

GOVERN-MENTALITY & SCHIZHOPHRENIC HYPHENS

Challenges to Creative City Planning in Singapore

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This paper explores the topic of creative city planning in Singapore by comparing two educational cases for the Singapore Global Schoolhouse strategy: Yale-NUS College and NYU Tisch Asia. The partnership model, personified by the hyphens in the names of the liberal arts college Yale-NUS and medical school Duke-NUS, has demonstrated success in Singapore for its ability to merge the entre-preneurial enterprises and civic vision of a university. On the other hand, NYU Tisch Asia's failure, while also stemming from other various factors, is primarily attributed to a one-sided, import-model without a clearly defined vision. Though there are other successful university cases that do not fall on a partnership model, such as business schools INSEAD and ESSEC, my choice to focus on Yale-NUS and Tisch stems primarily from their direct relationship to Singapore's vision to be a creative city. Using both of these case studies, I argue that a schizophrenia between autonomy and re-striction has removed spontaneity from creativity in Singapore. Finally, I propose that a currency of trust is foundational to building not only a creative city but also a city that fosters creativity.

“Our vision, in shorthand notation, is to become the ‘Boston of the East’. Boston is not just MIT or Harvard... It is a focal point of creative energy; a hive of intellectual, research, commercial and social activity. We want to create an oasis of talent in Singapore: a knowledge hub, an "ideas-exchange", a confluence of people and idea streams, an incubator for inspiration.”

Speech by Teo Chee Hean, Minister of Education (2000)

According to the Martin Prosperity Institute (2015), Singapore is ranked ninth on the Global Creative Index, scoring high on domains like Talent (ranked 5) and Technology (ranked 7).¹ Yet, in January 2012, Singapore’s education minister, Heng Swee Keat, admitted he was surprised by the number of top CEOs who feel that Singaporean graduates lack the qualities a knowledge worker needs to succeed i.e. the drive to venture out of their comfort zone². This disconnect between rankings and everyday embodied performances and perceptions provide an avenue for reflecting on 2 aspects of creative city planning: 1) the challenges for creative city planning in a city-state like Singapore which holds a schizophrenic position on creativity, and 2) the interplay between Singapore’s

Foucauldian governmentality, and the creative yet pragmatic environment of a creative city. In order to grapple with the question on whether creative cities can be planned, I will begin by historicizing Singapore’s two-message position in creative city planning and comparing two cases: NYU Tisch Asia and Yale-NUS College. I will then evaluate how a Foucauldian governmentality and its pragmatic relations create an environment that makes it challenging for Singapore to be truly creative. I argue that the schizophrenia in navigating the global/local, liberal/illiberal, and creative/pragmatic tensions resulted in two approaches – containment and planned diversification – which complicate further the question of whether creative cities can be planned. Finally, I will evaluate both these approaches, raise concerns for creative city planning in Singapore, and propose options for moving forward.

Singapore’s definition of creativity is derived primarily from a global neoliberal imagination, wherein the terms ‘foreign,’ ‘creativity,’ and ‘talent’ are often used within the same phrase. This is in line with Florida who views ‘talent’ as a prerequisite for ‘creativity.’³ Commenting on China in 2012, Lee Kuan Yew states the importance of an environment of “free” expression and “contest of ideas” as preconditions of a creative city.⁴ Indeed, Richard Florida’s 3Ts framework—Talent, Technology and Tolerance—permeates the foundation of creative city

¹ Richard Florida, Charlotta Mellander, and Karen M. King, “The Global Creativity Index,” Rotman, Martin Prosperity Institute, last modified July 8, 2015, <http://martinprosperity.org/content/the-global-creativity-index-2015/>

² Chua Yini, “Environment to blame for lack of drive, risk-taking: students,” *Yahoo! News*, last modified February 1, 2012.

