

# Tourism and the Creative Economy in Singapore

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Tourism and the Creative Economy in Singapore

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Many towns and cities around the world are developing their creative economy, so as to spur economic development, attract investments, rejuvenate their physical environments and spice up their cultural vibrancy (e.g. see Crewe & Beaverstock, 1998; Dahms, 1995; Hutton, 2003; Jayne, 2004; Tallon & Bromley, 2004). Singapore is no exception. With the growth of the creative industries, these towns and cities are also becoming sites of cultural consumption (Crewe et al., 1998; Hughes, 1998). Many “dying villages” and “ghost towns” use the creative industries to regenerate and re-market themselves (Dahms, 1995). Creative industries development has become aligned with regeneration initiatives in many places (Jayne, 2004: 203).

Singapore is not a dying village or a ghost town. Yusuf and Babeshima observes that Singapore is the “most energetic” at pursuing the creative industries in Asia (Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2005: 113). With more than 4 million people living on an island of only 680 square kilometers, Singapore is a densely populated and busy place. The island-state is also a striving financial and trading centre. It has the second highest per capita in the Asia Pacific, after Japan. Singapore’s wealth can be inferred from its excellent transportation infrastructure, tightly packed skyscrapers and affluent population. The creative economy is the next big thing in Singapore, as the government pursues various creative industries – arts and culture; design and media – and sees these sectors as necessary for the country’s economic survival. Tourism plays a significant role in the new creative economy. This paper examines the creative industries in Singapore and how tourism fits into the wider scheme of things. With tourism having a stake in the creative economy, the clashes of interests with other stakeholders arise; these challenges will be discussed. The efficient strategies behind the creative economy in Singapore must also be understood within the social and political contexts of the country. Unlike some places like Austria, Zurich, New York and Denmark (Roodhouse & Mokre, 2004; Held, Kruse, Söndermann, & Weckerle, 2005; Center for an Urban Future, 2005; Ooi, 2002), the Singaporean model is top-down, and the authorities are hands-on in wanting to manage creativity. These reflect the Singaporean soft authoritarian regime.

### *The Creative Economy in Singapore*

The Singaporean government takes an active role in transforming and ensuring the health of the national economy (Low & Johnston, 2001). Since Singapore's independence in 1965, its economy has grown and faced many challenges. Today, its economy is moving away from its manufacturing and electronic bases and to one actively pursuing the financial services, telecommunications, life sciences, tourism and the creative industries. This is where the Singaporean government sees Singapore's economic future (Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) 2000: 31)<sup>1</sup>:

In the knowledge age, our success will depend on our ability to absorb, process and synthesize knowledge through constant value innovation. Creativity will move into the centre of our economic life because it is a critical component of a nation's ability to remain competitive. Economic prosperity for advanced, developed nations will depend not so much on the ability to make things, but more on the ability to generate ideas that can then be sold to the world. This means that originality and entrepreneurship will be increasingly prized.

Singapore has no natural resources. It does not even have enough water for its own use. The wealth of this tiny island-state is generated primarily through labour power and by functioning within the global economic system. Not surprising then, Singapore is a strong proponent of free trade. The creative economy depends less on natural resources and more on labour, services and brain power. Making money from music, films, concerts, fashion, computer games, architectural services and other creative products is thus attractive for Singapore. In 2001, the Singapore government set up the Economic Review Committee (ERC), consisting of seven subcommittees, with the aim of developing strategies to ensure the continuous economic prosperity of the country. The ERC Sub Committee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI) expectedly suggests that Singapore should move away from an industrial economy into an innovation-fuelled economy, seeking ways to "fuse arts, business and technology" (ERC-CI 2002: iii). The city-state must "harness the multi-dimensional

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry for Information and the Arts (MITA) became the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) in 2003. Except for publication references, the ministry is referred to as MICA throughout this paper.

creativity of [its] people” for its “new competitive advantage”( ERC-CI 2002: iii). The recommendations are not surprising because the Singaporean government has been pushing for the creative turn for some years.

