

Building Resilience from the Ground-Up

Making Places to Nurture Happy
and Grounded Communities

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Abstract

Eco-social values have always been imbued in our Asian village culture. Village communities are resilient, often grounded in values of mutual help (referred to as Gotong Royong in Malay language) and traditionally a “no waste” culture where resources are creatively utilized to the best of their lifespans. However, with urbanization and increasingly fragmented societies, such village culture has been fast disappearing due to changing urban environments and modern lifestyles of overconsumption. This paper explores the nuances of Making Places by tracing the growth of a community space, called Kampung Kampus, in the urban context of Singapore (“Kampung” is a local Malay word meaning “Village”). Helmed by a non-profit organization, Ground-Up Initiative (GUI), Kampung Kampus started in 2009 with only 100 m² of space and the simple wish to bring back our “kampung spirit” through hands-on activities. In 2019, the land expanded to 26,000 m² and thousands of people from all walks of life participated in co-creating the space to be a “living classroom” where communities bond through hands-on activities such as farming, carpentry, crafts, and lifestyle and wellness programs. While the growth of Kampung Kampus may seem organic, there exist fundamental principles to guide the co-creation processes, which over time has been further refined to adapt to changing dynamics of a vibrant community. Besides community level engagements,

higher level influences such as changing land use guidelines can also impact the sustenance of ground-up movements. The resilience of the community was tested when it was thought that GUI would have to cease operations when the land lease ended in 2020. It was after many rounds of negotiations with the planning authorities that a new plot of land adjacent to the current site was offered for GUI for relocation. With the “Big Move” tentatively scheduled for October 2023, a new phase awaits as the community readies itself to rebuild the campus from “Ground Zero.” GUI as a case study exemplifies how design and collaborative efforts can contribute to enhancing urban eco-social values. However, long-term sustenance requires navigating multi-dimensional nuances in our society, balancing the aspirations of a growing city and nurturing groundedness during an increasingly rootless generation. This paper will conclude with a recommendation of strategies for ensuring that the spirit of volunteerism and Kampung Spirit is sustained and alive.

Keywords

building resilience, grounded communities, ground-up initiative, rootedness, no-waste culture

Introduction

We live in a digitally connected, socially disconnected world today. More and more, we see the disconnection between man and nature, disconnection between people, place, and time, disconnection within oneself. In navigating an increasingly connected virtual world, the constantly evolving and ever-expanding virtual web of interconnections reduces the need for face-to-face connections. For example, a group of researchers found evidence that ease of finding information on smartphones had led people to forgo opportunities for fostering connections through social interactions (Kushlev et al., 68-74). Likewise, technological advancements that contribute to the development of our modern societies, affording us greater efficiency, convenience, and standard of living, have replaced many manual processes of yesteryears. This phenomenon has reduced the need for acquiring basic life skills which used to be essential for survival. These are all signs of what French philosopher, Guillaume Ferrero, observed more than a century ago that by the “Principle of Least Effort,” organisms tend to seek the easiest way to achieve the greatest outcome (Ferrero, 169-182).

While it is no longer relevant to go back to the old ways of living, there are still many life lessons to be learned from the hands-on approach. Traditionally, our Asian village cultures are hands-on cultures where mutual help between members of the communities form the foundation of the social fabric. These closely knitted relationships ensure the passing down of values and practices that form the safety net of resilience for the communities to overcome challenges and threats faced in their daily lives.

Fast forward to our modern societies today, the nature of building human relationships has taken on a much wider range of forms, influenced not just by our technological advancements but also by the evolution of our living standards and built environment to accommodate the social aspirations of individuals and economic structures. While our social fabric has widened, it is often at the expense of compromising the depths of interactions which are the key factors that determine the health, and therefore strengths of human relationships. It is only when strong relationships are built that communities can stay resilient while facing the challenges of the 21st century.

Part 1 shares the key motivations and background for the building of a community led project, Kampung Kampus, in the urban context of Singapore. More than a community space, this is a ground-up movement with a vision for sustainable living. Part 2 documents the growth of Kampung Kampus and the multi-dimensional nuances faced while trying to keep the organization afloat and relevant. Descriptive slices of kampung life are shared as visualizations of how the crafting of spatial design create opportunities for imparting eco-social values into everyday interactions. Lastly, Part 3 looks beyond 2020, when the land lease for Kampung Kampus expires in 2023, and GUI relocates to a new adjacent site. This is still a work in process, a journey that is seeing a new chapter unfold.