³ Richard Florida, *Cities and the creative class* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁴ Graham T. Allison, Robert Blackwill and Ali Wyne, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights on China, the United States, and the World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

planning in Singapore.⁵ Situated in Singapore's economic pragmatism, creativity is measured by how much it contributes to the economy, instead of the "elaborately performative creative human accomplishment" as defined by Wilson and Keil.⁶

Extending the pragmatics of creativity, the Global Schoolhouse strategy was formed in 2002 to realize Singapore's plan to be more reliant on a knowledge-economy. The policy is compatible with the Singapore government's definition and measure of creative success, in that its Key Performance Index (KPIs) are measured by attracting 150,000 international students into Singapore by 2015, and to lift the education sector's contribution to the GDP from 1.9% to 5% in the same timeframe.⁷ The strategy aims to create high quality "world class education." According to then education minister in 2000 Teo Chee Hean, the vision is to become the "Boston of the East," that goes beyond branded universities to form "an oasis of talent in Singapore: a knowledge hub, an ideas exchange, a confluence of people and idea streams, an incubator for inspiration."⁸ Large subsidies through the Tuition

Fee Grant are provided for international students who study in the three public universities in Singapore. Students who choose to take up the grant would have to serve a three-year service obligation by working in Singapore, directly contributing to the talent pool and Singaporean economy.

Led by the Economic Development Board (EDB), the 'Global Schoolhouse' is a planned effort to increase the diversity of education models and certifications for students to pursue. However, this effort is not without failed university ventures. Before the 2011 elections, deemed by scholars and the media as the turning point for the Global Schoolhouse strategy, Singapore was run like a client-state with entrepreneurial university ventures, thereby diluting the ideological purity of its project. The divorce in the 'Global Schoolhouse' strategy and practical finances has inevitably led to a range of costly failures including among others, New York University (NYU) Tisch Asia campus.

New York University Tisch Asia Campus: A Flop

In 2007, New York University (NYU) was invited by the the Economic Development Board (EDB) of Singapore to open an art college in Singapore called Tisch Asia. A transplant university from New York, Tisch Asia would grant a fine arts masters degree from NYU's renowned art school, Tisch. To ensure its success, EDB transferred about \$US17 million to Tisch Asia between 2007 and 2011 (\$US9.6 million in the form of a loan and \$US6.13 million as a grant to the campus to offset taxes on Singapore tuition). Despite the financial injections, Tisch Asia showed a \$US6 million deficit for the 2009 financial year, up

⁵ Richard Florida, *Cities and the creative class* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁶ David Wilson and Roger Keil, "The real creative class," *Social & Cultural Geography* 9, no. 8 (2008): 843.

⁷ Peter Waring, "Singapore's global schoolhouse strategy: retreat or recalibration?" *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 5 (2014): 875.

⁸ Gopinathan, S. L. M. H., and Michael H. Lee. "Challenging and co-opting globalisation: Singapore's strategies in higher education." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 33, no. 3 (2011): 293.

from \$US5 million the previous year.⁹ Part of the failure of Tisch Asia lay in the NYU administration's view of the Singapore government as a client-state, as well as the actions taken upon that view. "We were potentially too optimistic about the level of support we were going to get from the Singapore government, and the size of the market out there," Tisch spokesperson Shonna Koegan told NYU Local.¹⁰ In a letter to NYU Trustees, Tisch Asia students accused NYU of valuing profits over scholarship, and of selling its brand instead of its vision or scholarship.¹¹ The letter also revealed that the EDB in 2011 was willing to forgive outstanding loans worth US\$9.6 million and would consider further grants if Tisch Asia offered its programs exclusively in Singapore and started an undergraduate program. When Tisch Asia overestimated the demand for its graduate program, it demanded US\$40 million cash advance to discuss a possible collaboration with the National University of Singapore (NUS) on an undergraduate program. NYU President John Sexton requested that all the expenses of the undergraduate program be paid for by the Ministry of Education, and also that taxes be paid to NYU for the use of their brand name. The parliament rejected NYU's request.

⁹ Yojana Sharma, "US branch campus demise is a cautionary tale for Asian ambitions," *University World News*, last modified November 16, 2012.

