



# The Art of Culture in Community Development

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# Executive Summary

Community development has gotten increased attention in Singapore over the past couple of years. This is now, and will continue to be heightened by the impact felt here and globally from the present Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the resultant fractures in society affecting relationships on both the individual and communal level. There is a myriad of methodologies, approaches and practices to community development, but they largely reside within the domains of the community and social sectors, and in recent years, the health sector in Singapore.

This paper makes a case for cultural approaches to community development, and the accompanying tools, processes and forms in the arts, in recognition of the fundamental role culture plays in how communities form and are sustained. A cultural approach, or arts-based community development, intersects with community development approaches from other disciplines but also engenders unique outcomes because of its focus on values, beliefs and behaviours. Together with community-engaged arts processes, it contributes to community building and integration, as well as high levels of engagement.

Although arts-based community development is a fledging field, there are several interdisciplinary collaborations in Singapore that demonstrate the value of the arts in community development. To more deeply understand arts-based community development practices in geographically-based communities, this paper has selected 3 case examples:

## **The Community Theatre by Beyond Social Services**

helmed by Izzaty Ishak, an artist and community worker employed full-time by Beyond Social Services

## ***Curating Whampoa (2016-2018)***

led by Tsao Foundation as well as Professor Thomas K. Kong, who co-designed the programme

## ***Let's Go PLaY OutSide! (LGPO!)***

by 3Pumpkins, led by Lin Shiyun at Lengkok Bahru (2018), in collaboration with South Central Community Family Service Centre

These cases were selected because of their arts or creative practices which are central and intertwined with community engagement; the depth and nuances of their engagement with the community with community development goals in mind; and their long-term commitment to the community. They also offer insights on how arts and creative approaches have been employed in the community, social and health sectors through the collaborations between artists and organisations, or when an arts approach has been incorporated into an organisation, as in the case of Beyond Social Services.

Insights from studying the interviews conducted with artists and key organisational members from each of the cases have been organised in 4 main statements as to how a cultural approach, and art-based processes contribute towards community development:

1

### **UNIQUE VALUE OF THE ARTIST**

Artists are able to nurture a) the creative capacities of communities for collective-solutioning and community expression, and b) the civic capacities of communities to negotiate what it means to be a community

2

### **EMBEDDEDNESS**

Embeddedness is the key that expands community engagement practices into community development, and can mitigate ethical considerations when working with communities

3

### **SPACES**

Spaces animated by community needs and aspirations become places for community development

4

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

Community development is sustainable when regenerative networks are created and systems can continually be co-created

Finally, this paper introduces two overseas examples which ArtsWok managed to witness first-hand—Toride Art Project in Japan and Pillsbury House + Theatre in the United States—to expand the imagination and highlight further possibilities for arts-based community development in Singapore. Drawing on the insights from the cases and references to the overseas examples, this paper ends with present opportunities that can be harnessed for arts-based community development here that will contribute towards our sustainability as a cohesive and resilient society.

# Introduction



“ Culture is not a pile of artefacts – it is us; the living, breathing sum of us.<sup>1</sup> ”

- Jon Hawkes

According to Our SG Arts Plan 2018–2022, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) described the “arts as catalyst for building a civic culture of care, cohesion and confidence”.<sup>2</sup> Ever since the 2012 Arts and Culture Strategic Review Report (ACSR), there has been an increased focus on bringing arts into communities, which is underpinned by the deeper desire to utilise the arts to strengthen community ties. While the power of the arts to strengthen communities is acknowledged, there is not enough recognition of the fundamental role of the arts in shaping culture—the values, meaning, aspirations of a nation—that cuts across all other sectors of society.

Culture underpins all activities. It determines how we organise society, relate to one another and express values of our interdependency; it is how we negotiate and dialogue with one another, how we respond to the needs of others, how we care and resolve challenges in society. “Culture is not the decoration added after a society has dealt with its basic needs. Culture is the basic need—it is the bedrock of society.”<sup>3</sup> The arts is indispensable to that process of articulating and shaping culture because it is through the arts that “a society makes (or discovers) meaning”.<sup>4</sup> Through producing art—“artifacts and experiences intentionally created to convey beauty or meaning, giving shape to concepts and feelings”—we are shaping culture.<sup>5</sup>

Culture is not the decoration added after a society has dealt with its basic needs. Culture is the basic need—it is the bedrock of society.<sup>3</sup>

In Singapore, where there is an overwhelming focus on economic progress, it is easy to overlook the fact that the desire to make sense of our lives, form values, conduct ourselves and relate to others is an intrinsic need. However, when economic development and market-based efficiency is prioritised as the metric of progress and development, our values and moral perspectives become replaced by market norms. In other words, we start to embrace market values as part of our culture. The pragmatism and efficiency of Singapore is the culture that we produce as a result of it. While those values can be beneficial, when it is the overwhelming logic upon which society is organised, we compromise on the other values that holds the social fabric of a nation together. More than ever, there is a need to examine priorities and recognise the pervasiveness and the centrality of culture in the way we exist. It is fundamental to identity and a “sense of belonging” and “should be an integral part of our lives, as it is a means for us to express ourselves and our values, to exercise creativity”.<sup>6</sup>

Community development has been the new buzzword within the health and social sectors. In recent years, more attention has been paid to community development and its role in

<sup>1</sup> Jon Hawkes, *Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning* (Victoria: Common Ground Publishing, 2001), [http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/community/Downloads/HawkesJon\(2001\)TheFourthPillarOfSustainability.pdf](http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/community/Downloads/HawkesJon(2001)TheFourthPillarOfSustainability.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National Arts Council, *Our SG Arts Plan (2018-2022)*, 7, <https://www.nac.gov.sg/dam/jcr:d8c447f2-078f-4566-b722-10e750c5495b>.

<sup>3</sup> Hawkes, *Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Hawkes, *Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Arlene Goldbard, *The Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & the Future* (Waterlight Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>6</sup> “To Pursue Growth in the Arts, We Must Re-examine Our Mindsets,” *Rice Media*, 21 July 2020, <https://www.ricemedia.co/current-affairs-ricexdialogic-pursue-growth-arts-re-examine-mindsets/>

building community health and well-being, and social cohesion. Part of the process of building communities involves recognising that local communities have their own culture and have a role in co-creating values—it is derived collectively, not directed or prescribed. It begins from individuals in local communities.<sup>7</sup> What these communities are able to articulate and dream of determines what the culture of Singapore would look like. If communities are to be engaged and granted the space to generate community-owned expressions and dialogue on values, then access to the arts and art-making that can allow society to collectively discover meaning would be indispensable in the work of community development.

## The Present State of Society and Community in Singapore

All over the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and amplified a slew of challenging issues that underlie societies—many of which are structural. Governments scramble to respond, institutions are often failing and countries are left wanting. With the crisis, a tsunami of needs, gaps and fissions in society have (re)surfaced—socioeconomic inequality, the unequal impact of the crisis among the privileged and underprivileged, the haves and the have-nots,<sup>8</sup> the vulnerable and isolated populations who are struggling to cope with the changing situation,<sup>9</sup> the surge in domestic abuse,<sup>10</sup> the neoliberal logic that has prioritised efficiency at the expense of ethical imperatives to ensure fair and equal treatment of foreign workers, the inclusion and exclusion of communities, “othering” and racial pathologising.<sup>11</sup>

In the face of these stresses that the pandemic has placed on our nation, then Minister of MCCY, Grace Fu, stressed the importance of social cohesion, where “we want strong communities to be tied through the social fabric, we want them to be connected, we want trusting strong bonds between the communities as well.”<sup>12</sup> The pandemic revealed that “there’s a very thin sense



Photo credit: 3Pumpkins

<sup>7</sup> Grace Fu, “Weaving a strong social fabric through difficult times” (Speech at OnePeople.sg’s “Regardless of Race dialogue IV: Race Relations in Times of Adversity, 30 May 2020), retrieved from <https://www.mccy.gov.sg/about-us/news-and-resources/speeches/2020/may/weaving-strong-social-fabric-through-difficult-times>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Wong Pei Ting, “The Big Read: Digitally estranged, seniors struggle with sense of displacement in pandemic-hit offline world,” *Today*, 2 May 2020, <https://www.todayonline.com/big-read/big-read-digitally-estranged-seniors-struggle-sense-displacement-pandemic-hit-offline-world?fbclid=IwAR2Uv2o3PvpWV9UeEMdkllR-CLJwkpOASUTKdZieOTEerJEbfNKA2kNQQw>  
Tee Zhou, “Coronavirus:Families scraping by in tougher spot now,” *The Straits Times*, 19 April 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/families-scraping-by-in-tougher-spot-now>

<sup>10</sup> Wong Yang, “Concern over rise in domestic abuse as stay-home period kicks in,” *The New Paper*, 9 April 2020, <https://www.np.sg/news/singapore/rise-domestic-abuse-cases-families-forced-stay-home>.

<sup>11</sup> Chong Ja lan, “Who are we trading off? Considerations for Singapore’s post-pandemic social compact,” *Academia.sg*, 23 April, 2020, <https://www.academia.sg/academic-views/who-are-we-trading-off-considerations-for-singapores-post-pandemic-social-compact/>

<sup>12</sup> Grace Fu, “Weaving a strong social fabric through difficult times”

of mutual obligation, very thin sense of lateral ties across society”<sup>13</sup> The communities in Singapore are weak in organising to care for one another within residential estates, and there is a reliance on professional services, government and volunteer groups to organise. Within communities, the capacity to organise and respond is extremely weak. The perils of the crisis have made one thing clear—the government cannot provide for every need. There are needs that intermediate institutions, civil society, and communities are in better positions to address. The civic consciousness of citizens in being able to care for one another, volunteer and take action to meet needs is paramount in order to develop sustainably as a society.

The Straits Times article<sup>14</sup> on essential workers in Singapore provided an entry point to consider the role of the arts in society. At the most superficial level, it is easy to see how the arts do not have direct value in the fight against a health crisis. However, a look at the fissures that were amplified by the pandemic would provide a clear indication that what is being put to a test is not only the health system but the values of our society. How we have shaped our culture hitherto, determines our priorities and responses in times of crisis. Where the arts are crucial is in how it can contribute towards laying foundational values that we will hark back to.



Elderly participants from the community during a workshop in Breaker Project's Kioku Shugei-Kan Tansu space, which was previously a shop.  
Photo credit: ArtsWok Collaborative

## Arts and Cultural Approach to Community Development

“ Artists do not go into the local community in order to solve its issues. What we value in artists is their ability to perceive the truth beyond the surface and their critical point of view to doubt pre-conceived ideas. Or an eye for overlooked existence and unspoken memories, and a keen observation on the implicit social pressure.<sup>15</sup> – Amenomori Nov ”

Amenomori Nov is the founder of The Breaker Project which is an art project located in Osaka, Japan, whose work ArtsWok managed to witness in person. The project originally came about because of her view that contemporary art and creation had “deviated from its connection to daily life”<sup>16</sup> She found it problematic that a social culture that prioritises economic efficiency “has resulted in a uniform cultural value system with little diversity”, and believes that artists who operate in ways counter to the prevailing logic can help to reunite us with “a lost ability to imagine

<sup>13</sup> Teo You Yenn, “Beyond the pandemic: What we have learned and have still to learn,” edited transcript of *Academia.SG Webinar*, 1 May 2020, retrieved from <https://www.academia.sg/events/20200501-transcript/>.

<sup>14</sup> Janice Tai, “8 in 10 Singaporeans willing to pay more for essential services: Survey,” *The Straits Times*, 14 June 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/8-in-10-singaporeans-willing-to-pay-more-for-essential-services>.

