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Social Architecture: Theory & Practice Summer 2020

Faculty

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Social Architecture – Theory and Practice aims to equip the students with theoretical/historical knowledge of ‘Social Architecture’ as well as practical skills for practicing it. Students are exposed to key concepts, methods and goals developed in social architecture, an umbrella term that includes community architecture and planning, community design, social design, democratic design, community development, etc. which share a common approach of environmental design that encourages social behaviors leading towards public interests and common good, such as liveability, safety, and sustainability.

Social architecture and public spaces play an essential role in our society: as areas to foster social interactions, places for cultural practices, and spaces to interact with nature. The role of responsible architects, planners, and urban designers is to design such environments that benefit humanity and ecology. As the world is currently coping with the most serious health crisis of the century, such responsible design becomes all the more crucial now and in the future.

While it is not easy to find works reflecting on this promise in mainstream architecture, there is no lack of ‘creative activism’ within the profession across the world: from disaster relief to vernacular revival and climate resilience, and from tactical urbanism to advocacy in community and social equality. In Singapore, architects, planners and designers have also been advocating for heritage, biodiversity, sustainability, food resilience, and participatory design. These social architects envisage new direction in architecture, take action to bring about change, and use design as a means to encourage others to join them.

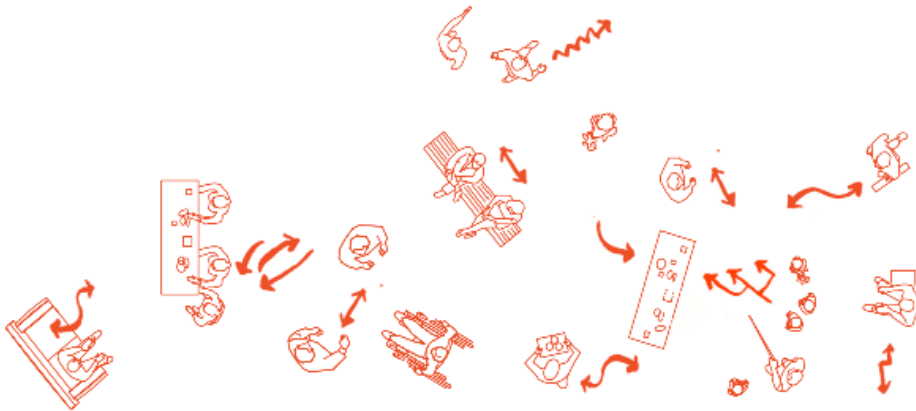
Resonating with the theme of SINGAPORE ARCHIFEST 2020—"Architecture Saving OUR World", students explored the potential roles of social architecture and public spaces in addressing issues of climate change, public health, social equity and cultural continuity. These case studies are documented in two formats: a publication and a website with interactive map. This project, we hope, is only the beginning in bringing together such social architecture movement, to bring forth the spirit of creative activism amidst the dynamically changing world, and to show how architecture can make a difference.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Singapore Institute of Architects and the Singapore Archifest 2020 Organising Team for the opportunity and assistance in connecting with the selected architecture firms and organisations while conducting this research. We would also like to express our deepest gratitude to all the architects and designers who have kindly agreed to be interviewed and consented the use of their photos and drawings in our publication and website.

Social Architecture website: socialarchi.github.io

Singapore Archifest website: archifest.sg



SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Archifest special edition - Architecture: saving our world 2020

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Ground-Up Initiative



About Ground Up Initiative:

About:

Ground-Up Initiative (GUI) is a non-profit community, guided by the spirit of innovation, resilience and grounded leadership to demonstrate urban sustainability.

Vision:

Towards a 5G (Gracious, Green, Giving, Grounded and Grateful) Nation.

Through this 5 points, GUI hopes to form the foundation for a 21st Century Kampung Culture that cultivates holistic solutions for a happier, liveable and sustainable future for modern society.

Mission

To build up their campus as a school of life and to showcase best practices in sustainable living for Singapore, and nurture a conscious community with hearts, minds and hands focused on a humane and sustainable future.

