

# GUIDE

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FOR  
**BUILDING A  
SUCCESSFUL ARTS  
AND CULTURE  
ECOLOGY:**

EVALUATION, SELECTION AND  
ACTIVATION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD  
SPACES FOR COMMUNITY ARTS  
AND PLACEMAKING

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**ZDRAVKO TRIVIC  
NINA MASCARENHAS  
DUONG QUYEN  
BENG KIANG TAN  
RITA PADAWANGI**

FOR  
**THE NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL, SINGAPORE**

**2018**



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Zdravko Trivic, Nina Mascarenhas, Duong Quyen,  
Beng Kiang Tan & Rita Padawangi

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ECOLOGY: EVALUATION, SELECTION AND ACTIVATION OF  
NEIGHBOURHOOD SPACES FOR COMMUNITY ARTS AND  
PLACEMAKING

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Tan & Rita Padawangi  
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Centre for Sustainable Asian Cities (CSAC)  
School of Design and Environment  
National University of Singapore

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All quotes presented are taken from the focus group discussions or interviews with local artists and art event organisers and paraphrased for the purpose of this Guide, with the written consent obtained from each participant.

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# INTRODUCTION: GUIDE OVERVIEW

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# WHAT IS THIS GUIDE?

This **Guide to Arts and Culture Ecology** aims to **support the establishment and growth of community arts right where communities live, work and play**. It was developed in the context of “**Arts and Culture Nodes**” initiative, launched by the National Arts Council's in 2012. This initiative establishes a comprehensive **island-wide network of arts touch-points within the local neighbourhoods** to provide all residents with greater access to quality arts, bring vibrancy and stronger identity to neighbourhood public spaces, and increase opportunities for community participation and bonding through arts.

Such touch-points go beyond formal arts venues (typically found in the city centre) and involve partnerships with various neighbourhood institutions, such as community centres, libraries, recreational clubs, corporate and non-profit organisations. Current arts and culture nodes include:

#### Libraries

- Woodlands Regional Library
- Jurong Regional Library
- Tampines Regional Library

#### SAFRA Recreational Clubs

- SAFRA Jurong
- SAFRA Mount Faber
- SAFRA Punggol
- SAFRA Toa Payoh

#### Non-profit and Corporate Organisations

- My Community
- Mapletree Business City
- Asia Square
- Participate in Design

#### Community Clubs and Centres

- Bedok Community Centre
- Kallang Community Club
- Our Tampines Hub
- Pasir Ris Elias Community Club
- Siglap South Community Centre
- Taman Jurong Community Club

Each of these nodes offers a variety of arts programmes and brings unique flavor to the arts scene in the heartlands.

The content presented in this Guide represents the synthesis of a study conducted at Bedok Town Square and the following arts and culture nodes: Woodlands Regional Library, Kallang CC, SAFRA Jurong, and My Community (Queenstown). Accordingly, most of the visual references used for this Guide come from arts events held at these nodes and spaces in their respective neighbourhoods.



# WHAT IS THIS GUIDE?

Whilst framed in the context of the National Arts Council's "Arts and Culture Nodes" initiative, this Guide offers steps, tools and strategies for anyone keen to build a strong ecology of arts and culture spaces, programmes and communities and boost vibrant public life and creative activities in the neighbourhood.

The overarching aim of this Guide is to:

## SUPPORT GROWTH OF ARTS AND CULTURE ECOLOGY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

### CHOOSE SUITABLE ARTS VENUES

- Present a step-by-step framework to **identify and evaluate spatial opportunities** in the neighbourhood and **choose the most suitable formal and informal venues** for community arts and culture activities

### ACTIVATE PUBLIC SPACE

- Articulate **strategies to activate public space through arts**

### ENGAGE AND BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY

- Suggest ways in which arts and space can **actively engage the community** and trigger positive social impact

"Nadine & The Enchanting Pots" by Sweet Tooth (Cake Theatrical Productions), performed at the plaza outside Boon Keng MRT station Exit B, as part of Kallang ArtsTreats Festival, organised by Kallang CC.



# WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

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## 1 - Community arts organisers

to understand the spatial capacities of their neighbourhoods within and beyond their own premises and choose the most appropriate spaces (and collaborators) for their arts and culture activities.

