

The artpreneurial ecosystem in Singapore: Enabling and inhibiting the creative economy

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Abstract

This chapter explores the different idiosyncratic dimensions of the artpreneurial ecosystem in Singapore. Artpreneurship is encouraged in the city-state, as artists are encouraged to view their practices as business. The Singapore artpreneur ecosystem has emerged from the pressures of an intensification of global discourse on the creative economy, and from internal needs to re-define the cultural dimension of its economy. Four pillars anchor Singapore's artpreneurial ecosystem, namely: the education system; the value and social norms of Singaporeans; the influence of broader policy and officials' understanding of creative expressions in a democracy; and the connection with internal and international markets (and competition). While the will and policy interventions have made Singapore part of the international network for creative and cultural production, the opportunity to embrace creativity fully can only be possible with a broader understanding of the value of culture and of the need for artistic freedom to support creativity.

Introduction

One of the reasons why many artists remain poor is their 'denial of the economy' (Abbing 2002: 34). Abbing argues that the strong 'art-for-art-sake' value makes it difficult for them to address the commercial aspects of their works and their profession. Simply speaking, talking about money makes many artists uncomfortable (Ooi 2010a). On the other hand, artists around the world, including those in Singapore, are encouraged to be more entrepreneurial. Instead of taking a Kantian view of unadulterated art, artists should take on a more economic-oriented approach, as they address different aspects of their craft and profession. 'Artpreneurs' see their art practice as business. Besides art making, they must also pay attention to promotion, marketing, pricing strategy, hiring a

manager, engaging with art consultants and reviewers, canvassing art collectors, and devising internationalization strategies in making their art into a business enterprise (Becker 1984; Grenfell and Hardy 2007). They may also find ways to transfer their artistic skills into other industries. As an artistic entrepreneur or ‘artpreneur’, the artist is more commercially pragmatic and business-like (Engelmann et al. 2012; Harvie 2015). Artistic integrity need not be sacrificed and business is often framed as part of art practice. As a result, artpreneurs do not feel guilty having to engage in business, and are usually not dependent on public support.

Following this logic, there should then also be a conducive artistic entrepreneurial ecosystem or ‘artpreneurial ecosystem’. The idea of an entrepreneurial ecosystem is popular and has come to shape and define many creative and entrepreneurial districts, ranging from Silicon Valley in the USA to Zhongguancun in China (Isenberg 2010). While scholars argue about the effectiveness of such ecosystems, an ecosystem is generally defined as a ‘diverse set of inter-dependent actors within a geographic region that influence the formation and eventual trajectory of the entire group of actors and potentially the economy as a whole’ (Cohen 2006: 3–4). The interdependency and the interplay of various parties generate new business ventures. This view has come to dominate the development of the creative economy in many countries (Chapain et al. 2013). In such an environment, different creative domains are placed together in a place that has friendly regulations, quality higher learning institutions, easy access to creative workers, and access to the market (Comunian et al. 2010).

Singapore is trying to create its artpreneurial ecosystem, supported by cultural development policy, business regulations, educational institutions, an art market, and a receptive populace. The development of this ecosystem is part of the island-state’s creative economy strategy.

The Singapore National Arts Council (NAC), in its aptly titled section of its *Annual Report 2014/15* ‘Chapter III: Ecosystem’, presents its perspective on creating the arts and culture ecosystem in Singapore (National Arts Council 2015: 45):

We believe everyone can play a part in shaping Singapore into a distinctive global city for the arts. With more resources for the arts – from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing, artists and arts groups can realize their ambitions and create excellent works of art that impact the communities and our nation.

The Council requires a network of alliance to achieve its mission, and welcomes partnerships that will drive and build a sustainable arts future. With the unveiling of the \$20million Cultural Diplomacy Fund by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), the National Arts Council has begun and will continue to raise the international presence of our arts and culture by seeking new markets, growing networks, and profiling the best of Singapore’s artists.

