



CREATIVE RESPONSES TO SUSTAINABILITY

Cultural initiatives engaging with social and
environmental issues

SINGAPORE GUIDE

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Singapore Guide

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1

Detailed Introduction

1.1 Foreword

Our crashed economies, fossil fuel based energy consumption and changing natural environment and climate are just a few examples that prove our current systems are broken in many ways. We have an urgent need for new structures in society. But moving away from these current systems is complicated and requires imagination, vision and creativity. The starting point for this research is an investigation into the potential of artists for proposing and envisioning alternatives and for shaping new and resilient societies.

Our modern societies have become very complicated and are changing so quickly that there is barely time to reposition or to develop a response to that change. Artists, however, have a unique ability to respond, often taking the role of pioneers, or even activists. They can also take a position of addressing issues in a (more) ‘free’ realm and may therefore have the ‘response-ability’ to react on what needs to change, or how we can change it. The word ‘response-ability’ is used here deliberately, as originated by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, and refers to having a unique and creative ability to respond to something, this being the essence of the reasonable being.¹ Just as the European Renaissance exploded during the 14th century, artists can be at the forefront of igniting 21st century social and environmental transformations.

Globally the contribution of the creative sector is getting increasing recognition in building more sustainable societies. We have realised that climate change is – at least in large part – a cultural problem, an effect of our lifestyle and consumer behaviours. To start influencing human behaviours we have to go beyond communicating the science of climate change. The creative and cultural approach to climate change has proved to be very effective, since it speaks to people on

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1 LEVINAS, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh. 1961

an engaging, human, accessible, critical or fun level. Arts and culture have proved to be effective tools with which to advance new ideas and influence social norms. Critical engagement from the creative sector is complementary to the engagement of business, science and industry.

Many developing countries see technological innovations as the answer for shaping these new societies. 'Technology is going to save us', is a recurrent phrase. However, more and more artists are moving in exactly the opposite direction, focusing on projects related to craft, gardens and working with communities, taking a strong interest in our changing environment. These artists do not think that technology is the answer to all our problems, but that an important part of moving towards a sustainable future is related to social, cultural, human, low tech solutions. Developing alternative structures to our current system requires a change in the way we live, embracing low tech, human solutions, as well as high tech innovations.

At the same time, economic growth in Asia is transforming cities, lives and landscapes. Asia, and specifically China, has the power to drive this change. What our futures will look like depends in large part on how the growing economies are responding to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. Their response is critical to environmental disruptions that are often a consequence of such processes, such as contamination of soil and water systems, erosion of natural habitats, a growing number of endangered species and rapidly collapsing biodiversity, the production of greenhouse gases contributing to unprecedented air pollution and climate change. These challenges, however, come with huge opportunities for science and sectors such as the renewable energy industries.

Climate change and other environmental disruptions do not acknowledge borders. How do we, as nations, deal with a problem without borders? To instigate real change we need to be collaborating globally on as many levels as possible. This research aims to build cultural bridges between Asia and Europe in terms of mapping artists engaging with social and environmental issues and identifying their needs and wishes. This research is a small step into providing an overview of who is doing what. It aims to stimulate more cultural collaborations on these themes and seeks to inspire future projects with examples of best practices. Each research is compiled in a Country Guide with the following objectives:

- 1.** An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the arts scene based on over 50 interviews with artists, curators, cultural policymakers and academics.
- 2.** A directory of the 20 most pioneering or influential cultural initiatives engaging with social and environmental issues.
- 3.** A set of concrete solutions for the sector in order to effectively contribute to shaping more sustainable societies through arts and culture.

The aims of the research are:

- 1.** To build the foundation for an Asian ‘knowledge alliance’, an informal network of artists, curators and arts managers supporting each other and working in the field of sustainability.
- 2.** To provide artists and arts professionals with an overview of potential partners to engage with on these issues in other countries and regions.
- 3.** To influence cultural policymaking to allow more opportunities for artists to collaborate with each other on issues related to social and environmental responsibilities.

Two previous policy reports and one network have been instrumental towards the present research:

- 1. ‘Arts. Environment. Sustainability. How can Culture make a Difference?’ (Asia-Europe Foundation [ASEF], 2011).** In 2008, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) initiated a 4-year project series called *Connect2Culture* that investigated the evolving role of arts and culture in society, with particular focus on the debates surrounding climate change. The activities undertaken as part of the project were summarised in the dossier, *Arts. Environment. Sustainability. How can Culture make a Difference?* (ASEF, 2011). The project engaged with many Asian and European experts from different sectors (arts, science, technology etc.) to address issues related to art and environmental sustainability through artistic collaborations and cultural policy meetings. The dossier is both a summary of ASEF-supported work in this area and an invitation for continued engagement and network forming. This research builds on that knowledge and work. The dossier is available online at: <http://www.asef.org/images/>

[docs/Culture%20make%20a%20difference.pdf](#)

2. International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) and Julie's Bicycle, D'Art Report 34b: 'The arts and environmental sustainability: an international overview'. November 2014. The D'Art report gives a global review of developments in policies and programmes related to culture and environmental sustainability. It informs international arts leaders about good practice and resources in this key policy area, and how such policies impact on national arts and cultural organisations. D'Art Report 34b provides a snapshot of arts and cultural engagement with environmental sustainability with an emphasis on policies, not on artistic content or wider arts practice. This research Guide hopes to complement the D'Art report, with a focus on art practices engaging with environmental sustainability in different countries in Asia. <http://www.juliesbicycle.com/files/IFACCA-Report-Full.pdf>

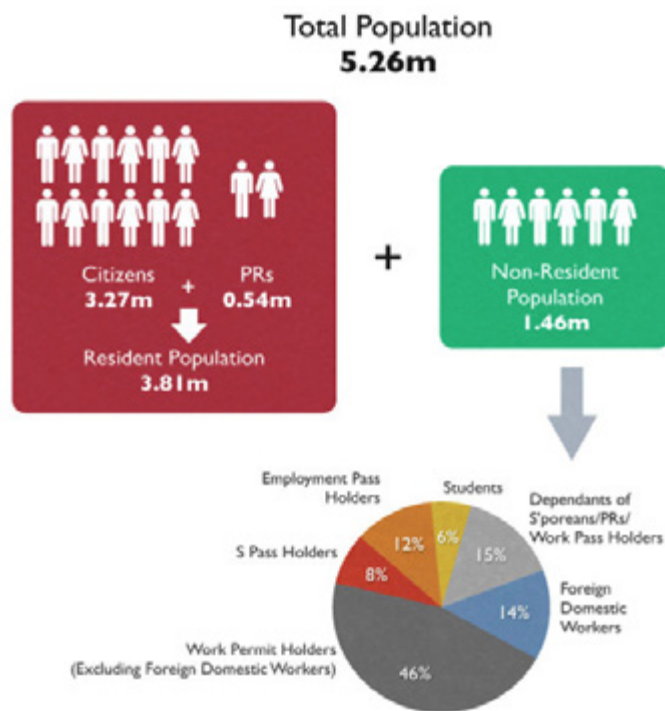
3. The Green Art Lab Alliance (GALA) 2012-2015. The Green Art Lab Alliance (GALA) was an EU funded project coordinated by TransArtists/DutchCulture and Julie's Bicycle; a pan-European network of cultural organisations engaging with environmental issues. The two years of GALA activities (across 2012-2015) spread over 22 countries in Europe, confirmed the appetite in the cultural sector to engage with environmental issues in many artistic ways. It showed the different types of engagement possible (labs, residencies, workshops, exhibitions) and the impact of collaboration and knowledge sharing. This functioned as catalyst to explore opportunities for a Green Art Lab Alliance in Asia. <http://greenartlaballiance.eu>

Creative Responses to Sustainability – Singapore Guide, will be launched during ArtCOP21, a Paris and world-wide programme of cultural events that is organised alongside [COP21 – the 21st United Nations conference of climate change](#). ArtCOP21 addresses climate change as a “people challenge” and aims to create a “cultural blueprint of positive and sustainable change”. <http://www.artcop21.com/>

Furthermore the launch of this Guide marks the birth of Green Art Lab Alliance Asia, a knowledge alliance for cultural organisations engaging with social and environmental issues. GALA Asia kicks off with a three day conference attended by art collectives from over 8 Asian countries, hosted by Margaret SHIU, renowned cultural leader and founder of Bamboo Curtain Studio

(10-13 December 2015).

1.2 Introduction to Singapore



Source: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Manpower
[Note: Numbers do not add up due to rounding]

FACTS AND FIGURES

Average gross monthly income from work of full-time employed residents 2014: \$ 3,770²

Average annual unemployment rate 2014: 2%³

Population density in 2014 (people per sq. km of land area): 7,814⁴

Religions: Singapore is a multi-religious nation, with Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Hinduism as main religions.

Climate: tropical climate with an average temperature of 31 degrees Celsius

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2 Ministry of Manpower Singapore: <http://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Income-Summary-Table.aspx>

3 Ministry of Manpower Singapore: <http://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Unemployment-Summary-Table.aspx>

4 World Bank data: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST>

Global carbon footprint: <http://www.wri.org/blog/2015/06/infographic-what-do-your-countrys-emissions-look> (World Resources Institute)

UNEP statistics on 118 indicators regarding natural resource use over the past 40 years: <http://uneplive.unep.org/country/index/SG#maps>

The bigger picture for resource efficiency in Asia and the Pacific: [Indicators_for_a_resource_efficient_and_green_Asia_and_the_Pacific-2015Indicator-for-a-RE.pdf](#)

Health statistics for Singapore: http://www.who.int/gho/countries/sgp/country_profiles/en/ (World Health Organization).

The island city state of Singapore is centrally located in Southeast Asia and has established itself as a financial hub, attracting people and business from all over the world. This makes Singapore highly westernised and carrying the highest population of expatriate workers in the region. On 12 March 2015 a BBC report stated “Out of a population of 5.6 million, 1.32 million are foreign workers, according to Singapore government statistics for 2014. Recent estimates by the website expatarrivals.com and others put the number of expats at around 600,000 – referring to professional and managerial workers, who are more skilled, earn much more and are often on employment pass visas.”⁵ Alongside the high number of expats, the majority of the resident population comes from three ethnic groups: Chinese (74.1% of the population), Malay (13.4%) and Indian (9.2%).