## 2 - Agencies and policy makers

who want to consider informal venues for the arts and/or identify potential partners in heartland neighbourhoods.

## 3 - Artists

to understand how their arts practices might best synergise with the spaces, people and activities in a neighbourhood.

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Taiko drumming workshop at the Woodlands Regional Library Auditorium



# WHY THIS GUIDE?

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Heartland neighbourhoods provide valuable spatial and human resources for arts and culture. These opportunities are, however, often untapped.

Good overall quality of space is essential for optional and social activities such as arts and culture events.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, careful selection of spaces in the neighbourhood and understanding the ways local communities use them are critical.

This guide offers a **systematic approach to evaluate key spatial conditions and users' activities** in the neighbourhood and eases the process of **choosing conducive settings for community arts and culture programmes**.

**Creative placemaking** and **arts and culture ecology** are the underlying concepts of this Guide.

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<sup>1</sup> See Gehl (1987).

# WHY THIS GUIDE?

## CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Creative placemaking is defined as a **process of bringing positive impacts to the community through a symbiotic relationship between arts, space and people.**<sup>1</sup> Creative placemaking may or may not involve permanent physical changes to neighbourhood spaces, but it always involves enhancing the **sense of belonging and attachment to the neighbourhood and community.**<sup>2</sup>

The sustained arts practice and active involvement of community members in arts and culture activities are the primary ways to achieve creative placemaking. Participation in the processes of spectating, creative learning, practicing, co-creating and performing as well as organising arts and culture events and activities in the neighbourhood has the capacity to build **stronger social bonds** amongst different members of the community. This may include artists and art interest groups, event organisers and volunteers, along with the rest of the community.

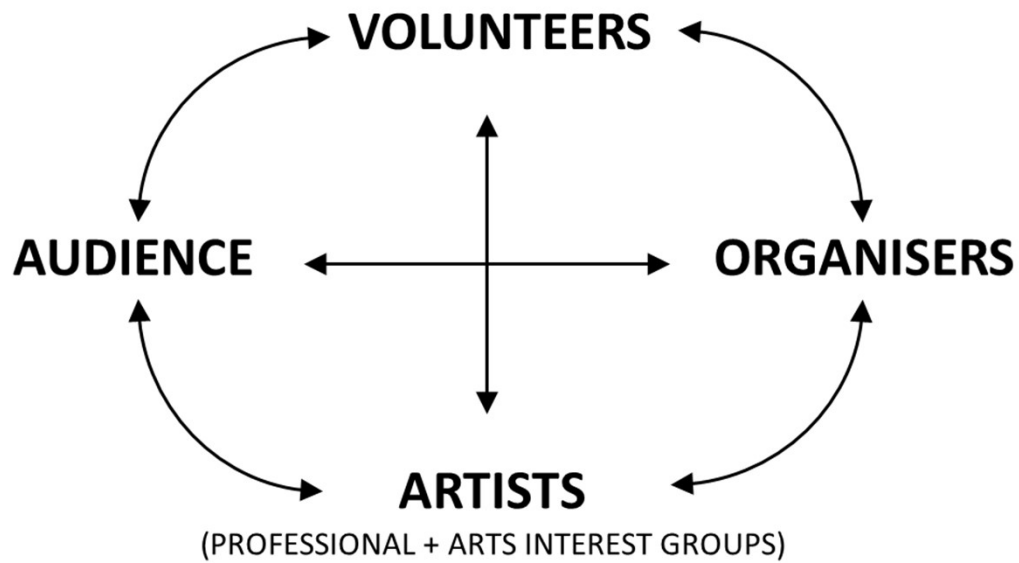


Creative placemaking diagram

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. Jacobs (1961), Montgomery (1998), PPS (2016), Silberg et al. (2013), Whyte (1980).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. Artscape (2016), Markusen and Gadwa (2010), PPS, (2013).

