic activities and a united platform to promote the three quays and the entire river precinct more holistically.

The area was also home to a diverse range of stakeholders with 500 property owners, 700 businesses and 10,000 residents, each with different interests and needs.

In addition, there was a lack of sustainable funding and resources that could effectively support place management efforts on a long-term basis. While this diversity has lent the precinct its unique characteristics, it has also been challenging for the precinct to put forth a collective vision that would benefit the stakeholders in the area.

In 2010, URA embarked on a feasibility study to find a formal and sustainable place management model that Singapore can consider adopting and identified Singapore River as the precinct to be the testbed for this study. Having shortlisted the BID model as a possible option, intensive and extensive engagements were conducted with public and private sector stakeholders to first identify key issues and areas of focus.

Through this process, it enabled them to understand the importance of place management and placemaking, and the value of working together to enhance the precinct. Early efforts also saw a group of enlightened and passionate stakeholders coming forward to take the lead as precinct champions.

The initial conversations led to the formation of a voluntary, informal Singapore River Task Group - made up of 17 public and private sector stakeholders to create an opportunity for stakeholders to begin working together. This served as a useful sounding board to provide views and support for initial initiatives and plans to shape the river precinct.

Several teething issues that tarnished the image of Singapore River for many years were brought to the table for discussion and one of these was touting and overcharging at Boat Quay. The group initiated “A Better Singapore River” campaign in December 2011 where businesses along Boat Quay signed pledges to adopt good business practices.

Efforts by hotels helped to market the campaign and regular patrols by government agencies further helped to reduce touting and overcharging activities.

¹⁹Information and insights on the placemaking journey for the Singapore River are also featured and first published in the book, The City at Eye Level Asia, Stipo, 2020.



**Stakeholder engagements
on the river precinct in 2011**

150 *one-to-one and small group sessions were held to gather detailed insights and information on ground.*

3 *surveys gathered input from the larger community. About 900 responses were received.*

6 *workshops hosted a total of about 200 participants, establishing common objectives and strategies.*



*Stakeholders at one of many meetings to develop the vision of the Singapore River precinct
Image credit: Singapore River One*

Singapore River One

The early successful efforts of the informal platform paved the way for a stronger commitment and desire from stakeholders to set up a more permanent group. This led to the formation of Singapore River One (SRO) in April 2012, a not-for-profit company dedicated to the place management of the Singapore River.

Most of the key landlords of developments along the river together with some of the Task Group members made up the initial 11 members of SRO, to champion the interests of stakeholders from all three quays.

At the start, SRO worked closely with government agencies and its stakeholders to improve the image of the precinct through quick-win projects. In addition to the anti-touting campaign, SRO refreshed the appeal of the river through active programming ranging from river festivals to weekend street closures.

Riding on the positive change, more property owners and business operators came on board and membership increased from 12 members in 2012 to 121 in early 2020.

The relationships and trust that SRO had cultivated over the years when it was a precinct association helped when it went out to engage the stakeholders to seek their support to form the pilot BID.

Similar to the approach adopted when SRO was initially formed, consultations carried out included those with government agencies that played a role in the planning and management of the precinct. More importantly, SRO also formed a dedicated task group that helped to formulate the business plan, and campaign for its support with their peers.

This was critical in bringing together the diverse group of stakeholders to understand and align with the vision for the precinct. The learnings and experience that SRO gathered in its initial years enabled it to become the first pilot under the BID programme when URA introduced it in 2017.

Its sustained active place management efforts have continued to support the precinct's businesses and stakeholders during both good and challenging times and has continued to attract people to the river.



Former Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan walking the Singapore River precinct with the stakeholders in 2012

Establishing a unifying focus and tackling challenges together

The formation of SRO served as a unifying platform that brought a diverse group of stakeholders together. This was critical in kickstarting stakeholder-led efforts that could bring benefits across the precinct.

From 2012 to 2017, as envisioned in its five-year business plan, SRO worked closely with its diverse stakeholders and government agencies to:

- **Reduce touting and overcharging** and other anti-social behaviours with campaigns such as “A Better Singapore River”, an early effort carried out in 2011;
- **Strengthen the river’s identity**, by developing a unifying logo, promoting activities and offerings around the river and organising sustained events and programmes to continuously attract people to the precinct;
- **Maintain a safe and clean environment**, by working closely with relevant government agencies to proactively identify and manage areas that are more litter and graffiti-prone, and carry out regular safety patrols;
- **Improve the river’s physical realm** by contributing to enhancing the outdoor dining experience, lighting up the shophouse facades along Boat Quay and beautifying public spaces along the river with murals and benches; and
- **Contribute to establishing regular water taxi shuttle services** along the river; operations started from 2013 and has become a key part and experience of the river precinct.



Map showing the stakeholders within the pilot BID

- | | |
|--|---|
| A Boat Quay
UOB Plaza 1 & 2
(United Overseas Bank Limited)
Shophouses:
Hong Leong Holdings Limited,
8th Era Investments Pte. Ltd,
Upside Property 1 Pte. Ltd,
and many individual property
owners | B1 Clarke Quay
Clarke Quay Central and Riverside
Point
(Far East Organisation) |
| C1 Robertson Quay
Robertson Walk
(Frasers Property) | B2 Clarke Quay
Clarke Quay
(CapitaLand Mall Trust) |
| C3 Robertson Quay
Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel
(Millennium & Copthorne Hotels) | C2 Robertson Quay
M Social Singapore and Studio M
Hotel
(City Developments Limited, Hong
Leong Holdings Limited) |



Campaign poster that advocated friendly business practices in Boat Quay



Dragon boat races in Singapore as part of the Singapore River Festival series. Image credit: Singapore River One



Visitors to the precinct enjoying outdoor screenings in Robertson Quay



Water taxis plying the Singapore River as part of enhancing the experience of the precinct

Improving the dining experience along Boat Quay

Outdoor dining along the riverfront promenade has been an attraction since the early 1990s. However, over the years, this outdoor area became less attractive with its unsightly tentages and signboards cluttering the promenade, blocking views to the river. The overhead power cables from the shophouses to the dining areas were also a fire hazard.

Hence, SRO put forth a proposal in 2014 to improve this area. In getting stakeholders, mainly the large number of individual shophouse owners to support the project, SRO held various community meetings and individual sessions to bring the stakeholders on board for this proposal. The group provided feedback and views during the design process, working closely with URA and ensuring stakeholders' concerns were addressed as far as possible.

Completed in 2017, some of the improvements implemented by URA included removing the overhead power cables and laying them underground, repaving parts of the promenade, designing new structures for the dining areas, creating two new open spaces with more direct access to the water and opening up views to the river from the promenade.

As the profile of the Boat Quay shophouses consists mainly of individual landlords, it has been challenging to bring them together to play a more pro-active role in the place management of the precinct. SRO's management of the Outdoor Refreshment Areas (ORAs) as the master licensee reinforces its role as a pilot BID and precinct manager, enabling it to address some of these issues on ground and to lead the stakeholders towards a common vision for the precinct.



Image credit: Singapore River One



Pedestrians pathways made safer with the removal of the overhead electric cables



More open views to the river from all sides of the promenade



Views to Boat Quay can now be enjoyed from other side of the river as well; good night lighting captures the rich architectural details of the shophouses

Activating public spaces

Over the years, SRO has worked with artists, design students and others to enliven various public spaces along the river.

Children now enjoy an additional play area along Robertson Quay, with play structures created to stir up their imagination and creativity. This has created a new communal space for the neighbourhood where residents come together and socialise.

Six specially designed public benches at the Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay riverfront allow people to rest and linger. Murals along the underpasses at the Circular Road back lanes make a much more delightful stroll. Murals on selected shophouse facades were realised with the support from landlords and businesses. The various murals were promoted and shared through art trails as part of the 2015 Singapore River Festival and the 2020 Singapore Art Week.