<sup>15</sup> Amenomori Nov, “Creating a Place: From temporary sites to permanent locations,” 2015, 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

and create”.<sup>17</sup> Artists do not go into the community to solve particular problems—that would be using the lenses of efficiency and pragmatism to understand the value of artists. Artists look at the values and attitudes that underlie social behaviours, practices and habits.

The issues surfaced by the pandemic are outcroppings of deeper chasms in the values held as a society. It is apparent that more needs to be done to build communities—to create the space for communities to articulate value, negotiate differences, develop trust, care and show compassion for one another. In other words, there is a need to invest in building the local cultures within communities. If arts are the key to developing culture in communities, then artists bear the tools—the grammar and vocabulary—for people to articulate, shape and evolve culture. Not only that, artists have the power to reflect, question and unpack meanings in society. The value of artists is in bringing their critical lens to ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, surfacing issues and tackling complexity. They facilitate spaces for dialogue, connection and collaboration, so that people can re-imagine.



If arts are the key to developing culture in communities, then artists bear the tools—the grammar and vocabulary—for people to articulate, shape and evolve culture.

Integrating the arts in community building is providing the access to express and articulate community aspirations, but also sharing a language in which a community’s culture can be continually renewed to express changing aspirations and values. Bringing artists into the work of community development democratises the access to self and community expression. Hawkes states that “communities have a right, as well as a responsibility, to engage with the values that determine the nature of the society of which they are a part of.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>18</sup> Hawkes, *Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*, 16.

# Arts-Based Community Development Practices in Singapore

Artists and/or organisations employing arts-based approaches in community development in Singapore are few and far between. For the purposes of this case study, we have identified three artists/creatives—who collaborate or are employed by organisations and the resulting programmes—to excavate insights on arts-based community development practices in Singapore:

Organisation	Project/Programme	Interviewees
Beyond Social Services (BSS)	The Community Theatre (TCT)	<p><b>Gerard Ee</b> Executive Director, BSS</p> <p><b>Izzaty Ishak</b> Artist &amp; Community Worker, BSS</p> <p><b>Susana Concorado Harding</b> Senior Director International Longevity Centre Singapore (ILC-S)</p>
Tsao Foundation	<i>Curating Whampoa</i>	<p><b>Thomas K. Kong,</b> Associate Professor Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore</p>
South Central Community Family Service Centre (SCCFSC)	<i>Let's Go PLayer OutSide!</i> (LGPO!)	<p><b>Ruth Tan</b> Executive Director, SCCFSC</p> <p><b>Ang Lay Hoon</b> Social Worker, SCCFSC</p> <p><b>Cynthia Koe</b> Community Engagement Executive, SCCFSC</p> <p><b>Lin Shiyun</b> Creative Director 3Pumpkins</p>

These organisations primarily work with geographically-based communities and articulate their work as community development. They were of particular interest because of the depth and nuances of their engagement with the community, their long-term commitment to the community, and the manner in which arts approaches are employed or interwoven into the work. Although not all the artists or creatives who work with these organisations necessarily identify themselves to be doing community development (Thomas in particular), their practice, processes and the outcomes overlap with community development outcomes.



Photo credit:  
 - Top left: The Community Theatre  
 - Top right: Tsao Foundation  
 - Bottom left: 3Pumpkins

The cases offer interesting comparisons because all of the organisations approach community development through different lenses and negotiate different considerations. Tsao Foundation being a non-profit that focuses on promoting successful ageing and active ageing while offering health services, embarked on *Curating Whampoa* from the perspective of community health. On the other hand, the work of SCCFSC and BSS are both situated within the social sector. Both organisations also identify with the principles and practices of asset-based community development. However, while SCCFSC is a Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) that also offers services that are specific to Family Service Centres (FSC),<sup>19</sup> such as case work, BSS is a VWO focusing on community development without the offerings of an FSC. This distinction translates into the way community development approaches are integrated into the programmes.

The different organisations work with creatives for different periods of time under different collaborative models, which in turn affects the permanency of the creative's work. In BSS, the artist, Izzaty Ishak, is employed as part of the organisation as a community worker running regular programmes. For LGPO! in Lengkok Bahru, Lin Shiyun, the artist of 3Pumpkins collaborated with SCCFSC over the course of several months although the ideal scenario would be for 3Pumpkins to commit to the community for a few years to discover and deliver desired social impact. LGPO! is also an existing programme that grew out of Shiyun's initiative that first took place in Toa Payoh, and was later brought to Boon Lay and eventually to Lengkok Bahru. *Curating Whampoa* was a two-year long programme that was initiated by Tsao Foundation, to which Thomas Kong, an architect, was brought on board to co-design and co-run the programme.

Please refer to page 13 for fuller write-ups on each of the case examples.

<sup>19</sup> FSCs have specified purposes and funding structures in Singapore's social service structure. See details on Family Service Centres at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Supporting-Families/Pages/Family-Service-Centres.aspx>

## Defining Arts-Based Community Development

In this case study, ArtsWok has chosen the term “arts-based community development” to situate the field of work for various reasons explained below. In practice, arts-based community development overlaps and may sometimes be conflated with practices of socially-engaged arts, community arts and community cultural development. The term is also used by William Cleveland from the Center for the Study of Art and Community in the United States and articulated as “arts-centered activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health, and/or productivity within a community.”<sup>20</sup> The choice to use “arts-based” situates the approach and grounds the work in the arts. However, this does not exclude cultural and creative approaches that may not be considered “art mediums” in the conventional sense. While it is not always practised this way, this paper is specifically interested in arts-based community development within residential communities.

The use of “community development” is situated and understood within the context of Singapore wherein it is practiced differently by different organisations and has associations predominantly with community, health and social work practices. We resonate with the understanding of “community development” on the ground that is adopted by community organisations, and have chosen to use the term for its intersections with the vocabulary used in the health, community and social sectors. The use of “arts-based” outlines the interdisciplinary nature of the work. The term, “community development” also clearly specifies particular social outcomes that may or may not be present in “community arts” or “socially-engaged arts”. We are also aligned with the broad-based theory by Bhattacharyya of community development as “promotion of solidarity and agency”.<sup>21</sup>

For a fuller discussion of the various terms used in this section, please see Annex A.

## Recognising the Legitimacy of the Arts Approach

Community development is a term that is shared across the fields of community, health and social sectors. In Singapore, these sectors dominate community-based work in residential communities and is also where access to resources and legitimacy for the work resides. As such, artists working in communities often have to ‘translate’ their work and reframe the outcomes of their work using vocabularies that resonate with the sector their work is best sited within—they often have to get access from the gatekeepers of the communities through borrowed vocabularies. These gatekeepers in communities from the aforementioned sectors have access to space to run programmes, relationships (and therefore trust) that have been developed with community members as well as financial resources.

Shiyun of 3Pumpkins has programmes that are sometimes the exception because LGPO! is an independent, artist-led programme. She fronted and initiated LGPO! in Toa Payoh as an independent artist and has already established her own practice with communities before being invited to work with SCCFSC. However, such an example is a rarity in Singapore and also a testament to Shiyun’s ingenuity and tenacity, since most artists or creatives often have to be invited to work in the community, in partnership with or engaged by community, social and health sectors. However, just as these sectors developed their own vocabulary to articulate the unique outcomes of their approaches, the arts and cultural approach also has its own outcomes that are underpinned by its own philosophies, theories and practice. Although outcomes of arts-based practices intersect and overlap with that of the more established health and social work practices, having to be subsumed or take a back seat to these sectors mean that artists and creatives are

<sup>20</sup> William Cleveland, “Arts-based Community Development: Mapping the Terrain,” *America for the Arts*, 2011, 4, <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/BCleveland%20Trend%20Paper.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Jnanabrata Bhattacharya, “Theorising Community Development,” *Journal of the Community Development Society* 34, No. 2 (2004): 10.

“constantly reinventing arguments to convince funders of the legitimacy of their efforts”.<sup>22</sup>

Part of the difficulty in building legitimacy lies in the fact that the practice employs similar art forms as the mainstream disciplines—such as theatre, visual art, film, etc., which lends itself to being seen as a “marginalized manifestation of mainstream arts activities”.<sup>23</sup> Apart from that, artists working in communities are often conflated with social and community workers from the social work profession. While an artist has the prerogative to align and situate his or her practice in any way, it is worthwhile to understand where they differ. According to Pablo Helguera, “social work is a value-based profession based on a tradition of beliefs and systems that aim for the betterment of humanity and support ideals such as social justice, the defense of human dignity and worth, and the strengthening of human relationships. An artist may subscribe to the same values but make works that ironises, problematises and even enhances tensions around those subjects, in order to provoke reflection.”<sup>24</sup>

The starting point of artists differ from social workers. Artists approach their work in communities as artists making art, not as artists doing something else. It does not mean that they are not aware of the social or therapeutic outcomes of their work, it is the belief that “they do the most good by concentrating on the empowering qualities of the creative processes and not the diagnosis or treatment of what is ‘wrong’”.<sup>25</sup> It is only when these differences are recognised and the practice legitimised that the full potential of the practice can be realised. Artists can claim their existence in the realm of art, as artists—like every other artist, artists working in communities possess their unique aesthetic conveyed through mediums that are

situated within communities, in social outcomes and social relations.

However, it is also true that the artists in their work in communities occupy an ambiguous position cutting across the disciplines of community, health and social work, and often achieving similar outcomes. Artists have to continually negotiate the “uncomfortable” tension between art and non-art, art and other disciplines like social work, sociology or community health, but that is “exactly the place it should inhabit”.<sup>26</sup> It is in the tenuous position that the artists lend themselves to interdisciplinarity—bringing together different disciplines, drawing networks and discourses within particular contexts in communities. However, that should not drown out the intents and approaches of the arts that yields unique cultural outcomes.

Cross-sector collaboration remains the principle that we believe to be necessary in communities because of the multi-faceted nature and dynamism of communities, and also recognising the structural context in Singapore where access is often organised according to various sectors. In fact, arts-based approaches can expand community development outcomes within communities. Through the insights gleaned from these case studies, we hope to shed light on the intrinsic value of arts-based approaches in community development, reveal the considerations that artists and creatives have and finally suggest some new opportunities in the field.



Photo credit: The Community Theatre

<sup>22</sup> Adams and Arlene Goldbard, *Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 2006), 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 34.

<sup>25</sup> William Cleveland, *Art in Other Places: Artists at Work in America's Community and Social Institutions* (Massachusetts: Arts Extension Service Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 4.

# About the Case Examples



# About Beyond Social Services’ The Community Theatre

**Beyond Social Services** is a non-profit organisation that adopts an asset-based approach to working with low-income communities in Singapore. “It aims to provide opportunities for children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds to avoid a life of delinquency and break free from poverty.”<sup>27</sup> They work with families through a community development approach and act as “a conduit to external resources and support, and a focal point for community dialogue.”<sup>28</sup>



Publicity photo from TCT’s “One More Light” production.  
Photo credit: Asnur Asman

## The Community Theatre

- Founded by Beyond Social Services in 2015 as a Youth Volunteer Development Programme
- Directed by Izzaty Ishak since its inception
- The group consists of about 30 members who contribute on a voluntary basis
- The group meets up regularly to create theatre pieces and put up performances. Some performances are held in the community’s neighbourhood spaces such as void decks, badminton courts, and community centres free of charge, such as *One More Light* (2019); other performances are part of other programmes, such as *The Block Party* (2019) which was part of M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival and targeted at the general public
- Pieces are devised and performed by members of the rental flat community, often about their own lived experiences, together with youth volunteers from elsewhere

<sup>27</sup> Justin Lee, Andrew Lim, Sim Jui Liang, Shamil Zainuddin, Dhevarajan s/o Devadas and Hana Alhadad, “Nurturing Villages & Safeguarding Communities: A Case Study of Beyond Social Services,” 15 January 2020, 5. Retrieved from [https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/a-case-study-of-beyond-social-services\\_report.pdf](https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/a-case-study-of-beyond-social-services_report.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5.