The island is highly urbanised and only 1% of the land is used for agricultural purposes, which results in most food being imported from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia.⁶ A lot of fresh water is also imported, although this is slowly changing. With a history of water-stress, in recent years Singapore has become a hub for companies involved in water treatment. ‘Singapore has identified water and environment technologies as a key growth sector since 2006’⁷ says the Public Utilities Board (PUB), the country’s water agency.

Since it is very densely populated, land reclamation has become a very popular way of trying to create more space in Singapore. This has sometimes resulted in tensions with Malaysia and

5 <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20150311-why-expats-call-this-utopia>

6 Statistics from the World Bank: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.AGRI.ZS>

7 <http://www.pub.gov.sg/Pages/default.aspx>

Indonesia, where most of the imported sand for land reclamation used to come from. Since 2015, both countries have banned the selling of marine sand to Singapore for the purposes of land reclamation. Working with a Singaporean sand surveyor, artist Charles Lim conducted research around land reclamation practices in Singapore. His work, SEASTATE, represented Singapore at the Venice Biennale 2015⁸, and is represented on the cover of this Guide.

Singapore is only 137km north of the Equator, which gives it a hot tropical rainforest climate and sunshine all year around. Plants and flowers grow easily in this climate which has given Singapore the nickname “the Garden City”. This ‘garden’ is very neatly kept with hardly any garbage on the streets. The Singapore Botanical Garden has been a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site since July 2015. With an average temperature of 31 degrees Celsius, the widely available air-conditioned malls are very popular places for people to shop. The very clean subway, the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) and buses are all air-conditioned too, as are cinemas and other public spaces.

The People’s Action Party (PAP) has been the ruling party since 1959. The leader of the PAP, Lee Kuan Yew passed away in March 2015 and has left a strong imprint on the island. 2015 is an important year for Singapore for other reasons; it celebrates 50 years of independence as a nation with the extensive SG50 event programme. In November 2015, the long awaited National Gallery⁹ opens its doors, a major new visual arts museum created from two monumental heritage buildings of the 1920s and 1930s colonial era. The National Gallery will focus on Singapore and Southeast Asian art from the 19th century to the present day and oversees the world’s largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian art, consisting of over 8,000 artworks.

Singapore was a British colony from 1824 to 1965. It was occupied by the Japanese during World War II. English is still commonly spoken and is one of the four official languages together with Malay, Tamil and Mandarin Chinese.

Singapore is home to the highest percentage of millionaires in the world and is the world’s fourth

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8 Find out more about the work of Charles Lim on his Vimeo channel: <https://vimeo.com/user16151903>

9 <https://www.nationalgallery.sg>

leading financial centre with its skyline filled with shiny skyscrapers¹⁰. Although people used to live in kampungs (villages), most people now live in high-rise public housing provided by the Housing & Development Board (HDB) and in condominiums.

Singapore has a small number of independent art spaces. The oldest and most significant is The Substation. See the Directory for more information and the overview of 20 spaces/initiatives in Singapore engaging with social and environmental issues, including The Substation.

The main art schools are LASALLE College of the Arts (established in 1984) and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA, established in 1938). LASALLE is focused on preparing graduates for careers in the creative industries through ‘a practice-based and industry-led pedagogy’¹¹. NAFA, the oldest art institute, is more traditional and receives polytechnic-level funding from the Ministry of Education.¹²

For younger school students (13-18) there is SOTA, the School Of The Arts. SOTA is a national pre-tertiary specialised arts school with a six-year integrated arts and academic curriculum. The two main universities are Nanyang Technical University (NTU) with a total of 32,699 students enrolled in 2014¹³ and the National University Singapore (NUS) with a total of 10,748 students enrolled¹⁴. Both offer academic art education. Smaller universities are Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) and Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT).

The key funding body for the arts is the National Arts Council (NAC). The NAC is part of the 22 government agencies that serve Singapore. In March 2015, Sam Tan, the Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth, stated that 25 million Singapore dollars (SGD) “will be pumped into the traditional arts” over the next five years. This confirms the government’s focus on ‘heritage projects’ such as research and documentation of traditional Asian art forms. “It is

10 MAHTANI, Shibani (1 June 2012). “Singapore No. 1 For Millionaires – Again”. *Wall Street Journal Southeast Asia blog* (New York).

11 <http://www.lasalle.edu.sg/about/>

12 <http://www.nafa.edu.sg/about-nafa/who-we-are>

13 [http://www.ntu.edu.sg/AboutNTU/CorporateInfo/FactsFigures/Pages/EnrolmentbyCollege\(AY2014-15\).aspx](http://www.ntu.edu.sg/AboutNTU/CorporateInfo/FactsFigures/Pages/EnrolmentbyCollege(AY2014-15).aspx)

14 <http://www.nus.edu.sg/registrar/statistics.html#table2>

important for us to build inclusive communities that interact and play with each other, regardless of race, language or culture. This is something the traditional arts can do”, said the Minister.¹⁵

II. Government Funding

Government funding for arts and culture has continued to grow from \$541.4 million in 2012 to \$677.3 million in 2013 (Chart D-2).

Chart D-2: Government Funding



Source: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and Ministry of Communications and Information. Figures prior to 2012 were from the then Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

* 2008 to 2012 figures have been revised to reflect operating and development expenditure. All figures are based on Financial Year.

^ 2013 figures are an estimate. Growth in funding in 2013 was due to the development of the National Gallery Singapore, redevelopment of Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall and first year of full disbursement of the Arts and Culture Strategic Review funding.

Image from https://www.nac.gov.sg/docs/statisticspdf/mccy_culturalstats2014.pdf

1.3 Methodology

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This Guide is for policymakers, artists, arts managers, curators, or anyone working in the cultural field interested in creative and sustainable societies, more liveable cities, a healthier personal lifestyle and engaging with issues such as food security, urban infrastructure and wellbeing. The Guides are a starting point to find partners and give the reader an introduction to the cultural field in the country. It also gives concrete proposals to policymakers, based on the identified needs and wishes of the sector.

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15 <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-budget-2015-traditional-arts-sector-to-receive-25m-in-funding>

WHAT IS THE METHODOLOGY?

This qualitative research is based on in-depth interviews with key players in the cultural field such as curators, museum directors, policymakers, funders, (arts) educators and cultural managers. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and transcripts of the interviews are available on request – only with permission of the interviewee. The key people have been identified by using different (local and international) networks and via recommendations. Not all identified key people were available for an interview so this research is by no means exhaustive. The selection for the Singapore Directory is based on over 50 interviews conducted between April and July 2015.

The research objectives for the interviews aimed to identify:

- How do artists and cultural organisations engage with social and environmental issues in Singapore?
- How can they be more effective in contributing to building a healthier, more creative and more sustainable Singapore.

HOW TO READ THIS GUIDE

This Guide consists of the following sections:

- State of Affairs: this is based on over 50 interviews conducted with key players in the cultural field in Singapore. It gives a taste of the current challenges the cultural field is facing.
- A Directory that lists the 20 most significant initiatives in Singapore engaging with social and environmental issues. This selection is based on over 50 interviews conducted.
- Concrete proposals on how to strengthen this sector of cultural initiatives engaging with social and environmental issues.
- A Glossary, including 8 recurring trends from the interviews. The identified trends are: Critical Making, Cultural Heritage, Food Security, Digital Revolution, Creative Industries & Crafts, Urban Infrastructure, Advocacy, and Well-being.

2

State of Affairs, Singapore Guide

THE SINGAPORE ARTS SCENE	
Strengths	Weaknesses
funding available	(self) censorship
governmental institutions very connected	limited discourse

2.1 Funding

The National Arts Council (NAC) has a strong focus on communities and ‘getting people together’. The NAC works mostly through outward partnerships, such as with the Housing & Development Board (HDB). Furthermore the NAC is aiming at economic sustainability for the sector through seed funding for artists and trainings in business skills.

The (artist) interviewees indicated the need for process-based funding as most of the current funding is project-based and focused on tangible outcomes.

Isaac KERLOW (Earth Observatory Singapore)

“ There is a lot of funding available in Singapore, but it comes with a lot of pressure to perform. There has to be a tangible outcome like an exhibition, otherwise you don’t get the validation. The mentality is that there needs to be a very short line between the proposal and the result. It’s a Singapore thing.¹⁶

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16 Interview with Isaac KERLOW, Earth Observatory Singapore on the 13 May 2015

2.2 Discourse

Not much art in Singapore stems from a seam of political awareness and there are not many people who can make a living by being a professional artist. Most of them have taken on day jobs and can do their 'pet projects' in the evenings and weekends, or are getting support from their families. The art market, art discourse and art audience is not very developed, as it is mostly commercial and buyer based. This creates a lack of writing and discourse, a shared concern amongst the interviewees. Reflection is considered crucial for a thriving arts scene.

The lack of political engagement seems to come from a lifetime of being looked after by the Government. Because Singapore is a small country it is possible to control things. A few of the interviewees indicated that it is mostly the older generation that self-censor and that this is slowly changing for the younger generations.

Stephanie DOGFOOT (poet/lawyer):

“*I'm optimistic about change; a lot of people have studied abroad, we have the Internet and this all makes it more likely for people to challenge the governmental narrative. It will be less totalitarian. The next generation will not remember the 'Marxist conspiracy' and the arrests of 1987.*¹⁷

Alexander YANG (IAA):

“*We, Singaporeans, have wilfully traded our independence for stability and hospitals.*¹⁸

Art that is particularly critical and political may be censored, though it is mostly self-censorship that the artists face. This makes artists engaging with political issues sometimes reluctant to apply for governmental funding. However, for projects engaging with issues around 'heritage' or 'nature' in a non-political way, the NAC offers very welcome support and the majority of the artists interviewed indicated they have received NAC funding throughout their career. 'The Government is very generous but not always without strings attached.'¹⁹

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17 From a conversation with Stephanie DOGFOOT, Singapore Green Drinks on 21 April 2015

18 Interview with Alex YANG, Independent Art Archive on 24 April 2015

19 Anonymous quote from interview

2.3 Increasing awareness

Access to the Internet, travelling and studying abroad have all increased the awareness about climate change and environmental issues in Singapore. People are more educated, they travel, they have Internet and they want to express themselves. Though environmental sustainability is generally recognised as something important, engaging with it through culture is not widespread in Singapore. The majority of the interviewees agreed that they felt this was changing because of studying abroad and having access to information through the Internet.