The first creative initiative was taken after the release of the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts. Consequently, among other things, the National Arts Council (NAC) was formed in 1991, more support was given to art groups and schools started offering art programmes. Essentially, the government started paying more attention to the arts and culture (Chang & Lee, 2003). And in acknowledging the importance of tourism in the arts and culture, and to further the 1989 recommendations, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB)<sup>2</sup> and the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA), took the initiative in 1995 to make Singapore into a “Global City for the Arts” (MITA & STPB 1995; Chang, 2000; Ooi, 2001). In that plan, among other things, Singapore will develop its arts trading sector, get world famous artists to perform and found the Asian Civilizations Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and the Singapore History Museum. The aim then, and still is, to make Singapore into the cultural centre of Southeast Asia.

And in 2000, the MICA pushed the 1995 initiatives further and envisaged Singapore as a “Renaissance City” (MITA 2000). The plans are more ambitious and one can now see results. The promotion of the arts and culture in Singapore is seen to: “enrich us as persons”; “enhance our quality of life”; “help us in nation-building”; and “contribute to the tourist and entertainment sectors” (MITA 2000: 30). The 2000 Renaissance City report acknowledges that “the 1989 Report had put in place much ‘hardware’ for culture and the arts and that what is necessary now is to give more focus on the ‘software’ or ‘heartware’. It is argued that “instilling in [the] people a sense of the aesthetics and an interest in [heritage] should be the next step in [the] nation’s development” (MITA 2000: 13). The iconic Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay has since opened, the seed of Singapore’s parliamentary democracy has been transformed into The Arts House @ the Old Parliament. And in moving away from just building infrastructure, the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music was set up at the National University of Singapore. Art schools in Singapore – the Nanyang

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<sup>2</sup> In 1997, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) became the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). Except in publication references, STB is used in this paper.

Academy of Fine Arts and the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts – have been expanded and their profile increased. Arts festivals and performances have not only become more abundant but have also become more accessible, for instance, the Esplanade offers hundreds of free concerts annually, and besides the Singapore Arts Festival and Singapore Film Festival, there are now also individual festivals for Chinese, Malay and Indian arts and cultures. The government has set aside S\$50 million (€25 million) for the various projects and programmes over five years. (MITA 2000: 59). Singapore will become more culturally exciting for both residents and tourists.

Building and expanding on the 2000 Renaissance City report, the already mentioned 2002 ERC-CI report produces the most ambitious and comprehensive blueprint yet on the creative economy, which includes explicit and specific plans to develop the media and design sectors. Borrowing from the UK, the Singaporean authorities define the creative cluster as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (ERC-CI 2002: iii, Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) 2003: 51). Singapore is concentrating on three broadly defined creative sectors (ERC-CI 2002: iii):

*Arts and Culture:* performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, photography, crafts, libraries, museums, galleries, archives, auctions, impresarios, heritage sites, performing arts sites, festivals and arts supporting enterprises

*Design:* advertising, architecture, web and software, graphics industrial product, fashion, communications, interior and environmental.

*Media:* broadcast (including radio television and cable), digital media (including software and computer services), film and video, recorded music and publishing

The ERC-CI report provides three aptly-named visions for the respective creative sectors: “Renaissance City 2.0”; “Design Singapore” and “Media 21”. These visions of a more creative Singapore are further supported by a Ministry of Trade and Industry’s paper, “Economic contributions of Singapore’s creative industries” (MTI

2003). The authorities see close linkages between the arts and culture, design and media sectors. The arts and cultural sector is considered the artistic core of the creative economy, and is essential to ensuring the overall economic performance of the various creative industries. The arts and cultural sector is to provide the learning tools and experimentation space for creative individuals, interacting with the media and design sectors (ERC-CI 2002: 10). The arts and culture sector is also considered an investment. Chief Executive Officer of the NAC, Lee Suan Hiang said (personal communication):

The government's role is to address market failure. In business and industry, we have R&D [research and development]. R&D is often funded by government because R&D is a cost centre, not a profit centre. In the arts, we also need experimentation. In experimental art, in new art, artists use a new language that the public is not familiar with. Because these are new products and unknown, they are more difficult to market. They need time to gestate and be accepted. So, there is market failure which the government needs to address. This is where NAC comes in. We provide grants to encourage artists to experiment and try new things. Our facilitation is to address market failure. We sometimes need to help expedite certain strategic projects which may take longer if left to the market by removing barriers and providing incentives and seed funding.