The second paragraph of the quote demonstrates how the Singaporean authorities view art in the wider context of diplomacy, international business, and international exchange. This is an example of how cultural development and economic development are intertwined in the city-state. The entanglement of cultural policy and Singapore’s economic development has received considerable research interest (Chang and Mahadevan 2014; Chang 2000; Chang and Lee 2003; Chong 2005; Kong et al. 2006; Lee 2004; Lim 2012; Ooi 2008, 2010b, 2011). Such studies often highlight the tacit aim of the Singaporean government in wanting to cultivate the creative capability of the population, and to introduce innovations and generate lucrative businesses. Such a goal requires the translation of creativity from the cultural creative industries to other industries (Trüby et al. 2008). For instance at the start of 2016, among other things, a new statutory board – SkillsFuture – was formed to inculcate in the population that education is a lifelong learning process with the aim of making the population more innovative and creative (Ho 2016; Seow 2016). Getting an education is to be seen as an ongoing marathon for the Singaporean worker and not merely a paper-chase at one’s early stage of life. The worker needs to stay innovative and creative, and continuous training should

help. Education is an integral part of developing and growing local creative economies and ecologies (Tan and Gopinathan 2000).

In this chapter we explore and unpack the different idiosyncratic dimensions of the artrepreneurial ecosystem in Singapore. It goes behind and beyond the official view of the arts ecosystem there. The chapter is structured in three parts. In the first part, we consider how this ecosystem was developed in Singapore following pressures from an intensification of a global discourse on the creative economy as well as from internal needs to re-define the cultural dimension of its economy. In the second part, we consider four pillars in the Singapore context that shape its artrepreneurial ecosystem, namely: the education system; the value and social norms of Singaporeans; the influence of broader policy and officials' understanding of creative expressions in a democracy; and finally the connection with internal and international markets (and competition). The final part draws conclusions and directions of future research in this fast-evolving topic.

The emergence of an artrepreneurial ecosystem: Cultural and creative industries in Singapore

After decades of fast economic growth since Singapore's independence in 1965, the role of the arts and culture was given a new perspective in 1989 (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts 1989). In 2002, after various incarnations, Singapore's cultural development strategies were framed within the creative industries context (Economic Review Committee – Services Subcommittee Workgroup on Creative Industries 2002). This means that the arts and culture will play a bigger role in the growth and future of Singapore (Kong 2012; Lee 2004; Ooi 2011; Purushothaman 2016; K. P. Tan 2007; Wong et al. 2006). This bigger role is part of the strategy for the country to move away from its industrial economy to an innovation-led one. As part of the plan to generate prosperity through creativity and innovation, the arts and culture is core because it epitomizes creativity. For instance, in 2000, the then-Ministry of Information and the Arts envisaged Singapore as a 'Renaissance City'

(Ministry of Information and the Arts 2000). The then-Deputy Prime Minister, now Prime Minister, stated in the same report that (Ministry of Information and the Arts 2000: 32–3):

Creativity cannot be confined to a small elite group of Singaporeans ... In today's rapidly changing world, the whole workforce needs problem-solving skills, so that every worker can continuously add value through his [sic] efforts ... and the arts ... can be a dynamic means of facilitating creative abilities.

Over the years, numerous cultural institutions were created, including in the mid-1990s, the Singapore Art Museum, Asian Civilizations Museum, and the National Museum of Singapore. In 2015, the National Gallery was inaugurated. Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, which opened in 2002, has become a lively arts venue and offers hundreds of free performances annually. There are now 172 art galleries and 183 performing arts venues in the city-state (National Arts Council 2015: 46). There are also cultural festivals, including the Singapore Biennale, Singapore Arts Festival, Singapore Writers Festival, and Singapore Film Festival. Recent trends include the increase in enrolment in tertiary arts courses from 3,793 in 2011 to 5,599 in 2014. In art philanthropy, private contributions climbed from S\$26.6 million (US\$20.5 million) in 2010 to S\$53.8 million (US\$41.4 million) in 2014 (National Arts Council 2015: 47–8). Flattering to the island-state, Singapore was lauded by the *South China Morning Post* as Hong Kong's main art hub competitor and is winning (Tsui 2016).