Robert ZHAO Renhui (artist):

“ I have an obsession with our relationship with nature and our ideas about what is natural. My ideas about that changed after I studied in London. Travelling helped to see Singapore in a different way. In London, I learned to look at the bigger picture.²⁰

CHING Ling Loo (urban farmer):

“ I'm grateful to Goldsmiths for introducing me to broader thinking, introducing a different idea about what sustainability means. But it also made it harder to find a job in sustainability in Singapore. I now work for a heritage consultancy that looks at preservation of local heritage.²¹

2.4 'Greenwashing'

'Going Green' seems to have become a trend with businesses. However, the interviewees agree that the engagement gets stuck on a very superficial level of 'ticking boxes' and in some cases is just so-called 'green washing'. Environmental consultants are generally hired by big companies to help them 'tick the boxes' and reach the 'green standards'. Urban development is always prioritised over sustainability. When sustainability is considered the focus, it is generally sustainable technologies that will prioritise development and will allow people to live Western/Singaporean lifestyles. Asian corporate structures are usually run by families or the Government, ranging from supermarkets to petrol stations. Sustainability comes very much at the technical

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20 Interview with Robert ZHAO Renhui on 1 May 2015

21 Interview with CHING Ling Loo on 13 April 2015

level, the infrastructural level and in terms of greening and retro-fitting buildings. In Singapore there is a limited cultural understanding of sustainability, nor is there a holistic approach to it.

Singapore is particularly good at connecting government agencies and universities with businesses and industry. Citizens are less engaged than industry, as they see it as a Government responsibility.

Jiehui KIA (Forum for the Future):

“Certain parts of the private sector and government are very tightly linked, they keep in regular contact and are aware of each other’s plans. But then there is a wide gap between the ground and the big guys.”²²

2.5 Art and environment

All the interviews touched upon the question of whether artists can contribute to shaping more sustainable societies. The opinions of how artists impact societies varied widely, though everyone agreed that cultural engagement does have some effect and is somehow important. Some of the replies include:

- Art could change the world as it’s a way to ‘transcend your own reality’. For a society it can ask the question ‘What is possible’?
- Artists can imagine freely and therefore make leaps across stale bureaucracies.
- Art can plant ideas in people and it can inspire people. Experiencing an artwork can be a shortcut to the public, in comparison for instance to reading essays. It makes knowledge more accessible.
- The emotions that art can provoke have a deeper impact on people than science. To impact the individual is not so difficult, however to impact society is much harder.
- Art can express what you can’t express in formal language.

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22 Interview with Jiehui KIA on 23 May 2015

- Laws try to shape our behaviour whereas culture actually does shape our behaviour. Culture can be seen as informal law, culture is the determinant.

Joyce Beetuan KOH (NAFA/artist):

“Artists have a strong evaluative power. They can be critical and they have the ability to (critically) look at themselves and question things.

However, with my work I don't want to change people's behaviour, I think that's a very condescending attitude. The audiences can decide for themselves what they think, I can't determine their experience, I just offer a platform.²³

Kai LAM (artist):

“We need to be self-critical, individual as well as institutional. Social and environmental engagement should be part of all those agendas. Art is all encompassing, is always responding to the environment, so has a high potential to contribute.²⁴

2.6 Production

Production is generally cheaper in Asia than in Europe and this has advantages and disadvantages. Cheap production allows diversity, providing Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, for instance, with very vibrant art markets. With Indonesian and Malaysian economies rapidly developing, growing production also results in an increasing impact on the environment. The landscape is changing with forests being cleared in Indonesia and Malaysia. The landscape provides the income. If you drive to Malaysia from Singapore you can see the forests burning. Indonesia does not have a well developed public funding system for the arts, so artists have to sustain themselves by selling their art. This makes their art market very object based.

In Singapore storage tends to be a problem for artists both in terms of space and climate. There is not much space to store artwork, and it is too hot to leave work out in a non air-conditioned space. This has contributed to the cultural sector being very slow in catching up with environmental

23 Interview with Joyce Beetuan KOH on 14 May 2015

24 Interview with Kai LAM on 16 May 2015

sustainability. Work that is not sold often gets destroyed as there is no space to keep it.

Isabelle DESJEUX (artist):

“ *It's impossible to work with wax as the work will melt and I will find mould on my work if I don't keep it air-conditioned.*²⁵

Venka PURUSHOTHAMAN (Vice-President (Academic) & Provost, LASALLE College of the Arts):

“ *Long-term sustainability is not something considered urgent in Singapore. For the current Government it's a very recent development to be considering it, the awareness wasn't here. It has no foothold across the sector. The general practice here is to dispose. We don't have a supply chain that is sustainable.*²⁶

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25 Interview with Isabelle DESJEUX on 15 April 2015

26 Interview with Venka PURUSHOTHAMAN on 22 May 2015

3

Concrete proposals

Although the interviews demonstrate the appetite from the sector to engage with social and environmental issues, it also becomes clear that the main obstacles are the lack of infrastructure and knowledge to do so. There is a huge step to be taken, and culture cannot shy away from engaging with sustainability. The interviewees offered very practical ideas and solutions on how we can make progress and they indicated what they would need to move towards a more sustainable society.

3.1 Knowledge exchange and facilitated networking

Fostering partnerships between different organisations in Asia working in this field and providing a platform for knowledge exchange between these organisations and artists involved is required. Being ‘networked’ is a strategy that helps share the risks of pioneering. Furthermore, Singapore is considered to be run by technocrats and needs to interact with different networks and work in a more cross-disciplinary fashion.

Venka PURUSHOTHAMAN (Vice-President (Academic) & Provost, LASALLE College of the Arts):

“It’s important to be part of communities around the region through Asian networks. Information doesn’t flow naturally from one community to the other, you need more informal gatherings. International students could become information networks.”²⁷

3.2 Regional and transnational collaboration

It would be beneficial to work in the region more and have the benefit of sharing knowledge. ‘It multiplies and amplifies what we know and can know and you don’t have to struggle through

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27 Interview with Venka PURUSHOTHAMAN on 22 May 2015

everything'. It would be good to get more easily connected to people to be paired up. Initiatives are trying to build up relationships elsewhere. 'When you're working with the same topics you can create common platforms. A mapping would make that much easier.' What can countries in the region learn from each other?

Mobility can be linked to local development. In terms of cultural and geographical definitions, it is worth considering not only one Asia, but multiple Asias in which different things can be learned from each other. This helps deconstruct fixed terms and geographies and enriches and enhances the diversity.

Godwin KOAY (artist):

“ We need to care about what's happening in the region, it's very scary if we don't. This is one of the reasons why we need to have transnational networks, to combat that. We need to be demonstrating what is possible without the state, without authority defining how you should or shouldn't be. That's the space of collaboration.

3.3 Cultural leadership

Singapore is famous for bringing in foreign talent in various disciplines, from electronics to engineering and economists. Why not hire great leaders of Sustainability? There should be more opportunities for cultural leaders to engage with environmental sustainability. Singapore and especially the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) are keen to demonstrate leadership around sustainability. Two of the NTU buildings won Green awards. They like to think in big projects, with big impact.

Michelle Y. MERRILL (NTU):

“ The most critical is to change the mindsets of the people who are going to be our next leaders, our next politicians, our next decision makers. They will be setting the big agendas. ²⁸

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28 Interview with Michelle Y. MERRILL on 14 April 2015

3.4 Bridging gaps between grassroots and policy making

With its manageable size and the role played by the Government, awareness about sustainability in Singapore could be rapidly increased. To start the movement from bottom up has proven to be hard because there is a big gap between the Government (policy) and what's happening on the ground (grassroots). Some interviewees indicate that they try to bridge those worlds by speaking to their local MP and proposing ideas and alternatives. 'We tell him what we hope he will do'.²⁹ However, the movement needs to be driven from both sides - top down as well as bottom up.

Alecia NEO (UNSEEN):

“Internet is providing a space for engagement, but you need to take both routes, also engaging your MP.”³⁰

3.5 Engaging more young people

The majority of interviewees confirmed that to make steps towards a more sustainable society we need to engage young people. Young people often get disillusioned and they need encouragement to get engaged. There is a need for a system to cultivate those young people. Schools are a great way to engage young people. Education on climate change and sustainability can influence their behaviours and has an impact on the long term. 'It needs to be shown that this type of engagement is not just a grassroots thing, it's not *uncool*. Arts can change that current stigma of *uncoolness*.'³¹

Nor Lastrina HAMID (350.org):

“There should be more youth NGOs. There should be climate change leadership development. It would be good to have an international youth climate change network, people to send to COP and conferences. Expose the people that are interested to international networks, have them

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29 Interview with Alecia NEO on 24 April 2015

30 *ibid.*

31 Interview with Nor Lastrina HAMID on 18 May 2015

*meet decision makers, get to meet ambassadors, have access to certain people.*³²

3.6 Engaging artists

All interviewees agree that it is very important to engage artists when we want to move to a more creative, healthy and sustainable society. Below is a selection of some of the reasons given by different interviewees:

- 1.** Artists tend to have a more worldly perspective and are more willing to learn from each other's practice. Networking is much stronger in the arts than in other jobs. 'Because there's so little money, we invite each other and support each other, we like to travel to each other's country. There is a strong sense of solidarity in the international art scène because we are all struggling. This gives a sense of community.'
- 2.** Artists play an underestimated but significant role in capturing the changing values and norms and preoccupations of contemporary society.
- 3.** People put up barriers when they negotiate in their societal role. Art and empathy can break down those barriers.
- 4.** Art is a good place to do that as you can try things, there is more freedom as you are not so locked into a certain way of working and there is more leeway to try and see what works better. Instinctively artists are given a bit more space to be unusual. The flipside to that is that some art/artists are not taken seriously. But we can manage that by accompanying it with proper research and deliverables.
- 5.** We need as many corridors of communication as possible and we need them to be between the different disciplines, giving opportunity for cross fertilisation. We need to provide artists that are aware the access with to the tools to say what they need to say.
- 6.** Singapore lacks the culture of the gift. Everything becomes an invoice. Everyone always expects something back immediately. Artists don't have that as strongly. Society needs to

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32 *ibid.*

shift to being nice to your neighbours.