Website: <https://groundupinitiative.org/>

All photos are courtesy of Ground-Up Initiative

by Adler Teo

case study: kampung kampus

Project Name: Kampung Kampus

Location: Singapore

Date Designed: 2009

Date Completed: Ongoing Phase 1 (as of August 2020)

Size: 26,000 sqm

Client: Government Organisations, Local Community, Nee Soon Residents, Leadership and Training Groups

Donor/Support: Bottle Tree Park Pte Ltd, Chong Pang CCC, Singapore Land Authority, OSG Container and Modular Pte Ltd, Leads Engineering(S) Pte Ltd, Jin Shun Engineering Pte Ltd, Satay By The Bay Pte Ltd, Builders 265 Pte Ltd, TTJ Design & Engineering Pte Ltd, Yan San Metals Pte Ltd, Bestal Roof & Fabrication Pte Ltd, JOE Green Pte Ltd, APds Architects LLP, JS Tan Consultants Pte Ltd, iCON Engineers LLP, BCM Consultants Pte Ltd, CH2M Hill Singapore Pte Ltd, Triple Eyelid, Building System and Diagnostics Pte Ltd, Building & Construction Authority, Singapore Green Building Council.
(In no order of merit)

Abstract

“Singaporeans needs to be more daring and creative”

- one of the findings of the Remaking Singapore Committee 2002.

The late Kampung Chief, Mr Tay Lai Hock was 39 years old then. He had given up his corporate job and annual six-figure salary to backpack around the world. Through his travels, it made him wonder: “How could creativity and risk-taking be nurtured when the very people who teach are risk adverse, and when the environment does not allow these attributes to flourish?”

With this thought in mind, he returned to Singapore in 2002, with a determination to do something about this situation. In 2008, his evolving answer to that thought took the form of Ground-Up Initiative (GUI).



cultural and historical context

Back in 2009, the late Kampung Chief, Mr Tay Lai Hock and a small group of early GUI members started 'Balik Kampung' - GUI's flagship programme - on a small plot of land in Lim Chu Kang. After which they moved to a 100sqm of land at Bottle Tree Park that was used for Sustainable Urban Farming. This also marked the first space the Kampung community was built on.

Genesis of Project

Since its inception, GUI has been bringing people from all walks of life to collaboratively cultivate the space, inspiring togetherness and instilling ownership. Balik Kampung, is GUI's flagship programme to fulfill this purpose.

After moving to Bottle Tree Park, GUI started its first project named SURF (Sustainable Urban Roof-top Farm). From there, GUI was awarded an additional 600 sqm of land by the Bottle Tree Park management after eight months of

witnessing GUI's impressive progress.

Over a span of four months GUI continued to impress the management of Bottle Tree Park, growing 500 sqm more, to a total area of 1200 sqm.

From 2010 - 2014, GUI held various major events, activating mass action for good as well as programmes that are specifically designed to nurture resilient and mindful leaders, with a deep sense of responsibility to society and an acute awareness for the environment.

In 2014, the community rallied together to win the support of the government and public for the usage of a stunning 26,000 sqm piece of land for GUI which was originally designated for residential and commercial use.

Design

GUI has been bringing people from all walks of life to collaboratively cultivate the space, inspiring togetherness and instilling ownership. Kampung Kampus was built upon the existing kampung infrastructure that was there since



GUI moved in 2009. There was little master planning to be done as they simply needed practical spaces that fits their usage. The large campus site helped to accommodate and bring people together for a common good. A range of diverse social enterprises are carefully designed to cultivate a multitude of strengths for a wide spectrum of individuals and groups, forming a robust, nurturing eco-system of GUI within the Kampung Kampus – which covers the fields of education, farming and craft.

GUI was designed to be a destination where various organisations and countries come to experience ideas and inspirations on how to rethink our assumptions on our way of life, and cultivating grace, gratitude, empathy amongst people.