- Utilises interactive theatre in the form of Forum Theatre<sup>27</sup> and performative theatre workshops which encourages audiences to engage in dialogue about the issues at hand

While TCT is a theatre group, it is first and foremost a community. This was achieved in part through the value of embeddedness upheld by Izzaty, which has not only allowed her to develop a thorough understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by the community but has also enabled her to build genuine relationships with them. She recalls spending 2 to 3 years getting to know the community through interacting with volunteers, having meals with youth and playing with them at the void deck. It is due to these relationships that the youth feel a sense of belonging to each other and have developed the trust to share their vulnerabilities.

However, for Izzaty, a key aspect of embeddedness is the acknowledgement that she is not a part of the community though she might be close, a sentiment that is shared by Gerard. Both Izzaty and Gerard believe that to falsely identify as a member of the community is to take away from the genuine strength and individuality of the community. Izzaty was also cautious not to view herself in a position of privilege over the youth, and conversely, actively encourages shared ownership over TCT. BSS and TCT also thrive on a strength-based approach which views the youth as contributing members of the community instead of beneficiaries. Moreover, the performances produced steer away from a sympathy-generating lens and aim to empower the community by highlighting their gifts and unique strengths. Thus, it is in these ways that BSS and Izzaty respect and empower the community while also successfully managing the tensions that may arise with their roles.

The Community Theatre also creates safe spaces for personal expression and the navigation of difficult conversations, facilitated by the form of theatre. In TCT, drama is used as “a tool to uncover the emotions [the youth] want to negotiate.”<sup>30</sup> Since the stories are centred around the real-life experiences of the youth, emphasis is placed on sharing these stories although it might be difficult. However, it is through the sharing and the pieces derived from them that the youth are able to dispel the stereotypes surrounding them. Thus, it can be said that the process of creating an artwork that reclaims one’s own narrative is inherently empowering and agency-generating. Moreover, the style of Forum Theatre encourages audiences to present their views, personal experiences and thoughts concerning the present issue. The process surfaces disagreements while sorting through them in empathy-centred and constructive communication—which are features of community development. Audience members also often gain new insights to their situations and are sometimes motivated to undertake change. TCT illustrates the capacity of the arts, specifically storytelling and theatre, to build relationships through the development of understanding amongst community members and the empowerment of every member.

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<sup>29</sup> Forum Theatre is an interactive theatre created by Augusto Boal, also known as “Theatre of the Oppressed”. In forum theatre, the protagonist encounters a form of oppression or obstacles and audiences are invited to take the stage as “spect-actors” to suggest alternative options and solutions to overcome the oppression or the problem. For more information, read Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York : Theatre Communications Group, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> An interview with Izzaty conducted by ArtsWok Collaborative on 12 June 2020.

# About Tsao Foundation's Curating Whampoa

- A 2-year long community arts and heritage project held from 2016 to 2018
- Led by Tsao Foundation and Professor Thomas K. Kong, co-funded by National Heritage Board
- Aimed to strengthen and enrich the current existing heritage ecosystem in Whampoa by revealing and curating the evolving stories, living wisdoms and vernacular knowledge of the elders; and in doing so, transform attitudes towards older persons and the ageing process by raising their engagement and visibility
- Community engagement included a show-and-tell session, workshops to develop community curator capabilities, exhibitions and multiple sharing sessions with stakeholders
- Through co-creation, *Curating Whampoa* also lays the foundation for community ownership of the project in the hopes that it can develop community advocates capable of developing and maintaining a community museum
- Involved intergenerational work with schools like School of the Arts (SOTA) and Bendemeer Secondary School



Demonstrating calligraphy.  
Photo credit: Tsao Foundation.

There are several components to *Curating Whampoa*:

## 1. *Tangible Stories*

- Conceived and led by Professor Thomas Kong over a 2-month period starting in October 2016
- With the goal of recognising the value of the elderly as bearers of history and heritage, senior residents of Whampoa were asked to share a story related to an object they possessed
- Stories were documented and the artifacts photographed

## 2. Photovoice: *Everyday Whampoa*

- In collaboration with PhotoVoice SG and began from December 2016 onwards
- Over several sessions, participants were guided by mentor photographers and writers in the basics of visual and narrative storytelling respectively
- At the end of the project cycle, each participant contributed a photographic or mixed media series that records his/her personal story and Whampoa's heritage

## 3. *Rumah Whampoa*

- An exhibition from May to August 2017 that travelled to 11 different locations in the Whampoa area
- Featured stories and photography by senior residents of Whampoa which comprised material from *Tangible Stories* and *Everyday Whampoa*

#### 4. *Tangible Companions*

- A collaboration with students and faculty from the Department of Visual Arts at SOTA from January to April 2017
- Aimed to imagine contemporary “companions” for the artifacts presented in *Tangible Stories*
- SOTA students were invited to create works based on an object owned by a resident of Whampoa and respond to each artifact’s history, qualities and its affective relationship with the owner
- The resulting works were exhibited in *An Echo We Remember*, launched in April 2017 and held at SOTA premises

#### 5. Social Archiving

- From January to April 2017
- Explores a new form of archiving that combines curating, gift giving, storytelling, safekeeping, and the renewal of the life of a collection
- Aims to match-make Whampoa residents’ collections of objects with potential archivists
- Encourages active and creative re-interpretation of the archived objects and materials that extends beyond the passive role of offering a storage space

#### 6. *Rumah Whampoa EATS*

- Over the theme of homecooked food, 9 senior Whampoa residents and 20 students from Bendemeer Secondary School collaborated through storytelling, recipe sharing and recording to co-curate a roving exhibition, *Rumah Whampoa EATS*, launched in April 2018
- The material emerged from a series of curator’s workshops, which was a collaboration between Tsao Foundation and Hong Kong-based Community Museum Project. The sessions explored themes for community building in the Whampoa neighbourhood, as well as shared curatorial concepts, and research approaches to developing cultural themes and inventories for the community

Community for Successful Ageing Community Development (ComSA CD) began in 2014 to facilitate successful ageing in the community by effecting sustainable changes in social capital, knowledge of self-care and healthy lifestyles as well as positive ageing. The approach that ComSA CD takes is asset-based community development. Under the framework, ComSA targets seniors ranging from those who are healthy and active, to those who are frail, have complex, multiple chronic conditions and are socially isolated. ComSA CD focuses on self-care, building community solidarity and social capital, as well as building capacity through training and recruiting community advocates. *Curating Whampoa* is part of the effort to promote the positive aspects of ageing and to change mindsets about ageing.

*Curating Whampoa* demonstrated that the intersection of arts and heritage in a geographical community can strengthen the consciousness of collective memory, achieved through the concept of a living museum. For instance, *Tangible Objects* and Social Archiving rekindled memories of past experiences while *Tangible Companions* and Photovoice encouraged active engagement with these memories—processes that are essential to the upkeep of collective memory. These processes were enhanced by their situation within a specific residential community because the memories concerning members are highly related to the socio-geographic aspects of the places in which they live. The creation of a map that showcased the history of the neighbourhood and that embraces the individuality of members living there grounds the collective memory. The form of photography employed in *Everyday Whampoa* challenged community members to view their space through an alternate lens, allowing them to discover new facets of their community hence generating new knowledge for the formation of collective memory. When members feel a connection with such memories, they experience a greater sense of belonging to these memories and the community that possesses them.

# About SSCFSC and 3Pumpkins' Let's Go PLaY OutSide! (LGPO!)



Photo credit: 3Pumpkins

- LGPO! is social practice project spearheaded by Lin Shiyun under 3Pumpkins
- Lengkok Bahru iteration conducted in partnership with SCCFSC began in 2018 where Shiyun worked closely with Cynthia Koe and Ang Lay Hoon, a community worker and social worker respectively
- LGPO! enters a neighbourhood by activating the public playground as a broad-based inclusive platform to connect diverse communities, targeting estates with rental flats where there are more vulnerable communities
- Sessions were held fortnightly in the neighbourhood playground
- Aims to build community support among children from low-income neighbourhoods through playful activities and performances, such as storytelling
- In LGPO! at Lengkok Bahru, 3Pumpkins also worked with artists Isabelle Desjeux and Farez Najid in its programmes
- Apart from LGPO!, 3Pumpkin's work with SCCFSC also included an exhibition, *Seeing The Obvious*, consisting of 9 works installed all over the estate, co-created by community members and stakeholders, students from Nanyang Polytechnic (School of Design, Visual Communication)
  - *Seeing the Obvious* is a place-making project that focuses on connecting and facilitating collaborations among adults and stakeholders so that they are actively involved in creating inspiring environments for children in the neighbourhood. It involves co-creation with the community to look at the living environment from different angles and to think deeply about the design and activation of public space as humanised places to connect people<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> "3P Community Development Arts Programme," Let's Go PLaY OutSide!, retrieved on 7 September 2020 from <http://www.letsplayoutside.org/about.html>

*Let's Go PLayer Outside!* highlights the capacity for activation and transformation of public spaces through the arts. The choice of utilising the playground was an informed one, motivated by its high visibility and accessibility which would allow programmes introduced to change perspectives towards the space and arts activities. Upon seeing the activities being conducted, children from various areas of the community were attracted and began to join in, which resulted in interactions between children of various demographics within the community. Moreover, the playground is intrinsically an intergenerational space where parents usually accompany their children. While the children participated in the activities, Cynthia and Lay Hoon took the opportunity to build relationships with the parents who were present. Over time, the playground—which was initially perceived as an unsafe place due to the presence of negative peer influence and youth-at-risk behaviours—transformed into a safer space for play and inter-community interactions. Thus, it was through the introduction of new programmes and rituals from LGPO! that the existing narratives of the neighbourhood could be challenged and altered.

*Let's Go PLayer Outside!* also succeeded in exemplifying the strengths of play. That is, the inherently process-driven nature of play builds freedom in discovery, exploration and creation. For Shiyun, the sessions are not about creating artworks but about creative expression, which she achieves through the largely improvisational nature of the sessions. While she has certain activities in mind, she gives the reins to the children, attending first to any stimuli they bring in and allowing that to inform the short-term goal of the session even when it is different from what she had planned. In doing so, she validates the childrens' imagination, a process that is essential for its development. Additionally, the sessions are also a safe space for children to negotiate their emotions and relationships with others. Cynthia and Lay Hoon recounted that when children were disruptive or in conflict with other children, Shiyun's response was to allow the children to express themselves, before using the situation as a learning opportunity. As a whole, Shiyun's emphasis on the process-driven nature of play makes LGPO! an activity which can reignite one's curiosity and imagination towards one's environment and community residing there.