7. Singapore needs to allow things to have complexity. We need to be comfortable with complexity and multiple readings of things. This is what art can do.

3.7 Systems thinking

‘Systems thinking’ is the process of understanding how systems influence one another within a complete entity, or larger system. One interviewee emphasized the importance of systems thinking as ‘Western objectiveness ignores relationships and interconnectedness’. Systems thinking breaks with the illusion that people and nature are separated. This is where the arts have more direct access. We need to find ways to ‘retrain’ people who have been trained in this linear mindset that separates objects. The arts can do this (retraining process) in a much more direct way. Intuition operates at the systems level. ‘There is a need to get in touch with that mode of thinking and integrate it with our current scientific reasoning. The arts have the biggest contribution to make in integrating these functions.’³³ There is a lot of power and possibility in the arts. It is where people seem to be the most aware and the most passionate. Climate change and limited resources have an impact on business, there is a risk coming so they need to include it in their business strategy. On the positive side, environmental challenges come with opportunities for businesses, such as for innovative water technologies and the renewable energy industry.³⁴

Jiehui KIA (Forum for the Future)

“ We are not telling the businesses they are doing a bad job, but just teaching people to think in longer cycles. For instance the example of the 3D printing: you have to work around trends. The Government, academics, peers are starting members’ groups and there is a huge wave of start-ups. People think 3 years cycles. The business cycle is 10-20 years.³⁵

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33 Interview with Jiehui KIA on 23 May 2015

34 Scott, Mike. ‘Asia’s ESG challenges are opportunities for investors. Financial Times. 6 July 2015

35 Interview with Jiehui KIA on 23 May 2015

3.8 More fun

There can still be some stigma attached to grassroots engagement, from climate change to ageing. Taking a fun, accessible and enjoyable approach to engaging people seems to be effective. It can be a way of offering something refreshing and new that people can relate to on a personal level, such as round table discussions, that break down barriers. Food is a great way to engage people. The best way to encourage people to get engaged is by not restricting creativity and taking the fun and enjoyable approach. Arts and culture can be perfect for that.

Veerappan SWAMINATHAN (Sustainable Living Lab):

“People need to see it’s fun to engage, need to see how enjoyable repairing is. This is a lot about your marketing strategy. If you want to engage the masses you can’t just be talking your own language. It needs to look like something successful, like something people want to be part of. If Coke can do it, why can’t environmentalists do it?”³⁶

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36 Interview with Veerappan SWAMINATHAN on 9 April 2015

4

Glossary

4.1 Introduction to the Glossary

Commercial corporations often use the word ‘sustainability’ in their annual reports (sometimes to ‘greenwash’ their practice) and environmental charities use the same word to indicate their deep-rooted engagement with environmental issues. Words such as ‘organic’, ‘green’, ‘natural’, ‘recycled’, ‘biodegradable’ and ‘renewable’ are all over our consumer products and are used interchangeably. They have been used so often that they have become hollow, empty. They have almost lost their meaning. The word ‘sustainability’ is globally used in many different ways. This Glossary is a ‘growing document’, collecting alternative words related to sustainability worldwide and is an attempt to further explain what is meant by the word sustainability in this Guide.

Practically every interviewee in Singapore said that they were not the right person to talk to because they ‘didn’t know anything about sustainability’ or worse – ‘I don’t recycle so I’m not the person to talk to about sustainability’, feeling guilty about their waste/carbon intensive lifestyle. In addition it became clear that the word sustainability is considered a very Western word, mostly associated with ‘policy language’ – meaning it is not relevant to individuals and especially not related to an artistic or cultural context. Artist Robert Zhao even admitted that the word sustainability was mainly associated with something being expensive: ‘electric cars are more expensive and organic food is more expensive’ – both are supposedly the ‘sustainable alternative’.

For the purpose of this Guide, sustainability has a different meaning. It refers to a holistic approach to things, recognising the interconnectedness of people as well as nature. It means that sustainability encompasses and inherently touches upon social issues (from ageing populations to migrant workers’ rights) as well as environmental issues (from climate change

to the extinction of species). Sustainability is about respecting and caring for your environment, people and planet, not being harmful to the environment or depleting natural resources, and thereby supporting long-term ecological balance.

‘Sustainability goes beyond saving energy or making products or houses more “environmentally-friendly”. It directs us in such a way that it questions the way in which society functions, including governance, legislation and policy, but also culture, belief systems, behaviour and education which are among the many factors that determine social and environmental outcomes.’³⁷

According to the environmentalist Bhavani Prakash, ‘Professionally, I would define it in the way the Brundtland Commission says, “To meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. And more specifically in an operational sense, I would use the Natural Steps’ 4 system conditions, which means “nature is not subjected to systematically increasing the following:

- Concentrations of substances from the earth’s crust,
- Concentrations of substances produced by society,
- Degradation by physical means,

and that people in society are not subjected to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.” For me personally it means, leading a life where we feel connected to all of existence, extending kindness to all species, and all living ecosystems.’³⁸

4.2 What do we mean by sustainability?

The different country Guides will look at local alternatives to define the word sustainability and the (local) themes it relates to. Below are some of the most interesting and recurring themes that were highlighted by the interviewees in the context of Singapore.

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37 *Asian Perspectives on Sustainability*, Vol. IV of the *Encyclopedia of Asian Design*, Bloomsbury 2016. Volume IV: Transnational Issues in Asian Design; Volume Editors: Haruhiko FUJITA, Osaka University, Japan and Christine GUTH, Royal College of Art / Victoria & Albert Museum, UK.

38 From email correspondence with Bhavani PRAKASH, 18th of April 2015

— ADVOCACY

This identified trend touches upon the wider spectrum of advocacy for sustainability, from (cultural) policymaking to (creative) activism (or activists).

— CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND CRAFTS

Creative industries is the ‘umbrella term’ for a range of disciplines including design, architecture, film, television, fashion, gaming, and crafts. It is identified as a worldwide economic and societal growth area. Working with crafts is also included in this booming field, resulting in an upcoming interest in learning traditional skill. This identified trend is linked to (both social and environmental) sustainability as traditional crafts and hand made products are (generally) much more environmental friendly than mass produced goods.

— CRITICAL MAKING

Critical Making refers to an emerging international movement of people interested in making things themselves. They embrace new technologies such as 3D printing as well as low tech repairing, using their own hands to fix things. The makers meet each other at MakerSpaces and Maker Fairs organised all over the world, to share supplies, skills, and ideas.³⁹

— DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Internet provides Singapore with international access to information and social media has revolutionised the way people organise themselves and share information. Social media offer a strong tool with the potential to give power back to the citizens. Important players in keeping the Internet safe (or unsafe!) are hackers. The so called ‘white hats’ are ethical hackers, working with the intentions to improve (online) security. They protect and question issues around privacy and surveillance and do ‘penetration testing’ — software attacks to identify vulnerabilities in computer systems. These hackers are very important in an increasingly digital world.⁴⁰

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39 <https://makerspace.com>

40 For more info on what a white hat is: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_hat_\(computer_security\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_hat_(computer_security))

— FOOD SECURITY

Food Security is a theme referring to a movement of people becoming more conscious about their food. Urban farmers are becoming more commonly seen worldwide. They are growing their own food and want to increase the awareness around food security as a response to how food distribution systems have evolved and the majority of our food is imported. This movement believes that growing food re-connects urbanites to nature, conserves natural resources, and cultivates a sense of community; bringing people together through the sharing of food.

— GOTONG ROYONG

Gotong Royong refers to a collaborative approach, helping each other and your neighbours, the community. It originates from Indonesia, where nationalism was on the rise after the Second World War. Indonesia's first president Sukarno actively pursued the idea of *gotong royong* as an Indonesian way of life in a newly-independent nation. *Gotong Royong* is selfless and it contributes to a higher goal, the needs of society/the community and strengthens its cultural identity. In Singapore it flourished later, in the 1960s and '70s when, after Independence, the country was struggling with its economy and national identity.⁴¹

— HERITAGE

Heritage refers to the issue of cultural heritage and identity. It means to explore your own cultural roots and history. It relates to environmental sustainability in the sense that heritage also includes historic sites such as cultural and religious buildings, ancient landscapes and, for instance, graveyards. Heritage activists fight to preserve and restore these landscapes and buildings. It is linked to social sustainability as heritage activists often long for a stronger sense of community and looking after each other.

— KAMPUNG SPIRIT

Kampung spirit is very linked to *gotong royong*, though is more all-encompassing in the village (*kampung*) life. It refers to sharing, trust, friendships and generosity.

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41 <http://remembersingapore.org/2013/09/17/kampung-spirit-and-gotong-royong/>

— LINGCHI

Lingchi is considered the opposite of sustainability and refers to ‘an incremental death of global ecosystems by a thousand cuts– a phrase with origins in a form of execution used in Imperial China, which involved slicing a convicted criminal’s flesh until death ensued.’⁴²

— TRANSFORMAKING

Transformaking is a combination of the words transformation and making, an ‘invention’ of the House of Natural Fiber (HONF) in Yogyakarta. The word is used at the summit HONF organised in September 2015, bringing together hackers, makers, scientists, artists and researchers to exchange ideas about transforming society. ‘The change in the process of making and knowledge production is underlined by contextualised maker activity geared towards fuelling change, thereby challenging traditional modes of production and consumption, creative and cultural expression, structures of societal organization, ownership, access, intellectual property and copyright regimes, models of participative democracy, citizen science and civic governance in a process of Transformative Making or – what we call – ‘Transformaking’.⁴³

— URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Globally more and more people are living in cities. ‘Urban infrastructure’ relates to urban issues such as water, waste, energy and sustainable development.

— WELL-BEING

Stress and burnouts are typical 21st century diseases. However, the counter movement is that more and more people are looking for a better work-life balance and taking a more holistic approach to well-being. This is linked to both social and environmental sustainability as looking better after yourself includes looking better after your environment (both people and planet).

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42 Asian Perspectives on Sustainability; Volume Four of the Encyclopedia of Asian Design, Bloomsbury 2016. Volume IV: Transnational Issues in Asian Design; Volume Editors: Haruhiko FUJITA, Osaka University, Japan and Christine GUTH, Royal College of Art / Victoria & Albert Museum, UK.