Arts and cultural development is now seen as part of the development of the creative economy. The tenuous relationship between cultural products, cultural policy, and creative economy has been discussed at length in some academic circles (Galloway and Dunlop 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt 2005) and policy fora (Bakhshi et al. 2008). This questionable relationship is a reflection of entrenched traditional dichotomies and issues around work, consumption, and production in the creative and cultural industries, even though such dichotomies are questioned and intentionally

broken down through policy attempts. While it is important to reflect on the historical development of Singapore to understand the current development of its artrepreneurial ecosystem, it is also important to consider the key dimensions that shape its current and recent development. In particular, and will be elaborated, we identify the following (Figure 1):

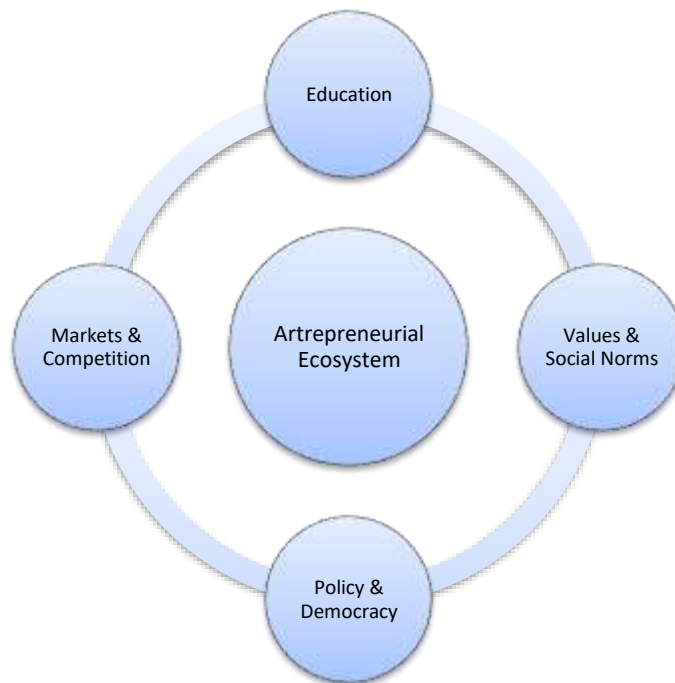


Figure 1: The four pillars of the artrepreneurial ecosystem

- *Education*: both in reference to development of arts in every student curricula, but also to its further specialization in higher education programmes;
- *Values and social norms*: these shape the development of the ecosystem at various subtle levels, including influencing people’s aspirations, anxieties and how they interact;
- *Policy and democracy*: the development of CCIs is shaped by direct policy interventions (especially in relation to cultural policy) as well as indirect ones. While democratic values are

largely seen as necessary for the freedom of creative expressions, democratic creative expressions may challenge social and political status quos, and raise questions on policies;

- *Markets and competition*: the development of a cultural ecosystem also depends on its production (of ideas, objects, or events) meeting a demand, market, or audience. The balance between internal markers and broader international competition will also affect its development.

In the context of this book, these four pillars have probably larger application, in providing a framework to understand how creative ecosystems in different Asian contexts work and adapt. However, we believe these pillars might acquire different weight or significance in different economic and political contexts and therefore need to be understood in relation to local specificities.

Education

More commercial-oriented creative domains such as design and media tend to be identified as part of the creative industries plan (Council 2008; Economic Review Committee – Services Subcommittee Workgroup on Creative Industries 2002; Ministry of Information 2008). At the start of 2016, Singaporeans are again urged to be bold innovators, this time by the chairman of the Committee on the Future Economy, Liang Eng Hwa. To encourage this, the Singapore government is reorganizing the education system to promote lifelong learning, with the aim of producing more innovators and entrepreneurs (Lim 2016). The education system has a role to play in cultivating the young into an ambitious entrepreneurial class in the future. But the links between the arts and culture, creative education and a more innovative population run along a particular (flawed) logic in Singapore. Being an entrepreneur entails being creative. Being innovative requires one to be creative. The education system should thus encourage creativity. And since the arts epitomize creativity, the arts should be encouraged and taught in school as they stimulate creativity and lay the foundation for future entrepreneurs and innovators. The centrality of the arts and culture in the creative economy is