Impact on Community

Since 2008, GUI has touched more than 100,000 lives in Singapore, organised more than 550 programmes from 2014 till present, engaged with more than 500 corporate/governmental partners and engaged more than 20,000 volunteers. Through its initiation till present, it has salvaged and recycled more than 130,000kg of waste wood for newly purposed craftworking and harvested more than 3000kg of organic vegetables.

Milestone Community Programs:

Heritage Kampung - GUI held a five-month long festival, Heritage Kampung, to reconnect fellow citizens with Singapore's heritage and the timeless values embodied by our pioneers representing each ethnic

group. Several ministers graced the festival, including Minister Shanmugam, Minister Tan Chuan Jin and Minister Grace Fu – prompting them for the first time to reconsider the usage of the land that GUI sits on. It was designed for commercial use, but the question put forth was the sustainability of educating the younger generation on the preservation of our heritage, society and land.

Just One Earth (JOE) - GUI has held more than 300 sessions of JOE for more than 50 kindergartens. JOE teaches students the value of our planet and a healthy environment, while teaching practical skills of recycling, reusing, and how to grow small plants in reused bottles.

H3ROES - To realise GUI's vision, programmes are specifically designed to nurture resilient and mindful leaders, with a deep sense of responsibility to society and an acute awareness for the environment. H3ROES is an environmental leadership programme organized with Canon and NEA.

Discussions and Lessons

Through the conversation with GUI, we have come to see the importance of how the land really brought people together through its role as a facilitator - creating a common purpose for the community to be bonded through hands-on activities - which embodies the spirit of the kampung culture here in Kampung Kampus.

Being able to connect urban dwellers to nature through direct participation on the land is a rare and precious experience that is seen in few places and Kampung Kampus is one of them. However just like any enterprise, there will come challenges and obstacles in which GUI is currently facing an uncertain future of their land lease ending soon. This beckons the question of a possibility of shifting and the consequences of shifting. This is definitely a struggle not just for GUI but various establishments that have strong attachment to traditions and see the value of land very differently.



GUI believes strongly in the idea of how it is not about the land but the people. In which communities, especially a tight-knitted one like GUI, can be moved and its foundation can be built up again no matter where they are. "It will be a struggle but it is possible", as quoted from the Kampung Architect, Bingyu. We can see that land and green spaces are fundamentally important physical assets but a strong philosophy as well as the power of a community is equally important

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studio - L

About studio-L:

Studio L is a Japanese firm that focuses on community design. As community designers, the firm focuses on empowering the local people to participate in problem solving in their neighbourhoods. A typical workflow of a project consists of researching on case studies, conducting interviews and workshops as well as connecting different people in the local community to be involved in the project. Studio L was founded by Ryo Yamazaki together with Takanori Daigo, Shinji Kanba and Arisa Nishigami in 2005 (previously known as Seikatsu Studio). Its early years saw the team working on projects such as the renewal of a magazine delivered from a park management organisation in Osaka and the Senri Rehabilitation Hospital Project which helped Ryo Yamazaki to recognise a new role of a community designer.

Website: <http://www.studio-l.org/en/>
All photos are courtesy of studio-L

by Tan Gee Yang,
Naomi Bachtiar

case study: Hajimari Art center

Project Name: Hajimari Art Center
Location: Inawashiro, Japan
Date Designed: 2013
Date Completed: 2014
Size: 235.66 sqm (building size), 1,217.14 sqm (site area)
Client: Asaka Hospital Group

The content of this case study is partially derived from the interview with Noriko Deno, who was involved in this project.

Abstract

The Hajimari Art Center is an Art Brut Museum which was established by renovating a 120-year old sake brewery. The building belonged to the Asaka Hospital Group. The hospital usually displayed the arts of the patient in their hospitals and hence wanted to transform the building into a museum that exhibited Art Brut. The hospital approached studio L to explore how they could go about creating such a museum.



