3.	**Research Sharing 2:** **Arts & Culture Nodes in the Heartlands of Singapore: Exploring Strategies, Spatial Opportunities & Impacts** **Dr Zdravko Trivic, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore (NUS)**
3.1.	This research project was a collaboration between NAC and the Centre for Sustainable Asian Cities (CSAC) at the School of Design and Environment, NUS to evaluate the opportunities and impacts of arts and culture on local neighbourhoods and communities. The focus of the research was NAC's 'Arts and Culture Nodes' initiative, which started in 2011 with the aim to bring quality and regular arts programmes to Singaporeans through a network of touch points in the heartlands.
3.2.	This study was conducted in 2 phases to consider how public spaces can be activated through the arts, and what impacts the arts can create on neighbourhoods and communities in Singapore. The outcome of the first phase was a guide for bringing the arts into neighbourhoods and building a successful neighbourhood arts and culture ecology, while the second phase developed a Neighbourhood Arts and Culture Impact Assessment framework to evaluate the impacts of arts programmes at specific nodes.
3.3.	Broadly, the nodes strategy brought the arts to heartland locations such as libraries, community clubs, non-government and corporate organisations though partnerships that unlocked new spaces beyond formal arts venues typically located in the city centre. The study identified 5 nodes that differed in maturity, spatial capacity, target groups and outreach mechanisms, namely Woodlands Regional Library, SAFRA Jurong, Tanglin Halt (My Community), Kallang Community Club and Bedok Town Square. A premise of the study was that quality of the (public) spaces would significantly influence the type and intensity of the arts activities that take place in those spaces.
3.4.	Informed by the concepts of neighbourhood cultural ecology, creative placemaking and participation in the arts, the research scope centred on 3 aspects of: a. Space activation through the arts; b. Impacts of the nodes strategy; and c. How the nodes strategy could be further strengthened.
3.5.	Starting with a two-part spatial opportunities analysis, general spatial conditions of public spaces were mapped. This firstly included the scale, level of enclosure and type of ground surfaces, and secondly, pedestrian activity of where people go and where they gather. These two pieces of information were then superimposed to come up with 4 initial categories of neighbourhood spaces, as potential venues for the arts:

		a. Well-utilised spaces near frequented movement paths, such as near public transportation hubs and shopping malls – suitable for broadening and diversifying arts audiences;
		b. Spaces near other well-used facilities that may not be close to movement paths but are intimate spaces that provide opportunities for deeper engagement in the arts;
		c. Spaces near movement paths but without substantial amenities to keep residents dwell in such spaces – good locations for pop-up publicity activities to drove public to other venues; and
		d. Underutilised venues such as amphitheatres and carparks yet often good quality spaces and suitable for arts programmes with good publicity.

3.6. These, combined with a literature review of urban space frameworks, and arts venue requirements, as well as interviews with artists and organisers, enabled the development of a set of suitability criteria to further evaluate pre-selected neighbourhood spaces. Elaborating on what successful arts and culture ecology could look like, Kallang CC was cited as a successful case study as meaningful personal connections were established between arts professionals, amateurs and volunteers that went beyond physical space.

3.7. The second phase of this study then investigated the research question of impact of the nodes strategy. To identity suitable impact indicators, a review of over 200 non-economic impact indicators narrowed the number down to 50. The team also involved various node partners to validate and further prioritise 20 indicators. While the 20 indicators would not be exhaustive, this selection represented a sum of literature review efforts and perspectives from the ground. The resulting Neighbourhood Arts and Culture Impact Assessment framework from the second phase of the study was developed to assess the impact of arts programmes and capture feedback for future improvements under 2 main domains of attributes:

a. Descriptive measures of the success of arts programmes; and
b. Qualitative dimensions such as social, educational and wellbeing impacts that measured what was felt and reported by the community.