¹⁰ Zoë Schlanger, "Anatomy of a Failed Campus: What Happened at Tisch Asia?" *NYU Local*, last modified March 5, 2013, <https://nyulocal.com/anatomy-of-a-failed-campus-what-happened-at-tisch-asia-4ffefoffof14?gi=dbe03cb422f2>

¹¹ *ibid.*

Growing Schizophrenia

Singapore portrays itself as a global city, tolerant and open to talent and diversity, yet puts forward a pragmatic 'Singaporeans First' cohesiveness and rootedness. For instance, the NYU case, along with other failed ventures, coincided with growing dissent and xenophobic sentiments in Singapore. The 2011 general election has revealed a gap between public perception and the government's policy of openness to foreign capital.¹² Mainstream and alternative media lament the effects of globalization, highlighting the concern that foreigners (and foreign students) are increasing the cost of living and limiting career and educational opportunities for local Singaporeans. This divide occurs even within Singaporeans, namely Singaporeans who reap the benefits of the knowledge economy and those who do not. As such, the divide between the globally mobile and creative 'cosmopolitan' and the general man-on-the-street 'heartlander' has resulted in the Singaporean government speaking two different languages to two different portions of Singapore society.¹³ As such, the government walks a tightrope between global and local, between liberally diverse yet illiberally pragmatic, and between free yet bounded. This schizophrenic position, arguably a sentiment that is shared even outside of Singapore, complicates the dynamics of creative city planning. How can Singapore foster a new breed of creative

¹² Peter Waring, "Singapore's global schoolhouse strategy: retreat or recalibration?" *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 5 (2014): 880.

¹³ Kenneth Paul Tan, "Sexing up Singapore," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 4 (2003): 419.

class who will be more ‘connected to the world,’ yet still committed to ‘our best home’?¹⁴

Containing Creativity and Planning Diversity

I argue that it does so through a governmentality that manages “men in their relation to those other things that are customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking.”¹⁵ More precisely, Foucault defines governmentality as the “conduct of conduct,” regulating not just selves but the way in which the self and others are regulated.¹⁶ The tension between governmentality and Singapore’s schizophrenic desire to be a liberal creative city rooted in pragmatic Singaporean values manifests in its creative city planning. The internal contradiction pointed out by Liu & Lye highlights a tension between autonomy and restriction: how much freedom is granted to foreign corporations within Singapore?¹⁷ In answering that, Singapore adopts what I term a containment and planned diversification balancing approach to embrace neoliberalism while still committing to its illiberal and pragmatic policies.

¹⁴ Kris Olds and Nigel Thrift, “Cultures on the brink: Reengineering the soul of capitalism—On a global scale,” in *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, James D. Faubion, and Robert Hurley, *Power* (New York, NY: New Press, 2000).

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Petrus Liu and Colleen Lye, “Liberal Arts for Asians: A Commentary on Yale-NUS,” *Interventions* 18, no. 4 (2016): 578.

Yale-NUS College: Balancing on a Hyphen

Yale-NUS College is a strong case demonstrating such a balancing act. The hyphen that links both Yale and the National University of Singapore (NUS) symbolizes a partnership not just of “two great universities” (as the vision suggests) but also an entrepreneurial and civic partnership. Broadly defined, ‘civic’ refers to the processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members of communities, while ‘entrepreneurial’ can be understood as practical and business realities. To the Yale counterparts, Yale-NUS is an experiment for higher learning. Bryan Penprase provides this perspective: “Yale-NUS College is a case study in the convergence of internalizing strategy from US University (Yale), and a recognized need for a new form of undergraduate education from the partner host country (Singapore).”¹⁸ The Yale-NUS Curriculum Report furthers this ‘civic’ notion by adding that “liberal arts do not ... prepare students for a single career path” but “aim to equip students the furniture of the mind and character that will help them in many different fields beyond their professional lives.”¹⁹ Meanwhile, swayed by

¹⁸ Bryan Penprase has written multiple blog entries in his website about the founding process of Yale-NUS College: Bryan Penprase, “Yale-NUS College—A New Community of Learning in Asia,” last modified November 2014, http://bryanpenprase.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Yale_NUS_College_history_chapter.pdf