This play area at Robertson Quay offers more play opportunities for children and was sponsored by a precinct stakeholder



This is one of the many benches designed by Interior and Product design students from the Raffles Design Institute Singapore in 2018 as part of their course work, in consultation from Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC). The benches reflect the history and identity of the river



*The murals along the river were developed by different artists and partners over time. Students from the Raffles Design Institute created six murals along the underpasses in 2014 (image on the left), while local artists such as Joyotee Ray Chandhury, Nivedita Kesavan and Paroma Ray created some of the murals at the Circular Road back lanes (image on top right)
Image credits: Singapore River One*

Creating memorable events

To create new excitement and interest around the river precinct, SRO introduced and curated signature events such as the Christmas by the River (2013-2015) and the Singapore River Festival (2015-2019). It also worked to support stakeholders in their organisation of the Saint Patrick’s Day Festival (2013-2019).

Held yearly, each edition of these events explored different themes and programming across the three quays with active participation from stakeholders in the precinct.

Examples of the activities at these festivals ranged from food markets to performances, art trails, outdoor movie screenings, street parties and dragon boat night races. The inaugural edition of the Singapore River Festival also partnered with other events for wider impact such as the Singapore Writers Festival which was held at Boat Quay.

Each edition of the Singapore River Festival attracted an average of about 100,00 visitors and the participating stakeholders grew from 50 in 2015 to 157 in 2019. Saint Patrick’s Day Festival attracted more than 20,000 visitors for each edition.



Aerial performance during inaugural edition of Singapore River Festival 2015



Children enjoying the pop-ups at the annual St. Patrick's Day Festival at Circular Road



Lanterns walkabouts organised at the Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations in Robertson Quay



Maze playground at Clarke Quay Central during Singapore River Festival 2019



'Lah Bazaar' organised at Clarke Quay during Singapore River Festival 2018



Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations at Robertson Quay. Image credits: Singapore River One

Turning Circular Road into a weekend car-free zone

One of SRO's key initiatives that had a major impact was the Circular Road closure.

Inspired by the success of the pilot effort that SRO initiated to close the road at Boat Quay for the Saint Patrick's Day Festival in March 2013, it was keen to pursue road closures on a longer term basis. With support from Circular Road stakeholders, SRO worked with the authorities to turn Circular Road into a regular weekend car-free zone from 2014.

As a result, many experienced a more intimate yet vibrant atmosphere along the road. SRO actively managed the leasing of selected car park lots as extended outdoor dining areas to the restaurants along Circular Road during the closures.

LOPELAB and the Raffles Design Institute piloted the re-purposing of about 30 car park lots on both sides of the road into attractive public spaces for people to enjoy. In addition, live music performances, group exercises and roving magician acts were brought in to enliven the street.

According to SRO, such initiatives have resulted in revenue increases for some businesses by more than 30 per cent in 2019. Based on SRO's annual visitorship surveys, more than half the visitors to the precinct felt that having car-free weekends was more convenient, and close to half of the visitors reported being more likely to visit the area on car-free weekends.



Community engagement meeting with Circular Road stakeholders



Image credit: Singapore River One



Image credit: Singapore River One

The initiatives have helped the landlords and business operators to better understand the value of good tenant mix and the positive image that the precinct can achieve; thus, helping in part to address the challenge of bringing stakeholders together to achieve a common vision.

Behind the scenes, SRO coordinated and organised the logistics and held regular meetings, working with the stakeholders for the smooth running of each closure. It also set up a hotline to address feedback and queries from the public or agencies about the closures.

People enjoying live music shows during road closure at Circular Road



Family-friendly activities organised during the road closure at Circular Road



Image credit: Singapore River One

Exercise groups enjoying the open space during the regular road closure at Circular Road

Placemaking today and beyond

SRO continues to manage and lead place management efforts for the entire Singapore River precinct, working closely with its diverse stakeholders and government agencies.

Even in challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it has adapted its strategies, tapping on a wide range of social media and other digital platforms to actively promote the precinct and support its stakeholders.

Vouchers with discounts for over 170 outlets including hotels, restaurants and malls were offered from June 2020 to June 2021 to encourage spending in the precinct. Takeaway and food promotion campaigns helped to entice more to order from the precinct's food outlets. In addition, its revamped website in 2020 presents more interactive elements for people to explore the various offerings in the three quays and has a dedicated placemaking section to share more about its value and impact. According to SRO, this has generated an increase of more than 100 per cent in new visitors to the new website between Dec 2020 to March 2021.

SRO has also been supporting its stakeholders with regular talks and webinars related to their businesses such as understanding the commercial value of shophouses and more recent topics related to confronting the challenges arising from COVID-19.

Looking ahead, some challenges for the precinct include curating a more favourable tenant mix and increasing the stakeholders' sense of ownership in their precinct's development. SRO's future plans will address these challenges through various engagement platforms and bringing the stakeholders with differing perspectives together to work towards a more welcoming environment for its residents and visitors.



To learn more about SRO, click the link below,
<https://singapore-river.sg/> or scan the QR code



Tanjong Pagar

The Tanjong Pagar area is a mixed-use precinct in the city centre. It was part of the Chinese town designated in Sir Stamford Raffles' Jackson Plan in 1822. With the area supporting port activities, shops, living quarters, clan associations, schools and other amenities were introduced to support the Chinese merchants and communities who settled in the area, making Tanjong Pagar one of Singapore's first live-work-play precincts.

Over the years, the area has evolved. Parts of it formed the Central Business District and is home to many diverse businesses and creative industries. There is also a growing vibrant live-in population and a regular flow of visitors with various hotels located throughout.

There is a unique blend of old and new, with modern buildings contrasted with historic streetscapes. Many of the beautifully restored shophouses and distinctive walkways along Tanjong Pagar Road and Tras Street are a result of earlier large-scale restoration and improvement works.

Throughout the area, there are also pockets of green spaces and public spaces that people have come to love and gather in such as the historic Duxton Plain Park and the familiar Tanjong Pagar Plaza.



Familiar public places for people to enjoy in Tanjong Pagar like the Tras Link Park and market at the Tanjong Pagar Plaza



Role of placemaking for the area

Cheng Hsing Yao, Chief Executive Officer, GuocoLand, notes that the demographics of residents, workers and visitors have become more varied with several mixed-use developments in the area, including GuocoLand’s Guoco Tower, which is built right above the Tanjong Pagar MRT Station. The area already has a strong ‘live-work-play’ characteristic, but he sees placemaking playing an increasingly critical role in helping to bring people to the area.

“We have an interesting and diverse mix of stakeholders from small local businesses to multi-national companies existing in the same precinct. Our collective vision and placemaking efforts can help foster a stronger appreciation and understanding of this precinct and encourage more people to feel a sense of ownership for Tanjong Pagar,” he shares.

Justin K Chen, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Arcc Holdings, an active stakeholder in the area, agrees. He adds: “When things change as quickly as they do in Singapore, it’s challenging for locations to retain a sense of identity just based on a revolving cast of tenants.

There must be a more deliberate focus on building up the heritage of the place. This is one of the advantages of Tanjong Pagar but that also results in a range of different perceptions of the area depending on who you ask. Placemaking can help build on this and create compelling, unifying narratives about the place that excite people.”

Thus, in 2019, Hsing Yao, together with other development owners in the area formed Discover Tanjong Pagar (DTP), working closely with URA, as a pilot under the Business Improvement District (BID) programme. The aims of the group were to carry out place management efforts that could bring communities closer together, strengthen the area’s positioning and offerings and further support local businesses in the area.