however challenged. Introducing creativity and the arts in schools does not necessarily lead to more entrepreneurial and innovative graduates, as we will discuss later. Many artists – albeit creative ones – are not entrepreneurial or economically successful. The term ‘creativity’ is ambiguous and vague, and creativity is not a single way of thinking, solving problems, or inventing ideas. The links between creative education, the arts and culture, and the creative economy have to be re-examined. In the context of higher education and the creative economy, Comunian and Gilmore (2014) accentuate in their framework that there are three types of engagement and impact that wed creativity and industrial production. The first is linked to the simple presence of higher education in a specific local context and the ‘estate value’ it creates. In creative economy terms, this value is often translated into cultural productions. As Chatterton (2000) underlines, many city-universities have traditionally been well positioned in providing the city with cultural facilities (Ting 2014), such as art galleries and theatres, but more recently they have taken this role further by including a wider range of cultural facilities, such as media production facilities, recording studios, or rehearsal spaces. New ‘creative hubs’ developed by higher educational institutions seem to highlight the value of co-location and clustering that such learning and research organizations can play in the creative economy (AHRC 2011). Singapore is no different. The Prime Minister of Singapore has insisted that co-location of universities, dedicated research and development areas, creative districts, and start-up hubs have paid off in the city-state (Wong 2015). The National University of Singapore (NUS) has a music conservatory and an art museum, just a stone’s throw from Singapore’s innovation hub, LaunchPad@one-north. It remains unclear how such creative cultural amenities and creative industrial innovations interact. But the magazine, *The Economist*, stated that Block 71 at Ayer Rajah Crescent (as part of LaunchPad@one-north) hosts ‘the world’s most tightly packed entrepreneurial ecosystem, and a perfect place to study the lengths to which a government can go to support startup colonies’ (The Economist, 2014).

Following from the first, the second type relates to the generation of ‘creative knowledge’.

Comunian and Gilmore (2004) highlight two dimensions of this creative knowledge. One closely relates to the idea of human capital, the other links to the idea of ‘knowledge exchange’. In relation to the importance of human capital, Faggian and McCann (Faggian 2006: 497) argue that ‘the primary role of the university system appears to be its role as a conduit for bringing potential high quality human capital into a region’ and, therefore, having a highly skilled labor pool far outweighs the benefits generated by knowledge spillovers. This is also one of the arguments behind the popular ‘creative class’ theory (Florida 2006). The flow of creativity and cross-fertilization of ideas do happen but how that process can be managed and generate innovations quickly remain unclear. Regardless, the dialogic flow of creative knowledge and ideas is championed in all creative industries policies around the world, including Singapore (Ooi 2010b; Potts and Cunningham 2008). The earlier example of re-organizing Singapore’s education system to produce a more innovative population is a case in mind.

The exchange of creative knowledge and ideas is not even and smooth. This is the third type of engagement between creativity and industrial production. The arguments that favour a role for higher education in the creative economy from a knowledge exchange perspective suggest that these institutions are expected to function as research and development laboratories (Cunningham et al. 2004) and be part of the broader innovation system (Bakhshi et al. 2008). This has become increasingly important in making the point that arts and humanities have a positive impact on society and provide good value for money. Some scholars see this focus on knowledge transfer and exchange as an imposition of a ‘techno-economic’ paradigm onto the arts (Bullen et al. 2004). Regardless, most higher education institutions have accepted this new perspective, thinking of it as an opportunity to add value to their work (Lindberg 2008; Powell 2007; Purushothaman 2016). Although the evidence gathered is mostly anecdotal, there is an increasing pressure to show the importance of these dynamics (Hughes et al. 2011). The exchange of knowledge between creativity

and industry production is often asymmetrical. For example, it is easier for artists to emerge from non-art professions than for artists to become professionals that require technical and professional training. This means that the knowledge exchanges may not be balanced between different creative professions.

As expected, challenges remain in bringing education, the arts and culture into the industrial sector. Also from this perspective, the cultural creative industries are competing for creative individuals in other industries. Nevertheless, as highlighted by Comunian and Ooi (2016), Singapore shows a strong commitment to investing in its education infrastructure for its cultural creative economy push. This is reflected in the interest in careers in the arts as the prospects widen over the years with government funding for arts programmes and projects (Yang 2014). In particular:

- **New pre-tertiary specialized education:** In 2008, Singapore's School of the Arts (SOTA) became the first pre-tertiary level dedicated arts school in the city-state.
- **Funding and new status for existing providers:** Since 1999 the government raised the status of the two existing arts schools offering diploma courses (Lasalle College of Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA)) to be at the same level of funding as polytechnics, meaning that they are officially recognized and supported as tertiary education institutions.
- **New buildings and creative infrastructure at higher education level:** The Singapore University of Technology and Design was established in 2009. The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music in NUS was established in 2001 as Singapore's first conservatory. The School of Art, Design and Media Building at Nanyang Technological University was completed in July 2006 at a cost of S\$38 million (US\$29 million). Following the Singapore government's plan and investment, Lasalle relocated in 2007 from the Goodman Road campus to the city area.
- **New partnership with international universities:** In September 2012 the Glasgow School of Art opened its first overseas campus, in partnership with the Singapore Institute of Technology. It delivers programmes in 'Communication Design' and 'Interior Design' (Singapore Institute of

Technology 2014). In 2012, Lasalle and the Goldsmiths College of the University of London inked a five-year deal to offer 14 public-funded arts degree courses. The Prime Minister of Singapore witnessed the event, demonstrating the government's seriousness in supporting quality arts education (Wong 2012).