Remembering our past, imagining our future: A 21st century *kampung* story

Technological advancements have seen rapid changes, influencing the workings of our modern cities in multi-dimensional aspects from lifestyle choices to consumption patterns, to design of our built- environment. Place-making and one's perceptions of space take on not just a physical dimension but also a virtual one. In the context of Singapore, the tides of change have been fast-paced and felt especially over the last decade. As fast as we may have developed, we are also fast becoming an amnesiac nation as old buildings make way for new, forested areas make way for highways, and many more other ways of erasing memories of a growing nation with big dreams and little space. We must make an effort to start remembering our roots. As warned by Singapore's late Deputy Prime Minister, S. Rajaratnam, "Singaporeans should not become a people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing." (Koh, 141)

Remembering our past, living our present

Singapore's growth as a young nation may be seen as almost miraculous—from our economic progress to political stability, education, standard of living, technological innovations, etc. While the challenges faced through the various stages of our history may have evolved with the times, the

challenge of bringing together people of diverse backgrounds and building a common national identity remains to this day.

What we have achieved as a nation may be phenomenal. However, for our young who have not lived in the past, it is easy to take for granted what our pioneer generation had built. The crisis of historical amnesia is addressed on a state level with Singapore's "National Education (NE) Programme" (Chia). While education feeds the mind, it is imperative to translate the values to actual living practices in our everyday interactions. Simply put, we need to walk the talk.

We are now living in an age of material abundance, yet for those of us who remember, something seems to be missing. People seem to be walking faster and smiling less, doors seem to be more often closed than open, and eyes which used to meet in greetings seldom linger beyond a moment of acknowledgement. Though seemingly inconsequential, it is in such small daily encounters that we create the environment for connections between people, places, and shared memories.

Imagining our future

Land matters. In an urban and densely populated city-state such as Singapore where majority of our population live and work in high-rise apartments and buildings, the connection between people and land is limited. This disconnect is further exacerbated by economic forces that incentivize the sale of land plots and policies financializing housing as a commodity. Thus, to reconnect people to the land is of fundamental importance and an essential first step to place making.

There is an old Chinese proverb [钟灵毓秀] "Zhong Ling Yu Xiu" meaning that a place filled with beautiful spirits of nature will endow and nurture men and women with talent and grace (Figure 1). The quality of space expressed by this proverb was in ancient times when people lived near nature, and life and natural processes were much more integrated than in our modern times. However, in our current urban contexts, where man-made environments and "concrete forests" are the status quo, we must rethink our relationships with nature. Our modern civilization has been exploiting

Earth's natural resources and damaging its balance. It is time to give back and make places that heal the land, and through the processes, heal our human spirit.



Fig. 1. GUI community's photo moment with Minister Shanmugam in front of newly painted hoardings with the words "Zhong Ling Yu Xiu".

The happiest place is that which comes from within. A space can evoke in us feelings and emotions unique to our own sensory perceptions. Meaningful places are usually places which trigger in us feelings of happiness that last even after we have left the physical space, lingering then in our mental space. As humans, we have this ability to experience such profoundness due to two of our chiefs' "inner senses," that of memory and imagination. Such abilities for memory-based simulations are found to support adaptive functioning and more far-sighted decision making (Schacter et al. 1-32). Though unique to individuals, our experiences can be transmitted, just as cultures and practices have been passed down generations, through storytelling. Happy places tell stories and give birth to new possibilities, both of which we need more of in our cities of clones and amnesiacs.

The making of a 21st century Kampung Kampus in Singapore

Kampung Kampus (KK) was envisioned to be a “School of Life,” a ground-up community space in Singapore. It is a *Space* where one can learn through experiential hands-on activities, community service and self-discovery; a *Place* for sustainable living in an urban context, supporting livelihoods and services which are eco-conscious and low in carbon footprint; a *Home* where open hearts and open minds connect.

Covering a land area of 26,000 m², Kampung Kampus is located in Yishun, a district in the northern region of Singapore. Helmed by a local non-profit organization, Ground-Up Initiative (GUI), the community has an outreach of more than 150,000 people from all walks of life since 2008 through its various programs and activities, ranging from farming, to carpentry, leadership training, wellness and health, etc. The flagship program is called *Balik Kampung* (meaning “Back to the village” in local Malay language) where volunteers participate in the making and maintenance of the space and its facilities.