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# Insights



# UNIQUE VALUE OF THE ARTIST

*Artists nurture the creative capacities of communities*

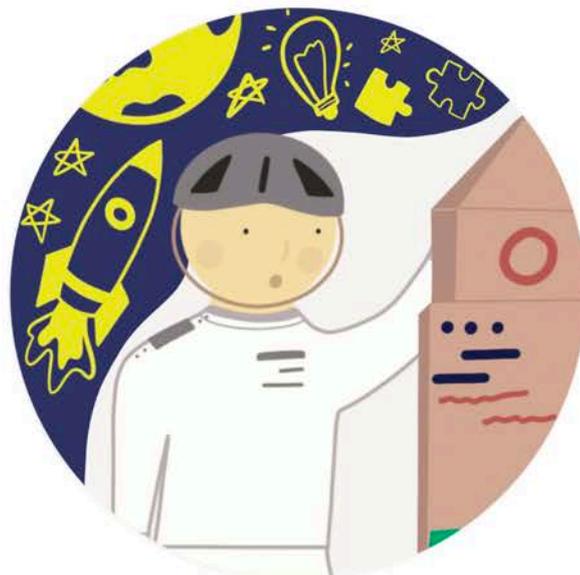
## Through their focus on sense-making

- The artist is predominantly interested in **identifying how people see the world**, not what issues they face per se and how to solve it
- The artistic impetus is to **provide space and tools for self-expression and negotiation of emotions**
- These processes are driven by **curiosity and discovery of new perspectives**



## To design their own solutions and sculpt their own culture

- Artists **inject and model creative processes**, creating opportunities for new conversations and action
- Artists pique the curiosity of community members and invite them to **create through play**, allowing for **embodied experiences of sense-making and enabling new forms of discovery**
- Artists inspire community to **innovate, find solutions and explore new possibilities** for themselves
- Artists provide the **tools and mediums** for enabling **self-expression and a language to articulate their culture**



*Artists nurture the civic capacities of communities*



## Through designing new contexts to examine community issues and build relationships

- Artists employ **open and collaborative processes** that **foster inclusion**
- **Dialogic approaches** respect the **dignity and agency of individuals** without offering prescription or judgment
- When artists create **non-judgmental, respectful spaces and model empathetic listening**, they encourage community members to also do the same
- Encourages **development of relationships** across diverse groups

# Insight One

Artists are able to nurture a) the creative capacities of communities for collective-solutioning and community expression, and b) the civic capacities of communities to negotiate what it means to be a community

“ The twentieth century has transformed the entire planet from a finite world of certainties to an infinite world of questioning and doubt. So if ever there was a need to stimulate creative imagination and initiative on the part of individuals, communities and whole societies the time is now. The notion of creativity can no longer be restricted to the arts. It must be applied across the full spectrum of human problem-solving.<sup>32</sup>

- World Commission on Culture and Development

Creativity should not be exclusive to artists and creatives. It is a central quality necessary in communities so that they can “imagine what [they] want (especially if it is different from what [they] currently have) and have the ability to mobilize collective action to turn those ideas into reality.”<sup>33</sup> If communities are to develop the ability to find their own solutions, creativity is a central quality. Artists nurture the creativity of communities by injecting their creative energies when they create, modelling creative modes of thinking and inviting the community to exercise their creative muscles. The other crucial value of artists lie in their ability to nurture the civic capacity of communities—they are able to design spaces and introduce processes that seed civic competencies.

If communities are to develop the ability to find their own solutions, creativity is a central quality.

## 1) Artists are distinctive in communities because their focus on sense-making lends them a unique role in developing creative capacities

The artist is first and foremost interested to identify how people see the world and not what issues they face or how they can solve it. The artists' preoccupation lies in sense-making, asking questions and responding creatively. This perspective is articulated by Shiyun who shared that her “entire adventure in the neighbourhood is actually driven more by the curiosity to want to make sense of how society is organised, to make better sense out of it, and wanting to inject more fun in living.” She added that artists “try to make sense of the world through transforming and reorganising lines, shapes, colours, sounds, objects, words ... what appeals to our senses.” In a similar way, Thomas was also interested in *Curating Whampoa* because it intersected with his curiosity of “how communities take that initiative to co-create spaces for their use, for social uses”. He was “curious to see how the elderly, for example, can begin to start to curate, tell stories of their life through objects as a way to understand the grassroots heritage of Whampoa. The notion of curating came about—so the idea of using different forms, different techniques, different platforms—to curate stories, wisdoms, impressions about Whampoa growing up.” This motivation sets artists apart from others who engage communities through the lenses of social work or health who more often than not, are interested in diagnosing problems and providing solutions.

<sup>32</sup> From a summary of the visionary publication, World Commission on Culture and Development *Our Creative Diversity* (1995) Paris, UNESCO cited in Hakwes, *Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Springboard for the Arts and Helicon Collaborative, *Creative People Power* (2018), 11, <https://springboardforthearts.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Creative-People-Power-Report-2018.pdf>.

It is also worth noting that the focus on sense-making with communities can blur the emphasis between the haves and have-nots; a form of bridging that facilitates community building and development. Ruth, the Executive Director of SCCFSC, remarked that LGPO! was able to bring together children from across the socio-economic spectrum, from the rental and the purchased flat communities. At the heart of LGPO! is play and art-making, which makes it a space that is free of baggage and other preconceptions.

Although the point of entry is different for artists and workers in the community, health and social sectors, that does not mean that artists are unaware of issues which these workers care about, such as inequality and social justice—the work overlaps but the impetus may be different. Shiyun articulates the work of LGPO! as a “3P Community Development Arts Programme” of which, one of the objectives is to identify social gaps, reaching out to inspire vulnerable communities, especially children and youth.” Artists that work in the community are cognisant of community issues and dynamics but the instinctive approach or curiosity is to understand how community members comprehend the world, and to provide the space and the tools for people to express themselves and make sense of their thoughts and feelings.

**The distinctiveness of artists in the community also creates an opportunity for artists to occupy a position of neutrality which can create new entry points for community building.** Shiyun shared her perspective that “what is lacking are

people who can hold a neutral space for collaboration and hold conversations between different groups, awakening and injecting some new energy to existing norms through transforming aesthetics and simply being able to have the autonomy to do things differently ...”

Lay Hoon, a social worker from SCCFSC, thinks that the neutrality stems in part from the understanding of the artist as someone outside of social services but also from the way artists offer their responses, which set them apart. Cynthia, a community worker from SCCFSC recalled a particular incident during LGPO! when a boy began destroying instead of building structures with cardboard. When she witnessed what happened, she was curious as to how Shiyun might respond but was surprised that Shiyun allowed it to happen where she might have intuitively stopped the destruction immediately. Instead, Shiyun observed the boy’s behaviour without intervening but subsequently addressed the issue, and “talk[ed] to [the children] in her own way.” This neutrality or non-judgmental stance enables the motivations for behaviour and difficult emotions to be expressed and then collectively made sense of, and understood; contributing towards community building.

To occupy the position of neutrality is also something that needs to be intentional because being an artist does not immediately make one neutral in the community, as artists also have their own biases and blind spots. The artist’s role can also be complicated depending on their relationship with the community. As a community worker with BSS, Izzaty runs TCT, facilitating applied drama sessions while simultaneously wearing the hat of a community worker which does not necessarily make her neutral. It is something that she has to contend and negotiate with constantly. However, as an artist, she maintains her distinctiveness in the community because of her presence in journeying with community members through sense-making and theatre-making processes.



Photo credit: 3Pumpkins

## 2) Artists nurture the creative capacities of communities to design their own solutions and sculpt community culture

When placed in communities, artists and creatives inquire, create and open up opportunities for new conversations and action. *Curating Whampoa* took the approach of “a curatorial project involving people, objects, spaces and activities in the Whampoa estate” to eventually establish “a living museum” to reframe the narrative of ageing.<sup>34</sup> The impetus of these creative projects gives time and space for hidden stories to be incorporated in new conversations. Thomas articulated the preciousness of accruing time to these narratives that would have no opportunities otherwise: “Being able to talk about your life, your stories and all that, and have someone to sit in front of you to listen, that’s quite a luxury in this day and age. We are all so busy and we don’t have time to slow down. To be in a room and have someone ask you, ‘When did you start collecting bus tickets?’ You’d feel like, ‘I’ve wanted to tell you for many years already and finally I manage to tell you.’” Apart from that, Susana also holds the perspective that through creative processes, there is “something new that has been created so it’s kind of like there’s growth in that experience.” In that process, participants are also brought to a realisation of what creativity is and how it can be applied. When artists bring their creative energies into an interface with the culture, stories and issues in the community, they create room for exploration while modelling creative processes in the community.

Beyond just initiating conversations and modelling creative processes, artists pique the curiosity of community members and invite them to exercise their creative muscles through play. Artists are playful and constantly asking new questions, exploring, challenging and making sense of things. When they are working in communities, they invite people to play alongside them, to be curious of their environment and

circumstances. Being curious develops a criticality in asking questions and challenging assumptions; propelling experimentation and the exploration of solutions; and enabling people to see novelty in the everyday which underpins the capacity to imagine change and identify possibilities. In essence, curiosity can help to develop critical consciousness necessary for solutioning. Critical consciousness means not accepting an undesirable condition as fate or unchangeable but understanding the structure of causes that brought it about, and then evolving strategies to mitigate them.<sup>35</sup>

In TCT’s weekly meeting, the sharing and exchange of stories are woven into the drama games, and TCT participants use the space to explore pertinent issues such as their perceptions of people in poverty. Izzaty facilitates the devising process, which taps on the stories contributed by the members, to create forum theatre pieces which are brought to the community they reside in, inviting the wider community to participate, play and respond. In doing so, their creativity is activated through asking questions and collective solutioning.



Sharing stories of the objects.  
Photo credit: Tsao Foundation

<sup>34</sup> Tsao Foundation, *Curating Whampoa: Community Curating – A Guide and Resource* (2019), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Jnanabrata Bhattacharya, “Theorising Community Development,” *Journal of the Community Development Society* 34, No. 2 (2004): 13.

More importantly, play and creation allow for embodied experiences of sense-making which enables new forms of discovery, as opposed to a solely cognitive approach. Ruth highlighted the importance of embodied experiences in discovering and uncovering new knowledge. She pointed out that within the context of a FSC or a typical modality, people are speaking to each other on very cognitive terms. “The engagements are very much verbal and you tend to talk to adults and they share with you their issue” but “people only present to you what they want to present.” She added that art is “non-intrusive” and that through play, people “discover new things, [they] discover new talents, they enjoy, they open up – even those with special needs.” Izzaty also expressed that sentiment in the belief in “drama as a tool to uncover the emotions that they want to negotiate.”

Most crucially, if art-making is the way that people express themselves, their values and culture, **when artists work in communities they impart skills and tools that the community can then apply to their own lives. These mediums and tools for creation enable self-expression and provide a language for people to articulate their communities’ values and culture.** Through creating with the community, artists enable community members to be more aware of their creative capabilities, and their agency in interpreting their experiences as individuals and as a community.

The creative muscle is something that needs to be continually utilised before it can become a force of habit and an instinct that communities can rely on to adapt to changes. Nurturing and strengthening that creative capacity opens up the opportunity for community development in ways that are more experiential, relevant and authentic.

Through creating with the community, artists enable community members to be more aware of their creative capabilities, and their agency in interpreting their experiences as individuals and as a community.



Photo credit: 3Pumpkins

### 3) Artists can nurture the civic capacities of communities to negotiate what it means to be a community

**Artists nurture the civic capacities of communities because they are able to craft and design new contexts to examine community issues, build relationship across differences, and facilitate the process of community building.**

In Singapore, “civic” brings to mind the “socio-cultural aspects of civility, including the typically Singaporean public discourses of courtesy, graciousness and politeness” as opposed to civic in terms of the political rights or the relationship of a citizen with the state.<sup>36</sup> Developing civic consciousness might therefore be associated more with being engaged in communities, developing or exemplifying shared values, emotional attachment and sense of belonging. Being “civic” might therefore allude to a certain mindfulness, care and concern towards the community.