- **New courses introduced by a variety of traditional and new providers:** New courses were introduced in 2000s, such as diplomas in arts management and theatre production design (NAFA) and more Master of Arts programmes and bachelor degree courses at Lasalle. Nanyang Polytechnic started offering a new diploma in motion graphics and broadcast design, and Temasek Polytechnic a new diploma in retail and hospitality design (Liaw 2007). Alongside the usual providers expanding their portfolios, new providers such as Hyper Island have been encouraged to provide new courses (Chew 2012).
- **Promotes an attitude towards learning and creativity:** The education system is still largely seen as uncondusive for exploration and creativity. So yet again in new plans set up in 2016, the Singaporean government attempted to change people's attitude towards learning and creativity. Starting from primary school, children's educational progress will no longer be focused obsessively on academic results. The aim is to make learning more enjoyable. Pupils will be given more time to pursue a wider range of interests, 'sustain their curiosity, cultivate an innovative spirit and pursue a well-rounded education' (Philomin 2016). The love-for-learning approach is not new and has been advocated before. It is considered central in promoting the cultural creative industries.

In spite of these initiatives, there is resistance from employers, teachers, parents, and children, as the system aims to dilute the focus on examination results and career prospects. One big reason is that academic results remain the main quantifiable measure of a child's capability (Ng 2008; Ooi 2012). The concern for purpose and tangible results has even been expressed by faculty and students in the

NUS-Yale Liberal Arts programme, which started in 2013 with the purpose of encouraging bold and open thinking (Liu and Lye 2016; Philomin 2015). Another issue facing Singapore, and other many newly democratized countries, is the freedom of expression that is often assumed and demanded in the creative economy. These two points will be discussed next.

Social values

While there are increasingly more positive stories of success about artists in the media, a career as a professional artist is still not considered stable and lucrative (Ooi 2012). Many artists we spoke to reveal their apprehension, and a professional visual artist, WB, gave advice for those who want to take that path: ‘save up first’.¹ The sister of an established sculptor, who spoke anonymously, revealed that she wanted to be an artist too but having one member of her family (her older brother) as an artist is ‘dangerous enough’. What she means by ‘dangerous’ is the high risk of not being able to sustain oneself economically as an artist. She is now an executive in a large multi-national, and has taken upon herself to support her brother in the future, if necessary. A full-time painter in Singapore, KJN, who graduated from a local art school, recalled that almost all his classmates have ambitions to be professional artists or want to work in the creative field after graduation. Five years after graduation, when we first met him, he estimated that only about 5 percent succeeded in that ambition in his class. In spite of the many professional artists in Singapore, these examples are views largely shared by artists, and show that a career in the arts is perceived as risky and not lucrative in Singapore. If one wants to be an entrepreneur who will make plenty of money, going into the arts is not the obvious option.

Resistance against art making often starts early in life. FST is a sculptor and also teaches in a local polytechnic in a design programme. During an interview in 2015, she recalls a recent encounter with a student’s mother. One of her very talented students was punished by his mother because he was

drawing human figures in his assignments, making his mother angry. The mother scolded her son and threw the pictures away. FST recollected:

The mother thought her son was wasting time. ‘What has design to do with drawing people?’

The distraught student loves to draw and draws well since young, and his mother does not believe that all his drawings are part of the training and education, instead he is back to his old habit of pursuing a useless hobby.

As a result, FST met up with the mother to explain that drawing human figures is part of his design assignments. Among the artists, art teachers and ordinary Singaporeans we met, such a view is not the exception, even though few would admit that they would punish their own children for channelling much energy into drawing or doing art.