Map showing the stakeholders within the pilot BID

- | | |
|---|--|
| A Carlton City Hotel
Carlton City Hotel
(Singapore) Pte. Ltd. | D Orchid Hotel
Orchid Hotel Pte Ltd |
| B1 Icon Village
Far East Organization | E Downtown Gallery
Alkas Realty Pte. Ltd. |
| B2 Oasia Hotel Downtown
Far East Organization | F1 Sofitel Singapore City Centre
GuocoLand |
| C International Plaza
Tian Teck Investment
Holding Co. Pte. Ltd. | F2 Guoco Tower
GuocoLand |



Open green spaces at the Duxton Plain Park



Public spaces for rest within the Guoco Tower in Tanjong Pagar

Hsing Yao, who is the former DTP Chairman, sees the pilot BID programme as providing a good framework to guide place management efforts.

“As our city matures, we want to have more distinctive districts that provide varied experiences. It is hard to achieve this through just a top-down process alone.

BID helps to encourage greater ground-up efforts and show the value and potential of placemaking for precincts like Tanjong Pagar. As most of us are new to the place management processes such as forming an association, how to develop practical and equitable policies and frameworks to guide efforts, and how to cost and execute activities and events effectively etc., BID sets the stage for us to engage one another more actively, establish good communication and build trust over time,” he says.

Bringing communities together

Some of DTP’s efforts in 2019 included a district race for families that had pit stops to check into at various parts of the area as part of the Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations. In addition, DTP organised the “Tanjong Pagar Gives Back” movement to encourage the public to fulfil the Christmas wishes of under-privileged children, elderly and migrant workers. Their efforts benefitted 800 beneficiaries.

In November 2019, the group also supported URA’s “Tanjong Pagar Day Out”. The event celebrated the heritage and communities in the area with a series of tours, exhibitions, film screenings and pop-up installations. As part of the activities, DTP invited the Urban Sketches Singapore group to also capture the many different facets of the area.

Such activities helped to connect the various communities in Tanjong Pagar, enhanced appreciation for the precinct and served to draw traffic to the area that could support the smaller businesses in the precinct.



'Tanjong Pagar Gives Back' initiative by Discover Tanjong Pagar fulfilling the wishes of under-privileged groups



Activities organised as part of 'Tanjong Pagar Day Out' celebrating the heritage and communities in the precinct



Discover Tanjong Pagar community green

One of DTP's key efforts was the activation of a green space. Measuring 1,650 square metres in size, it is bounded by Tras Link, Wallich Street and Peck Seah Street. The challenge was how to activate and curate the space meaningfully that enabled people to make this space their own and feel at home.

The approach taken was to place chairs on the green space, where people could simply move these around in any way they want. This was low-cost and easy to maintain. DTP's various stakeholders came together one weekend to clean up and beautify the chairs, involving their children in the experience as well.

Within a short time, the space had become popular and well-liked, attracting different groups of people, from families and friends to residents and visitors. DTP also gathered 45 stakeholders, residents and hawkers in this space to pledge the National Anthem on National Day in 2020 and formed a human heart to pay tribute to the frontline workers in the precinct during COVID-19.

DTP later went on to adopt this space from November 2019, calling it "Discover Tanjong Pagar Community Green", to continue to actively manage it for the community. To further enhance the greenery in the area, the group also aims to plant a total of 100 trees in this Community Green over the next five years, in support of the One Million Trees movement by the National Parks Board. The first 16 trees were planted in December 2020 and 14 hearts were created within the green space to enable people to continue to enjoy this area safely.

Being an important community space, there are continued plans to further activate this space to entice people to keep coming back to the precinct.



Temporary activation of the Tanjong Pagar Community Green with chairs that people can arrange and relax on

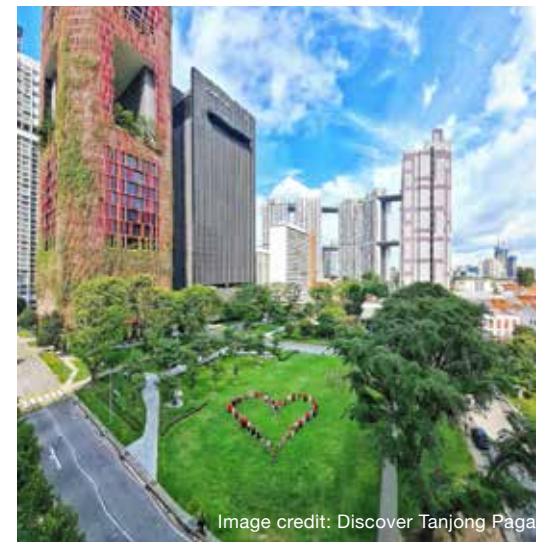


Image credit: Discover Tanjong Pagar



Image credit: Discover Tanjong Pagar

DTP stakeholders at the planting of 16 trees at the Tanjong Pagar Community Green

Making places and spaces their own

Within Tanjong Pagar, there are communities and residents who initiate efforts on their own, making the different places and around this precinct more endearing.



Duxton Plain Park: making green spaces more well-loved

This historic green space was created from the land previously occupied by the Singapore-Kranji Rail Line. It holds a special place in people's hearts with its strategic location and warm atmosphere. Residents and stakeholders have actively used this space for exercise classes and other activities over time, making it a favourite amongst many.



Guoco Tower: creating focal points for the community

Known as *City Room*, it is a popular privately owned public space that serves as a multi-functional venue. Aside from events, the open and friendly space is also used for many spontaneous activities, such as being a gathering point for residents and their families after a long day. Together with the adjacent Tanjong Pagar Park, *City Room* contributes to the many public spaces and parks in Tanjong Pagar, creating a welcoming and delightful living environment.



Tanjong Pagar Plaza: shaping informal spaces

Many residents, stall owners and stakeholders have come to love this commercial centre, which has its own food centre and market. It was built in 1977 as part of the public housing development. On the ground floor, affordable food, healthcare services and life-style necessities surround a common plaza shaped like a donut, which acts as an informal public space for chance encounters.

You can often see residents and others appropriating the public space as their own, setting up tables, chairs and stools for a quick chat, a slow sip of coffee or simply playing chess with friends.

Placemaking today and beyond

The Discover Tanjong Pagar group and its continued efforts have provided a unified platform for the diverse group of stakeholders, made up of hoteliers, retail mall operators and office building owners, to work closely to further enhance this precinct together.