The growth of Kampung Kampus has been an organic one. Fully self-initiated and self-funded by the community of GUI, public and corporate supporters. Since acquiring the first 100 m² of space in 2009, it has expanded to 1200 sq m. in 2010 and 26,000 m² in 2014. With limited resources and uncertainties in changes of land use policies, the community has to be innovative and creative to find ways to sustain the place with available resources. Spaces are designed to serve multi-purposes: farming plots serve as program areas, and outdoor “classrooms” and events are carried out in natural settings. When faced with constraints, one is forced to be creative and collaborative in order to sustain the project.

A master plan was drafted for Kampung Kampus when the land was exponentially expanded to 26,000sqm in 2016. However, ground situations most often require onsite modifications by the users. Working with and coordinating diverse teams on the ground with sometimes competing needs for use of common facilities are situations that no designer or master planner can anticipate. It was a humbling experience for me personally to face the limitations of our profession as a user-cum-designer, not because of the

technical challenges, but rather the ups and downs that can either dampen motivation or make the growing community even stronger.

For GUI and Kampung Kampus, it was a common vision that brought the community together. When there is a bigger purpose, it takes open hearts and open minds to put aside individual differences and egos to grow as a team. Kampung culture and the sense of ownership takes time to form, be challenged, destroyed, and reformed. To navigate, it takes a balance of *hardware*, *software*, and most importantly, *heartware* - hardware being our built environment, software being the programs and activities, and heartware being the creation of a “safe environment” and culture for meaningful connections to be formed.

Working with the community to visualize and actualize the spaces and environment to support the aspirations and facilitate the functions, it is important that participants speak the same language in translating and aligning the community’s eco-social values through the design and making processes.

Remembering GUI’s early days

The birth of our kampung culture started taking shape in 2008 before we even got the first plot of 100sqm of space in Yishun. It was an impossible dream back then when GUI started looking for land to start out and was offered a space in Lim Chu Kang, co-sharing it with a tenant who was a sculptor (Figure 2). While there was space, accessibility was an issue. An opportunity came in 2009 when GUI was offered a small plot of land in a thriving housing district which was easily accessed by public transport.

The “seed” that was to grow into our Kampung Kampus today was thus planted with our first beautiful connection with a wheatgrass farm owner, Mr. Yeo, who is also the owner of an electrical hardware and services shop. Mr. Yeo was a friend of GUI’s founder, Mr. Tay Lai Hock. Knowing that GUI was looking for a plot of land to reconnect our community with nature, he kindly offered an unused 100sqm greenhouse structure in Bottle Tree Park, Yishun, located in the northern region of Singapore. This act of graciousness seeded our first plot of food garden, which we called SURF



Fig. 2. GUI started out from a farm plot in Lim Chu Kang, Singapore. (Photo credit: GUI)

(Sustainable Urban Farm) site which attracted more volunteers to join in the movement of greening our living environments. The decision to start with an urban food garden was a strategic one to build up a community of committed volunteers with diverse interests and backgrounds (see Fig.3).



Fig. 3. Setting out planter bed locations in first 100sqm of space – SurF Site! (Photo credit: GUI)

The significance of growing a food garden is about making a commitment to take care of a piece of land, a concept that is gradually lost in our modern fast-paced lifestyles of conveniences. Thus, so as not to forget the inter-relationships between Man and Nature, it is important to bring health back to our soils and grow healthy food that nourishes our bodies and sustains life.

Most neighborhood community gardens then were started by farming enthusiasts and “green /healthy living advocates.” Hence, we needed to cast the net wider to engage the general population in adopting sustainable living as a way of life. The challenge of projects initiated by interest groups is in their sustainability as they are subjected to the interest level, availability, and expertise of individuals.

To serve the objectives of GUI, a conscious effort has been made from the start to be an inclusive community where people of all ages with diverse interests can come together in a common space and still find ways they can be engaged meaningfully.