There is also a view that one can be an artist without formal training. Parents will want their children to have a strong professional foundation that would ensure the children’s future financial stability. Their children can choose an art career later if they still desire and are ‘everyday geniuses’. Everyday geniuses are individuals who are not formally trained but have become successful artists (Fine 2004). Such cases are however rare (Pralong et al. 2012). But for instance, in the 2015 UOB Painting of the Year award – the most prestigious painting prize in Singapore – Aaron Gan won the Gold Medal. Gan did not go to art school, and was running his own migration consultancy firm four years ago. He became a full-time professional artist because of his long-time personal ambition and interest. As a self-taught and naturally talented painter, he learned about the Singapore art world by reading up and talking to artists, curators, and reviewers. As an example of his enthusiasm, after meeting Ooi, Gan read Ooi’s article on the emotional challenges in selling art in Singapore (Ooi 2010a), and showed great enthusiasm in knowing more and finding ways to navigate through the art world system. He asked for introductions to people in the art community and sought assistance, for instance, in getting

an art historian to review and write a foreword for one of his catalogues. He is appreciative of Utterly Art, a gallery, for carrying his watercolour paintings. Gan is an artpreneur. He is pro-active and the authorities want to see more cases like Gan. It also indicates that his lack of training in art career management can be compensated.

Failures to succeed in the arts can however be blamed on the artist. One artist recalled a question she was asked by an officer at the NAC: ‘Why can’t you be creative enough to make money?’ During our interviews with creative educators, there was a clear acknowledgement that education should be relevant for the graduate’s employment in the fledging creative economy. With the big investment that the government is making, some of the faculty and managers recognize the opportunities that the government initiatives would bring to their graduates. A university faculty member said: ‘They’re investing in infrastructure for which students, graduate students, will be needed to fill the posts that are opening’. There is a strong rhetoric of employability, and a belief that these graduates would be able ‘to create their own jobs’, another university faculty member said in another interview.

Graduates are thus to be blamed themselves if they do not get into creative careers.

In other words, seeking a creative education is sometimes seen to be lesser than a science or technical one; it implies that one is not strong academically. If one is good academically, one can pursue one’s creative dreams later by switching over. And if one is truly creative, one will find opportunities to be commercially viable. This creates fear and anxiety in people who choose the creative education path, which would affect the entrepreneurial spirit (Isenberg 2011).

Policy and democracy

The notion that democracy is necessary for the creative economy to flourish is questioned by the authorities in Singapore (Ooi 2010b). The Singaporean government asserts that every society is different, and Singapore must identify its own problems and find its own solutions. This is also the principle stance behind the city-state’s cultural creative industry policy. This means that creative and

artistic expressions can be controlled. For instance, for street performers, they need to audition and seek a license to perform at selected places. Their proceeds should also go to charity, so that artistic craft is not used as an excuse for begging in the streets (Othman 2009). In 2014, the Media Development Authority wanted to introduce a self-classification scheme to get arts groups to give age-appropriate ratings to their own works in line with the agency's classification code. More than 45 art groups rejected the scheme, knowing well that it is a programme that will lead to self-censorship, as arts groups take on responsibility to perform within the censorship guidelines or be punished if they classified their works wrongly. Consequently, the scheme was dropped because of the protests (C. Tan 2014). Award-winning film maker Tan Pin Pin's documentary *To Singapore, with Love* is banned in Singapore because it documents views of political dissidents who are in exile. The authorities found the film to 'contain untruths about history' even though it is critically acclaimed in international film festivals (D.M. Tan 2014). The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in Lasalle removed two objects from Loo Zihan's installation *Queer Objects: An Archive for the Future* in a gay-themed exhibition in 2016. Sex between men is a criminal offense in Singapore even though the law is not actively imposed. The two items were collected from the local annual pride event, Pink Dot. The exhibition catalogue however acknowledged that there were only 79 objects out of the 81 in the exhibition and the ICS director explained (Lee 2016):

[The exhibition] is intended to be inclusive, particularly bearing in mind that we have young as well as mature students at Lasalle, many from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Ours is an open, highly visible gallery with a full glass facade. Due to the nature of two objects, which could potentially be considered offensive to some members of the public, we discussed with Wong Binghao [curator] and Loo Zihan, the artist, the possibility of removing the items, which were both sex toys. After our discussion, everyone agreed to exclude the items before the exhibition officially opened.