3.8. The framework was applied over 2 studies, covering 19 arts events and more than 500 surveys were completed, with findings summarised under the following categories:

Space, Programme and Participation/Attendance Attributes
a. Different nodes utilised their capacities and the capacities of their neighbourhood in different ways;
b. Suitability of the arts venue also depended on types of programmes (e.g. scale);
c. Existing arts attendees (so-called 'arts-lovers') were more demanding of the quality of venue and programme;

	d. Over 90% of the participants were in favour in of having arts programmes in their neighbourhood, which was in-line with the arts and culture nodes strategy to bring arts closer to where people lived in particular for parents and the elderly; e. Diversity of programmes across the nodes was well-received as reported through surveys and focus-group discussions but the perceived quality of programmes differed across the nodes; f. 'Arts-lovers' tended to be more sensitive to programme quality, with some participants categorising "free events/no pre-registration/informal venue" as not "quality" arts; and g. The nodes strategy had been successful in reaching out to new audiences, with more than 70% of audiences at the events surveyed being new audiences. *Impact on Space Activation* a. Vibrancy brought to the public spaces by arts activities was appreciated by residents who already felt a stronger attachment to their neighbourhood. Arts events gave them reasons to venture out to spaces they had never visited before; and b. Temporary props encouraged people to use those spaces before and after the arts activities, such as at Tanglin Halt, where the food court also performed as an extension of the seating area for the audience. *Impact on Social Bonding* a. The arts re-established social bonds such as when attending arts events with family/friends, with some reporting that they made new friends; b. Community arts were an opportunity to bring people from passive face-to-face communications to more active interactions among strangers; and c. Attendance at arts events also led to greater pride and appreciation of other cultures. *Other Observations* a. While the study did not cover the impact on educational benefits and on personal well-being, these came up often in focus group discussions; and b. The study reflected public interest to pursue and continue participating in the arts as audiences and volunteers.
3.9.	Informal neighbourhood spaces allowed social bonding and interaction to take place and incentivised people to be actively engaged in the arts.

	Q&A **Facilitator: Dr Sharon Chang, Chief Research Officer, NAC**
3.10	*Dr Belinda Yuen: Do you see opportunities in the community arts nodes strategy to engage people to think about their health and then building their capacity to address it?* *Dr Trivic:* Many of the conversations at the focus group discussions showed the potential of the arts to impact wellbeing and health. [Dr Trivic then cited an anecdote about a lady whose child has special needs and would stay calm after attending arts activities.] Besides the example of Dr Andy Ho's Project ARTISAN, the boundaries between nursing homes and the local community could be blurred so that people could start to appreciate nursing homes as a public amenity and as a space that contributed to building intergenerational ties. The nodes strategy could be seen as a means to that end.
3.11	*Pigeonhole: Most of the findings affirm what we know. Good to have it articulated as a study. Were the results surprising to you, vis-à-vis other countries?* *Dr Trivic:* Although the results were not extremely surprising, the qualitative findings provided a different outlook to some of the more quantitative indicators that were identified. As compared to other international studies, this was also conducted as a city-wide research for the entire length of the study. Internationally, some studies on community spaces for arts activities carried out in London and other parts of the UK returned to looking at formal arts venues as opposed to staying true to studying community arts venues. Another noteworthy observation of the current nodes strategy was how it got different communities and partners to come together to engage with the arts, especially in comparison with other cities.
3.12	*Dr Stephanie Burridge: Did the study look at the breakdown by art forms, taking into account the forms that require certain conditions for e.g. specific surfaces for dance or theatre, as compared to say, music which is more mobile in comparison?* *Dr Trivic:* While the full report of the study would detail further findings, the research had to adapt to the available programmes at the various nodes, which comprised mainly performing arts programmes and arts and crafts workshops. However, there were other community and public arts programmes for other art forms – such as public art, and other NAC initiatives – that were not covered in this study. In this context, the study did not attempt to draw conclusions about the types of arts programmes that would work better for community arts, although there were