“Civically-engaged people are at the core of every healthy community, and “effective place-based change needs to be rooted in broad and diverse citizen power”.<sup>37</sup> If the goals of community development involve collective action, its members must find value and the *raison d’être* of

<sup>36</sup> Terence Lee, “The politics of civil society in Singapore”, *Asian Studies Review* 26, No. 1 (2002), 99.

<sup>37</sup> Springboard for the Arts and Helicon Collaborative, *Creative People Power*, 9.

the community, to have the civic consciousness that will drive someone to care and invest in community affairs. It involves the ability to dialogue, negotiate and reckon with differences and disagreements, and in spite of the challenges of being a community, continue to care and be engaged. The heart of community development must involve the development of civic capacities. Only with civic consciousness and shared values will communities know why they can or should be a community.

Artists who work in communities are able to nurture civic capacities because of the collaborative and open processes they employ which result in inclusive practices and an awareness of the importance of inclusivity. These principles are intuitive to the arts approaches they embody. Difference is not something to be afraid of, or a problem to be solved. Rather, it is something that evokes curiosity and calls for understanding. Izzaty shares an interesting concept with regard to the spaces that are created. She debates about whether she should be creating a “safe” or “brave” space whereby a “safe space” is one where people feel safe and comfortable to be in but a “brave space” is one where people are willing to share their thoughts, be vulnerable but also ready to feel offended or hurt. The latter “is where resilience is built”.



TCT member Rushaimi models for a photoshoot about the contradictory messages that people living in poverty often encounter.

Photo credit: Kei Franklin

**Artists employ dialogic approaches undergirded by empathy that respect the dignity and agency of individuals without offering prescription or judgement, enabling genuine communities to develop.**

Artists are fundamentally interested in how people see the world and within that framework, all subjective experiences and individualities are recognised and given a place. A dialogic approach does not dictate what one should do or what one should say but focuses on listening deeply, and responding with empathy during the conversation. That process allows individuals to express themselves and to come to their own conclusions. In LGPO!, Cynthia observed that while Shiyun always has a general plan for each session, it is always a consultative process of adapting to what the children who show up want to do. In that way, Shiyun never dictates or directs what the children should be doing or learning but allows for conversations and exploration.

The dialogic process in *Curating Whampoa* was also bi-directional. The designers and curators in the project would share ideas with the seniors and constantly consulted them on design decisions and project directions. *Rumah Whampoa EATS*, for instance, came about because seniors were interested to look at food and recipes in the community. Gerard Ee, the Executive Director of BSS pointed out the role of the artist in the community in facilitating the process of storytelling. He says: “it’s about the people’s stories and you as an instrument, as a medium for those stories to surface.” To create that kind of space, the artist takes a step back and cedes power to the community, enabling cultures and identities to organically form.

When artists create non-judgmental, respectful spaces and model empathetic listening, they encourage community members to also do the same, and thus they are more willing to be vulnerable to each other, share more intimately, and allow relationships to develop, even across diverse groups.

# EMBEDDEDNESS

*Embeddedness is the key that expands community engagement practices into community development, and can mitigate ethical considerations when working with communities*

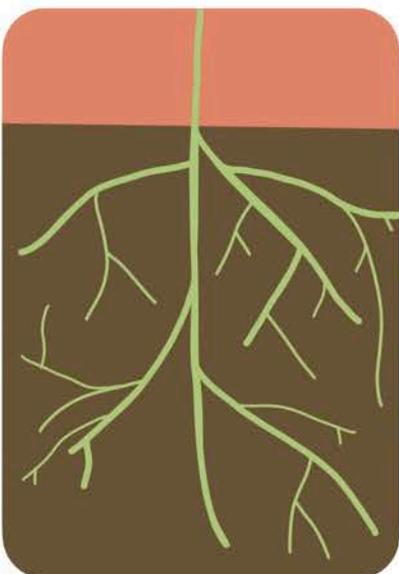
## Embeddedness as the key to community development

- Defined as the **depth of relationship** one has with the members of the community and the extent to which one is **connected to the community's networks**
- Being embedded helps to deepen trust between the artist and the community, allowing for a more thorough appreciation and understanding of community strengths, needs, culture and networks
- The degree of embeddedness affects the depth and breadth of an artist's work



**An enduring presence is also a signal of commitment and rootedness, which are important ethical considerations for community development work**

- Being embedded—a **commitment to build genuine relationships with the community and planting oneself within the networks of the community over a longer period**—can help to negate the ethical considerations of having an otherwise transient outsider intervening in the space
- Regardless of the duration of embeddedness, the artist, community members and collaborators should discuss and negotiate expectations surrounding their relationships and time spent together



# Insight Two

**Embeddedness is the key that expands community engagement practices into community development, and can mitigate ethical considerations when working with communities**

## 1) Embeddedness as the key to community development

**E** mbeddedness can be understood as the depth of relationship one has with the members of the community, as well as the extent to which one is connected to the community's networks. In all of the case examples, embeddedness was a common characteristic practised by the creatives and/or organisations. Shiyun articulated that she has dedicated 3 years to be with the Lengkok Bahru community (the emergence of Covid-19 and lack of resources might put this plan on hold for a while), spending time to understand and observe relationships in the community and being connected to the community. She explained she had to “take time to observe and understand the spaces and their inhabitants, then suggest ways to change habitual practices which are not conducive to forming positive social relationships.” Beyond just a physical presence, embeddedness is also an immersion in the community and “being together”. Gerard articulates that “it’s a value actually, embeddedness is not just a physical presence. It’s more than a physical presence—it is a supportive presence, it is a happy presence. You’re happy to be in the community, you’re happy to be with the people.” Izzaty provides a glimpse of the profundity of the connection and presence: “The practice is a lot of doing things that you thought you wouldn’t have to do to just build relationships with them. It’s really like playing at the playground, dancing with them, talking to them on the phone, giving out food distributions or just chilling out under the block with them to just get to know them...the practice is not just the [making of] artwork, it is the coordination work, it is the relationship-building work, being vulnerable also—it’s part of the work.”

More critically, embeddedness expands community engagement into community development because it helps to deepen trust and allows for a more thorough appreciation and understanding of community strengths, needs, cultures and networks. The intimate understanding of the community allows for specific processes that can allow values to be nurtured and built within the community—the degree of embeddedness affects the depth and breadth of an artist’s work.

## 2) An enduring presence is also a signal of commitment and rootedness, which are important ethical considerations for community development work

One of the key considerations of many artists working with communities is the ethics of entering and leaving the community. Prior to working in BSS, Izzaty had a glimpse of the importance of embedding oneself in the community when she conducted a trauma-related drama programme: “It was only during that session that I could interact with them. I couldn’t know things that were outside, I couldn’t know what community they were coming from. My work had to be solely focused on there and then, and that’s when I didn’t find it very useful because the follow-up work doesn’t really happen and I don’t know what’s the impact of the work that I’m doing. When I start having a relationship with the kids, and when they start opening up, leaving the space feels very uncomfortable. Then I started thinking, I don’t think this is very sustainable, I don’t think this was very fair to build a relationship that was one-off. That makes me question a lot. As a practitioner, what kind of artist do I want to be in the community? I think that’s

the reason why [when] people ask me, “Why don’t you leave Beyond? Why don’t you be a freelancer?” But I say no, Beyond gives me that opportunity to sustain relationships or be in the community a bit more.”

Being embedded—a commitment to build genuine relationship with the community and planting oneself within the networks of the community over a longer period—can help to negate the ethical considerations of having an otherwise transient outsider intervening in the space. In all of the organisations, artists work with local organisations that are rooted within the community. Notably, LGPO! (3 years) and *Curating Whampoa* (2 years) are programmes that spans over a few years—with plans for these programmes to continue in some shape or form. Although the presence of the artists and creatives are not as long as Izzaty’s role in BSS (6 years to date), the close collaboration with a community organisation as well as the commitment to be available and present at least within the duration of a longer-term programme makes it possible for the artists to build trust. It then rests on the artists, community members and collaborators to discuss and negotiate expectations surrounding their relationships and time spent together.



Photo credit: 3Pumpkins



Photo credit: The Community Theatre

# SPACES

*When spaces are animated by community needs and aspirations, they become places for community development*

## Space vs Place

- **Space** refers to the **material environment and built structures**
- **Meaning** is attached to a space through the activities and relationships associated to it, transforming it into a **place**

## Spaces designed with openness can become points of convergence for community members

- Creating opportunities which cater to the various demographics within a community can **expose members to interactions outside their social circles**
- **Variety of entry points** for participation creates interactions of varying dynamics
- These opportunities and entry points allow members to **negotiate differences, fostering inclusivity**



**"Incomplete" spaces that invite the community to use or "complete" them allow for community participation and for needs to coalesce**

- Having an "incomplete" space could mean **keeping the use of spaces open**, not predetermining its use, but inviting community members to shape the use of space based on their needs and wants
- Attention must be devoted to the **emotional spaces and informal networks** created

# Insight Three

## Spaces animated by community needs and aspirations become places for community development

“Community is an activity ... communities are defined not only by their physical infrastructure and natural boundaries, but also by the daily activities and actions of the people who live, work and play there. A community can be defined as “a site of collective decision-making maintained by the people who built it, for their own benefit.”<sup>38</sup>”

- Majora Carter

Beyond mere spaces for activities, physical spaces need to be understood as part of a cultural ecology, described as “the creative process of adaptation or adjustment to circumstances such as physical/natural environments and resources as well as adaption to other groups through the use of technology, social grouping, economic organisation, etc.”<sup>39</sup> If culture is to be understood as “the product of the reciprocal interaction between people and a particular environment over time”, the culture of a community must be understood in terms of how people, place and use intersect—who uses which spaces for what purpose.<sup>40</sup>

### 1) Spaces vs Places

Spaces are general, objective locations or areas—they are the material environment and the built structures. Places on the other hand, include both subjective and objective aspects of a location. They are filled with meanings, associations and attachments. Rather than seeing physical spaces as empty, holding areas for activities, they need to be recognised for the meanings people can, and will attach to the space through the activities and

relationships associated with it. While the built design of spaces is important, how activities and interactions are designed within spaces would affect the attachment and memories of the space. When there is an invitation for community members to project their needs, aspirations and self-expression into the space, these spaces can become meaningful and relevant. When that happens, these spaces become places with meaning, history and memories for community development.

It is also important to realise that spaces are dynamic and the meanings and use of the space can change. The invitation for the community to co-create spaces allows community members to articulate their needs and explore collectively how these needs can be met, but also creates the opportunity to develop a sense of ownership and belonging to these community spaces.

### 2) Access to physical spaces enable community needs to surface and for networks to form

“Incomplete” spaces that invite the community to “complete” the spaces based on community needs allow for community participation not only in shaping the use of the space but also allowing for common needs to coalesce. In the case of SCCFSC, Ruth shared that the design of the new SCCFSC space in Lengkok Bahru took into account the needs of the community. She shared that the space was designed to be a “community joint space”. They did not want to create a “very stone-cold-like [space] under the void deck, [that would] take another person’s funeral space”. They consulted the communities in

<sup>38</sup> Springboard for the Arts and Helicon Collaborative, *Creative People Power*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Janet Pillai, *Cultural Mapping: A Guide to Understanding Place, Community and Continuity* (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia : Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2013), 7.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3.

two cycles and heard about various concerns: “... like children said no place to play, mothers said no place to breastfeed, no space for children; children outside neighbours complain, children downstairs also people complain. It’s meant to be an extension of the rental homes so most of the families say they have many children and they have no space so we actually extend our space to be the extension of home so that the children can come here and they can be engaged in activities, board games, play and do whatever they want to do.”