Censorship and creativity are seen to be incompatible notions (Chong 2012; Lee 2010; Tan 2007). Singaporean authorities have defined a 'balance' between the two (Ooi 2010b). They do not see a need for complete freedom of expression and total acceptance of diversity in nurturing the arts and culture. Even the Yale-NUS Liberal Arts programme has to be adapted to the 'Asian' context (Davie 2015; Liu and Lye 2016). In Singapore, a distinction is made between the creative process and the contents that come out of creative processes. The authorities encourage creative thinking but want people to steer away from publicizing certain views. All countries have laws that limit some form of expressions, for example, on pornography and hate-crimes. To the authorities in Singapore, lacking the freedom of expression in certain quarters such as expressions that disturb the multi-ethnic, multi-religious peace, as well as thoughts that challenge the authorities, does not mean that a city cannot become a creative arts hub. The arts and culture can still grow without having to delve into forbidden areas. Creative individuals are supposed to place their energy on being entrepreneurial and concentrate on economic development. So, the authorities also make an implicit distinction between economically valuable and economically less significant creativity. Former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong revealingly mentioned that, 'It has not been proven that having more press freedom would result in a clean and efficient government or economic freedom and prosperity' (The Straits Times, 2005).

Furthermore, the Singaporean authorities take the view that although chaos and experiments are only expected in a creative ecosystem, the environment must also be stable and orderly enough to drive the creative industries in the desired direction. They have also accepted that creative spaces will sprout despite attempts at control. Creative and supposedly deviant expressions are largely tolerated as long as they are not attracting widespread attention and not threatening public peace. But as mentioned earlier the possibility of a clamp-down has given rise to self-censorship and self-restraint. This is an effective form of policing without the need for active control.

Artists who want to express themselves in politically controversial ways will not get state support. These artists may still do their art but do not expect support for their enterprises from the state; it is not part of the art ecosystem that NAC will promote. Tellingly, in response to criticism that the Singaporean government has stifled artistic expressions that are socially controversial, the chief executive of the NAC, Kathy Lai, stated her organization's position (Lai 2015):

These are taxpayers' monies and we, as custodians, need to balance rigorous processes with aesthetic sensibility to determine how they are to be utilised. We will have difficulty funding art with public funds if such works merely feed a desire for self-expression, without any consideration of their impact on the public and whether they truly enrich their lives.

Those who advocate 'art for art's sake' and lament the arts are being 'instrumentalised' could reflect on whether it is such an ill if the arts are 'used' for the greater good of society.

The Singaporean entrepreneurial ecosystem has evolved into one with a purposeful logic. Artists' creative spirit is channelled through social, political, and also financial means. So besides the tendency towards self-restraint, the state-controlled media has presented some artists as trouble-makers and attention seekers. Anti-establishment art will not be sanctioned by the national art body. In the context of the arts and culture, many artists are economically viable only because of state support, for example receiving subsidies for art housing, grants for performances and exhibitions, invitations to overseas study trips and museum purchases. Receiving bad publicity may threaten future support from not only state agencies but also private ones. On the other hand, the high-handedness of the state has also inspired some artists in their works (Luger 2016; A. Tan 2007).

Markets and competition

There is a dilemma for the authorities as they try to lift the artistic standard in the country while many local artists feel that they are ignored and marginalized. An entrepreneurial ecosystem should welcome talents and competition. Best practices should be picked up and introduced into the local system. The many international collaborations in Singapore's creative higher education apparently indicate that the authorities want to introduce quality creative education but also embrace foreign approaches. More importantly, in the case of partnership with international universities, all involved (Singaporeans and internationals) are keen to point out that there is a degree of reciprocity, which goes beyond the formal degree validation processes which international institutions offer to local institutions. 'It is a two-way partnership, it's not a one-way partnership, it's not just a validation relationship but really looking at what kind of opportunities are there for both sides to learn and create new knowledge, create new transnational relationships', posited an interviewed teacher from the School of the Arts or SOTA. However, from a broader higher education policy perspective, there is a recognition of some dependency created, as a higher education policy maker we interviewed spelt out:

The advantages, you actually quickly have quality programme that is certified by a good university overseas and you have then good capability transfer from these institutions. With the capability transfer the disadvantage is that you are a price taker, and as a price taker you are more subjected to the terms that you would not like, so it is not ideal in the long run to sustain a model fully on partnerships.