43 <http://transformaking.org>

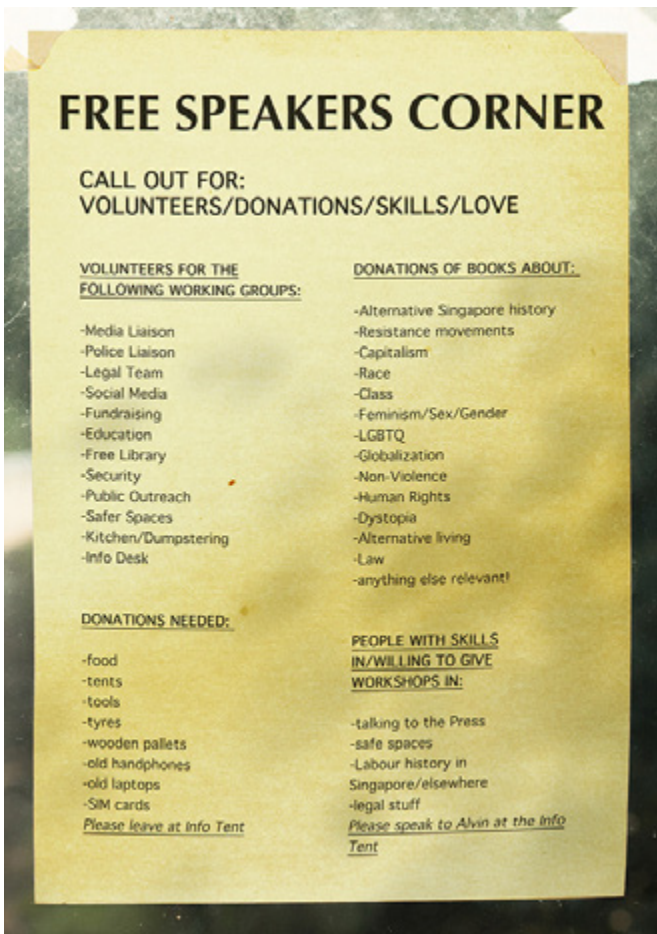


*Banyan Tree, along Astrid Hill,
Ms Tanvi Gupta, 14, Student, c. 1940s.*
ZHAO Renhui, 2015



*'Ranjang Jati: The Teak Bed that Got Four Humans from Singapore
to Travel to Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi and Back Again,'
2009–2015, Wilton Close, Singapore.*

Lucy DAVIS,
Photograph by Shannon LEE CASTLEMAN



content slated for destruction
(Free Speakers Corner)

Stephanie DOGFOOT and remote
working group with **Godwin KOAY**

Digital print on paper, stacked
Each 42 x 29.7 cm, 2015

The Forgotten Space (2010)

Allan SEKULA and **Noël BURCH**

Film still. Photo courtesy of NTU CCA Singapore



5

Sustainability Trends

The researcher has identified eight trends in relation to sustainability; themes that kept on recurring in the interviews. These eight trends form the leading threads in the research and will be reflected in each country specific Guide. The eight trends for creative responses to sustainability in Singapore in 2015 are:

5.1 Critical making

Singapore has a lively maker movement, meaning more and more people are recognising the power, enjoyment and importance of using their own hands to make and fix something. Veerappan Swaminathan, co-founder of the Sustainable Living Lab says ‘We need to have more respect for the makers’ culture. It can contribute massively to social, economic and environmental issues. A student doesn’t feel bad about climate change, it’s beyond their scope. Repairing is active and a realistic engagement step. I just want the students to enjoy the workshop. I want to show that repairing is fun.’⁴⁴

The Sustainable Living Lab tries to promote the maker movement by giving workshops on repairing. Though we see the movement taking off worldwide, in Singapore it seems to be a direct response to the ‘mall culture of consuming’ as central to Maker Culture is the ideology to make things yourself again, instead of buying. Whether it’s gin, jewellery or a zine, there is a trend of people picking up the tools to make and repair.

At the schools and colleges, the movement is being led by design teachers, according to artist and teacher Regina de Rosario⁴⁵, later confirmed by LASALLE College of the Arts.⁴⁶ They are

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44 Interview with Veerappan SWAMINATHAN on 9 April 2015

45 Interview with Regina DE ROSARIO on 8 April 2015

46 Interview with Venka PURUSHOTHAMAN and Audrey WONG on 22 May 2015

aware of global movements and do not want to teach the students to just design more objects, producing more waste and wastage is silly and not efficient. And Singaporeans like efficiency.

A student indicates climate change is beyond their scope, they do not know what design has got to do with it. The makers' movement offers a realistic step of engagement, instigating behavioural change through different consumption patterns, and enjoying repairing and up-cycling. In addition, the movement could influence distribution and manufacturing practices, explains Veerappan, 'people could just buy the design but not the actual chair and it can be built or even 3D printed on demand.' This would reduce both shipping and waste, and avoid unwanted items lying around in storage.

'No one is thinking about environmentalism in Singapore, there are just some cases of accidental environmentalism because things are so expensive. Take the example of cars, all young people want them, no one can afford them, that's when people start to share. People operate from self interest,' says Veerappan.⁴⁷ Items being too expensive are at the heart of instigating the sharing economy. The maker movement and its innovations are to be built up from the ground and creative and technical skills and networking are crucial elements of it.

The main obstacle is time and space, both limited in Singapore's hard working and densely populated society. Plus the older generation is not willing to pass on manual skills as they are not considered needed for a good job. However, it also seems to come with a financial gain. According to Veerappan, 'Repairing can be monetised, we will be selling tools.'⁴⁸

5.2 Heritage

A major recurring theme in the interviews was the issue of identity and cultural heritage. This seems to be related to two things: 1) Singapore being a young nation with many different nationalities and religions living together and 2) the speed at which Singapore is changing. Brand new buildings are mushrooming and historic sites have to make place for them. Urban farmer Ching Ling Loo says: 'The link between sustainability and cultural heritage is forgotten in

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47 Interview with Veerappan SWAMINATHAN on 9 April 2015

48 Interview with Veerappan SWAMINATHAN on 9 April 2015

Singapore. People think sustainability is about engineering.⁴⁹ Unfortunately community, social issues and heritage and sustainability are not considered linked to each other. But people do want to hang to their historic sites as they represent their cultural history - therefore initiatives such as SOS Bukit Brown, a campaign to preserve a cemetery in the city, are widely supported.⁵⁰ Cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection could be much more linked. The most active 'heritage activists' are the Singapore Heritage Society and the Nature Society (Singapore).⁵¹

Professors from two schools (NTU and LASALLE) confirmed that the topics students are most passionate about are cultural heritage and identity. The colonial past is a big theme for Singaporeans and their identity. 'We have cultural roots with India, China, Malaysia, and that makes cultural identity a big theme for local artists.' Language is also key in this, with the government rejecting the use of *Singlish*.⁵² There is no culture of holding on to artefacts. LASALLE states this is related to Singapore being 'shockingly global, holding the DNA of the global.' 'Students are looking to find their own voice and finding out what the local is and means. This often comes with nostalgia for the *kampong*⁵³ spirit, the community before capitalism, before the Westerners came here.'⁵⁴

5.3 Food Security

With just 1% of the land used for agricultural purposes, Singapore imports most of its food, mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia. Initiatives such as The Edible Garden City are trying to change this attitude and encourage home growing of food and growing food on under-used spaces such as rooftops and sidewalks.

The Edible Garden City project is a response to how food distribution systems have evolved, including the 'crazy packaging culture'. This movement believes that growing food re-connects

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49 Interview with CHING Ling Loo on 13 April 2015

50 <https://sosbukitbrown.wordpress.com>

51 Interview with Jennifer TEO on 18 April 2015

52 Singlish (Singapore English) is the local English based creole dialect, widely spoken in Singapore.

53 For a detailed explanation of *kampong* spirit, see the Glossary.

54 Interview with Venka PURUSHOTHAMAN and Audrey WONG on 22 May 2015.

urbanites to nature, conserves natural resources, and cultivates a sense of community. Unfortunately Growell, the pop-up urban farm developed by the Edible Garden City that was held in a shophouse in Little India, has now lost its space, confirming that space is the biggest challenge for this movement.

Nevertheless organic farms are seeing a huge increase in interest and the government is very interested in high tech growing, such as SkyGreens and aquaponics. With more awareness about food, people are starting to read food labels now. Food from China is cheap but not as popular as it was, following the 2008 Chinese milk scandal.⁵⁵ A recent 'food scape' by AVA (Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore) shows that the biggest challenges are danger of food supply running short due to outbreaks of food diseases in countries that Singapore imports from, danger of food supply being cut off due to the closing of a port in countries that Singapore imports food from and supply problems caused by political changes in neighbouring countries.



AVA diagram at <http://www.ava.gov.sg/explore-by-sections/food/singapore-food-supply/the-food-we-eat>

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55 The 2008 Chinese milk scandal was a food safety incident in China, involving milk and infant formula, and other food materials and components, adulterated with melamine. China reported an estimated 300,000 victims, with six infants dying from kidney stones and other kidney damage, and an estimated 54,000 babies hospitalised.

Food encompasses many things, and proves to be a good way to connect people, politics and culture. Talking about food means talking about health, about planting and growing, about the food system, about people's diets. It reconnects people with land.

TAY Lai Hock (Ground Up Initiative):



People don't touch the soil anymore as we are living in increasing urbanised areas in Asia. We need to increase the awareness about our disconnection to land.

5.4 Digital Revolution

People are organising themselves online and are sharing information. Though public demonstrations are rare and unpopular, the Singaporeans are more comfortable to show their support online (through 'likes'). Social media are very actively used and young people like Amos Yee (who made critical comments about religion and politics in conjunction with the mourning of the former Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew) get a lot of popularity from people. The Internet has made it easier to get engaged with forms of online protest. People realise the extent of the influence of big corporations and the names of environmental polluters can all be found online. This also allows the international press to feature news easily accessible to Singaporeans. 'That's important because Singapore is just looking at itself though the environmental problems are affecting the bigger region.'⁵⁶ A good example is 'The Online Citizen', pushing debate on wider topics such as migration. Hackers mostly stay under the radar but are addressing issues such as surveillance and privacy. A place where hackers can find each other is Hackerspace.sg.⁵⁷

5.5 Creative Industries

'Creative industries are becoming increasingly an important component of modern post-industrial knowledge-based economies. Not only are they thought to account for higher than average growth and job creation, they are also vehicles of cultural identity that play an important

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56 from an anonymous interview

57 <http://hackerspace.sg>

role in fostering cultural diversity ‘.⁵⁸ This confirms the worldwide interest from policy makers in the fields of design, architecture, film, television, fashion, gaming, and crafts, — not only having cultural value, but also being economically viable. With an ‘umbrella term’ for these disciplines, it allows governments to recognise creative industries as a growth sector. Working with crafts is included in the field, resulting in a renewed interest in learning traditional skills. These are linked to (both social and environmental) sustainability as traditional crafts and hand made products are (generally) much more environmental friendly than mass produced.

