



CASE STUDY

Singapore | Remaking Bedok

# Crafting and Activating New Civic Spaces

**B**edok, an ageing and increasingly crowded suburban town, received a makeover in recent years under the Remaking Our Heartlands programme. Commercial, social and transport facilities were boldly consolidated to carve out people-centric civic spaces, and nurture a sense of community and place identity at the heart of a rejuvenated town centre.

## The Challenge

Planned in the 1970s and completed in the early 1980s, Bedok was the fifth town developed by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) to provide affordable public housing and improved living conditions.

Originally built for a population of 150,000, Bedok was designed as a self-contained town with a full suite of transport, commercial, educational and community facilities, including a bus depot, food centre, polyclinic, community centre, public library and swimming complex.

The town facilities greatly improved living standards. However, as the population grew to almost 295,000 by 2010, it became apparent that the town centre was becoming inadequate in meeting residents' needs.

Town amenities were scattered widely in low-rise buildings surrounded by car parks, which discouraged walking and instead attracted a growing number of cars that created traffic congestion. Inefficient land use by the sprawling, single-storey bus interchange and an underutilised Bedok Adventure Park also meant that existing facilities could not be easily expanded.

Significantly, the town lacked a sense of place and identity as past developments had overlooked the history and heritage of the area. In addition, without a central public space where people could gather, residents did not have opportunities to interact and bond.



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Sprawling and scattered amenities in Bedok New Town in the 1980s.





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## The Solution

To rejuvenate ageing towns like Bedok, the HDB launched the Remaking Our Heartlands (ROH) programme in 2007. The scheme aimed to create more engaging and attractive homes through town improvements that built on the unique identity of each estate. Bedok, as part of the larger East Coast area, was selected in 2011 for the second phase of the programme.

The first improvements sought to inject new life into the town centre by boosting commercial activity and improving public transport. Between December 2013 and November 2014, the new integrated Bedok Mall and Bedok Residences was launched with a transport hub linking a train

station and a new air-conditioned bus interchange, for more convenient pedestrian access while tucking the interchange out of sight.

The well-loved Bedok Interchange Hawker Centre that sold affordable food to the general public was relocated next to the new mall. The relocation of some of the original stall holders to the new centre—with its increased seating capacity, larger stalls and barrier-free accessibility—continued to draw residents and regular patrons to the new site.

The next phase consolidated other non-commercial civic facilities into the high-density, high-rise Bedok Integrated Complex, to be completed

01 Commercial activity at Bedok Mall has injected new life into the town centre.

02 The hawker centre, a community favourite, now sits next to its old location.



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in 2017. Replacing the underutilised Bedok Adventure Park, the site will house former low-rise, stand-alone facilities such as the swimming complex, polyclinic, library, community centre, sports centre, senior care centre, childcare centre, and retail and food outlets, thereby releasing more sites for redevelopment.

The consolidation of commercial and civic amenities at the town centre freed up space for pedestrian circulation and activities.

By March 2016, the 320-metre pedestrian mall was enhanced with benches, wheelchair-friendly ramps and better lighting to enhance accessibility. New landscaping beautified the area flanked by shops and the food centre.

The enhanced pedestrian mall connected the mall, transport hub and food centre seamlessly to the new Bedok Town Square—the most significant feature of the town centre redevelopment. The first of a new generation of town squares introduced in housing estates, the sheltered plaza has a high ceiling equipped with a huge industrial fan to keep the space well-ventilated and conducive as both a thoroughfare and rest stop for pedestrians.

Recognising that the key to transforming public housing estates into more vibrant

places was not merely about improving physical infrastructure, HDB turned towards community-based placemaking efforts.

In April 2016, about 1,000 residents participated in a public consultation exercise to name their town plaza and contribute suggestions for activities to be held there. Ideas included outdoor movie screenings, mass yoga sessions and performances. These inputs helped to shape the square's identity and purpose.

A community-building seminar and a Build-a-thon were also held in May 2016, where participants brainstormed ideas on how to create a lively town centre through design interventions, installations and programming. To keep residents informed and to get their feedback on work in progress, community exhibitions were staged to mark the launch of the ROH programme, followed by smaller exhibitions in January 2015 and June 2016.

A Town Plaza Activation Team, comprising local community partners, schools, grassroots leaders and the National Arts Council, was set up to continue involving local residents in keeping the space alive through events and interaction.

“ Having been involved in remaking the town centre, residents have continued to organise and participate in community events ... ”





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## The Outcome

HDB's efforts to gather residents' views helped to identify key issues relating to accessibility and the need for public space for community interaction. These inputs helped to remake Bedok town centre as a thoughtful blend of integrated, accessible facilities and well-loved public spaces.

More significantly, the participatory planning process added to the sense of ownership among residents. Having been involved in remaking the town

centre, residents have continued to organise and participate in community events, supported by the dedicated Activation Team set up.

Since its opening, the Bedok Town Square has hosted numerous community events, including a community job fair and a dance appreciation event. The constant bustle and activity at the town square has created a buzz that residents and businesses have welcomed. ○

01 Bedok residents share their hopes and aspirations for the town at a pop-up public engagement event.

02 The sheltered town plaza is a key community event space suitable for all weather.