¹⁹ Bryan Garsten, Charles Bailyn, Jane M. Jacobs, Kang Hway Chuan, Bryan Penprase, “Yale-NUS College: A New Community of Learning,” last modified April 2013, <http://www.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Yale-NUS-College-Curriculum-Report.pdf>

statistics of the career success of US liberal arts college graduates, Singaporean decision-makers are invested in the venture as part of a long-term strategy to create a variegated ecosystem of educational institutions, i.e. Boston of the East.²⁰ Unlike NYU, which I argue failed due to its one-sided investment lacking a clear civic vision, Yale-NUS aspires to be a full partnership, hybridizing the civic and entrepreneurial university. Far from being a mere import, the hyphen of Yale-NUS hybridizes the more practical business realities of NUS, a university serving the Singaporean public and economy, with the greater civic education emphasis of the Yale liberal arts model. As stated in the Yale-NUS curriculum report, “no college can survive without a dash of utopianism.”²¹

That is not to say that Singapore’s schizophrenia has not influenced the planning of Yale-NUS. Freedom of speech and, by extension, creativity, is bound within campus walls. In terms of student make-up, Singaporeans are ensured the majority at the College, while ‘a globally diverse student body with over 40 nationalities’ rhetoric pervades admissions material. The porosity of creativity is contained as a way of navigating local tensions. Kong questions the possibility of Singapore ever attaining “the cultural/creative ‘quotient’ rival

²⁰ Petrus Liu and Colleen Lye, "Liberal Arts for Asians: A Commentary on Yale-NUS," *Interventions* 18, no. 4 (2016): 580.

²¹ Bryan Garsten, Charles Bailyn, Jane M. Jacobs, Kang Hway Chuan, Bryan Penprase, “Yale-NUS College: A New Community of Learning,” last modified April 2013, <http://www.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Yale-NUS-College-Curriculum-Report.pdf>

to New York, London, or Paris” since educational spaces in Singapore operate in ‘bounded creativity’ due to government censorship of public spaces.²² The genuine unbounded spirit of the liberal arts is also dampened. To operate in Singapore, institutions have to accept some limits on expression, especially on racially or religious incendiary matters and those that interfere with local politics.²³ Furthermore, while Yale has requested for the lifting of the Tuition Fee Grant for Yale-NUS for preserving the unbounded spirit of the liberal arts, the Singapore government has opted to retain it.²⁴ This decision demonstrates the neoliberal pragmatic balancing act between globally minded yet Singapore-situated, portraying the schizophrenia of being “In Asia” yet “for the World.”

In so saying, containment is symbiotic with planned diversification. The knowledge-creative hub is engineered with a freedom that is tied to

²² Lily Kong, “Ambitions of a Global City: Arts, Culture and Creative Economy in 'Post-Crisis' Singapore,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18, no. 3 (2012): 290.

²³ Kris Olds and Nigel Thrift, "Cultures on the brink: Reengineering the soul of capitalism—On a global scale,” in *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 203, as cited in Petrus Liu and Colleen Lye, "Liberal Arts for Asians: A Commentary on Yale-NUS," *Interventions* 18, no. 4 (2016): 578.

²⁴ Bryan Penprase, "Yale-NUS College—A New Community of Learning in Asia,” last modified November 2014, http://bryanpenprase.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Yale_NUS_College_history_chapter.pdf

spatially-dependent. For instance, Singapore's containment approach is exemplified in the recent regulation of Speakers Corner for foreign involvement and foreign funding.²⁵ Voices of dissent, accusing the government of being too foreign-minded, are quelled by a broadening and diversification of academic pathways. Boundaries of creativity are made clear, rationalized with pragmatic reasons, as a way of fostering a creativity insofar as it contributes to the economy, instead of a genuine desire to embrace creativity along with all the benefits of the novelty, innovation, and surprise it offers.²⁶ This sentiment is captured in a speech by Cabinet minister George Yeo in 1991: "Singapore will always need a strong centre to react quickly to a changing competitive environment. We need some pluralism but not too much because too much will also destroy us"²⁷ Governmentality, enforced through the Singapore government, has left the power to define creativity reserved for a limited number of stakeholders. Sanctioned sites of creativity, such as Yale-NUS College, are awarded

²⁵ Singapore has prevented foreigners to be involved in local rallies, including Pink Dot and started imposing permits for foreign sponsors to local rallies. Read Linette Lim, "Pink Dot 'disappointed' by new Speakers' Corner regulations," *Channel NewsAsia*, last modified October 21 2016, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/pink-dot-disappointed-by-new-speakers-corner-regulations/3225072.html>

²⁶ Dean Keith Simonton, *The Wiley handbook of genius* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

²⁷ George Yeo, "Civic Society – between the family and the state," lecture at the NUS Society Inaugural Lecture, World Trade Centre Auditorium, Singapore, June 20 1991.

just the right amount of 'freedom,' bounding and limiting creativity for specific intentions.