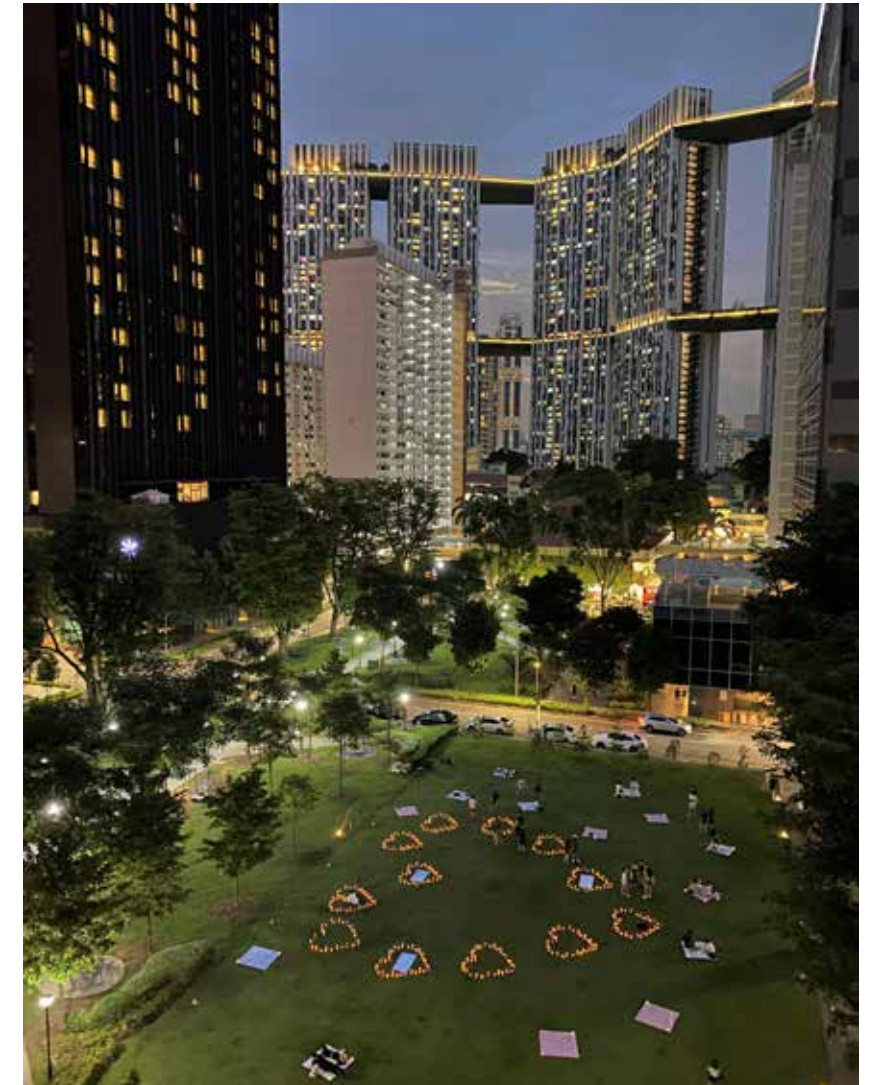
In presenting a unified front, its dedicated website offers updates and information about key events, activities and offerings in the precinct, including sharing personal stories of people and places in the area.

Moving forward, one of the key challenges for the area is finding ways to further sustain interest in the precinct and draw people in especially during the weekends. DTP is experimenting with organising and curating a range of activities, including activating its various public spaces, further making the area relevant for its diverse communities.

On challenges and what else one can aspire for the area, Kenneth Li, DTP Chairman shares: “What is exciting and interesting about Tanjong Pagar is that it is dynamic with a diverse demographic of people living, working and visiting this area. Building on the strong identity of the area, DTP strives to connect the various communities in the area whilst actively promoting its eclectic offerings.

In the future, we hope to see a further evolution of our network of public and community spaces enhanced by greater connectivity. We also hope to build stronger communities amongst local businesses and stakeholders, working together to further develop and grow this amazing precinct.”

For more information about Discover Tanjong Pagar, go to <http://www.discovertanjongpagar.sg/> or scan the QR code



An activation of the Tanjong Pagar Community Green through light art installations by students of St. Joseph's Institution International in Oct 2021

Kampong Gelam

Kampong Gelam has its origins as a thriving port town and is one of Singapore's oldest urban quarters in the city. In Malay, the word *kampung* means 'compound' or 'village', while *gelam* is often attributed to the long-leaved paperbark tree, which was found and used locally for boat-making, medicine and even as a seasoning for food in the past.

In 1822, Sir Stamford Raffles allocated the area to the Malay, Arabs, Bugis, Javanese and other communities. The area subsequently became one of the seats of Malay royalty in Singapore. It developed into an urban area that was an important centre of trade, publishing, intellectual thought, fashion, education, cultural and religious life for the Malay world.

Over the years, it has evolved into a mixed-use multi-ethnic neighbourhood while retaining its strong Malay/Muslim heritage and character. The historic core of the precinct, bounded by Ophir Road, Victoria Street, Jalan Sultan and Beach Road, was gazetted as a conservation area in 1989.

The area has a rich heritage and culture with iconic buildings such as the Sultan Mosque and the Malay Heritage Centre. It has a diverse and distinctive mix of businesses complemented by its beautiful streetscape. The area is home to over 600 shophouses and has many traditional trades and home-grown brands in food, retail and textile businesses.

Each street in the precinct has a different character. For example, Haji Lane is a shopping haven with multi-label stores, quirky boutiques, bars and cafes while Arab and Bussorah Streets offer more traditional wares such as high-end traditional and modern textiles, *batik*, *kebaya* (traditional Malay/Javanese dress), Persian carpets and handmade perfumes.



Different facets of Kampong Gelam, from landmarks such as the Malay Heritage Centre to textiles, long-standing shops and lively activities organised regularly along its streets

Initiated by passionate champion

Place management efforts for the area was initiated by Saeid Labbafi, a Singapore resident and long-time stakeholder of the area. He and his family own eight carpet shops along Arab Street and has been operating in this historic precinct for close to 20 years.

Seeing the potential and opportunity to enhance the area, coupled with his love for the neighbourhood, Saeid felt that more could be done if everyone banded together. Thus in 2011, he approached 10 shops to get initial support to work together to lead improvements and other efforts for the area.

At the beginning, the challenge was how to prioritise focus areas. Saeid identified improvements that were of common interest to the stakeholders. Efforts included improving the cleanliness of the area, introducing relevant events and regular bazaars that helped to increase footfall to the precinct, and creating outdoor refreshment areas.

The success of such early efforts demonstrated the value of place management. And that gave Saeid greater confidence to form One Kampong Gelam (OKG) in 2014, to actively drive place management initiatives for the area. The group grew to have about 60 members over time.

On ways to gain the support of the diverse stakeholders over time, Saeid recalled carrying out many surveys. For every major event and enhancement implemented, surveys were conducted with businesses to understand their needs and to ensure that improvements were made with their interests in mind.



Stakeholder meetings to draw ideas and feedback on the placemaking initiatives in Kampong Gelam

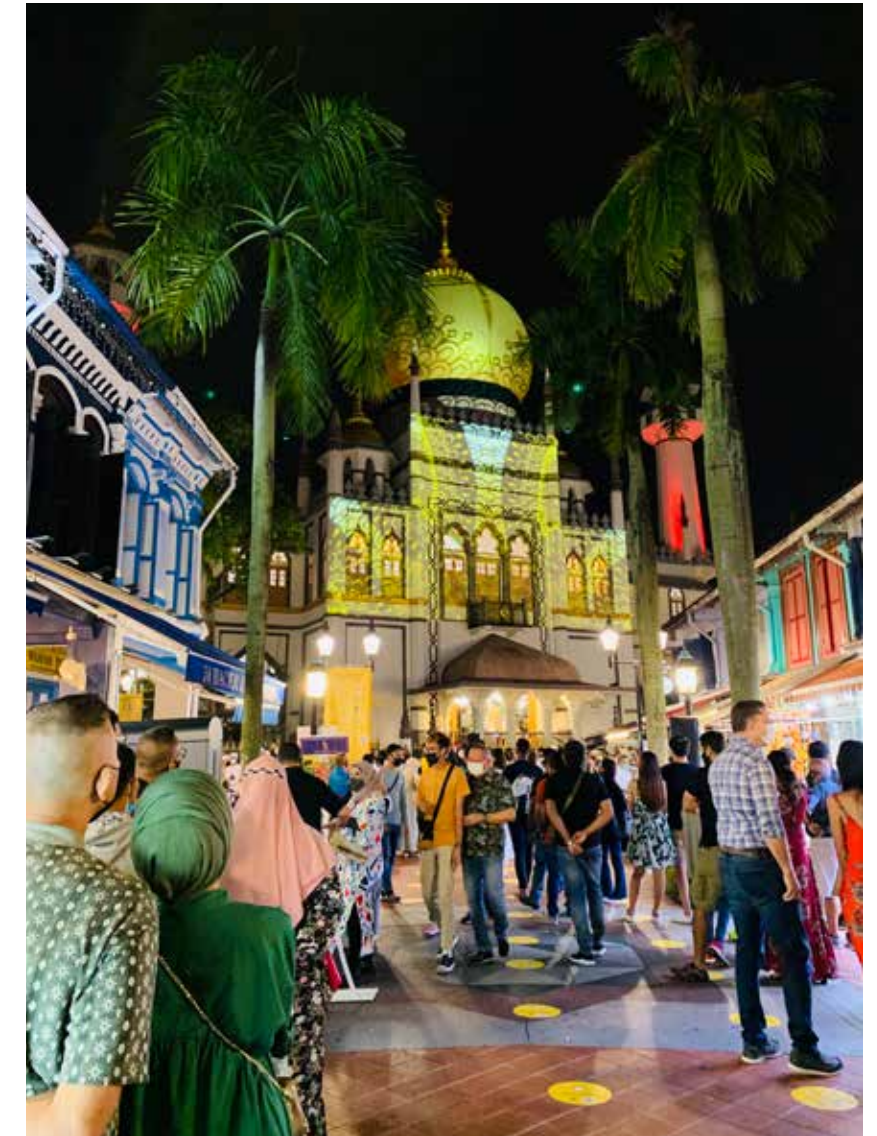
Celebrating the heritage and strengthening friendships