This theme is closely linked to critical makers, although the creative industries are focused on economic development. Traditional crafts have proven to have a business value, but the (sustainable) examples mainly come from Thailand, Viet Nam and Korea. Art school LASALLE indicated to be looking at the research interests of international students from countries such as India and Cambodia. ‘In these places we are bringing the notion of a creative industry’.⁵⁹

Business and industry relations are important and well organised in Singapore. Art academies and Universities keep strong relationships with the sector and encourage participation with practitioners.

5.6 Urban infrastructure

Globally more and more people are living in cities. The global urban population in 2014 accounted for 54% of the total global population and continues to grow. It is estimated that by 2017, even in less developed countries, the majority of people will be living in urban areas.⁶⁰ Most countries have urban and rural places. Singapore is entirely urban and the Centre for Liveable Cities is tasked by the Government to keep the densely populated island ‘liveable’. They do this by documenting previous lessons learned in relation to water and waste management in Singapore since 1965. The Centre’s mission is to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, while creating knowledge to address emerging challenges. It also shares

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58 UNESCO mapping on creative industries:

http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/files/30297/11942616973cultural_stat_EN.pdf/cultural_stat_EN.pdf

59 Interview with Venka PURUSHOTHAMAN and Audrey WONG (LaSalle)

60 http://www.who.int/gho/urban_health/situation_trends/urban_population_growth_text/en/

knowledge with, and learns from, other cities and experts.

This current approach to sustainability focuses on ‘sustainable development’, including prestigious prizes for ‘green architecture’ such as the BCA Green Mark⁶¹ and BREEAM certifications.⁶² This follows the pattern of decades of prioritising building engineering by the Housing and Development Board. There has mainly been an interest in high tech developments from the Government. In relation to renewable energy the National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS) states: ‘Climate change mitigation in Singapore is very complex as there is limited access to renewable energy sources. Solar energy seems the best option but then the big challenge is space. The country is too densely built, this also leaves out the option for nuclear. There is nowhere to escape. Therefore the main strategy for the NCCS is to look at energy efficiency. The focus is on mitigation measures in households, waste and water, buildings, transport and industry. They are trying to ‘retrofit’ buildings to Green Standards. There are also grants made available for this through the GREET programme (Grants for Energy Efficiency Technologies).’⁶³

5.7 Advocacy

The Singapore Public Order Act states that for any outdoor activity you need a permit. A gathering with more than 2 people can officially be disturbing the peace and is therefore illegal if not pre-authorised. The one place to demonstrate (with permit) is the Speakers Corner.

The international, environmental, creative activist movement 350.org is active in Singapore, although less than in some other countries. In Singapore 350.org is part of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Nor Lastrina Hamid, Team Manager for Team Young NTUC 350.org states: ‘In Singapore we had the same political power for over 50 years, which makes it natural to connect things together. Within the NTUC structure there is always someone from the People’s Action Party (PAP). I see that as a benefit. Our direct contact person is from the Ministry of Environment. It is an advantage because you can tap into the Government’s efforts, things are

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61 http://www.bca.gov.sg/greenmark/green_mark_buildings.html

62 BREEAM is an international environmental assessment method and rating system for buildings: <http://www.breeam.org/about.jsp?id=66>

63 From a talk by TANG Tuck Weng on 16 April 2015

more coordinated. Because we are all volunteers it gives the 350.org brand more credibility. Every year the police ask us if we are going to protest that year. Usually we tell them we won't and it gives us a better working relationship, a better positioning.'⁶⁴

5.8 Well-being

Research by the regional job portal Jobstreet⁶⁵, and confirmed in 2013 by the Singapore Social Health Project⁶⁶, claimed that more and more young professionals in Singapore are suffering from burnouts. Singapore has a reputation of having a lot of stressed people and a high percentage of burnouts. However young Singaporeans are less willing to go into high paid stressful jobs and are looking for more balance in their life. One interviewee stated: 'We have come very far as a country and, increasingly, people are looking at other dimensions to their lives, the more intangible things that go beyond the material.'⁶⁷

The Ground Up Initiative, the 21st century *kampong*, is overwhelmed by the amount of volunteers that keep on coming in who want to 'reconnect with nature'. Through a diversity of activities such as organic farming, woodworking, repairing and maintenance, curating art, and exploring humanitarian-related projects, (inter) connections are woven between one another as well as with the land. This confirms that people are looking for a new balance in their lives.

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64 Interview with Nor Lastrina Hamid on 18 May 2015

65 <http://www.jobstreet.com.sg/aboutus/no-work-life-balance-88percent-singaporeans-work-overtime.html>

66 Singapore Social Health Project 2013: <http://www.nvpc.org.sg/Portals/0/Documents/Knowledge/Social%20Health%20Project/SSHP%20Report.pdf> by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre.

67 Interview with Kenneth Kwok and Yeng Yeng Queck on 29 April 2015

6

Directory of arts and environment initiatives in Singapore

6.1 Introduction to the Directory

This Directory offers a selection of 20 initiatives in Singapore engaging with social and environmental sustainability. It showcases a combination of art spaces, festivals, government agencies, contemporary dance companies, platforms, residency programmes, urban farms, artists' initiatives, labs, community organisations, archives, funding bodies and maker spaces. This selection is not meant to be exhaustive but it is based on over 50 interviews conducted in Singapore between April and June 2015. It may provide a starting point for artists and creative people to make connections with like-minded organisations committed to building more sustainable societies. The Directory follows this structure:

- A description of the initiative
- The year the initiative was founded
- Who it is for
- A direct quote from the founder or someone from the team
- The URL
- How it relates to the eight identified sustainability trends

In the Glossary you can find the detailed information on how the interviewees related to the eight trends, which were recurring themes in the interviews.

6.2 Directory of cultural initiatives engaging with social and environmental issues

— ART SCIENCE MUSEUM

Located at Singapore's Marina Bay Sands it's hard to miss this significant building, designed in the shape of a lotus flower. The bowl shaped roof allows for harvesting of rainwater which is recycled for the use in the building. The museum holds a small permanent collection but mainly hosts international touring exhibitions. Since 2015 the programming of the museum is looking more into sustainability issues, for instance hosting the FuturEverything conference and the exhibition 'The Art and Science of Sustainability' in October 2015.

Founded: 2011

Type: museum

Related Trends: creative industries, digital revolution, critical making

Who for: anyone interested in science, design, architecture, media and technology

Quote: Honor HARGER, Executive Director of ArtScience Museum

“Sustainability has always been a hot topic of discussion, and has been gaining traction in recent years. Art and science can help us find creative solutions to ensure environmental sustainability. We hope to leverage on the exhibitions and programmes at ArtScience Museum to engage and educate the communities about the importance of environmental protection.

URL: <http://www.marinabaysands.com/museum.html>

— ARTS FISSION

ARTS FISSION is a dance laboratory proposing a new genre of dance theatre informed by Asian traditions, cultures, and aesthetics. The experimental choreographies highlight contemporary concerns such as the developing urban environment, culture and climate change, with a focus on reflecting the humanity of Asian countries. The choreographies are often based on ancient epics and traditional folktales.

Founded: 1994

Type: contemporary dance company, partly government funded

Related trends: heritage, urban infrastructure, well-being

Who for: anyone interested in dance or a cultural approach to environmental issues

Quote: Angela LIONG, Founder

“Climate change is not just about science or art, the solution is an organic circle. Part of the problem is that people are very rapidly losing their connection to the land. Land is a condo. Everything is temperature controlled. You just step into a mall and it’s not hot anymore.”⁶⁸

URL: <http://www.artsfission.org>

— BRACK

Brack is a platform for socially engaged artists and their work. It gathers projects, people, and ideas that feed a progressive philosophy of life. A platform for socially engaged artists and their work, Brack projects include a range of pursuits: curatorial initiatives, educational programmes, artist commissions, talks, tours, performances, books, an itinerant library, and an online archive of avant-garde media. Brack is currently preparing a programme connecting artists and writers.

Founded in: 2014

Type: platform

Related trends: heritage, food security, urban infrastructure, digital revolution, well-being

Who for: art- and socially-engaged people and groups

Quote: Melanie CHUA, founder

“A hundred years ago, our neighbourhoods and city squares were a civic space where people bought their goods and produce, heard speeches, and shared the news of the day. Today, both physical and online spaces face fragmentation.

Brack makes space where the creative emergent minds are able to share their ideas and projects, and at the same time, gather to present a vibrant, empowering landscape of people, projects and ideas that could feed a progressive philosophy of life.”⁶⁹

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68 Interview with Angela LIONG on 8 April 2015

69 From email correspondence with Melanie CHUA

URL: <http://www.brack.sg>

— CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART (CCA)

Part of the National Research Centre of the Nanyang Technical University (NTU), the CCA runs three programmes: exhibitions, residencies, and research & education.

NTU CCA Singapore positions itself as a centre for critical discourse and experimental practices in Singapore, the region and beyond. Their 2015 exhibition, Allan SEKULA's Fish Story, looked at the maritime world. Allan SEKULA's argues in his work that the sea is the 'forgotten space' of the contemporary global economy.

Founded in: 2013

Type: artspace, Government funded

Related trends: heritage, digital revolution, urban infrastructure (potentially other tags depending on the exhibitions and resident artists)

Who for: gallery open to the public, residencies by external nomination

URL: <http://ntu.ccasingapore.org>

— CENTRE FOR LIVEABLE CITIES (CLC)

Centre for Liveable Cities is a governmental agency set up by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. The Centre's mission is to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities. Through its Research, Capability Development and Knowledge Platforms, CLC shares knowledge with, and learns from, other cities and experts.