My paper aims to draw attention to a tension that arises – in that there are 2 levels of creativity: 1) an infrastructural, planned, top-down form of creativity and 2) an embodied, spontaneous, bottom-up feeling of creativity. The answer to whether or not creativity can be planned, I argue, lies in the way in which creativity is defined, and its set boundaries. Matched up against its definition of creativity as economic, Singapore succeeds in being a creative city, achieving high points on many ranking metrics. However, the extent to which this limited definition of creativity translates into the talent pool remains to be seen. An environment of governmentality within a state necessarily stifles the creativity of its citizens. Pragmatism is rather incompatible with creativity as it deems risk-taking an undesirable trait – a trait much needed for Singapore to transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based one.

I propose that the focus on creative planning should not be on whether or not the city is creative, but whether its citizens feel the ability to be creative. Unfortunately, Singapore succeeds in the former but fails in the latter. Singapore's creative city planning rids value from spontaneous creativity or diversification, deeming spontaneity unworthy of contributing to the economy.²⁸ Singapore attempts to 'control' and 'bound' creativity through containment and planned diversification. Yet, both these approaches fail to account for cases where spontaneous and planned creativity interweave into one another. Instances such as vogueing from Harlem or jazz from New Orleans demonstrate how

²⁸ Jane Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities* (New York, NY: Random House, 1961).

both spontaneity and structure are needed for creative city planning. Planned diversification, without a genuine understanding of creativity, falls short of merely accomplishing an illusory set of hyphens and diverse credentials. Hence, I argue, the success of Yale-NUS College is attributed to its ability to hybridize the entrepreneurial and civic university, allowing for planned and unplanned creativity to interweave into a “community of learning.”

How can planned and unplanned creativity be interwoven meaningfully in creative city planning? Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Tharman Shanmugaratnam took an eloquent stab at this during an SG50+ Conference at Shangri-La Hotel: “The toughest question to ask ourselves ... is not what we add to the education system, but what we subtract.”²⁹ The task of subtracting, he said, requires “courage,” but will pay off. Subtraction of governmentality and containment, in other words, allowing for the spontaneous outburst of creativity and diversification, I foresee, will be the way forward for Singapore. The ‘courage’ DPM Tharman spoke about refers to a courage of trust. Indeed, the currency for an entrepreneurial vision is cash, while that of a civic vision is trust. Reflecting the needs of the time, Lee Kuan Yew has created an atmosphere of regulation and self-regulation that is impeding Singapore’s neoliberal transition into being a creative city. In his book *The Man & His Ideas*, Lee said: “They say people can think for themselves? Do you honestly believe that the chap who can’t pass primary six knows the consequence of his choice

when he answers a question viscerally, on language, culture, and religion? [...] We would disintegrate.”³⁰ What Lee failed to understand is how African slaves in America, many of whom did not undergo formal schooling, produced jazz, inciting one of the largest music industries in the world of that time. The same can be said of Silicon Valley and even Boston. These places are rhetorically cited and exist in the imaginations of many Singapore officials, yet the histories of creative American cities demonstrate a transition from spontaneous to planned creativity. It matters little whether Singapore reaches a point of being the ‘Silicon Valley’ or ‘Boston of the East.’ Instead, what matters more is developing a currency of trust, a trust that is foundational to spontaneity, and a trust that allows for all its citizens to feel free and creative instead of those educated few whose school names have hyphens.

²⁹ Ng Jing Ying, “Education system ‘has to evolve’ to spur creativity,” *Today*, last modified July 4, 2015, <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/education-system-has-evolve-spur-creativity>

³⁰ Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez and Sumiko Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew: the man and his ideas* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings and Times Editions, 1998).

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