The NAC is also working with the MICA to set up a pre-tertiary arts school in 2008, so as to "identify and nurture the creative talents of young Singaporeans" (NAC 2005: 29). These are plans of the comprehensive strategy to (ERC-CI 2002: 15 - 20):

build creative capabilities (such as embed arts, design and media into the various levels of education, establish a flagship art, design and media programme at the National University of Singapore), create "sophisticated demand" for the arts (promote public art projects, create "creative towns", where arts, culture, design, business and technology integrated within community planning and revitalization efforts, introducing a world class Singapore Biennale, and create a new Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) and develop the creative industries (including cultural tourism, internationalization of recording music, publishing, arts supporting industries, merchandising Singapore's heritage resources).

Tourism will both support and benefit from the creative economy. Tourists will consume many of Singapore's creative products, especially those in the arts and cultural sector. And a lively and exciting creative economy will also promote Singapore's image and attract more tourists. In working closely with many other state agencies, the STB has been assigned the tasks of arts marketing and promoting cultural tourism in the creative economy (MITA 2000: 8). These tasks are taken seriously by the STB; it sometimes goes beyond the responsibility of a tourism promotion agency, some may argue.

Firstly, the STB actively seeks out international conferences, exhibitions and events in the various creative industries to be hosted in Singapore. For instance, Singapore will host the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers Congress in 2009. The design industry is still fledging in Singapore, and such an event will help inch Singapore into the global limelight. While supporting the vision of Design Singapore, the goal for STB is to bring in high yielding MICE tourists. Catherine McNabb, STB Director (Strategic Clusters I) said (personal communication):

We want to secure as many strategic events as possible, events that will reinforce our strategic goals. For instance, we want Singapore to be seen as the design hub of Asia, Singapore as a biomedical hub, we want to strengthen our banking and financial image. We aim to enhance Singapore's brand equity in the key clusters.

The then-Director of Creative Industries Singapore, Baey Yam Keng<sup>3</sup> offered a broader explanation of why the STB should continue to draw in grand international events to Singapore (personal communication):

Recently [2005], we hosted the International Olympic Council meeting. Such events, by themselves, are not profit generating. For example, security is costly. But there are other benefits, not just hotel stays and shopping but also the international branding of Singapore. Such high profile events highlight the Esplanade and the Singapore River; these help to sell Singapore. That is why

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<sup>3</sup> Baey Yam Keng resigned from this position in April 2006 to become a Member of Parliament. He is expected to champion the creative economy, especially in the arts and culture, in Parliament.



we have not only to look at dollars and cents but also at the more intangible benefits to Singapore.

So, such big events will not only bring in tourists – which is a primary concern of the STB – it will also promote positive images of Singapore. And the STB actively approaches players in the local industries to stage these international events.

Secondly, the STB and other state agencies actively seek out opportunities not only to host international events but also opportunities to make Singapore into the hub of global and regional organizations, including those in the media, design, telecommunication, pharmaceuticals and financial sectors. As a regional hub for companies and industries, business persons will inevitably travel to Singapore. These persons will also be high-yielding tourists. In the context of the creative industries, for example, Singapore is fast becoming a regional hub for the global media industry. MTV, Discovery Channel, HBO and BBC have already made Singapore their regional headquarters. Singapore offers a conducive business environment, which includes political stability, tax breaks, free training of workers and attractive packages for expatriates. But to the STB, it also hopes that Singapore-centered and Singapore-slanted contents will also be promoted in the international media when Singapore is the regional headquarters. For instance, with the MTV Asia 2006 New Year's eve celebrations in Singapore, images of Singapore were telecasted throughout the region, creating a happening image for Singapore (see also STB 23 February 2006). Expectedly, the STB sponsors such activities.

