

SUMMARY OF KAMPONG JAVA FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

There was broad consensus with the proposed vision for Kampong Java as a:

1. *Sandbox*: Broadly defined as a space for experimentation and incubation of works, where a process-driven ethos is valued over a product-driven mindset.
2. *Multi-disciplinary venue*: Where artists from different art forms have opportunities to work together.
3. *Grounds-up initiative*: Accessible and affordable space for artists by artists.

The following summary captures highlights of thoughts and ideas raised in the focus group discussions, and covers four areas – Workspace & Infrastructure, Tenant Mix & Programming, Rental & Affordability, and Operating Model.

Workspace & Infrastructure

Given that the space is meant to be a sandbox, it should have flexible operating hours as it was shared that many artists create their best works in the early hours of the morning. Rather than limiting the space to just the tenants, it was suggested that co-working spaces could be incorporated, where artists/arts workers can pay a small fee to use these co-working spaces periodically.

To better facilitate knowledge sharing and networking, the idea of a common library was well received, where tenants could also gather and interact. Many also preferred the current fences to be removed so that the front porches of each unit form a contiguous open space. There were further suggestions for the space to exude an instant creative vibe, e.g. through wall graffiti, so that the public is aware that Kampong Java is an arts space.

Tenant Mix & Programming

Many felt that Kampong Java should be host to multi-disciplines and be inclusive and diverse. It should not be for artists who prefer to work in silo. There must be interaction for inspiration to come about and collaborations to take place. The general consensus was for Kampong Java to have artists of all ages as intergenerational exchanges are important in the art-making journey.

A genuine effort should be placed on showcasing presentations by communities of various age groups and demographics, disability arts, and programmes that draw from Kampong Java's surrounding neighbourhoods. Many were excited by the potential of the space for experimentation and the presentations of works-in-progress, as such incubated showings are helpful for artists to test-bed ideas with an audience.

A widely shared view was for the space to host International Residencies to create dialogue between Singapore and international artists through a cross-pollination of ideas and experiences. The International Residency programmes would be for incubation purposes with the intention of Kampong Java site-specific works.

There were also suggestions for a Producer-cum-Arts Manager to plan for programmes which involve all the tenants as well as the diverse communities in its surrounding neighbourhood as these programmes would enhance the vibrancy of the space.

Rental & Affordability

Rental affordability was a concern with almost all the participants. Urging for affordable rental, some suggested for it to be pegged against the average income of an artist's salary at 25% maximum, while others proposed the option of artists co-renting or time-sharing with each other.

Another suggestion was for shorter lease periods e.g. 6-month tenancy agreements instead of multi-year leases. This would mean that artists are allowed to rent a space as and when they need to and/or when they can afford to.

Operating Model

The participants were generally in agreement that it does not make sense for five separate organisations to run a unit each at Kampong Java. There would be no synergy and Kampong Java would appear to the public like five different spaces instead of one contiguous space. They agreed that Kampong Java must be viewed and understood as a singular art project for sandboxing purposes.

Some suggested for a Co-Op model as the view was for artists to self-manage. The Co-Op can be set up by independent artists, arts companies and/or arts businesses, where the art businesses can be co-collaborators in not only the art-making journey, but in managing and maintaining the space. Ideally each member of the Co-Op must bring along unique and relevant skill sets that can aid in the management of Kampong Java.

There were some who felt that the space should be run by a suitable individual who can bring the community together to discuss administrative and operational issues. This person must have vested interest in all tenant profiles so that he/she can do intentional curating of tenants from different art forms and to ensure spaces have multi-purpose use. Primarily, many agreed that the human factor is very important when it comes to the central management of the space. It should not be an impersonal commercial-type service provider but a House Manager who can create a good social mix of tenants, balance tenants' different needs and deconflict competing interests.

-END-