Cultural and Historical Context

With the building being a 120-year old former sake brewery, there exist a long history with the site. where it withstood the trial of an earthquake and has become a familiar sight to the people of Inawashiro. The building is firmly rooted to the town and this is something that has to be taken into account when renovating the building to house the museum. Meanwhile, the site was in the countryside where most residents are involved in agriculture. It is important to ensure that the community is open to having the museum and feel welcomed to utilise the museum as a community space. They need to feel comfortable to come freely in their Wellington boots.

Genesis of Project

The 120-year-old building belongs to a hospital which specialises on mental illness and intellectual disabilities. The hospital used to have a facility in the region that supports people with such disabilities by allowing them to create art. The works used to be displayed in the hospital or in festivals, and the hospital wanted to explore how a museum

that connects people through art could be created. This form of art is called Art Brut. Art Brut is a term coined by French Painter Jean Dubuffet which describe art made outside the art institutions by those without formal training. By focusing on this form of art, the Hajimari Art Center become a place that welcomes everyone. It becomes an informal community space and the goal is to create a space where people could come not just to look at art but to chat and have tea. Art in this sense becomes a catalyst for people to gather.

The curator for this museum was hired even before the museum was built such that he can participate in the conceptualisation of the museum. This allows a clear vision for the museum to be developed.

Design

Studio L started gathering information by going door-to-door, asking the local residents a few basic questions. Because the museum is located at a high street, the shopowners are potential visitors to the museum (In Japan, there is usually a shop front and a living quarter at the back. As such, shopowners are residents as well).



Some questions asked includes what they think about having a museum in the street, how they live and would like to live in the future, what problems or concerns that they have as well as the culture and how it can be incorporated in the museum. This research is important because the museum should not be an alien to the context. It is the people's and so should act as such. Studio L made sure to include the local residents from day 1 so that the museum do not end up being exclusive. The perception of the people regarding the museum is shaped from these interactions. Involving the people through dialogue and workshops allow the residents to build a sense of ownership.

Building a rapport with the local is crucial in

getting the local residents involved. 4 interns helped out in engaging the community. The interns lived in a house behind the museum. They could not cook very well and would turn to the residents for help. The residents gave them their produce but they were not sure how to consume it and had to ask the residents. The next time, the residents brought cooked food for them. There was also the case of an old lady who suffered from dementia and could not remember her way home. The interns often help guide her home. By living there, they got to know the residents very well and gradually got the residents interested in the museum project.

A crucial step in the engagement of local residents is to get them to participate in workshops. These workshops allow the relationship between residents and museum to be explored.

Impact on Community

The museum becomes an informal community space that connects people together and allow for community building activities to take place. With the residents being involved from early on, the relationship between the people and the museum becomes significant enough such that a separate opening ceremony was held specially for the local, in addition to the official tape-cutting ceremony. Studio L prepared a barbeque and residents are invited to bring their own food. When the project was explained to the residents during the barbeque, many of them have already known and were interested in the project.

After the opening of the museum, the residents remain central to the museum. Annual events and regular workshops are planned by the residents. The museum becomes a community gathering place for the residents, with the residents taking active charge of the happenings in the museum. This is something that is rarely seen in other museums where visitors simply act as spectators .

The project was meaningful for the residents. For the people who worked on the project, the process and the resultant museum are something that stay with them. One of the interns even went back to work as a staff in the museum.

Discussions and Lessons

The Hajimari Art Center project has been successful in getting local community involvement by going deep into the community and doing it from the early stage. This is something that can be applied to Singapore especially in projects that are envisioned to play an important role in community building. A key characteristic of the community design methodology is that the community becomes empowered as their voices are heard. It is important in the context of Singapore that the form of community engagement is not simply as a formality to appease the residents, but rather for it to be a platform for change. Interactions with the residents should be viewed as the ideal opportunity to gain valuable insights relevant to the particular project. Only then could the needs and wants, of the residents explicitly stated or not, could be addressed.

While local engagement is important, what is also key is to distill the information gained from



this and to apply it meaningfully to the project. There may come times when conflicting views arise even within the residents. In such a time, the role of a community designer would then be to negotiate these differences and find a common ground to work from.