

00:00 – 00:39

Kerrine: Hello and welcome to another podcast hosted by culture360.ASEF.org, the arts and culture portal of the Asia-Europe Foundation, ASEF. Today, we're continuing our conversation with Agni, where we dive into the topic of environmental sustainability and cultural mobility and looking into the context of Indonesia. So this is the second episode in our series, and we're excited to explore how Indonesia is navigating the pressing issues of travel, environment and sustainability. So, Agni, welcome back to the podcast.

Agni: Thank you. It's nice to meet you again.

00:40 – 03:40

Kerrine: So let's start with a very broad question first. There has been a lot of interest in the intersection of travel, environment and sustainability, especially in the recent years. How do Indonesia's mobility funding calls and programmes actually address these urgent issues?

Agni: Actually, this part is very interesting for me because all this time, I think we didn't really give space to discussion about this issue. And mostly, the initiatives that are running on ecological issues and environmental issues are done by the artists through artworks. So I think, to have time to reflect on this question and to speak about environmental sustainability in relation to cultural mobility. For me I think it's important also to recognise that as we are addressing our carbon footprint, we are also addressing the opportunity gap. I'm using this as an illustration. According to the data released by the Passport Index earlier this year, Indonesia passport is ranked 57th globally and sixth within the Asian region, trailing behind Brunei, Timor-Leste and Thailand.

So this ranking highlights significant challenges, where passport holders from lower ranking countries often face more restrictions on international travels. And this limitation can affect our ability to participate in conferences, educational programmes, symposiums, workshops, or even art residencies, which in turn can restrict their professional and personal development opportunity.

Also to my knowledge, there are no specific approaches that has been developed or promoted to address the environmental sustainability in relation to Indonesia's mobility funding calls.

On the other hand, like I mentioned before, Indonesian artists have increasingly turned their attention to environmental issues using their works, to address and raise awareness about ecological and sustainability concerns. So overall, while there is a rising awareness among artists about the importance of environmental issues, there remains a need for a more cohesive approach to integrate sustainability into funding and mobility programmes.

03:41 – 05:41

Kerrine: Yes, I think that's a very important point that you have brought up. We cannot only rely on artists to actually make a statement about environmental sustainability. It takes two hands to clap. So we'll definitely need funders in Indonesia and the ASEAN region to also adapt, to keep up with this debate of environmental sustainability and mobility.

So moving on, what do you see are some of the biggest challenges in making travel more sustainable, especially in Indonesia and Asia? And given the complexities of sustainable travel in

Asia compared to in Europe, how can we facilitate physical meetings between people of both regions?

Agni: I think and as most people in Asia know, making travel more sustainable in Indonesia and Asia may involve some big challenges. One of them is more likely related to infrastructure. Because Southeast Asia, like especially in Indonesia, we are lacking of a well-integrated transportation like in Europe and services to support slow travel. Because also many areas are still heavily rely on air travel, due to the distances between islands and the lack of efficient land or sea alternative.

In many Asian countries I also observe that air travel is more popular because it's more convenient and faster. So changing travel habits and preferences to sustainable travels will be more challenging, because not only that it will be less convenient, but it can be more expensive if the travel involves complex routes.

05:42 – 07:44

Kerrine: So if I could also expand on that. When we look at adopting more sustainable practices, how else can we also facilitate physical meetings between people while adopting more sustainable practices, are there ways that we can do so? For example, it could be maybe meeting more often in the region, like you said, because there's now more interest for people to travel and meet within Southeast Asia itself rather than going to Europe, for example.

So I was just also thinking, when we look at slow travel, because we also mentioned that it's not a very popular alternative for many artists and culture professionals. What impact would slow travel have in terms of opportunities and the income that, for artists and culture professionals in Asia, what would this mean?

Agni: I think slow travel also relates to how the international art programmes now operate. Because for example, it's as easy as related to the visa permit. Most of the residencies only lasts for one until three months. If an artist is coming from Europe by sea with the ship, like it will take a lot of time to then arrive and join the residency programme.

So, that also doesn't make sense. Or if we need to attend, art exhibitions because we need to install the work. We also need a more fast and reliable transportation or else we will be losing the time and all the preparation. I haven't thought of any other possible alternatives besides air travel and yeah perhaps to work in the region or to work locally is one of the better option for this.

07:45 – 10:03

Kerrine: All right, so if we are shifting gears to talking about the types of formats, opportunities that are available. So, we all know that because of Covid, we've all started to work online more often. Now recently with travel coming back, we have adopted hybrid formats as well. So within Indonesia, have the calls continued to prioritise online and hybrid activities, or is one form more prioritised than the other?

Agni: I think since the travel restriction in Indonesia that relates to Covid-19 have largely been lifted, online platforms now are only being used for non-artistic activities like mostly for technical meetings, to prepare an exhibition or to prepare art projects.