Another example to demonstrate how the STB directly supports strategic creative business activities and make Singapore into an attractive media hub, it has a Film-in-Singapore scheme for foreign film makers. Wanting to benefit from what movies can do for tourism, as proven in *Braveheart* did for Scotland and *Lord of the Rings* for New Zealand, the STB wants to use movies and television series to create awareness and portray a positive image of Singapore. Under the Film-in-Singapore scheme, STB will pay for half the costs for film production in the city-state. The STB will also offer advice on where to shoot and will coordinate with other authorities (e.g. police, National Park Board and attraction operators) to ensure the smooth shooting of scenes in Singapore.

The STB wants Singapore to be the regional headquarters for international organizations. Such setups will bring in revenues and provide employment in the economy; in terms of tourism, there will be more business visitors and the image of Singapore as a business centre will also improve. It is thus that the STB and other state agencies are constantly hatching schemes to make Singapore even more attractive for these organizations.

Thirdly, and related to the earlier two points, the STB takes the lead in shaping the cultural and physical landscapes of the city. The STB is actively trying to make Singapore into an attractive place to visit, work and live. A vibrant arts and culture scene is considered essential to “enhance the attractiveness of Singapore to global talent and businesses” (ERC-CI 2002: 10, MITA 2000: 24). The authorities acknowledge that Singapore is inadequate in offering cultural activities to draw highly skilled foreign workers to work in the city-state (Yusuf et al., 2005: 114; "Singapore paints rosy employment picture"). The Economist Intelligence Unit found that Singapore ranks behind Tokyo and Hong Kong as a sought-after place for expatriates because of its dearth of cultural activities (“Singapore stages a cultural renaissance”). Singapore is working hard to move away from its sterile image as a “cultural desert” (Kawasaki, 2004: 22). The STB is at the forefront of many such initiatives, ranging from pushing for longer opening hours for bars to the founding of the three national museums (MITA & STPB, 1995; Ooi, 2005b). In the latest move, the STB is in charge of seeking the best bids to build two mega complexes that will house casinos, conference and entertainment facilities. These so-called integrated resorts will drastically alter the cultural scene of the city.

Enlivening up the cultural life of the city requires changes to regulations and policies. These changes affect various aspects of social life in Singapore. As a result, during a parliamentary sitting on 13 March 2004, a few Members of Parliament voiced their worries about the loosening up of regulations in Singapore to attract tourists and to present a more creative image of Singapore. Member of Parliament Ahmad Khalis bin Abdul Ghani said (*Singapore Parliamentary Hansard* 13 March 2004):

We have seen discernable moves towards greater easing up of our social scene. The main reason for this easing up is to present Singapore as a more happening

place to woo tourists and foreigners. [... Some people] are concerned that such moves promote the idea that sexual promiscuity is acceptable, and therefore, this may undermine our family values. [... I believe ...] we do not quite need bar-top dancing or such other types of items to woo more tourists and foreigners.”

The then-Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Vivian Balakrishnan, replied that he agrees that Singaporeans “must not lose our values, and we must not lose our compass” and he continued (*Singapore Parliamentary Hansard* 13 March 2004):

There was an article that Professor Richard Florida wrote, entitled "The Rise of the Creative Class". [...] His research found that cities, which are able to embrace diversity, are able to attract and foster a bigger creative class. These are key drivers in a knowledge-based economy. The larger lesson for us in Singapore is that we need to shift our mindset so that we can be more tolerant of diversity. To achieve this, we have begun to take small but important steps to signal that we need a new respect for diversity and openness to ideas. So these examples that the Members cited, e.g., night spots to open 24 hours, bar-top dancing, and bungee jumping, are just part of that signalling process.”

The STB is taking steps to not only promote a trendy image but also to lobby for policy changes to realize a more exciting Singapore. The STB’s lobbying has social engineering implications (Leong, 1997; Ooi, 2005a). In this respect, the STB is not only creating a more exciting environment to enliven the cultural and entertainment sector, it is also challenging the mindsets of many Singaporeans.