In a country where spaces are rare commodities, acquiring a space like the one SCCFSC did and having the ability to shape it with the community might be difficult. In the absence of permanent spaces, access to temporary spaces is a compromise. Although it would be more challenging for needs and aspirations to get projected unto a physical space with transient uses, meticulous attention paid to the emotional spaces created and intangible networks can help to address needs. In the case of *Curating Whampoa*, the team did not have a permanent space available for the community to co-design more permanent uses. Much of the work rests on the emotional spaces developed—the networks, attitudes and mindset of the participants.

Having a variety of different types of spaces for participation is also important for creating interactions of varying dynamics. The context of LGPO! is interesting because the programme utilised a public space i.e. the playground but focused on the issues and needs that were revealed in that play space. The dynamics and work with community members in public spaces that are very open and used often involve different considerations. Specifically, in public spaces, an artist might work with the pre-existing understanding of the use and meanings of the space. Public spaces are potential sites to address existing norms, establish new rituals and reframe community narratives because of its visibility to everyone in the community. This is seen in the case of LGPO! where the impact extended beyond the participants of the programme per se. The perceptions shifted for the people who could visibly see alternative uses of the space that already had a reputation for vices. As a result of LGPO!, Cynthia shared that mothers began to feel

that the playground can be a safe space for the children to play in. The communal nature of public spaces has the ability of bringing individual needs and aspirations into an interaction with community needs and aspirations.



Photo credit: 3Pumpkins

### **3) When spaces are designed with openness, it can become a point of convergence for diverse community members and a place for community building**

Spaces are brought to life by the people who animate the space. The design of the activities and the impression the space gives determines who shows up. Through careful design, inclusivity can be created in a space to accommodate the diversity that exists there. Creating opportunities to gather, by catering to different demographics in the community can expose members to interactions outside their social circles. LGPO! was designed to be casual, open and inclusive. It was positioned as an organic activity rather than a purpose-driven and extensive programme. This programme eschewed concerted programming, which might bring to mind targeted FSC programmes, and capitalises on a fluid nature of arts approaches. These set-ups are important in shaping the perception of the space. When it is designed with thoughtful considerations such that it is meaningful and appealing to community

members, it creates the potential for a community space where differences can be negotiated, such as the playground becoming a site for children across socio-economic groups to interact, play, negotiate and form relationships.

The Community Theatre also demonstrates how open and safe spaces can allow diverse individuals to gather and build a community together. Youths across the social-economic spectrum—the rental flat communities within a geographical location and youths from elsewhere, usually living in purchased flats are intentionally brought together to collaborate and co-create performances reaching out to the community. An open and equal space is created across difference as all TCT members are called volunteers whilst at the same time, their different backgrounds, identities and experiences are acknowledged and welcomed as part of creating 'brave spaces' and the sharing of stories during TCT sessions. The diverse community within TCT contributes towards their uniqueness, and one of the factors which makes participating in this community meaningful, as seen from the size of the community growing over the years.



*Photo credit: 3Pumpkins*



*TCT's forum theatre piece "One More Light" performed at Lengkok Bahru.  
Photo credit: The Community Theatre.*

# SUSTAINABILITY

*Community development is sustainable when regenerative networks are created and systems can continually be co-created*

Sustainability is associated with the idea of regeneration and continuity. It is also about amassing resources that are “locally generated” or “from within by its members”, indicating that the community needs to have certain capacities to re-create and regenerate.



Sustainable development involves **developing touchpoints** capable of helping the community to **independently generate new networks** or **gather new resources to meet changing needs**

- Knowing how to tap on resources, having the networks and being able to continually amass social capital is critical for community members to be able to manage changing needs

## IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Ability to identify the human assets within the community builds the potential for community organising and collective problem solving
- Serves as a form of empowerment while ensuring the voices of the community are more widely represented
- Encourages independence after the project ends

## COLLABORATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

- Communities exist as ecosystems; the organisational stakeholders are within that orbit
- Collaboration can increase connectivity between community members and these stakeholders
- The perceived neutrality of artists can be leveraged to bridge different community stakeholders and work towards shared goals

Sustainable development involves **inviting community members to continually co-create systems**

- Creates access and indirectly connects people to resources to sustain themselves, and their community
- Developing the civic and creative capacities of communities is critical in enabling the community to continually co-create systems. It also involves inculcating values that enables members to take their own initiative such as agency
- Processes involving co-creation can provide the community with stakes in decision-making and solutioning, allowing them to develop their sense of agency

# Insight Four

Community development is sustainable when regenerative networks are created and systems can continually be co-created

“Community is not one of those things that we have to ‘do’. Community is like a forest—you don’t plant a forest. You safeguard it, and the forest grows on its own. You [have to] cultivate, protect, and safeguard the space.<sup>41</sup>”

- Gerard Ee

Sustainability is one of the key principles often talked about in community development. It is related to other fundamental questions of the role of a community developer or worker, the ethics of engagement and exit, and the ultimate goals of community development: Are community workers members of the community? Should the ultimate goal of community workers be to work themselves out of a job, to be no longer needed in the community? How does one responsibly exit a community?

The idea of sustainability is articulated in Asset-Based Community Development practices which believes that a “thriving community must be supported primarily from within by its members, resources, and capacities, for the present and future”.<sup>42</sup> The idea is similarly articulated by William Cleveland, defining sustainable development as “locally generated economic, social, and cultural development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>43</sup> In these articulations, sustainability is associated with the idea of regeneration and continuity. It is also about amassing resources that are “locally generated” or “from within by its members”, indicating that the community needs to have certain capacities to re-create and regenerate.

## 1) Sustainable development involves developing touchpoints capable of helping the community to independently generate new networks or gather new resources to meet changing needs

Knowing how to tap on resources, having the networks and being able to continually amass social capital is critical for community members to be able to manage changing needs. Some touchpoints that can be considered are identifying community leaders and collaborating with stakeholders.

**Being able to identify the human assets within the community builds the potential for community organising and collective problem solving.** Moreover, appointing leaders within the community serves as a form of empowerment while ensuring the voices of the community are more widely represented. Such efforts could be a way of easing the community towards independence and enabling sustainability after the project ends.

These leaders are also important to help bridge artists to the community’s network and to ensure the representation and inclusion of more community members. This intent is strong in the way that Tsao Foundation envisions the work of *Curating Whampoa*. Thomas explained that “Tsao Foundation wanted to help identify a group of active elders who can be leaders and curators but they can also begin to organise things among themselves”. The vision is one where the community is able to take the initiative to

<sup>41</sup> Stephanie Ho, *Going Beyond Social Services: Safeguarding the Community* (Singapore: Pagesetters Service, 2019), 158.

<sup>42</sup> William Cleveland, “Arts-based Community Development: Mapping the Terrain,” 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

articulate their desires and shape their own narratives. Susana expressed that her wish is “to really make it a living museum where people can visit and then the elderly will be the ones to explain.”

Communities exist as ecosystems in which organisational stakeholders are also part of. For the work to have a lasting impact, **artists should take into consideration the efforts of other stakeholders, and it may be beneficial for artists to seek out collaborations. It is important that artists also recognise their unique position in potentially connecting the stakeholders with the community and with one another where there are weak ties.** This is especially where oftentimes community-based organisations work in silos and focus on a specific demographic or location within a community whereas an artist is more open to incorporating differences and may not be subject to similar organisational limitations. As well, the perceived neutrality of the artist as discussed earlier can be leveraged on to bridge different stakeholders in the community, and work towards shared goals; in the process potentially creating increased networks and access to resources.

Using the example of shared space fostering collaborations, Izzaty articulated how the co-creation of spaces is an opportunity to build a bridge between community stakeholders: “If we had a space, I feel like collaboration with agencies would be very important and I don’t want that space to be owned just by Beyond. I want that space to be owned either by an agency or by the community itself. Then we are able to see that this work is not a Beyond work, it’s a community or collaborative work. [...] When we have more partners on board, they are able to understand the work better and they are able to see the work better.” Having stakeholders in a supportive and collaborative network would contribute towards sustainable practices and therefore, outcomes.

## 2) Sustainable development involves inviting community members to continually co-create systems

*Curating Whampoa* can only be understood as part of a broader strategy of sustainability that aims to get members to not only contend with the systems they are part of, but to also co-create a system of living. Susana explained: “We’re looking at the systems. Why systems? Because we realised that how the system is organised impacts how the older person is able to, or not able to, access those kinds of things that they need in order to live well in the community. So the system has got to make sense for the older person. That system has got to be something that would allow the older person to see themselves as being part of the system. They’re not just a beneficiary of the system, but they’re also actually contributing members of that system because they live in the community.”

According to Thomas, “ageing is an emplaced process”. By involving seniors in *Curating Whampoa*, the seniors are reshaping the narratives of ageing within a locality and being connected and incorporated to the locality’s network, history and resources. It is a work-in-progress and Tsao Foundation has a clear vision of how *Curating Whampoa* fits into their plan to integrate seniors into the design of the system. There is the understanding that getting the community to co-create systems creates access and indirectly connects people to resources to sustain themselves, and their community.



Photo credit: Tsao Foundation

Developing the civic and creative capacities of communities, mentioned previously, is critical in enabling the community to continually co-create systems. It also involves inculcating values that enables members to take their own initiative such as agency. **In particular, processes involving co-creation can provide the community with stakes in decision-making and solutioning, allowing them to develop their sense of agency.** According to Susana, the emphasis on co-creation in *Curating Whampoa* stems from the belief that the elderly are “spokesperson[s] of their own lives”. Being able to reshape the narratives about ageing for themselves is in fact allowing them to reclaim the agency over their lives. Susana explains that in being spokespersons of their own narratives, elderly persons “can be the medium and they can also be the message. And the message is that they are valuable, they are an asset to the community and they are the carriers of the history, so that’s the message by being part of the process.”

**Apart from that, the approach of mutual learning can also create an equalising space that builds a sense of agency through confidence-building.** In *Curating Whampoa*, the designers and curators in the project would share ideas with the seniors while the wisdom of the seniors provided the content. In the way that the seniors were constantly consulted on design decisions and project direction, there was an equalised space of exchange between community members and the creatives on the project, resulting in co-creation efforts and outcomes.

Sustainable development should be taken into consideration in community projects. Regardless of the amount of time one is given to work with a community, paying attention to how the project contributes to these areas of impact can elevate the purpose of the programme. Since the artist may not be in the community indefinitely, being able to consider the ways community systems can be co-created, and how community members and stakeholders are connected with touchpoints in the community can ensure the continued generation of networks, and flow of resources even after the artist leaves.



*Rumah Whampoa roving exhibition in Whampoa showcasing the elders' collections and their stories.*  
Photo credit: Jacelyn Kee.  
Exhibition design: Fellow.



# Community Development Possibilities and Opportunities



There is great value in a cultural approach, and arts-based processes to community development in Singapore, as demonstrated by the cases discussed earlier. Over the years, ArtsWok has had the opportunity to visit two organisations practicing place-based and arts-based work in communities over a long period of time in Minneapolis, USA and Tokyo, Japan. The organisations, Pillsbury House + Theatre and Toride Art Project respectively provide particularly inspiring models on what arts-based community development led by independent arts organisations who are embedded in communities can look like.