	discussions on how public programmes could be integrated for greater impact, and how outreach efforts by artists could be amalgamated.
3.13	*Prof Audrey Yue: The research started with 200 impact indicators before narrowing down to 20. Where were the initial 200 indicators drawn from and what was the rationale in cutting down?* *Dr Trivic:* A comprehensive literature review that investigated frameworks covering different aspects of arts and culture was conducted. These frameworks were for a whole range of scales, from intrinsic impacts on individuals to impacts on cities and countries. It was therefore necessary to select indicators that would be relevant to the context of the nodes strategy, and at the scale of neighbourhoods. As part of measuring the success of the nodes strategy, nodes partners' impact indicators and their long term goals for their spaces and programmes had to be accounted for.
3.14	*Dr Sharon Chang: As an urban planner, what is one takeaway necessary for artists to continue reaching new audiences in the heartlands?* *Dr Trivic:* Although the study implied that spaces require certain conditions to be met for arts activities to take place, the arts could happen everywhere and artists should continue bringing these unique experiences into everyday life.
	Q&A [Unanswered]
3.15	*Pigeonhole: How was "quality" defined?* *Dr Trivic:* From the beginning of the study, "quality" was not defined very strictly, although the aim of the 'Arts and Culture Nodes' initiative was to bring "quality" arts programmes to the heartlands. This was to avoid discussions on 'high arts' vs. 'low arts'. Initially, NAC's proposition that "quality" arts programmes are those performed or facilitated by professional artists was broadly accepted. Yet, despite the majority of events indeed being led by professional artists, the study has shown that the "quality" of such programmes, as perceived by the participants, considerably depended on various factors, including the type of the venue, entry fee, mode and level of engagement, content and language, among others.
3.16	*Pigeonhole: On study design, why arts events? Did the residents of these locations desire more arts events?* *Dr Trivic:* The key premise of node partnerships was the mutual interest in bringing arts programmes to local communities. Such partnerships were not only instigated by recent cultural policies to encourage community participation, but also in response to data collected on the ground, such as the NAC's Population Survey on the Arts, which revealed that some of the barriers for participation in arts activities were lack of time, low awareness about cultural events and absence of arts

	programmes near where people live, work and play. Our pop-up events in the pilot study also revealed that people wanted to see arts activities close to their homes, in parks, plazas, void decks, food courts, markets, shopping malls and other spots in their neighbourhoods.
3.17	*Pigeonhole: Was there a baseline assessment of the community relations or identity before the arts events?* *Dr Trivic:* Yes, a simplified study of physical and human resources (asset mapping) was performed in each neighbourhood prior to actual assessment of impacts of arts and culture events. This was done through on-site observations and walk-through interviews with "key community members" familiar with the neighbourhood, such as node partners' representatives and arts events organisers. Moreover, informal observations were done and documented before and after each event to capture the immediate effects of arts events on space and its users.
3.18	*Pigeonhole: There are findings where youth generation have not shown much appreciation towards the arts. Is there an approach/strategy to make arts more accessible and inculcate an appreciative culture in them?* *Dr Trivic:* Indeed, youth may not appreciate "traditional" artforms as much as other audience groups. However, perhaps the use of new technologies and interactive digital platforms could be one possible way to make them appreciate the arts more and participate more actively.
3.19	*Pigeonhole: Were the artists who presented programmes interviewed for this study? What were their perspectives?* *Dr Trivic:* Yes, several interviews were conducted with the professional artists who performed at or facilitated arts programmes at the nodes. All of them appreciated the opportunity to share their creative work with the local community at more intimate venues and in more informal ways. Moreover, for some of them, performing in a public space was one of the ways to publicise their more formal events or recruit students and even new members. However, most of them also shared various challenges with informal venues, as they were often not conducive enough. Yet, the satisfaction and impacts they make usually compensate for such shortcomings.
3.20	*Pigeonhole: The problem frame of the study was about (lack of) space usage. Why is there an assessment of the impact of arts in the community (eg. audience participation)?* *Dr Trivic:* Activating public space and enriching public life through arts by default included local communities. To overcome the short-term impacts of one-off events, better understanding of mutual impacts and benefits of both the arts and the community was critical.