Because of OKG's active efforts over the years, the area enjoys a warm and friendly atmosphere, with a strong community of businesses, institutions and stakeholders working together towards common goals.

This strong friendship amongst the stakeholders and communities took time to build. Organising the various initiatives such as the annual Ramadan bazaars, regular events and neighbourhood sketching group helped to bring people closer together and also brought out the rich culture and heritage of the area, with OKG working in partnership with the Sultan Mosque, Aliwal Arts Centre and Malay Heritage Centre.

Businesses came together to support the Muslim community during Ramadan to organise meals together following the breaking of fast. The Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community bonding. Streets were temporarily closed for this. Shopkeepers rolled carpets out onto the streets, and there were many lively scenes of communities catching up, laughing and eating together.

In 2021, the sharing of this warm atmosphere continued with a month-long event celebrating the spirit of Ramadan. Its major streets were lit up with festive lights. Throughout this period, there were evening light shows projecting animations and motifs of the rich history and culture of the area onto the facade of the Sultan Mosque (image on right). A series of workshops, tours and online shows introduced members of the public to many offerings of Kampong Gelam.



Closing streets with impact

Over the years, OKG organised street closures to further showcase the culture and heritage of the area and to draw people in. This started with experimenting with weekend car-free zones along Haji Lane from 2013, which later extended to Bali Lane (2014), Bussorah Street (2014) and Baghdad Street (2016).

These early car-free zones demonstrated the value of such efforts and enabled people to experience the streets at more intimate levels.

On the impact of such road closures, according to Saeid²⁰, the footfall to the area increased by 15 to 20 per cent, compared with days when there were no road closures. He also noted that more families frequented the area during the road closures, and they lingered longer too.

To sustain the vibrancy along these streets, OKG also took on a master lease for the outdoor dining and display areas, managing the rental of spaces to stalls and cafés to support their businesses.

Learning from the past street closures, in 2017, OKG, in partnership with the Aliwal Arts Centre, went on to organise the first precinct-wide car-free zone in Singapore involving nine streets in the area, during the Aliwal Arts Night Crawl.

Following this, the challenge was how to further use such street closures to bring out more of the heritage and culture of the area. OKG thus initiated “projeKGlamway”, together with others such as entertainment host and comedian, Najip Ali. The event turned Arab Street into a fashion runway in 2019, paying homage to the street’s traditional textile businesses. Lining the street with carpets reflected part of the identity of the street and created a unique setting to showcase fashion. At this fashion show, five local designers also showcased a special fashion collection using materials from the textile shops in the precinct.

Efforts to promote the Arab Street textile trade are ongoing since 2021, through a collaboration with the Raffles Design Institute where students created new collections using textiles sourced from Arab Street. The first of these collections was presented at the Malay Heritage Centre as part of the *Cahaya Ramadan* launch event in April 2021.

Such major events have made a big impact on the area in not just enhancing its vibrancy, heritage and culture but also demonstrated the many possibilities of good collaborations and how street closures could extend people’s imagination and experience of the area. These efforts can also pave the way for more permanent road closures for such a precinct in future.



²⁰ Kaur, G. (2015). Street life thrives in car-free zones. The Straits Times, 20 May 2016.



Activities promoting the traditional businesses in the precinct and healthy lifestyles during road closures
Image on left: Yoga at Haji Lane, image above: ProjeKGlamway outdoor fashion show at Arab Street

Curating meaningful art murals

One of the unique aspects of Kampong Gelam is its many art murals featured on the walls of shophouses and other corners of the precinct. These were commissioned and created by building and restaurant owners, institutions and OKG over the years.

Some of the earlier murals by restaurant owners and other stakeholders in the area such as marketing and events company, AMC Asia!, can be found along Haji, Bali Lanes and Victoria Street. Many of these were created by artists Didier Jaba Mathieu and Ernest Zacharevic. Other local artists have also come into the scene including street art group, RSCLS and local artist Yip Yew Chong.



One of the many mural artworks by Ernest Zacharevic on the shophouse facades in Kampong Gelam

Another showcase of street art is a unique outdoor gallery of 30 artworks created at the back alleys of Bussorah Mall in 2019. Framed art pieces hang alongside wall murals and commissioned graffiti. The art ranges from colourful modern pieces to works reflecting the culture and heritage of the area.

In April 2021, OKG worked with 17 artists to create unique street art spanning nearly 240 metres along Ophir Road and Bali Lane. This initiative features time portals and larger-than-life pigeons, contributing to a five-metre high Hall of Fame, that reflect different perspectives of Kampong Gelam - past, present and future.

These artworks are presented on metal noise barriers erected around the construction sites for the North-South Corridor. It is the first time that construction hoardings are beautified in this manner that meaningfully reflects the heritage of a place. This effort was supported by URA, Singapore Tourism Board and Land Transport Authority.

A key challenge in curating murals for a historic district like Kampong Gelam is to ensure they meaningfully add to the rich narratives about the area while allowing artists to express their creativity freely. Learning from the many murals and street art produced over the years, OKG has over time developed a common understanding and established key guidelines amongst stakeholders on curating murals purposefully to add new and deeper narratives for the area.



Artworks curated by the 17 artists on construction hoardings along North-South Corridor. Image credit: One Kampong Gelam

Placemaking today and beyond

Moving forward, the challenge remains how to keep Kampong Gelam thriving and relevant. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, OKG and stakeholders in the area have continued to innovate and experiment in the curation of its activities and efforts to regularly promote the area and to entice different groups of people to keep returning.

One example of a novel activity organised was the overnight camping stay at the Malay Heritage Centre grounds in 2020. A pilot effort for 10 nights, it offered an immersive experience for families with children, which included cooking classes and tours around the area. It created a magical and unusual experience for those who participated. It also showed how people could rediscover and re-experience a historic precinct in a new, safe and refreshing way.

To further expand on OKG's efforts, an informal partnership, the Kampong Gelam Alliance (KGA), was set up in 2018. Made up of a wider group of property owners, businesses, hotels and institutions in the neighbourhood, KGA sought to complement OKG's initiatives and help deepen place management efforts for the area.

KGA's membership has grown to be more inclusive, including more diverse stakeholders. The group is formulating a Place Plan with additional strategies to continue to shape Kampong Gelam as an attractive and resilient heritage and cultural precinct.



Reflecting on shaping Kampong Gelam

Kampong Gelam's active stakeholders, some of whom are part of OKG and KGA, reflect on what this precinct means to them, their roles in contributing to placemaking for the area and what they hope to see for its future.