Besides adopting foreign higher education into the Singaporean system, Singapore wants to attract local and foreign creatives. In fact, the country has suffered from a drain of artists. There are many examples of Singaporean artists leaving the country because of its artistic limitations. For instance, a Canada-based Singaporean sculptor was a recipient of the highest arts accolades in the city-state, the

Cultural Medallion in 2014. Similarly, Boey Kim Cheng, a poet, left Singapore for Australia after winning the NAC's 1996 Young Artist Award in 1997. Conceptual artist Lim Tzay Chuen represented Singapore in the 2005 Venice Biennale, and his controversial work of moving the tourist icon of Singapore, the Merlion, to Venice was eventually disallowed on the official ground of costs; he is now based in Beijing. Han Kee Juan, Director of the Washington School of Ballet, left Singapore for the Australian Ballet School in Melbourne in 1976 when he found opportunities lacking in Singapore and has thus not pursued a career in his home country (Tan 2009).

On the other hand, the authorities welcome foreign creative and productive talents to the city-state. The influx of foreigners (not just foreign artists) is a political issue for many Singaporeans. The 2011 elections saw the People's Action Party losing ground, and the public discourse took on a populist and xenophobic turn (Tan and Lee 2011). Policies are still in place to attract productive and innovative workers for the sake of the country but at a more measured manner. For instance after the year-long celebrations of Singapore's 50th jubilee in 2015, the authorities revealed plans to 'future-proof' the city-state. They have committed a record sum of S\$19 billion to Research and Development (Chang and Hio 2016). Much of the research money will go to solving challenges the country faces, such as water purification, cyber security, and handling emerging infectious diseases (Lin 2016). The chief of the Singapore National Research Foundation – the organization handling this pool of research grants – Low Teck Seng, revealed that his organization has more than 60 fellows, and to make Singapore into a top research hub it has to 'cream off the best in the world' (Lin 2016).

A similar argument is put forward by Comunian (2011) looking at the regeneration of Newcastle–Gateshead. While local policy ultimately aims to grow local creative economies, they often have to consider supporting a form of parochialism while taking the opportunity to support international artists. The balancing act of valuing local culture while trying to emerge as an international cultural player (Comunian and Ooi 2016) remains a challenge in Singapore. So in this context, many

attention-grabbing sculptures in public places are not local. Instead expensive Dalis, Boteros, and Lichtensteins are used to brighten up the concrete jungle in the financial and shopping districts. Local artists interviewed complain that public funding for the arts often go to foreign artists and art businesses. It is at times perceived that support for international artists hinders the local artpreneur. As a representative of the arts community, nominated Member of Parliament then, Audrey Wong, voiced this concern in response to the increased arts funding in the 2011 Singapore government budget (Yen 2011): ‘There is a concern that the additional funding will go towards international events like the recently concluded art fair, Art Stage, or attracting foreign productions to our shores.’ The Singapore artpreneurial ecosystem is not isolated from the island’s shores. Singapore is a very cosmopolitan and international city. The argument is to what extent the authorities should shield local artists from international competition.

Conclusions

The chapter has highlighted that the growth and support towards cultural and creative production in East Asia – and specifically Singapore – needs to be connected with multiple aspects defining its ecosystem. In particular, we identify four pillars: the education system, the value and social norms of the place, the influence of broader policy, and the Singaporean authorities’ definition of democracy, and finally the connection with internal and international markets (and competition). In the case of Singapore we detailed the often divided perspective of a global city that aims to move forward supporting new creative educational opportunities and new markets, but that is still anchored in established social norms and a narrow definition of freedom of expression. While the will and policy interventions might allow Singapore to emerge in the international arena of creative and cultural production, the opportunity to embrace creativity fully rests in promoting a broader understanding of the value of culture and of the need for artistic freedom to support creativity. In the context of this book, which explores a range of national and cultural contexts in East Asia, we believe that a better

understanding of the role of these four pillars can provide an increased understanding of the creative and cultural industries. This could help in providing a framework to understand how creative ecosystems in different Asian contexts might work, evolve, and adapt under increased pressures not only from policy but also from changing social values. Nevertheless these pillars would acquire different weight or significance in different economic and political contexts and therefore need to be examined in relation to local specificities.

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Notes

1 The two authors have immersed themselves into the Singapore art world. Between them, in-depth interviews were conducted since 2007. Artists of various disciplines, policy makers, art school teachers, and other relevant stakeholders were approached. Besides formal interviews, other data sources are used in this study, including informal discussions, documents, news stories, and participant observations.