So artists and cultural workers in Indonesia mostly have returned to physical spaces for a face to face encounter and travel. Because again, we live in a place where infrastructure is not our strength. So online interactions and activities during the pandemic have always felt like an obstacle, and like I'm personally and some of the artist friends that I met, we are tired of like connection interruption, glitch, blackouts like typical Asian and many other technical issues.

However, Indonesian government agencies and some local cultural institutions have adapted to these changes and are supporting hybrid and online activities in their programmes. So for example, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of Indonesia have continued to organise programmes that combine physical and virtual participations, but mostly in form of like online workshops and symposium.

10:04 – 13:29

Kerrine: So it's great to hear that while we all still prefer meeting face to face, there are some circumstances where meeting online would still be one of the options that we would choose, especially if it's time efficient and also if it's a technical meeting, like Agni mentioning earlier.

So thank you Agni for sharing with us that Indonesia has actually continued to prioritise both online and hybrid activities. And I guess it's also the same in ASEF and also, if I could say within most parts of ASEAN and Southeast Asia.

So if we are jumping back into the Indonesia context, we know that Indonesia is very known for its rich initiatives that involve and engage with its local communities, did such opportunities actually slipped through the cracks with the growth of digital and hybrid mobility and under what circumstances should international mobility be replaced, complemented by online exchanges?

Agni: Thank you Kerrine for the interesting question because this question actually reminds me of a conversation that I had in 2015 with some artist friends in Jogja. At that time, we were discussing about the importance of direct encounters in the artistic process.

One of the reason was, at the time, residencies become very popular and were even used as a platform for some main exhibitions in Jogja, including the Jogja Biennale that just incorporated residencies into their programme. When I talk with one of the co-founder about the reason why the Jogja Biennale were using strategy with residency programme to organise the main exhibition, there was like a very pragmatic or like a simple question. As simple as that sending people is way more cheaper than sending artworks. Or inviting international artists to come and work for the exhibition in the Jogja Biennale is easier and also more affordable for the organiser. Because at the time, the amount of support from the Indonesian government was not much. But other response to the new strategy that makes me interested is, coming from my artist friend that I mentioned about the encounter between discourses now, are not enough just through artworks in the exhibition space. But we need more direct encounters between artists or people, and the communities.

That's what makes the art discourse more dynamic and people can see and relate to the context that is being discussed through artworks.

13:30 – 16:14

Kerrine: Yeah so I think it's very important to contextualise the discussions, which is why face to face meetings and people travelling over are always much preferred as compared to meeting online at times.

So I'm going on to the second last question. So when do online exchanges actually work well? And what does a successful exchange actually look like?

Agni: I will answer this in a little bit, like with a little joke. Online exchanges can only work well when we have justice and equality to the internet connection and bandwidth.

Kerrine: Yes, yes, I completely agree.

Agni: But I mean again, I'm reflecting on my work experience during the pandemic. I think in 2020 or 2021, I was working with Singaporean dramaturg, Corrie Tan. She was initiating this online residency that invites young art critics in Southeast Asia.

It was like a six month online residency with series of conversation and workshops. I think in some format like, like this online residency that involves young art critics, because most of the activities involve discussion, conversation. So the online exchange programme works very well, because we have all the time and space without having to go outside or to prepare ourselves to go outside to join.

In terms of the format of the programme, it was also interesting because it was designed together, not like it has been designed before. And then people who participate join later as audience. So like the collective format, I think that that works well in this online exchange programme.

Kerrine: And I like that, and a collective approach has been taken for such a project because I think there's value in hearing from everyone. And like what Agni was mentioning earlier, we need justice and equality in order for an online exchange to work well. So it's always important to hear from everyone, rather than from just one person.

16:15 – 18:17

Kerrine: So if I can just round off the conversation with one final question. What is your vision or model of what sustainable travel should look like in Asia and what changes or improvement what you'd like to see moving forward?

Agni: I think this is the most difficult to answer because I think it's, it's more ideological than practical. To make networking opportunities accessible for everyone and people who are not mobile for example, that is also one of the vision that I think it's important if we discuss about sustainable travel. And I think because of the political situation nowadays, where artists have travel restrictions because of what's happening in their countries, that also limits the imagination of sustainable travel.

Like for example, artists from Myanmar who cannot freely travel since the military coup. I think I need more time to reflect on this as an arts manager who mostly work in residency programme. I mean it's, it's as simple as without residency programme, without people or artists traveling like what we experienced during the pandemic, things felt like more lonely.

Kerrine: So I think that's the end of our second part of this podcast. Thank you Agni again for your very insightful responses and for sharing with us what is happening in Indonesia and its take on environmental sustainability.

So let's stay tuned for more conversations on arts and culture from culture360.ASEF.org.

Agni: Thank you.