Start small: First 100 m² (Sustainable Urban Farm – SURF Site)

Grand visions can be overwhelming. So the intention was to start small with our first 100 m² of greenhouse space. Empty except for a concrete floor and plastic sheet roofing, the interior temperatures can reach a high of 40 degrees Celsius on a hot day. Unlike typical food gardens which are usually designed for maximum planting areas, the design of SURF site was intended to encourage explorations. The layout of the raised planter beds created walking paths meant to slow down one’s pace.

Aesthetics take on functional purposes, too, engaging volunteers who prefer making art out of recycled materials. Volunteers interested in craft work helped with creating mosaic art for the planter bed walls; those with good technical skills helped with constructing planter climbing frames out of discarded bicycle wheels salvaged from a library’s interior display. Glass bottles from pubs in Clark Quay (central Singapore were repurposed) for constructing walls.



Fig. 4. Completed SURF site filled with edible crops and herbs, recycled materials (e.g. glass bottles, bicycle wheels, broken tiles) were given a second life

With the construction of SURF site, the community grew. Week after week, more volunteers came, undeterred by the heat and bonded by a camaraderie built over hard work, sweat, food, and laughter.

New narrative for Singapore – a 5Gs nation

We hope to build a new narrative in Singapore – a 5Gs Nation. A tagline in our kampung is “5Gs connect better!” Thus we moved from the 5Cs (car, cash, credit card, condominium, country club membership) that many be defined as goalposts of success in Singapore to 5Gs in terms of values to guide our daily interactions - Graciousness, Green, Giving, Groundedness, and Gratitude. In imparting eco-social values, action speaks louder than words. Acceptance and internalization of values take time, and little steps count.

Being in a small space for a start helps as everyone gets to know one another faster when in proximity. Simple actions done with genuine concern have helped personal and working relationships. After seeing how our small group of 10 grew to a regular team of 20 to 30 volunteers in less than a year, GUI was offered an additional 300 m² of greenhouses, 200 m² of “backyard

space” fringing a natural stream, and a 600sqm outdoor terraced land to further our cause.

Daily encounters: Making time and space to observe 5Gs

In our busy city lives, making time and having the mental space to simply observe our daily encounters can be a challenge. Yet there is much to be gained from having such reflective experiences. In a new approach to well-being called Ecosocial Approach to Well-Being (EAW), it was found that when one reflects on eco-social values from holistic perspectives, the process helps one better understand and manage the causal complexities of the current times (Salonen and Konkka 19-34). In Kampung Kampus, spaces were designed to create opportunities for interactions. Much as design can facilitate such experiences, daily encounters are as meaningful as how much one places their attention on such interactions.

Graciousness

With more land comes more volunteers and greater responsibilities. With a space totaling 1200 m² by 2010, we named it Sustainable Living Kampung (SLK). The sheltered greenhouses were refurbished to be an open concept multi-purpose space similar to the living room of a typical home setting (see Fig.5). It helped that Mr. Yeo’s electrical engineering company came to help with installation of electrical works at no costs, and the Bottle Tree Park managers, Alex and Colin, supported our cause and did not charge us for use of their space. It was such goodwill and generosity that gave a good foundation from which GUI was able to reach further with our works.

Green

The open concept greenhouse structures were refurbished to allow for unimpeded views out to nature (see Fig.6). Although some volunteers proclaimed that they were not “tree huggers,” being in a space close to nature and interacting with “greenies” somehow influenced them to be more eco-conscious over time (see Fig.7).



Fig. 5. Volunteers installing lighting shades made out of baskets in SLK's Living Room



Fig. 6. Open concept greenhouse structures – kitchen area beside SURF site.



Fig. 7. Washing station uses bucket system to conserve water. Everyone washes own utensils after lunch. (Photo credit: GUI).

Our relationship with food was exemplified by placing the kitchen space right beside our SURF site. Volunteer chefs could simply pop by the food garden to harvest garnishes for the dishes or get herbs to make tea for all to enjoy. To better visualize our Food Cycle, uncooked food wastes were separated for composting. In our modern lifestyles of conveniences, wastes miraculously disappeared by the next days as rubbish trucks cart them away. Life processes as such are hidden. Thus, the act of making and putting matured composts back into the soils was a good learning moment for many.