The network of bonds built up between all stakeholders involved in the practice of arts and culture in the community



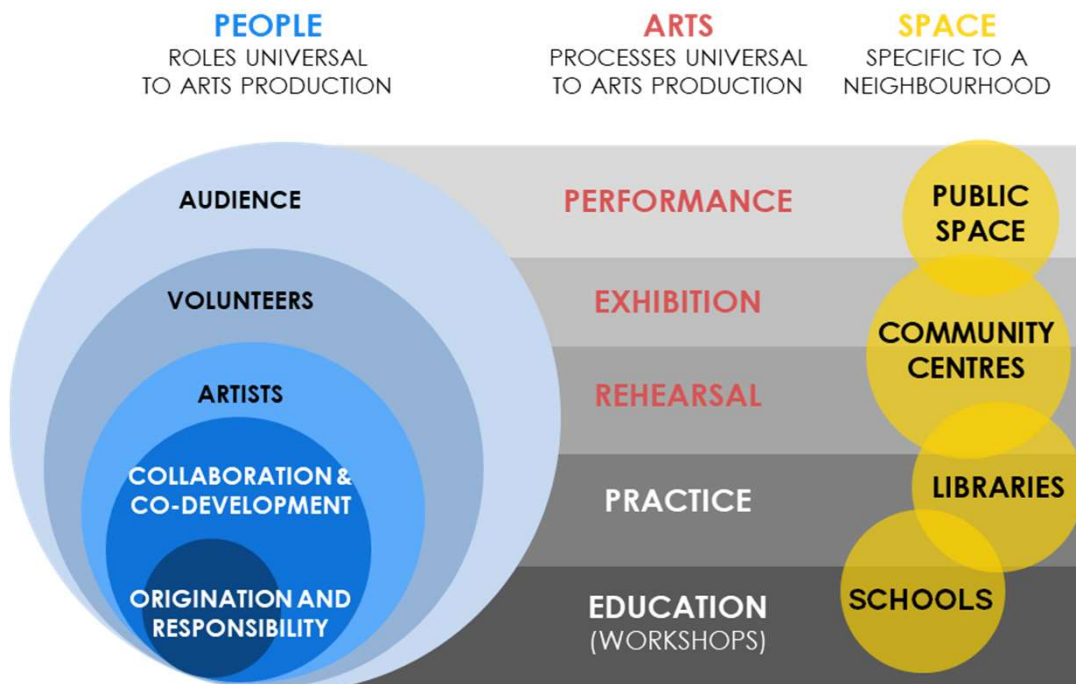
Launch of This Is Home x BrackMag at Tanglin Halt Community Plaza, as part of Arts@My Queenstown, organised by My Community

# WHY THIS GUIDE?

## ARTS AND CULTURE ECOLOGY

Neighbourhood arts and culture ecology refers to a **comprehensive network of physical infrastructure (space), people and organisations** established to support the regular creation, practice, performance and exhibition of the arts. It offers a useful means to leverage on the symbiotic clustering of creative resources and activities within the neighbourhood.<sup>1</sup> Such clustering provides a range of concentrated and complementary points of intersections for face-to-face interaction, networking, cultural and social exchange among various stakeholders.

The diagram below summarises the key elements of a neighbourhood arts and culture ecology. There are numerous possibilities for intersections between stakeholders, arts processes and spaces.



Key elements of neighbourhood arts and culture ecology

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. Artscape (2016), Stern (2014).