Founded in: 2008

Type: Government agency

Related trends: urban infrastructure, well-being

Who for: public, private and academic sectors, as well as international organisations, with interest in urban planning and development

Quote: Mercy WONG, Manager

“Efforts are being done to improve urban planning and infrastructure, and in my work this includes having a greater understanding of the social and cultural development story of Singapore.”⁷⁰

URL: <http://www.clc.gov.sg/>

— EARTH OBSERVATORY SINGAPORE (EOS)

The Earth Observatory of Singapore conducts research on earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and climate change in and around Southeast Asia. They believe that art can provide a unique connection between Earth Sciences and Society. In order to foster this connection they organise residency programmes, make film and videogames and connect artists and scientists to work together to explore the humanistic relationship of science to our society.

Founded in: 2004

Type: residency programme

Related trends: urban infrastructure, advocacy, well being

Who for: artists, scientists

Quote: Isaac KERLOW, Artist-in-Residence and Principal Investigator at the EOS

“We are not the Tate with a long tradition of excellence, and we don’t pretend that we are. But we do enjoy our little successes, such as a science institution being represented at an art museum in Singapore. That is pioneering for here! We’re doing something new, which is an accomplishment in itself but audience numbers are the wrong way to measure success. We have an attitude of wanting numbers, but the numbers don’t tell you anything about the impact.”⁷¹

URL: <http://www.earthobservatory.sg/outreach/art-and-science>

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70 Interview with Mercy WONG on 21 May 2015

71 Interview with Isaac KERLOW on 13 May 2015

— GROUND UP INITIATIVE (GUI)

GUI is a volunteer-driven and not-for-profit organisation that goes back to the fundamental activity of working on the land. Through a diversity of activities such as organic farming, woodworking, repairing and maintenance, curating art, and exploring humanitarian-related projects, interconnections are woven between one another as well as with the land. The aim of all the activity is to tackle issues in society and in our humanity and to increase awareness about our disconnection to land, food and soil.

GUI is like an open farm with a 21st century kampung (village) culture.

Founded in: 2008

Type: Urban farm, lab, community organisation

Related trends: food security, creative industries and crafts, urban infrastructure, critical making

Who for: everyone: young, old, farmers, artists, open to all volunteers

Quote: TAY Lai Hock, Founder

“One of the biggest challenges is to find a clear description of who we are. We are a farm, you can do workshops but we also have educational or crafts programmes’. What GUI is depends on what you want to do here.”⁷²

URL: <http://www.groundupinitiative.org>

— THE GROWELL POP UP / EDIBLE GARDEN CITY

The Growell Pop Up was held in a shophouse in Little India for a brief span of 2 months in 2015. It represented and pushed for a movement of urban farmers, coming together to build a community and raise awareness around food security. They are part of a larger ‘grow your own food movement’, championed by urban farming social enterprise Edible Garden City, which advocates for growing food at under-utilized spaces like rooftops and sidewalks, and believes that growing food re-connects urbanites to nature, conserves natural resources, and cultivates a sense of community.

Though the Pop Up has ended, the team is active doing workshops and practicing guerilla

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72 Interview with TAY Lai Hock on 19 May 2015

gardening as part of the Edible Garden City. Some of the members plan to embark on a new series of Talking Crop sessions, talks about food and agriculture, during the last quarter of 2015.

Founded in: 2015

Type: community organisation, urban farm

Related trends: critical making, food security, advocacy, urban infrastructure, well-being

Who for: artists, farmers, foodies, everyone who is interested in growing their own food, keeping bees or improving the quality of their life

Quote: Michelle LAI Jingmin, coordinator of The Growell Pop Up

“Food brings people together. It encompasses many things, it connect people, politics, and culture. Talking about food means talking about health, about planting and growing, about the foodsystem, about people’s diets. People are what they eat.”⁷³

URL: <http://www.ediblegardencity.com/> or for archives: <http://facebook.com/growellpopup>

— ILIGHT FESTIVAL

Ilight is Asia’s first sustainable light art festival, held in the Marina Bay District of Singapore. The festival is organised and presented by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). The festival takes place every other year and showcases innovative and environmentally sustainable light installations from around the world, transforming the Marina Bay waterfront into a magical space of light and color. The festival aims to promote an environmentally-responsible behavior for a sustainable future and participating artists incorporate the use of recyclable materials and adopt energy-efficient lighting in the creation of their light art installations.

Founded in: 2010

Type: bi-annual festival

Related trends: creative industries and crafts, urban infrastructure, advocacy

Who for: everyone, young and old

Quote: Charmaine TOH, co-curator

“We asked 47 stakeholder properties and businesses to be part of the Switch-Off-Turn-Up

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73 Interview with Michelle LAI Jingmin on 21 April 2015

campaign, encouraging building managers to offset the carbon footprint of the festival by reducing electricity use within their developments. This resulted in a significant volume of energy saved, rendering the festival carbon-negative.⁷⁴

URL: <http://2012.ilightmarinabay.sg>

— INDEPENDENT ART ARCHIVE (IAA)

The Independent Art Archive consists of a reference library and a collection of archival material pertaining to art in Singapore, collected by performance artist LEE Wen. The IAA programmes includes informal film screenings, music performances, performance art events, artist talks, discussions and related activities to stimulate an open discourse on art and question issues in contemporary society.

Founded in: 2012

Type: archive, artspace

Related trends: critical making, heritage, food security, digital revolution, urban infrastructure, advocacy, well-being

Who for: artists, intellectuals, anyone interested in the discourse on art

Quote: Alexander YANG, former Manager

“Younger artists aren’t so scared anymore as they haven’t been through the system.”⁷⁵

URL: <http://www.independentarchive.sg>

— INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL ZOOLOGISTS

The Institute for Critical Zoologists is an initiative by artist Robert ZHAO Renhui. It delves into the multifarious world around us to expose the strange assumptions humanity takes for granted about its surrounding landscape.

The Institute for Critical Zoologists aims to develop a critical approach to the zoological gaze, or

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74 From the Urban Redevelopment Authority: <http://www.ur.gov.sg/uol/media-room/news/2014/apr/pr14-27.aspx>

75 Interview with Alexander YANG on 24 April 2015

how humans view animals.

Founded in: 1996

Type: artist's initiative

Related trends: critical making, urban infrastructure, advocacy

Who for: artists, scientists, activists, anyone interested in zoology

Quote: Robert ZHAO Renhui

“People from the art world seem to be more eco friendly than other people as they are generally more critical. They live more responsibly. However, making art is not sustainable at all, it's a waste of resources. Sometimes I allow little defects in my work, otherwise it would all go to waste. Art is so object based, so art practice is all about waste.”⁷⁶

URL: <http://criticalzoologists.org>

— LIVING! PROJECT

Entrepreneur Allan Lim believes Singaporeans can effect global behavioural change towards sustainable urban living through community and art. He galvanises Singaporean special needs artists and French autistic students to install light art sculptures – made of energy-saving LED lights and thousands of recycled water bottles towering up to eight metres. Living! Project started 'Alpha Biofuels'; energy produced from community waste. One of the recent projects is ComCrop; mapping urban farms in Singapore.

Founded in: 2004

Type: community organisation, artist's initiative

Related trends: urban infrastructure, food security, well-being

Who for: anyone interested in food and sustainability

Quote: Allan LIM

“We wanted The Living! Project to be a positive push in the right direction – ultimately thinking beyond oneself and being globally responsible through creativity.”⁷⁷

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⁷⁶ Interview with Robert ZHAO Renhui on 1 May 2015

⁷⁷ From Allan LIM's online manifesto: http://edm.sif.org.sg/edm/DiverseCity/The_Living!_Project_by_Allan_Lim.pdf

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/ComCrop>

http://edm.sif.org.sg/edm/DiverseCity/The_Living!_Project_by_Allan_Lim.pdf

— MIGRANT ECOLOGIES

The Migrant Ecologies Project started with an attempt to trace the historic, genetic material and poetic journeys of a 1950s teak bed, found in a Singapore junk store, back to a location in Southeast Asia where the original teak tree may have grown. Through DNA tracking technology the journey was made and documented as a multidisciplinary art project. Migrant Ecologies now functions as an umbrella for projects addressing past and present movements and migrations of nature-cultures in art and life in Southeast Asia.

Founded in: 2010

Type: artists' initiative, platform

Related trends: critical making, heritage, creative industries and crafts, advocacy

Who for: everyone: artists, students, environmentalists, the wider South East Asian region

Quote: Lucy DAVIS, Founder

“Some artists seem to be a little shy of advocacy. It's a particularly-Singaporean reluctance. One that you don't see in Malaysia or Indonesia for example. There is a fear of artists (and academics) taking a stand because of both real and perceived dangers of getting into trouble, being blacklisted, losing one's job. The out of bounds markers are unclear and when you are “punished” you are never told explicitly why... which means no one ever knows when they step over the line and so people self-censor to be on the safe side.”⁷⁸

URL: <http://www.migrantecologies.org/>

— NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL (NAC)

The National Arts Council is the national funding body for the arts. It has a strong focus on communities and ‘getting people together’. The aim of the funding is to develop Singapore as a distinctive global city for the arts and to nurture the arts and make it an integral part of the lives

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78 Interview with Lucy DAVIS on 16 April 2015

of the people of Singapore. They have a strong focus on heritage and using culture as a way to stimulate social cohesion.

Founded in: 1991

Type: Government agency, funding body

Related trends: heritage, creative industries, urban infrastructure, advocacy, well-being

Who for: artists (all disciplines), arts managers, researchers, curators, youth, families, senior citizens, everyone

Quote: Kenneth KWOK, Director, Arts & Youth and Strategic Planning

“We’ve come very far as a country and, increasingly, people are looking at other dimensions to their lives, the more intangible things that go beyond the material. Singaporeans are becoming more vocal, for example, about the importance of culture and heritage, and about sustainability. We see more people actively and passionately speaking up about say, conservation issues rather than just leaving it to the government as in the past. There is also growing interest in the preservation of the traditional arts because of how they speak to who we are as a people and a nation.”⁷⁹

URL: <https://www.nac.gov.sg>

— PARTICIPATE IN DESIGN (P!D)

Participate in Design is dedicated to engage and enable people in shaping their everyday environments and local communities. Founded on the firm belief that everyone has the right to participate in and influence the design and planning processes that affect them, P!D provides services to design and facilitate the public participation and engagement process for communities in Singapore. It researches, tests and develops socially just and inclusive methods of design that are appropriate for local neighbourhoods, while also promoting the integration of participatory design in design education and practice.