## Pillsbury House + Theatre (PH+T)



Artists and community members gather for “Arts on Chicago”, an event on Chicago Ave where performances and activities take place on the porches and lawns of residences, and on the street, in the neighbourhood PH+T is located.  
Photo credit: ArtsWok Collaborative

Pillsbury House + Theatre (PH+T) located in Minneapolis in the United States of America first began separately as a non-profit theatre and social service agency that resided in the same building that became unified as a single organisation. From 2008, 2 Co-Artistic Directors, Faye Price and Noël Raymond were hired and placed in charge of developing a unified operation. The integration of arts and social services was arts-led and began first from organisational culture and practices. Their case example demonstrates the possibilities of a full integration of arts and community services that is centre-based and placed-based. They offer a full range of services from family services, community health services to creative placemaking and more. Arts-approaches are integrated into the practices within those domains. As an organisation,

it sees arts as a means “for people to get out of poverty. [Their] viewpoint was that you needed to provide social services, education, and community organizing, and you also had to inspire people—that’s where theatre fit.”<sup>44</sup> Led by Artistic Directors, PH+T offers a reference for the way artistic leadership is at the centre of integrating the arts with social services, for community development outcomes.

## Toride Art Project (TAP)

Toride Art Project (TAP) is the other example that left a deep imprint. Unlike PH+T, TAP began with the organisation of an arts festival in the suburban city of Toride. It was supported by the Tokyo University of the Arts (TUA) and eventually TAP developed into a non-profit arts organisation rooted within Toride. TAP is first of all an arts organisation, and approach the engagement and art-making in the community first as artists and creatives. While they acknowledge that their work is about developing social relations, they do not



Participants of Sun Self Hotel.  
Photo credit: Ito Yuji, © Toride Art Project

<sup>44</sup> Nancy Fushan, *Arts Integration as Pathway to Unity in the Community: The (Ongoing) Journey of Pillsbury House + Theatre* (2014), 9, <https://pillsburyhouseandtheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/arts-integration-report-2014-interactive.pdf>

profess to be doing community development; nevertheless, many outcomes of the art projects that transpired (over ten years and counting) yield community building, and in some cases, development outcomes. As an example, it illustrates the potential and value of a cultural and arts-led approach to the long-term work in communities. The connection and support of TUA has also been key to the success of TAP with the provision of resources and expertise—it provides access and action-learning for students who are aspiring artists or arts managers but also grants the organisation more institutional weight in establishing their relationship with the municipality, which further provides resources for the work in terms of human (including a dedicated staff from the municipality to work with TAP) and financial resources, as well as access to space.



*A participatory activity during the opening of one of TAP's community spaces, Viva. Members of the public were invited to create structures to imagine Toride City in the next 50 years.*  
Photo credit: ArtsWok Collaborative

Pillsbury House + Theatre and Toride Art Project are references and sketches of what arts-based approaches to community development can look like when culture leads and is given the space. They have demonstrated that arts and cultural approaches can stand on their own and lead the way; doing more than simply playing a supplementary role in community development as is the case in Singapore. At PH+T, the work is arts-led, not a collaboration but an integration of approaches and services. They believe for example, that for people to get out of poverty, imagination is part of the equation, not just a bonus to have. On the other hand, TAP yields community development outcomes even though the focus is on art-making with communities that recognises their agency, creativity and abilities to co-create. It is also enabled by their embeddedness, commitment and rootedness to a particular community.

What is clear is that having the legitimacy, space and access to sufficient resources is paramount if one believes that the arts has its inimitable role in communities. What is significant about TAP is the role the university plays in supporting the work through networks and bolstering its legitimacy. PH+T enjoys long-standing philanthropic support and a tradition and history of community work and services that spans more than a hundred years. While building groundswell support for the arts in community development may take time, it is equally important that arts practitioners recognise and articulate their own unique value in building communities and shaping culture.

Based on the insights and case examples both locally and overseas, we have identified several opportunities for further developing arts approaches in the community:

## A. Deepen the integration of cultural approaches in community

### 1 A call for artists to work within their own residential communities

- Being embedded by virtue of residing in the neighbourhood, it is easier for artists to understand the local networks and identify gaps or potentialities within their own community.
- Artists can leverage on their 'neutrality' and seek collaborations with local stakeholders from any sector—social, community or health, including businesses within the community, also taking note of ways to bridge the resources afforded by these different stakeholders.
- There can be more creativity and imagination in the type of activities and the type of spaces for community engagement and artmaking. These spaces can be public spaces with purpose-built uses, like the playground in the case of LGPO!, or spaces that are “incomplete” such as void deck spaces, to private or semi-private spaces such as within the premises of community organisations, or the Community Centre for example. There have also been examples of community-based arts projects that have taken place in residents' homes.
- There is an increased likelihood of community development outcomes over time if the artist is able to sustain their work with communities, especially since the artist is part of that community. The contribution of the artist to co-creating the culture and aesthetic sensibilities of a particular community would be impactful, and could result in more open, connected and collaborative communities



*Roy Payamal was invited to LGPO! at Toa Payoh to perform.  
Photo credit: 3Pumpkins*

### 2 Opening up the space for the arts to lead in collaborations between arts and other sectors

- Collaborators need to acknowledge the intrinsic value of arts and cultural approaches and be willing to cede power to the artist to shape and direct initiatives that may be unfamiliar. The time needs to be taken to understand arts-based processes, accept a certain degree of risks that may be involved with lesser known approaches, be committed to communicate frequently with one another, and collectively find and agree on appropriate evaluation measures of what constitutes success.
  - It is also critical to recognise that these approaches are intrinsic to artists working with communities. The arts comprise various disciplines, and artists are able to do what they do because of competencies and skillsets honed through training and experience.
- Artists need to be aware of the ecosystem of the community they intend to work in and understand the potential, and impact of their work and to practice ethically. When collaborating with community organisations, to also understand the disciplines collaborators are located within and how this might

impact the way their work is perceived and valued. Understanding where the overlaps or differences lie can enable better communication, and allow artists to bridge the gap in knowledge.

- In the model of collaboration between SCCFSC and 3Pumpkins, recognising and understanding how artists are distinct from social workers is crucial because that might be a source of friction in such collaborative models.
- Working with civic groups is another area of opportunity. Given the importance of the arts in shaping culture and the potential of arts processes in nurturing civic competencies, artists can seek out opportunities and consider ways to bring arts processes to the work of civic groups.
- For the arts to play an increased leading role in community development, access to resources and support for this work needs to develop in tandem—spaces to practice longer-term, financial resources for programmes, as well as human resources. The models demonstrated by PH+T and TAP are examples of what is possible. One can also imagine an organisation like BSS hiring more full-time artists and placing them in leadership roles. It is unfortunate however, that there are no other community-based organisations that fully adopt BSS' methodology towards community development.

## B. Promote community-engaged arts practices within education institutions and pro-active building of networks between arts practitioners and communities

1) Educational institutions can play an important role in connecting resources and ensuring its steady flow into communities. More academic programmes related to community-engaged arts practices, which weave practice components within the curriculum and connect artists with a wider network of community stakeholders are needed



*Tangible Companions—a collaboration between SOTA students and the Whampoa elders. A portrait of Mr. Basri bin Lorban and his late wife made with dust collected from his Whampoa flat. Photo credit: David Gan. Title: To Dust We Return. Artist: Lim Zeherng. Medium: Dust on paper.*

- TAP's inroad into the community hinged on TUA's legitimacy as an arts institution and their longstanding relationship with municipalities. Tokyo University of the Arts also has a specific programme dedicated to community-engaged arts practices and provide students with the opportunity to learn while practicing, with accompanying supervision. This also ensures a steady provision of practitioners for the arts programmes in Toride. Moreover, TAP also engages professional artists, and provides them with access to communities. Students from TUA also benefit from working with professional artists.
- The collaboration of *Curating Whampoa* with School of the Arts, and *Seeing the Obvious* (3Pumpkins) with Nanyang Polytechnic students are important for learning and exposure for the students. It also creates opportunities for networks to be built. Collaborations such as these are present in other communities and educational institutions as well. However, they are often ad-hoc, short-term and without a longer-term commitment or investment of resources to contribute towards the development of those communities.

# Conclusion



“ How do we begin to craft very carefully with people and with the things you have, in order to fulfil certain intentions? The intention, in hindsight [describing a previous project with a residential community in Japan] was about designing positive energies. It kind of broadened up what an architect or designer does, and same thing for an artist as well... 意匠 ('yi jiang') is interesting because 'yi' is, I believe, is intention [and] meaning. Also a craftsman of meaning—how do you begin to give meaningful hope and ideas to the community? ”

- Thomas K. Kong

Culture is indispensable to being alive, and the arts is both the medium and outputs of cultural expression. In a dramatically changing world, there is a need to relook at the values that we hold and the gaps in the social fabric. These are usually already played out in the geographical communities we exist in. We tend to see social issues as “unitary and definitive”—racism, sexism and so on.<sup>45</sup> However, issues interact, “reinforcing or contradicting one another” and result in particular social conditions that can be understood through culture—for instance, the idea that some groups are worthier than others is rooted in culture.<sup>46</sup>

Culture cannot be dictated or directed from top-down. It needs to be co-created at the local level. Only when individual and community needs, values and aspirations are understood and respected, can there be collaborations with, and within communities that can bring about resilient communities. The latter involve community members actively working together, providing support to each other, bridging across difference, and being civically engaged—believing one has the agency and responsibility to contribute to one's community. Artists wield the tools that impact culture, and can facilitate the formation, and expression of values and behaviours, seen in the ways community members relate, communicate and collaborate. This potential, for the arts to contribute towards community development has yet to be fully realised here.

Yet, there is an urgency for more bold approaches to addressing social needs, gaps and tensions, where society here and globally will get even more complex because of economic, environmental and technological changes already at our doorstep. The solidarity that is much discussed now during the pandemic as necessary and crucial, is part and parcel of the work of community development—artists and creatives need to step up to engender societal change, much as society and those in positions of power in various sectors need to acknowledge, trust, support and promote the legitimacy and unique value that artists bring to society.

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<sup>45</sup> Adams and Arlene Goldbard, *Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



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# Annex

# Annex A: A Note About Terms

When describing community-based arts, there are many different terms, each with their particular associations and meanings.

Terms	Description
Socially-engaged Art	<p>The term is situated in the art historical tradition of conceptual process art.<sup>47</sup> According to Helguera,<sup>48</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socially-engaged art is “a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art, and its state may be permanently unresolved.”</li> <li>• “Social interaction is also a key feature of any socially-engaged artwork.”</li> <li>• It “depends on action—not imagined or hypothetical—social action.” In other words, the work created is one that seeks to affect the public sphere meaningfully, and is not merely representative.</li> </ul>
Community Arts	<p>Community arts is a term that is common in Britain and Anglophone countries. Owen Kelly, who has documented the history of community arts in a book, considers it as a platform to effect social change, affect social policies and which encompasses the expression of political action. A useful definition situated in the context of Singapore is to regard community arts as “art that fulfils some of the criteria of being <i>in</i> the community, <i>about</i> the community, <i>for</i> the community and <i>by</i> the community.”<sup>49</sup></p>
Community Cultural Development	<p>It is worth highlighting a term used by Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard<sup>50</sup> in the context of Australia. The characteristics are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community, to distinguish it from one-to-many arts activity and to acknowledge its participatory nature, which emphasizes collaborations between artists and other community members</li> <li>• Cultural, to indicate the generous concept of culture (rather than, more narrowly, arts) and the broad range of tools and forms in use in the field</li> <li>• Development, to suggest the dynamic nature of cultural action, with its ambitions of conscientization and empowerment and to link it to other enlightened community-development</li> </ul>

“Community arts” has a broad definition and can refer to arts practices either *about* the community or situated *in* the community, involving varying degrees of participation *by* the community, and with different outcomes *for* the community. One might even add that, it can also be *with* the community, depending on the mode of engagement. Socially-engaged arts,<sup>51</sup> on the other hand, has an art historical tradition of conceptual art practices. A related term that artists might use is “relational aesthetics” which is defined by Bourriaud as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point

<sup>47</sup> Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Justin Lee and Jui Liang Sim, “Arts-Based Community Engagement in Singapore: Success Stories, Challenges, and the Way Forward” in *Handbook of Research on the Facilitation of Civic Engagement through Community Art (2017)*, 396.

