In search of Singapore’s past

Young Singaporeans are responding to the rapid pace of change by documenting lost places and memories.

Jennani Durai

There is an awakening of local pride, says Young Singaporeans founder Justin Zhuang, who created a new project, similarly related to childhood memories, called Old School Delights in Upper Thomson, which is a nostalgic feelings from Singaporeans has begun to flourish. Film-maker Roystan Tan, for instance, is known for his work on Singapore’s five-foot-ways, says he began documenting old places as he regrets not having appreciated things that are now gone.

Mr Kwek Li Yong, founder of MyCommunity, an informal grassroots group which they registered as a society, says the proliferation of heritage projects, against a backdrop of the very proliferation of virtual tours, has meant that “people inspire one another to share pictures and stories over the Internet, and more seniors learning how to get involved.”

Virtual tours of forgotten places

McLennan Laf has noticed that Young Singaporeans has drawn a huge reaction from Singaporeans who are shocked that their childhood memories may have vanished. When writer Justin Zhuang’s map of old playgrounds in Singapore became a viral hit, he says he was “stunned by the overwhelming reaction.”

He then started to understand that Singaporeans have a natural curiosity about the past and get sentimental about it. “I was struck by a sense that a lot of places in my memories have vanished. So now I feel an urgency to capture these remaining places,” he says.

App for heritage trails

They do not live in the neighborhood, but a partnership between MyCommunity and Living Buildings, a company that creates virtual tours of forgotten places, has now comprised a dozen other heritage buffs. The pair founded MyCommunity, an informal grassroots group which they registered as a society, in September.

The two bachelors say they are putting the Singapore Institute of Spatial and Social Sciences to good use. “We are making a list of places that have been shifting eastwards but there’s still a lot of interest in them,” says Mr Kwek.

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