They are Julina Khusaini, General Manager, The Malay Heritage Foundation, Zaini Osman, Senior Director, Mosque & Community Development and former Chief Executive Officer, Warees Investments, Kenneth Chng, Centre Manager, Aliwal Arts Centre and Mohamed Patail, Chairman, Board of Trustee, Masjid Sultan.

What is special about Kampong Gelam to you?

Patail: It is the warm atmosphere and the personal attachment people have to this place that make it special. I remember my growing up years at Bussorah Street. Everyone knew each other. Neighbours would drop by to *makan* (eat), have a chat or even take a nap. This same street remains, and it is a physical reminder of this wonderful atmosphere.

Many also have a personal connection to the Sultan Mosque as a historic landmark and social anchor. Former residents come back to visit the mosque even after they have moved away for years. People from all over Singapore also come to pray at this mosque. This is partly because of its special aura and location at Bussorah Street.

Outdoor dining areas along Bussorah Street as part of efforts to promote car-free streets in Kampong Gelam

Julina: It is unique because so many of us have a part of this place in our hearts. I remember my growing up years often visiting this place with my mother to choose the best fabric at Arab Street for Hari Raya, which is still known as the place where you can get a unique selection of textiles.

Now that I have been working in this area for some years, my experience of the place has deepened as I share more about its history, culture and community. I also discovered the best *Nasi Padang* (rice with dishes) here!

Zaini: What makes this area stand out is that it is a tangible reminder of our past. I recall often visiting Kampong Gelam as an architecture student because it is the place to experience our historic streetscapes firsthand.

Had it not been for the early conservation efforts to protect many of the shophouses and buildings in this area, it would be difficult for us to imagine what our streets really looked like in the past. These historic buildings contribute to the soul of the place.

Tell us more about your roles, challenges and examples of placemaking efforts that you have been a part of for Kampong Gelam

Patail: Beyond managing Sultan Mosque as a key landmark in the area and contributing views to how the mosque and the area can continue to attract people and stay relevant, I have been helping to also informally serve as a form of liaison between businesses and the relevant authorities over the years.

Whether it is explaining certain policies to businesses to adhere to or to share business concerns and interests with the authorities, it is a challenging job that can take place at any time of the day. I sometimes get calls late at night to attend to an issue on ground.



Julina: In helping to manage the Malay Heritage Centre as part of the Malay Heritage Foundation, I have always been interested in how the narrative of Kampong Gelam is told.

One of the initiatives I was proud to be part of was the introduction of 14 new heritage markers in 2017. This is in addition to those earlier set up by the National Heritage Board. The stories and contents on these markers placed throughout Kampong Gelam deepened the narratives and stories about this area. This is the challenge that such historic areas face – how to continue to tell compelling and interesting stories to keep their heritage and culture alive.

The heritage markers introduced were not just presenting historical facts, we also included how people interact with the place in more contemporary times. We featured more untold stories, more people stories and even included relevant song lyrics to bring across richer narratives.



Image credit: One Kampong Gelam



Zaini: Managing historic buildings and shophouses in Kampong Gelam and other areas across Singapore, we see our role as not just in enhancing the value of these properties for its social beneficiaries, but we are also honouring and protecting their heritage.

Many of us may forget that these buildings in Kampong Gelam were bequeathed to us by our forefathers and traders as heritage assets so that we can continue to use these buildings for meaningful purposes till today. Perhaps they had some foresight. They saw that the buildings and this place were going to be a critical part of the city.

A key challenge in how we manage such buildings today in a historic district like Kampong Gelam is being very mindful and careful about choosing the right tenants and business models that can contribute to and add to the strong character of the buildings and the area.

Kenneth: In overseeing the Aliwal Arts Centre, a key arts institution in the area, I see our role as trying to build a collaborative arts community for the area that includes artists, residences and businesses.

Aside from programming, we also collaborate with other arts institutions and businesses in the neighbourhood to showcase the diversity of arts and culture in Kampong Gelam from the traditional arts to contemporary and urban art. By creating a buzz on all fronts, we hope to cultivate public interest in discovering more about our local art scene and uncovering the creative energies that gives spaces like Kampong Gelam its unique character.

Cultural performances featured during the annual 2017 Aliwal Arts Night Crawl (images on the left and next page)

What can help sustain the relevance of Kampong Gelam and what would you hope to see for its future?

Julina: I think we need to have a good balance of culture, community and business for the area to continue to thrive. You cannot just focus on business alone without taking into consideration the rich culture and the kind of community you have in this area. You also cannot forget to build upon and strengthen the strong character and identity of the area. Any future efforts must manage and balance all three of these elements carefully.

We could also have a stronger focus on sustainability for the precinct, for example, whether it is in upcycling of materials or in promoting car-free zones. There are also various green spaces throughout the precinct which is quite unique for the area. It would be good to see how we can further enhance these and its overall greenery.

Kenneth: I would like people to see Kampong Gelam as a truly unique cultural melting pot made possible from years of understanding and working together as a community. Sure, every story has its ups and downs, ultimately it is the will to thrive together as a community that has persisted through the generations and will hopefully continue to do so.

Beyond the popular eateries, nightlife joints and tourist spots, Kampong Gelam also offers visual and aesthetic nuances that excite the soul. We hope in the long run that Singaporeans and tourists alike will also think of this precinct as an arts destination that embodies stories of our local culture.

Patail: We must continue to be innovative in how we adapt to the changing times for Kampong Gelam in ensuring that it remains relevant. I hope more can be done to help the younger generation better appreciate and understand Kampong Gelam's rich heritage and culture and the importance of sustaining such a historic area for generations to come.

Zaini: I hope that we can allow for things to grow and evolve more organically in Kampong Gelam in terms of its spaces and uses. We can explore and see how to encourage and enable a greater amount of experimentation and ground-up efforts. Kampong Gelam can serve as a form of testbed and urban lab to try out new things, creating new cultural experiences and products that best reflect its identity.



For more information about One Kampong Gelam, go to <https://visitkamponggelam.com.sg/> or scan the QR code



Jurong

The Jurong area is in the western part of Singapore. In the past, it used to be a mangrove swamp and was covered with gambier and rubber plantations like many parts of Singapore. Industrialisation efforts in this area from the 1960s have shaped the lives of many who found work in its factories and a new home to live in.

Over the years, the area has evolved into an attractive place to live, work and play in. There is a generous sense of green and open spaces in the area. Gardens and family-friendly attractions have been added over time, such as the Jurong Bird Park, the Science Centre Singapore and the Chinese and Japanese Gardens, contributing to its distinctive identity.

Parts of its heritage remain such as the Thow Kwang and Guan Huat Dragon Kilns, reflecting Jurong's past as a former brickworks industry.

A slice of mangroves can be found at the mouth of the Pandan Reservoir. The preservation of landmarks such as the Jurong Town Hall as a national monument also serves as a vivid reminder of the bold ambitions of pioneers in shaping Singapore's future. Completed in 1974, it served as the headquarters of Jurong Town Corporation (currently known as JTC Corporation) that was tasked to drive Singapore's industrialisation.



Jurong Lake District

The area continued to be transformed with the 1991 Concept Plan envisioning it as a major regional centre, providing more jobs closer to homes. In 2017, new plans were unveiled for Jurong Lake District, a core area within Jurong, to further strengthen this place as the largest business hub outside of the city centre.

Jurong Lake District spans 410 hectares comprising the existing commercial node around Jurong East MRT Station; a new mixed-use precinct around the future Cross-Island Line Station; a complementary leisure and recreational precinct surrounding Jurong Lake Gardens; and the International Business Park, which will be rejuvenated with more mixed uses in the coming years.