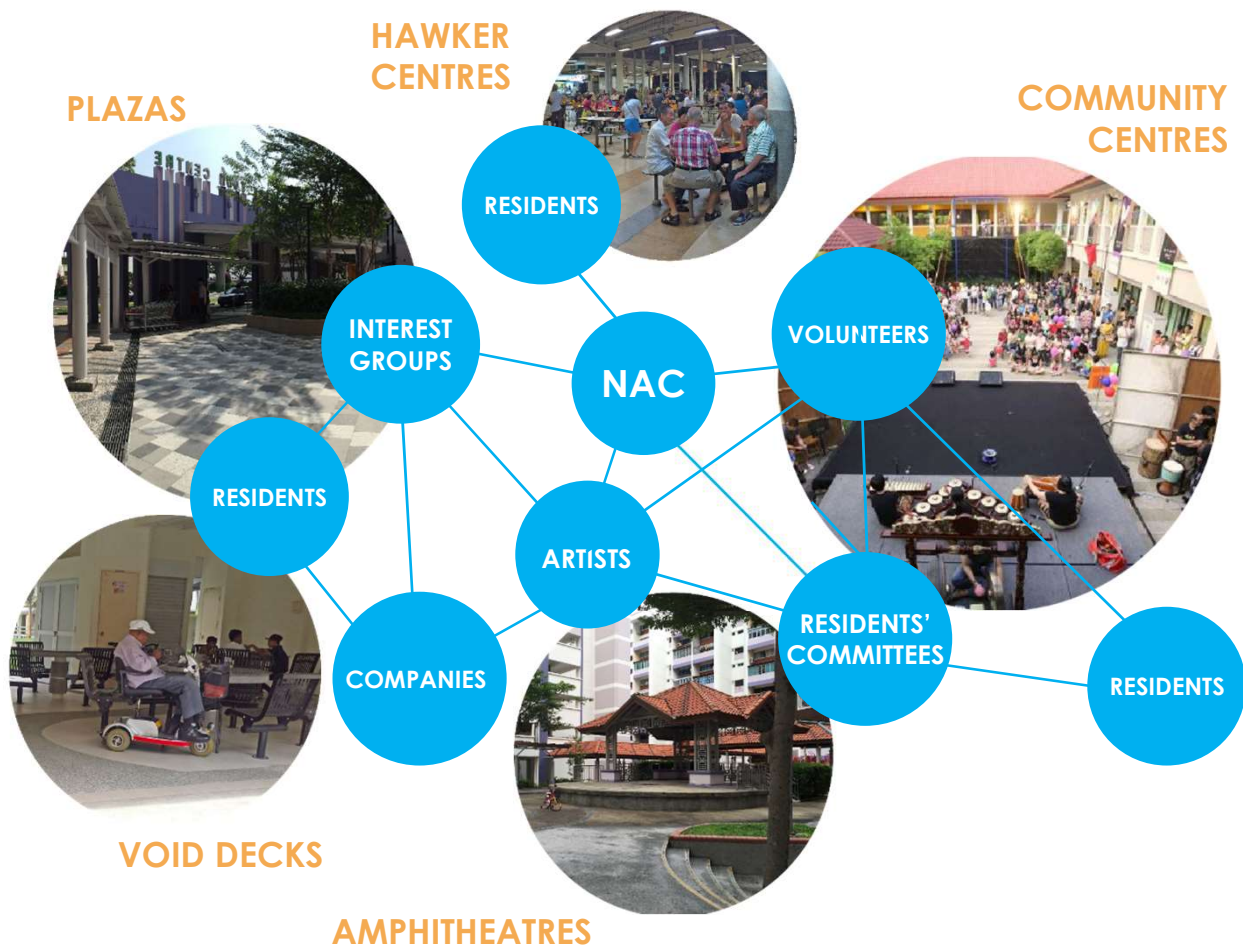


# WHY THIS GUIDE?

## ARTS AND CULTURE ECOLOGY

With space, people and the arts as the main components, this Guide develops strategies for establishing successful community arts and culture initiatives and networks in the neighbourhood, framed by the following key questions:

- **WHAT CAN SPACE DO FOR THE ARTS?**
- **WHAT CAN ARTS DO FOR THE SPACE?**
- **WHAT CAN ARTS AND SPACE DO FOR THE COMMUNITY? & VICE VERSA, WHAT CAN COMMUNITY DO FOR THE ARTS?**



Identifying potentials of neighbourhood arts and culture ecology – an example of possible people-space networks

# WHY THIS GUIDE?

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The Guide enables users to:

- **Understand key (spatial and human) assets and uncover** indoor and outdoor spatial opportunities for community arts initiatives in the neighbourhood.
  - **Shortlist, evaluate and select the most suitable spaces** in the neighbourhood as formal and informal venues for community arts in a systematic manner, based on key criteria for good public space and suitability for arts and culture events and activities that consider specific properties and requirements of different programmes.
  - **Identify and employ strategies for activating spaces and engaging community** through arts, considering specific types and requirements of arts programmes, target audiences and adjacent uses.
  - **Gain insights** about how to initiate and sustain community arts in the neighbourhood through the principles of creative placemaking and arts and culture ecology.
  - **Strengthen the existing** arts and culture nodes and partnerships, and help in the initial stage of identifying and **establishing potential new** nodes.
-