Fig. 8. Sharing session in stream after Balik Kampung activities. (Photo credit: GUI)

Giving

A non-physical space exists in our kampung, and that is a *Giving Space*. This unseen space that can still be felt is a personal space for reflections where giving time to oneself and to others for sharing our thoughts or learnings without judgement at the close of every volunteering session took place. Giving time builds patience and openness in sharing one another's thoughts, and reflections help build deeper connections no matter how brief

personal encounters may be. In terms of physical space used to facilitate this process, reflective sharing was usually conducted in open natural spaces such as our backyard space, in the stream (see Fig.8), or under shelter in our SLK’s living room.

Groundedness

Nurturing groundedness requires consistent effort and this helps build resilience in our community. This was achieved through farming (see Fig.9), making our own furniture out of salvaged discarded wood and materials, repairing spoiled tools and equipment, maintaining space, sorting and clearing wastes, etc. Nurturing such a hands-on culture is important when many in our current times lose touch of such basic life skills, abdicating them to foreign contractors and domestic helpers. *Getting our hands dirty* does make a difference!



Fig. 9. Planting seedlings at terraced land (Photo credit: GUI)

Gratitude

All the above-mentioned values are grounded in one's sensation and expression of Gratitude. A genuine "Thank you" can make a huge difference in our daily encounters. Food is a great connector. All volunteers, no matter which area they were helping with, would gather for a communal lunch cooked by fellow volunteers.

Growth: scaling up, stepping up

The dining areas were designed as an open concept space that allows visual connection. Volunteers passing through the space always get a fulfilling waft of food cooking or stewing on the stove, catching glimpses of chefs of the day at work. Food was usually laid out buffet style and lunch sessions commenced with gathering of volunteers followed by an introduction of the menus by the "master chef." Volunteers' collective chorus of "Thank You" after the chef's introduction never failed to drive up the energy to enjoy the meal after a hard day of work (see Fig.10).



Fig. 10. Communal lunch in SLK's backyard. (Photo credit: GUI)

With the successful implementation of Sustainable Living *Kampung*, GUI gained wider recognition and trust across the public, private, and government sectors. Programs and activities were planned to engage schools, corporations, authorities, and government agencies, etc. Central to the theme of sustainable living is to localize it to our heritage, what our pioneer generations of Singaporeans always knew and for us younger generations to redefine—our *Kampung Spirit*!

Just as GUI was gaining traction in 2011, the news from the Bottle Tree Park management that their land lease was to end by 2012 was announced. This also meant that the land where Sustainable Living *Kampung* sits on would be taken back by the Singapore Land Authority (SLA). Moreover, there was no definite usage plan for the land if the authorities were to take it back. Under the Master Plan 2008 (reviewed every 5 years), drafted by Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), the site was listed as a "white site" where land is reserved for meeting future planning intentions.

Faced with an uncertain future, it was a tough test of faith to keep walking. A milestone event was that of Heritage *Kampung* in 2012, where GUI collaborated with the Bottle Tree Park management to organize a successful heritage event utilizing the entire park space. While it was a celebration of Singapore's heritage, it also rallied communities, public, institutions, and corporates to keep this piece of land as a public park for all to enjoy (Fig. 11). After many rounds of negotiations and meetings with the authorities, GUI was finally granted part of the entire park space, totaling a land area of 26,000sqm on 1st September 2014. The terms of the lease was a short one, 6 years, pending review every 3rd year.

Getting the community ready to scale up from 1,200 m^2 to 26,000 m^2 was a test of grit, resilience, and faith (see Fig.12). Most critical of all concerns was a practical one, the costs involved in leasing the land directly from SLA when previously, the use of land, water, and electricity were free of charge with the graciousness of the Bottle Tree Park management. In addition to land lease charges which were tied to total built-up areas, (i.e., Gross Floor Area (GFA), building costs, and other costs involved such as manpower,



Fig. 11. Heritage *Kampung* event in 2012 to celebrate Singapore's heritage, also serving as platform to rally for the land to be saved (Photo credit: GUI)



Fig. 12. Kampung Chief conducting leadership training for team, rallying key members to step up to scale up (Photo credit: GUI)

maintenance, and operational etc.) huge sums of money are needed for a self-funded non-profit organization to operate.

The dilemma then was that much as the community wished to expand to provide more facilities and activity areas. More built-up space translates to higher land, construction, and maintenance costs. Public and corporate CSR



Fig. 13. Heartquarters – first building constructed in Kampung Kampus (Photo credit: GUI)

funding support was sought, and the community rallied for more people to support the cause through running a much tighter schedule of activities, programs, and workshop that helped to bring in the funds. Building costs, though kept to a minimum, were still pending full payment. As the building team of consultants, builders, contractors, and material suppliers knew of GUI's cause before taking on the projects, there was a common understanding and agreement that payments would be made in installments as the team work towards getting more funds.