<sup>50</sup> Adams and Arlene Goldbard, *Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> This is a term that is used by a collective Brack. For more information about their work, visit [brack.sg](http://brack.sg).

of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space”.<sup>52</sup>

The term “community cultural development” is useful to bear in mind as a reference to work in communities through the arts understood more broadly through culture. It embeds the arts within culture and posits the outcomes of the arts within culture. In the context of Singapore, the use of the term “cultural” however, might call to mind associations with traditional, ethnic cultures when it is actually being used in the broadest sense of the term.

As for the specific use of the term “community development”, some background on the use of the term in Singapore is necessary. Community development has a history of being state-supported. The People’s Association (PA) was established to “coordinate community centres”<sup>53</sup> and also oversees other grassroots organisations like the Citizen Consultative Committees and the Residential Committees (RCs), which help to promote neighbourliness and strengthen communal relations.<sup>54</sup> Community Development Councils (CDC) were also set up to “build a tightly-knit, compassionate and self-reliant community in Singapore”.<sup>55</sup> While the style of work has shifted from centralised, centre-based approaches resulting in passive participation, towards more engaging, participatory approaches towards building community ties, the programmes tend to revolve around “social activities or run task-oriented programmes”.<sup>56</sup> It seems that state-run organisations are limited in encouraging civic participation, community organising or the co-creation of solutions. The optics of being attuned to objectives of the government, coupled with the task-oriented mode of operation mean that programmes might be more directed, and may not embed community development goals where “people can organise themselves to develop long-term strategies for problem solving” as in other definitions of community development.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from state visions of community development, definitions on the ground differ from organisation to organisation. Community development in some cases can be understood as community work in social work parlance—where the approach “is a belief that people acting together have a great capacity to improve their own circumstances”.<sup>58</sup> Community development could be about “empowering people with the skills they need to effect change within their communities”.<sup>59</sup> Beyond Social Services, who champions an asset-based community development approach, sees itself “as a conduit to external resources and support, and a focal point for community dialogue”.<sup>60</sup> Definitions can also differ based on whether “community” is limited to a geographical area—interest-based communities, for instance, would require different approaches towards community development.

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<sup>52</sup> “Relational Aesthetics”, Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/relational-aesthetics>

<sup>53</sup> Lee and Sim, “Arts-Based Community Development in Singapore”, 399.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>55</sup> “History and Milestones”, Community Development Council, retrieved on 7 September 2020 from <https://www.cdc.org.sg/about-cdc/history-and-milestones>.

<sup>56</sup> Xian Jie Chan, “From ‘Homeless’ to Survivalist: A Journey in Community Organising” in *Community Development Arenas in Singapore*, ed. S Vasoo, Bilveer Singh and Xian Jie Chan (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2019), 161.

<sup>57</sup> Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Community Organising and Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1992) cited in “Neighbours Programme: A Community Work Approach to Integrate Health and Social Services for Acute Care Hospital Patients.” in *Community Development Arenas in Singapore*, edited by S Vasoo, Bilveer Singh and Xian Jie Chan. New Jersey: World Scientific, 2019, 56

<sup>58</sup> Goh, Mahmood and Shum, “Neighbours Programme” in *Community Development Arenas in Singapore*, ed. S Vasoo, Bilveer Singh and Xian Jie Chan (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2019), 55

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>60</sup> Lee, Lim, Sim, Zainuddin and Dhevarajan, “Nurturing Villages & Safeguarding Communities: A Case Study of Beyond Social Services”, 5.

# Annex B

## About Pillsbury House + Theatre

- Originated as a settlement house built by Charles Pillsbury in 1905 as a community resource centre with a health clinic, women's employment centre, youth clubs and art classes
- Aims to co-create change that inspires enduring change towards a just society
- Pillsbury House Neighbourhood Center (PHNC) opened in Chicago Avenue in 1980 and is part of Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) which is a network of 5 community centres, 70+ programmes and 8 business ventures in the Twin Cities. Features a deep integration of social service provisions including: family stabilisation, community health, food accessibility, education, career and future readiness
- Pillsbury House Theatre was founded in 1992 as a professional arts institution and human service agency
- Key programmes of the theatre:
  - ▶ *Chicago Avenue Project*
    - Brings local youth together with adult playwrights, actors, and directors to create and produce original plays
    - The youth co-create two performances a year with their adult mentors
  - ▶ *Breaking Ice*
    - A form of diversity training that strives for courageous and productive dialogue around issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace
    - Performances blend drama, music, poetry, movement and humor to explore issues of inequity and biases in the workplace
    - Each performance is accompanied by a post-show discussion lead by facilitators
- Integration of Pillsbury House Neighborhood Centre and Pillsbury House Theatre occurred in 2008<sup>61</sup> when PUC handed over the leadership of Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center (PHNC) to Faye Price and Noël Raymond, co-artistic directors of Pillsbury House Theatre. Under their leadership, they began a process of integrating arts with all of the Center's services.

The most distinctive feature of PH+T is its deep integration of arts alongside all other social services it

provides. This feature stems from the organisation's core belief that "cultural programming was an essential complement to social services in assisting individuals to build their capacity for civic engagement by enhancing self-expression and creativity."<sup>62</sup> An example of this arts infusion may be seen in PH+T's Resident Teaching Artist (RTA) model in which artists work alongside staff from education, youth development and human services departments. Through this, children are exposed to regular artistic experiences from a young age, which is crucial to their development of crucial skills such as empathy, creativity and collaborative problem-solving. This partnership not only allows for educational benefits for the children, it also allows both kinds of educators to learn from each other and their different methods.

PH+T also believes in the potential of "highly networked cultural assets" and its strengths in community development and capacity building. They seek to build networks that connect diverse individuals with each other and with the resources present in the community. As a result, PH+T began viewing itself as a "web" rather than a "hub" as a web more accurately represented their collaborative, inter-related and outreach-based processes. These processes are also principled by inclusivity and the accessibility of spaces is ensured, so that they successfully serve as points of convergence for the various demographics within the community. For instance, PH+T's community-rooted theatre has been praised for the diversity of its audience members, and the intimate and participatory setting it created.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the theatre implemented a "Pay What You Can" policy for a production policy which increased its audience size by 86% and has begun to tackle accessibility issues strategically to become a more welcoming venue for the disabled.<sup>64</sup> Thus, PH+T functions as a highly networked web of cultural assets through the variety of resources it provides to the community, as well as the inter-community interactions it fosters through the arts.

#### References and Further Reading:

Pillsbury House + Theatre, <https://pillsburyhouseandtheatre.org/>

Nancy Fushan, *Arts Integration as Pathway to Unity in the Community: The (Ongoing) Journey of Pillsbury House + Theatre* (2014), <https://pillsburyhouseandtheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/arts-integration-report-2014-interactive.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Nancy Fushan, *Arts Integration as Pathway to Unity in the Community: The (Ongoing) Journey of Pillsbury House + Theatre* (2014), 4, <https://pillsburyhouseandtheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/arts-integration-report-2014-interactive.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

# Annex C

## About Toride Art Project

- Founded in 1999 by by artist and professor Mr Watanabe Yoshiaki, with other artists who taught alongside him at the Inter-Media Arts department of Tokyo University of the Arts (TUA), members of the Toride City Office and some Toride residents
- Aims to develop Toride as a cultural city by supporting young artists in their practice and disseminating their work, as well as providing residents with various opportunities to interact with art
- Organised arts festivals which focused on attracting people from all over Japan to Toride to see temporary public artworks or art studios of local artists until 2009
- Toride Art Project is a separate and independent organisation from the University but has a close relationship with TUA
- After 2009, the direction of TAP changed, and features these core projects:
  - ▶ Art in Danchi
    - A social, experimental art project organised in apartment complexes
    - Aims to investigate how the local community could be changed through arts-based communication, and how relationships could be formed through art processes over time
    - The project consists of 3 sub-projects which operate daily including a cafe, a skills bank for residents to “trade” skills, and a collection of wall murals
  - ▶ Hanno-Hangei
    - Directed by Iwama Satoshi to find a way of living for the future by thinking and acting communally, on the ground and in nature
    - Aims to invoke inquiry into how to live, and how to handle living in nature, such as dealing with soil, plants, food, etc
    - Occupies 2 spaces: Takasu House, a building used for artist studios, exhibitions, workshops, and a yearly agricultural festival, and Geidai Shokudo consisting of a canteen and a gallery for art exhibitions

involved. Professors from Tokyo University of the Arts (TUA) work closely with TAP to shape the direction of projects. This enables TAP to leverage on the relationships and infrastructure that TUA has established within the community to open up more opportunities for deeper work. These opportunities took the form of available spaces, grants and the expertise of the academics. One of the sites of TAP, Geidai Shokudo, is also a university campus.

While the staff of TAP provide direction for the organisation, community members are given many opportunities to play active roles in conceptualising these projects. During TAP’s open meetings, which involve committee members and community members or citizen volunteers as they are called, the citizens are encouraged to provide their input on ideas and plans for future programmes. Due to this, citizens experience a strong sense of ownership over these projects and have even been given complete ownership over certain ones. The relationships on which TAP is founded are built on trust: the city council first recognised TAP as a legitimate organisation due to the fact that it was led by professionals from the university; community members believe that what the management and artists have at heart is their best interest; and the management trusts members with ownership over projects. The close relationship of the municipality and TAP is evident in their dedication of a staff within the municipality who works with TAP. Thus, TAP exemplifies the value of partnerships with academic institutions, and more saliently, the importance of building relationships and collaboration among various stakeholders in the community.

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Toride Art Project. <https://toride-ap.gr.jp/>

An essential part of TAP is the collaborative nature of its processes, and the diversity of stakeholders

# Annex D

## About ArtsWok Collaborative



The work of ArtsWok Collaborative focuses on arts connecting communities by harnessing the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference.

ArtsWok Collaborative works with multidisciplinary teams to design and implement innovative community-based arts programmes such as *BOTH SIDES, NOW*, an immersive arts experience that invites conversations about end-of-life issues, as well as *IPS Prism*, a civic-engagement piece which looked at governance in Singapore. In 2015, it launched the inaugural annual youth theatre festival *M1 Peer Pleasure*, a platform for creative and open exchanges with young people through drama and dialogue. It developed and continues to facilitate *The Greenhouse Series*, a field-building initiative that catalyses learning through a community of practice and action-learning lab. It also conducts and shares research that builds legitimacy for the field of arts-based community development. Our articles as well as case studies can be found on our website.

ArtsWok Collaborative Limited is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant 2018-2020.  
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