Founded in: 2012

Type: community organisation, registered non-profit organization, design studio

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79 Interview with Kenneth KWOK and Audrey WONG on 29 April 2015

Related trends: creative industries and crafts, well-being

Who for: potential partners such as grassroots organisations, educational institutions and initiatives aimed at building engaged and empowered communities. Also open for volunteers, not necessarily with design backgrounds.

Quote taken from the website:

“If you believe in the importance of a participatory, community-driven approach to design and problem solving, and can dedicate the time to contribute to the cause, we invite you to sign up as a volunteer. You’ll be given opportunities to work closely with people on the ground and grow as a community facilitator. We accept volunteers on a project basis, and harness a wide range of skills and resources according to the needs of each project we undertake, whether you are an everyday expert or a design specialist.”⁸⁰

URL: <http://participateindesign.org>

— POST-MUSEUM

Post-Museum is an independent cultural and social platform in Singapore which aims to encourage and support a thinking and pro-active community. It is an open platform for examining contemporary life, promoting the arts and connecting people. Though they do not have a dedicated space anymore, Post-Museum continues to engage in exhibitions, workshops, residencies and more.

Founded in: 2007

Type: non-governmental, independent platform

Related trends: critical making, heritage, digital revolution, urban infrastructure, advocacy, well-being

Who for: everyone

Quote: Jennifer TEO, Founder

“I’m interested in how people and industry see themselves as part of society and how we come together to make a better place. Art is a good place to do that as you can try things, there is more freedom, you’re not so locked into a certain way of working and there’s more leeway

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80 Excerpt from the website: <http://participateindesign.org>

to try see and what works better. Instinctively artists are given a bit more space to be unusual. The flipside to that is that some art/artists are not taken seriously. But we can manage that by accompanying it with proper research and deliverables.⁸¹

URL: <http://www.post-museum.org>

— THE SUBSTATION

The Substation is Singapore's first independent contemporary arts centre consisting of a black box theatre, a gallery, a dance studio, Random Room and two multi-function classrooms. Substation presents a wide range of artists and programmes, from traditionally trained dancers to local rock bands; established visual artists to young poets; publications to international short film festivals; experimental theatre to seminal conferences on Singapore arts and culture. Substation has a strong history of social and political engagement especially through theatre.

Founded in: 1990

Type: non-governmental, independent contemporary art space

Related trends: critical making, digital revolution, urban infrastructure, advocacy, well-being

Who for: artists, intellectuals, young people

Quote: Chelsea CHUA, Acting General Manager

“Since its opening, The Substation has been a home for the arts, and a space where different communities could gather to share ideas. From conferences to post show discussions, we have been a place where anyone and everyone can participate in a wide ranging discourse that could oscillate from arts policy to gender equality.⁸²

URL: <http://www.substation.org>

— SUSTAINABLE LIVING LAB

Sustainable Living Lab (SL2) is a social innovation lab that harnesses the energy of the maker movement to build a sustainable future. It implements real sustainable change and use that as our framework for education by giving workshops on for instance repairing and hacking.

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⁸¹ Interview with Jennifer TEO on 18 April 2015

⁸² From email correspondence with Chelsea CHUA

Founded in: 2011

Type: makerspace, lab, platform

Related trends: critical making, creative industries and crafts, digital revolution, advocacy

Who for: makers of any age

Quote: Veerappan SWAMINATHAN, Founder

“A student doesn’t feel bad about climate change, it’s beyond their scope. Repairing is active and a realistic engagement step. We do workshops and try outs at schools as it’s important to get ‘making’ it into the curriculum. I just want the students to enjoy the workshop. I want to show that repairing is fun. We need to ignite the maker movement. We need to tell the story of the stuff and have a practice of lesser consumption.”⁸³

URL: <http://www.sl2square.org>

— THE THOUGHT COLLECTIVE (OR SCHOOL OF THOUGHT)

School of Thought was conceived by a group of teachers who believe in social innovation through civic learning, in order to nurture the next generation of youth thought leaders and change-makers. Since its genesis, School of Thought has continued to promote innovation in education and civic learning in both the private and public sectors. With a growing group of 5 social enterprises, we have since evolved to become The Thought Collective - reputed to be at the forefront of social innovation in Singapore with our work in building social and emotional capital.

Founded in: 2002

Type: social enterprise

Related trends: well-being, food security, urban infrastructure, advocacy

Who for: society, young people

Quote: HOON Yi Shuan, Management associate business development & partnerships

“We were just a group of teachers who saw many youths growing disenchanted with life in our classrooms. Burdened by grades, they had little interest in national or global issues. We felt if they could experience an education that connected the needs of their examinations

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83 Interview with Veerappan SWAMINATHAN on 9 April 2015

with the needs of the world at large, something in them would shift for the better.⁸⁴

URL: <http://www.thethoughtcollective.com.sg>

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— UNSEEN ART INITIATIVES

Unseen Art Initiatives aims to evoke and harness the creative potential of people through arts. They do this through the creation of meaningful and engaging art works, projects and experiences about, with and for diverse communities. Unseen creates artistic and social dialogue through building strong narratives across various mediums and strategies, with a special focus on photography and video.

Founded in: 2012

Type: artist' initiative, platform

Related trends: advocacy, well-being

Who for: everyone, focus on young people, blind people

Quote: Alecia NEO, Founder

“ Things are changing, as the young generation has more access to information.

So much art training has traditionally been about sculpture or painting, but not about engagement.

OR the dialogue is about community art, which is really more to fit the Governments narrative.

Slowly people are becoming more receptive to change. Younger people are looking for venues.

People are still afraid of causing a stir, but they realise they have a voice and the time is ripe for change.⁸⁵

URL: <http://www.unseenart.co>

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84 From a correspondence with HOON Yi Shyuan

85 Interview with Alecia NEO on 24 April 2015

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Direct interviews and email exchanges took place between April and August 2015

(in alphabetical order)

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CHUA, Chelsea (The Substation) over email	
CHUA, Melanie (BRACK) over email	
DAVIS, Lucy (Migrant Ecologies).	16 April 2015
DESJEUX, Isabelle (L'Observatoire)	15 April 2015
DOGFOOT, Stephanie (poet)	21 April 2015
HARDJOWIROGO, Panuksmi (Garden Gang).	30 April 2015
HOON, Yi Shyuan (The Thought Collective) over email	
IMRAN, Ashua (artist)	27 April 2015
IQBAL, Ibrahim (urban farmer)	25 April 2015
JACK, James (artist)	10 April 2015
JIAN, Chui Yong (filmmaker)	15 April 2015
KERLOW, Isaac (Eart Observatory Singapore)	13 May 2015
KIA, Jiehui (Forum for the Future)	23 May 2015

KOAY, Godwin (artist)	18 May 2015
KOH, Joyce Beetuan (artist, NAFA)	14 May 2015
KRAUTZIG, Stephanie (Future Cities Laboratory)	17 April 2015
KWOK, Kenneth (NAC)	29 April 2015
LAIJM, Michelle (Growell)	21 April 2015
LAM, Kai (artist)	16 May 2015
LASTRINA, Nor Hamid (350.org)	18 May 2015
LIM, Charles (artist) (over email)	
LIM, Cindy (researcher)	29 April 2015
LIM, Shannon (urban farmer)	27 April 2015
LIONG, Angela (ARTS FISSION)	8 April 2015
LOO, Ching Ling (urban farmer)	13 April 2015
LOVETT, Gina (Asian Perspectives on Sustainability)	12 June 2015
MERRILL, Michelle Y. (Nanjing Technical University)	14 April 2015
NEO, Alecia (UnSeen)	24 April 2015
NG, Serene (NUS)	10 April 2015
PRAKASH, Bhavani (Eco Walk the Talk) over email	
PURUSHOTHAMAN, Venka (LASALLE)	22 May 2015
QUEK, Yeng Yeng (NAC)	29 April 2015
REBERNAK, Jerneja (UAL)	9 June 2015
RICCARDI, Valentina (Asia-Europe Foundation)	14 April 2015
ROJOIU Anca (NTU CCA)	9 April 2015
ROSARIO, Regina de (SMU, artist)	8 April 2015
SEKHAR, Anupama (Asia-Europe Foundation)	14 April 2015
SINGH, Ivy (Bollywood Farm)	22 May 2015
STAINES, Judith (consultant) over email	
SWAMINATHAN, Veerappan (Sustainable Living Lab)	9 April 2015
TAN, Melanie (SMU, designer)	9 October 2015
TAY Hock Lai (Ground Up initiative)	19 May 2015
TEO, Jennifer (Post-Museum)	18 April 2015

TOSCO, Davide (Garden Gang)	30 April 2015
VERSTRAETE, Katelijn (British Council)	3 April 2015
WENG, Tang Tuck (NCCS)	16 April 2015
WONG, Audrey (LASALLE)	22 May 2015
WONG, Mercy (Centre for Liveable Cities)	21 May 2015
YANG, Alexander (Independent Art Archive)	24 April 2015
ZHAO Renhui, Robert (Institute for Critical Zoologists)	1 May 2015

* Transcripts of the interviews are available upon request and solely with full permission of the interviewee.

About the researcher

Yasmine OSTENDORF is a cultural policy researcher with over ten years of professional work experience in the international cultural field. She researches, stimulates, connects and facilitates art, design and culture that positively contributes to society; i.e work that explores, questions and addresses our social and environmental responsibility. Seconded from Trans Artists to Julie's Bicycle in 2012 she founded the Green Art Lab Alliance, a pan-European alliance for the cultural sector with over 20 partners, to enable knowledge exchange on environmental issues. She continued to work as Programme Director for Cape Farewell in London, connecting artists and scientists to work with the topic of climate change.

With a grant from the Mondriaan Foundation (NL), she is currently doing research on 'Creative Responses to Sustainability' across interviewing artists, curators, and cultural policymakers about their needs, wishes and challenges in engaging with environmental issues. The research forms the foundation for an Asian sister of the Green Art Lab Alliance, launched by Margaret SHIU, renowned cultural leader and founder of Bamboo Curtain Studio in December 2015. Yasmine OSTENDORF is a Julie's Bicycle Associate.



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