Connecting people, connecting earth: Building heartquarters

GUI's administrative building, Heartquarters (fig. 13), is the first net-zero energy building constructed on the newly expanded land.

To help save building costs, GUI sourced for donation of used or excess building materials from suppliers where possible and collaborated with companies in the green building industry to install green technologies (e.g., solar panels using Heartquarters as a test bed). Through these interactions, good relationships with some of the contractors formed over time.



Fig. 14. Teak wood flooring salvaged from a dance studio (Photo credit: GUI)

While this bottom-up approach to a construction project helped reduced costs, the challenge of working with materials of varied specifications, dimensions, and sizes was one that the building team had to deal with. Interestingly, an alternative form of aesthetics took form.

The completed Heartquarters is one filled with stories: steel columns of varied sizes, leftovers from a mega-structure project, mudbrick-recycled glass bottle decorative wall, teak wood flooring which used to be part of a dance studio etc. (Fig. 14 and Fig. 15). This is our modern way of redefining what a “no waste” 21st century kampung can be, natural rather than “polished” aesthetics.

Healing the land, healing the human spirit: Building learning space

Part of the land area which we took over was a large open space where fish ponds used to be. This space was envisioned as our outdoor learning space where organic farming, outdoor activities, and experiential learnings can be conducted. To create more land areas, two of the ponds were partially



Fig. 15. Salvaged Teak wood flooring used in Heartquarters' Training Room. (Photo credit: GUI)



Fig. 16. Reconstructed natural ponds in Learning Space for aquaculture functions as part of KK's agricultural zone. (Photo credit: GUI)

filled up to create undulating land forms and open grounds (see Fig.16). While earthworks may seem to be a relatively straightforward task, this proved to be a test of how well we have internalized our values of 5Gs to manage the unfortunate event of earthwork sub-contractors' illegally dumping construction wastes onsite. Completion of this learning space was delayed for more than a year for the contractors to clean up the waste, treat the pollution, and reshape the land profiles. Healing the land with natural



Fig. 17. Experiential learning in organic vegetable farm, engaging one's senses (Photo credit: GUI)

farming soil improvement methods took time, but it was a necessary move as the long- term vision is to bring health back to our soils organically.

The very first lesson our Learning Space taught us was that healing the land is also about healing our human spirit. Besides serving as a space for outdoor learning, this was also the agricultural zone of Kampung Kampus, where an organic vegetable farm, a bee farm, a spirulina farm, and an aquaculture farm create various farm learning experiences for sharing about food security and sustainable farming (Fig. 17).

Beyond 2020: A new phase begins

Nurturing grounded leaders: Leadership succession

Kampung Kampus was thrown into its greatest challenge yet in August 2018. The year GUI's founder, Mr. Tay Lai Hock's sudden passing from a heart attack which marked the passing of the phase of his leadership. For 10 years from 2008 to 2018, GUI was guided by Lai Hock whom everyone called Kampung Chief. Chief was more than a charismatic leader, he was a visionary, a wise teacher, a loving brother, and many more that only personal encounters with him will tell. For years, Chief had prepared the core team

should such a scenario happen, taking pains to counsel and nurture each and every core member to step up and grow. Leadership training has always been core to Chief's teachings, and the result of his effort was seen the day the core team stepped up to the challenge of continuing and sustaining GUI's work. Leadership change is always a trying time for all, albeit an abrupt one. Everyone was forced to grow, fast. There were people who fell away and people who stayed. There was a surge of new connections as more people got to know of our story. More than 5 years had passed now without Kampung Chief, the core team is still in place, growing GUI and Kampung Kampus.

Forming new narratives: values-driven urban land use planning

Based on the latest Singapore Master Plan 2019 (URA, 2019), the land where Kampung Kampus is located is designated for housing developments, where previously in Master Plan 2014 (URA, 2014) it was still a "white site." The initial land lease ended on 17th April 2020 and has since been extended to June 2023 to allow sufficient time for GUI to move to the new site adjacent to the current space ("The Straits Times"). Navigating a balance between meeting national interest and community's aspirations is never easy if the parties involved are too rigid within their own definitions of needs and wants. Administrative red tape aside, positive outcomes of win-win situations can bring greater potentials than blind following of rules and regulations. Our authorities had a hard time trying to categorize Kampung Kampus under existing land use types.