3.21	*Pigeonhole: How were the nodes for study selected?* *Dr Trivic:* The nodes were selected to include as much diversity as possible, including both mature and newly established nodes, nodes with and without their own premises, members and general audience oriented, etc.
3.22	*Pigeonhole: Were there any particular interesting differences in reactions noted between different types of art forms (i.e. performing arts, visual arts, literature) in the different spaces?* *Dr Trivic:* In general, regardless of the type of events and the engagement of professional artists, the study revealed that the majority of participants (90% on average) highly appreciated all arts and culture events. This is probably because different art forms attracted different audiences. For instance, parents and kids appreciated events tailored specifically for them. On the other hand, senior residents could not fully value plays for children or pop-music performance. Finally, movie screenings received slightly lower scores, compared to live performances or hands-on workshops.
3.23	*Pigeonhole: Could you further explain your finding that "art lovers are more demanding"?* *Dr Trivic:* Expectations of "arts-lovers" were higher, probably due to their previous experience and familiarity with the arts. Such expectations applied to both the content and quality of the programme, as well as the suitability of the venue. As they would have planned their attendance in advance, as opposed to those who simply happened to be there by chance, they expected more for the time they invested, through deeper and unobstructed engagement with the arts.
3.24	*Pigeonhole: Arts and/or heritage events - do you think the content differs and whether the impact on communities would be different?* *Dr Trivic:* The content certainly influenced how audiences perceived cultural events. To a large extent, all investigated nodes tried to tailor the programmes they offered for specific community groups (age, ethnicity, language). Programmes organised by My Community in Queenstown confirmed that the local heritage could play an important role in arts appreciation, and could attract both local communities and visitors.
3.25	*Pigeonhole: Did the study provide any insight into the impact of the strategy on social mixing?* *Dr Trivic:* Social mixing *per se* was not an indicator measured. However, the study did measure whether cultural events could contribute to better appreciation of different cultures. Some respondents pointed out that they enjoyed the performance

	although they did not understand the language, for instance. Some events "worked better" in terms of multi-generational interaction than others. Finally, the study also indicated that arts events are important for extending social networks.
3.26	*Pigeonhole: What were the other factors taken into account for this study? E.g. town council policies etc.* *Dr Trivic:* Some of such factors were considered but not investigated in detail. For instance, the frequency of events could considerably depend on whether a certain space was contested or not, i.e. whether it is attractive for other (often) commercial events. This challenge was sometimes overcome when good relationships were established between the node partners and the Town Council, or other parties, such as shopping mall management.
3.27	*Pigeonhole: What were the arts projects and events in these nodes; how do you ensure parity when analysing statistics across varying artistic excellence and artforms?* *Dr Trivic:* One limitation of this study was the inability to choose specific characteristics of events, due to different offerings across nodes and different frequencies of the events. A more longitudinal study would be needed to address this issue of parity and comparison. The objective of this study was rather explorative and indicative, especially in the pilot phase, which framed more specific questions for the second round of focus group discussions. The intention was to understand the range of impacts in respect to specific node partner's capacities, goals and visions, rather than comparing or benchmarking across different nodes.
3.28	*Pigeonhole: In terms of sustainability, did the study consider how the arts programmes can be organized and managed by the community themselves than through government or NAC intervention?* *Dr Trivic:* Yes, this was the ultimate goal of this study. We specifically observed such mechanisms in more mature nodes, such as Kallang Community Club, which showcased high interdependence between professional and amateur arts programmes and volunteerism as the key means for sustainable and more independent development. This would be difficult to expect from newly established nodes, where NAC's input is invaluable, both in terms of financial and human support and training. Some other node partners, such as Participate in Design (P!D MacPherson), employ their efforts to train the artists to successfully engage the community. Building skills and networks as part of arts and culture ecology would be necessary for creative activities to be boosted in a neighbourhood and this would take time.

3.29	*Pigeonhole: Was art objectified in this case as a tool for activation of spaces for area placemaking, putting art at a disadvantage / disregard? Would it then be an issue of how art should be valued?*
	Dr Trivic: This question opens up a perennial and inconclusive debate about the intrinsic and instrumental value and impacts of the arts. And the answer is certainly not black and white. Indeed, the arts and culture face significant pressure and sometimes unrealistic expectations in order to justify their existence and funding. It was, however, important to note that socially engaged art did not necessarily originate from the quests of the governments or policymakers to achieve higher social outcomes. Knowing what the arts has accomplished and could do for local neighbourhoods and communities could contribute to both better appreciation of the arts itself and other non-art-related benefits.