Anchored by Jurong Lake Gardens, the third national garden of Singapore, Jurong Lake District stands out for its lush greenery and expansive lake. From 2023 to 2028, the redeveloped Chinese and Japanese Gardens, the New Science Centre and future tourism development will be progressively completed and line the waterfront with exciting leisure and entertainment offerings.

Neighbourhoods are planned around the lake making it easy and convenient for people to walk, cycle and take public transport to amenities and attractions located close by. These areas will also be supported by more sustainable and centralised infrastructure to optimise land and energy.

With Jurong's proximity to institutions of higher learning, innovation hubs and industries, more adaptable and flexible workspaces are planned to create a more vibrant work ecosystem in future that encourages greater collaboration and exchange of ideas.

Starting small

Against the backdrop of the various ongoing developments shaping the physical landscape of Jurong, the challenge is to determine how placemaking can bring together its many diverse elements and communities, and enhance the area in meaningful ways.

As placemaking for such a large area like Jurong can be quite daunting, a key approach is to start small first. Some of the initial placemaking efforts in Jurong focused on enhancing its public spaces and involving residents in the process. An example was the development of J-Link in 2014, a 270-metre pedestrian mall that sought to celebrate Jurong's history.

The link connected the Jurong East Town Centre to the MRT Station and the Science Centre Singapore. Residents contributed to the planning and design of various unique public spaces along this link, including a heritage trail and corner.

Since 2014, many different stakeholders have come forward to experiment with and carry out various placemaking efforts, aspiring to make Jurong even better. Some of these efforts ranged from improving the public realm, to activating public spaces and supporting different communities.

Creating good community spaces

A critical part of placemaking is in shaping and creating good community spaces for people to enjoy and gather safely. Thus, in the enhancement of the Jurong East Town Centre as part of the Housing & Development Board's Remaking Our Heartland programme, there were deliberate efforts to provide well-designed community spaces for residents and visitors.

The improved town centre was renamed J Connect in 2020. Not only did residents and local merchants actively contribute to the two-year effort of redesigning its communal spaces, these spaces are actively used by residents and visitors today.



*Different activities around Jurong Lake Gardens
Image credits: NParks*

Drawing people to the gardens

Given Jurong's wide range of attractions and spaces, the challenge is how to curate events, activities and trails that can best bring out its identity and help people better appreciate and explore its neighbourhoods and especially its green spaces.

The National Parks Board, People's Association's PassionWave (community club offering waterfront lifestyle programmes) and ActiveSG (a national movement for sport) work closely to curate active programmes in Jurong Lake Gardens all year round.

The diverse activities from guided tours, children programmes, horticultural talks to paddle boating and even arts, food and health programmes serve to attract different groups of people to the gardens.

Key events such as the annual Sustainable and Mid-Autumn Festivals also bring greater excitement to the green spaces. To manage the interest and crowds, online offerings such as digital concerts and workshops ensure that people continue to stay interested in the gardens even if they may not be able to visit the gardens physically all the time.

To bring in an additional dimension to the gardens, collaborations with the National Arts Council have created new art experiences, exhibitions and activities for people to enjoy. Within the gardens, ad hoc art installations or special displays bring delight and fun to the spaces.

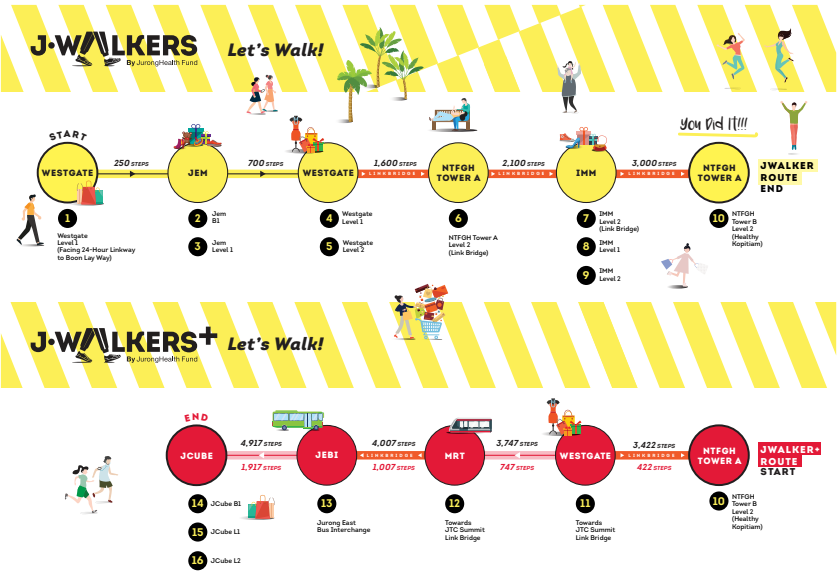
Re-appreciating older estates

To help people further appreciate Taman Jurong, one of the oldest residential estates within the Jurong area, the Taman Jurong Community Club in partnership with the National Arts Council, engaged placemaking group Shophouse & Co to curate a special self-guided art trail.

It presented 23 public art pieces created by artists and residents which were placed in different parts of the estate. The artworks contributed to the visual vibrancy of Taman Jurong while celebrating the estate’s heritage, its connection to nature and the residents’ community spirit.

According to the feedback received by the Taman Jurong Community Club, those who walked the art trail shared that it enabled them to not only learn more about art, but also gave them the opportunity to appreciate the evolution of the neighbourhood that they grew up in.

Residents and visitors shared that they were also happy that Taman Jurong has become livelier with the many art installations, of which some are even useful as public furniture, such as the tactile expressions benches.



Walking together

Placemaking is also about bringing communities together based on common interests and causes. One common interest found amongst communities in Jurong was walking.

To encourage people in the community to walk for health, the Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, supported by JurongHealth Fund, initiated a J-Walkers programme in 2019, by creatively using the J-Walk link bridge as a public space for community walking.

This has since evolved into an all-weather exercise route that combines window shopping with exercise and takes about 5,000 steps (or 50 minutes) to complete. The routes are actively promoted to partners, residents and shoppers.

The community enjoying their walk and the J-Walkers Trail
Image credits: Ng Teng Fong General Hospital

Connecting place with communities

Placemaking is best carried out by stakeholders and communities within their area.

An active stakeholder in the area is Bold At Work, an innovation studio lab set up in 2017 to equip young people with critical core skills for the future of work. As a living lab, they create tools, programmes and processes to help people and organisations discover their potential through the unique lens of personal assets applied in the context of space, place and community.

In 2019, they collaborated with Tembusu College to create a seminar on mural-making to discuss the role of art in public spaces and community life. Students went through the theory and conceptualisation and created an actual painting of a mural in the community as part of their course work. The final mural reflected impressions and memories gathered from walking the ground.

As a platform for the realisation of ideas, Bold At Work served as the incubator for the creation of a local magazine for the Yuhua neighbourhood, called *Kampung Jurong Zine*. Inspired by the distinct identities of the neighbourhoods in Tokyo and the thought that one could map a community through people and stories, the founders are exploring the potential such community stories can have in deepening intergenerational connectivity and social health.



The Kampung Jurong Zine (image on left) and the mural collaboration with Tembusu College students. Image credits: Bold at Work

Banding together

Given Jurong's expansive scale and gradual development progress across decades, the challenge is how to organise and coordinate placemaking efforts that can have tangible impacts in the shorter and longer term. There are also many different interests and priorities of the diverse stakeholders in the area.

The kind of partnerships and models that will work for Jurong will evolve over time. In 2019, URA initiated an informal network of several partners that consist of public, private and people sectors, to start the journey of experimenting with potential partnerships and platforms that can inspire stakeholders to find synergies and priorities to focus on shaping Jurong.