Most establishments are classified under one main "User Group" tied to a specific land use category. Kampung Kampus straddles various categories, from agriculture, to recreational, to institutional -the lines are blurred. While policies may be rigid, our human minds are not. To stay relevant in the 21st century amid climate change, we need to step out of our comfort zones and keep our communication channels open for new narratives to be formed and values-driven decisions to be made. Thus, while the authorities' decision to relocate GUI was not our best desired outcome, it was the next best option offered for a non-profit organization in consideration of competing land use in an urban context.



Fig. 18. Artist's impression of proposed new site for rebuilding Kampung Kampus (Image Credit: GUI)

Continuity and transfer of eco-values from Kampung to community to self

In a 2019-2020 study on GUI conducted by Singapore University of Technology and Design together with the Housing and Development Board as part of a “New Urban Kampung” research program, it was noted that participants and volunteers of GUI’s programmes experienced greater sense of health and wellbeing, as observed via four key aspects: (i) adopting intangible values of 5Gs, (ii) role of hands-on experience on environmental awareness and adoption of eco-behaviours and habits, (iii) connection with nature enhancing self-awareness and restorative introspection and (iv) social interaction forging sense of ownership and community in a safe space (Benjumea et al. 1134-1151). Guided by GUI’s eco-values system that integrates the Hardware, Software and Heartware aspects of Kampung Kampus, relatively abstract concepts of interconnectedness between Nature and Man are meaningfully explored and experienced through nature placemaking programs, e.g., Balik Kampung, farming, etc. facilitated by core members and trained facilitators. It was postulated that such experiences can support societal transformations as the processes encourage self-discovery

and promote collaborative learning in a natural context, offering new perspectives that could influence one's sense of connectedness to Nature and pro-environmental behaviors (Lauren et al. 191-199).

Building resilience through fostering Kampung Spirit

Faced with effects of climate change and a fast growing global population, resilience thinking for cities is an increasingly critical aspect of sustainable development. As a small island state with limited natural resources, Singapore's chronic exposure to environmental, socio-economic, and political stresses have always been key in shaping the nation's strategies for resilience planning not just for emergency preparedness or post-crisis recovery, but also to thrive from the tides of change to build capacities for handling crises when they come.

Two key challenges identified by A Resilient Singapore are climate change and Singapore's changing demographics. The former tests our environmental resilience and the latter our social resilience as the city state is seeing the strain of a rapidly ageing population, compounded by inflow of immigrants and foreign workers to maintain the robustness of our economies ("Centre for Liveable Cities").

In GUI, we believe that these two challenges are closely inter-related and the approach to building resilience is to always start with connecting people and connecting land. It is when one can build beautiful relationships for themselves, not just with others, but also within oneself and with nature that we will have a dynamic and robust system that can rebound from shocks and crisis.

On a ground level, these seemingly big concepts can be expressed in its simplest form. For example, they can be realized through the following activities: sharing a meal cooked by volunteers, immersing and experiencing first-hand what "Farm to Table" means when one enjoys the food that was harvested direct from the farm, and knowing that they were the fruits of labour from other volunteers who had come before them. It is through these simple acts of kindness that we can foster our Kampung Spirit over time,

putting aside one another's differences to embrace a common future where humanity and mutual help sees no boundaries.

"Farming our hearts"

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." (Saint-Exupery 95)

It is important to learn how to "see" with our hearts and not just our eyes. This inward journey that one needs to take, alone, is a journey that will bring clarity to how this world is perceived. For our hearts to see clearly, we will need to nurture it just as how we would farm a piece of land: watering our hearts with love, sunning it with compassion, breaking up hard clumps of ego and feeding it with inner peace and contentment.



Fig. 19. GUI team celebrating Chinese New Year 2017 in Kampung Kampus. (Photo credit: GUI)

The happiest place is that which comes from within

This happy place grounds us to weather the harshness of realities, nourishes us with compassion even during the toughest of times, anchors us to reach out to others in need and dances with love for us to keep smiling despite it all.

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