Arising from this initial network, new collaborations and initiatives have developed. Ng Teng Fong General Hospital & Jurong Community Hospital, Health Promotion Board, Southwest CDC, CapitaLand and Lendlease worked together to encourage the community to walk for health through the J-Walkers programme. The hospital also partnered with JTC and Science Centre Singapore to raise awareness for dementia intervention through a sensory mat exhibition.

Stakeholders who have common interests in sustainability, such as the National Parks Board, Foodscape Collective, Bold At Work and National Library Board, have also regularly initiated community conversations on sustainable living.

The good relationship built so far enables such groups to support and render help during more challenging times. An example is during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the partners in this network responded swiftly to Ng Teng Fong Hospital's urgent call for donation of materials and stationery to provide to its patients.

Placemaking today and beyond

As Jurong's physical landscape continues to evolve with new developments in future, placemaking efforts will grow and change in tandem, led by different stakeholders in the area, driven by their passion and love for this distinctive neighbourhood in the west.



Other space activations by Bold at Work such as its PARK(ing) Day participation in Jurong
Image credit: Bold at Work

Placemaking in other areas

Check out some examples and highlights of placemaking efforts in other areas across Singapore.

Bras Basah.Bugis

The Bras Basah.Bugis area has undergone various regeneration efforts over the years, evolving into an arts, heritage and design district. Placemaking efforts led by the National Heritage Board from 2008, together with its stakeholders, have enhanced its physical environment and drawn people in with different activities and programmes.

Efforts range from improving pedestrian pathways, activating public spaces, to installing wayfinding signages and contributing to turning Armenian Street into a pedestrianised street with spaces to relax in. Signature events such as the Singapore Night Festival also add new excitement to the area.



Chinatown

Chinatown is Singapore’s largest historic district. Remnants of its colourful past are still present and old traditions have remained, with a vibrant blend of old and new. The Chinatown Business Association (CBA) has been actively leading placemaking efforts for the area since 1999, working closely with the Singapore Tourism Board.

Over the years, CBA has played an active role in organising a variety of events that bring out Chinatown’s identity and heritage. It also curates a wide range of workshops such as tea demonstrations, pottery and cultural crafts to help people appreciate some of the older traditions and to promote the businesses. Working closely with various authorities and business groups, precinct-level digital initiatives were introduced in 2021 to help Chinatown stakeholders grow their businesses.



Civic District

Located in the heart of the city, the Civic District has been the site of momentous events in Singapore’s history. Many of its historic landmarks such as the former Supreme Court and City Hall and Old Parliament House, have been refurbished and re-purposed, contributing to the Civic District being an arts, heritage and cultural precinct. URA had undertaken environmental enhancement works to make the area more walkable with increased green spaces and landscaping.

Events around Civic District
Image credits: National Gallery Singapore



Placemaking efforts led by the National Arts Council, National Parks Board (from 2014) and Arts House Limited (from 2020), have helped to make the area livelier by organising more outdoor events in conjunction with their indoor programming.

Government agencies and the arts and cultural institutions have worked closely to strengthen the district’s identity, enhance stakeholders’ programmes, and manage and curate a range of activities and performances at the outdoor and green spaces.

One signature event is the Light to Night Festival, an annual district-wide public art festival held in indoor and outdoor areas. It has created innovative art experiences and engaging activities for all.





Image credit: PA

Geylang Serai and Paya Lebar Central

Geylang Serai is one of Singapore's oldest Malay settlements with a rich culture and heritage and is located close to Paya Lebar Central, a growing lively commercial centre.

The People's Association has been driving placemaking efforts for the Geylang Serai cultural precinct since 2019. It organises a range of events and programmes to bring communities together. Examples include the annual Hari Raya Bazaar, Geylang Serai Family Carnival and a community batik-painting event that broke the Singapore Book of Records for being the longest continuous batik painting.

Key focal points within this cultural precinct such as the Geylang Serai Market and the Joo Chiat Complex will be further enhanced with new cycling paths, a festive plaza, an iconic arch and other public spaces in future.

To further enhance Paya Lebar Central, several owners of key buildings here are on board to join the pilot Business Improvement District programme to help drive placemaking efforts for this area.



Little India

Little India is a vibrant precinct for Singapore's Indian community and a showcase of its ethnic diversity. Placemaking efforts for the area has been led by the Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association (LISHA) since 2000, working closely with the Singapore Tourism Board and other precinct stakeholders.

To further enhance the vibrancy of the precinct and attract more visitors, LISHA has introduced signature events over the years, such as Pongal, an annual harvest festival that brings back cows and calves to an area known for its historic cattle trade.

Since 2005, LISHA has taken over the organising of the Deepavali Celebrations and in 2010 started the Indian Cultural Fiesta that showcases the traditions of different ethnic groups. Beyond these, LISHA also works with the community and artists to activate key public spaces with art installations.



Orchard Road

Orchard Road is Singapore's premier shopping and lifestyle belt. Formed under the auspices of the Singapore Tourism Board, the Orchard Road Business Association (ORBA) has been driving placemaking efforts for this area since 1998. Plans are currently in the works to transform this signature street into a must-visit lifestyle destination via a lush green corridor, with new parks and more varied public spaces.

To inject greater excitement along the streets, ORBA has introduced various signature events over the years such as the annual Christmas on a Great Street. Even in challenging times, it continues to draw people to the area, leveraging technology with its inaugural virtual Black Friday event in 2020, that presented a three-day live stream of tours, buskers and shopping experiences.

ORBA has also activated various public spaces with pop-up stores and fun street furniture to create more delightful and engaging street experiences for shoppers and pedestrians.

Christmas on a Great Street at Orchard Road
Image credit: Orchard Road Business Association

Raffles Place

Raffles Place remains the heart of Singapore's business district, witnessing the progress and growth of our city state. Many stakeholders in the area came together in December 2019 to form a pilot Business Improvement District, named Raffles Place Alliance (RPA), with a vision to inject more vibrancy and buzz in the area.

Its early efforts included activating the Raffles Place Park with moveable chairs, organising regular workout sessions at Raffles Place Park as well as implementing safe distancing markers within the park to create a safe gathering spot. RPA is also working with the National Parks Board to engage stakeholders in shaping the redesign of Raffles Place Park.



Image credit: NParks



Getting started

For those thinking about contributing to, initiating or leading placemaking efforts for your precincts and neighbourhoods, here are 10 things to think about:

- 1 Know the place**
Get to know the place and stakeholders well; walk around often to familiarise yourself with the place and its people.
- 2 Have a clear vision**
Have a clear vision and plan for the area.
- 3 Start small**
Start with very small activities and efforts to benefit stakeholders and communities in the area.
- 4 Focus on common interests**
Find common causes to work on that will interest and bring communities together.
- 5 Bring out the unique identity**
Focus on efforts that reflect and bring out the unique values and identities of the place to create memorable experiences for the place.
- 6 Cultivate strong partnerships**
Communicate actively and regularly to share the vision and progress of efforts; build strong partnerships and relationships to leverage on synergies and pool resources collectively.
- 7 Build strong capabilities and champions**
Focus on building strong capabilities over time; identify and empower more people to be able to contribute, lead and become champions.
- 8 Track efforts, show impact**
Track the outcomes and impact of efforts; use data and other means to show the benefits of the initiatives to the community.
- 9 Keep trying and experimenting**
Placemaking takes time; implement pilot projects to learn what works and what doesn't.
- 10 Adapt with the times**
Be creative and innovative; be ready to change and adapt.



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- Door to Door
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Through the lenses of individuals, designers, architects, planners and precinct stakeholders, this book captures the evolution and growth of Singapore's placemaking efforts in the last two decades and offers tailored lessons and tips for individuals and communities who are keen to contribute to shaping the places where they live, work and play.