Fourthly, the arts and cultural sector of the creative economy needs tourism. In 2005, Singapore attracted nearly 9 million visitors and generated S\$11 billion (€5.5 billion) in tourism receipts (STB, 18 January 2006). The STB has a target to triple annual tourism receipt to S\$30 billion (€15 billion), increase annual visitor numbers to 17 million and generate another 100 000 jobs by 2015 (STB, 20 January 2005). The Singapore government has allocated S\$ 2 billion (€1 billion) to the STB to achieve the 2015 goals (STB, 11 January 2005). The art and culture sector benefits much from the tourism market. In fact, it is a necessity. The then-Minister for MICA, George Yeo

was cited in *Asiaweek* (“Quest for hardy blooms: Why art cannot be like hothouse flowers”) as saying:

As with everything in Singapore, we get more than what we would as a city-state of 3 million people because we serve, maybe, 300 million [from the region].

In the 2000 Renaissance City report, it cited a study commissioned by the STB, stating that \$1 spent directly on the arts, another \$1.80 of income would be generated elsewhere in a related industry (MITA 2000: 30). Art festivals, such as the Adelaide Festival of Arts and Edinburgh Arts Festival were used to demonstrate how the arts contribute to the economy (MITA 2000: 31). Tourists coming for cultural performances are thus also very welcomed. To the authorities, many art and cultural products are only viable because of tourism, in terms of increasing the market and generating revenues. These products, on the other hand, also attract tourists.

Fifthly, the STB and tourism offer a framework for Singaporeans, and also the Singaporean creative economy, to imagine themselves. The brand story of Singapore as a creative hub is drawn from “Uniquely Singapore”, the destination branding of Singapore. This brand tells of Singapore as a city that has blended the best of the West and the East, the traditional and the modern. This message has been effectively communicated to not only the world and also Singaporeans. The story fits into the general social engineering agenda set out by the government. The Singaporean government, using the mass media and the education system, promotes the view that Singapore has prospered and developed but Singaporeans are still Asians at heart. Singaporeans are officially constituted by three ethnic groups, namely, the Chinese, Malay and Indian (Benjamin, 1976; Siddique, 1990). The destination brand story accentuates this mix of Asian cultures in a modern context through the simplified and catchy slogan, “Uniquely Singapore”. Various agencies, the local mass media and even government ministers use this catchy and simple brand story to talk about Singapore. After the launch of “Uniquely Singapore” in 2004, Singaporeans are even encouraged to seek out “Uniquely Singapore” products (see Ooi, 2004; 2005a). Any destination branding story is, however, only selective in its portrayal of the place – elements are ignored and there are other ways to frame the place. Inadvertently or otherwise, authorities promoting the creative economy in Singapore are also using a

similar brand story. The then-Director of Creative Industries Singapore, Baey Yam Keng, said (personal communication):

The East and West thing is very strong in Singapore. Singapore is based in Asia but because of our colonial days, the way we have connected to the world, the way our education system is structured, we are very close to the West. This is a very nice blend. Creative people like something ethnic, something Chinese, something Japanese and something different. Singapore is where the East and West confer.

The “Uniquely Singapore” brand story has become a framework to understand and present Singapore’s uniqueness, both for tourists and for playing up Singapore in the global creative economy. In a subtle manner and over the past four decades, the STB has helped Singaporeans imagine themselves through what foreign tourists would see them as attractive (Ooi 2004).

The discussions above show that the creative economy is much broader than tourism but tourism plays a central part in the scheme of things in Singapore. There are however some serious challenges in using the Singaporean approach of intertwining tourism into the creative economy.

### ***Challenges in the Singaporean Approach to the Creative Economy***

A country taking the creative turn requires focused and tremendous efforts in terms of coordination between agencies and in seeking resources. Developing the creative infrastructure requires the cooperation of many stakeholders (Roodhouse et al., 2004). Furthermore, the management of creativity and culture will always face resistance (Crewe et al., 1998; Hughes, 1998; Jayne, 2004; Roodhouse et al., 2004). Singapore is no exception even though state agencies are known to work closely together (Schein, 1996). For instance, the NAC and the STB approach the arts and culture differently; the former tends to look at arts “from a non-profit angle” (ERC-CI 2002: 10-11), and the STB approaches art development from a “business (tourism) angle” (ERC-CI 2002: 10-11). As a result, in the interplay between the different stakeholders and their different interests, many questions arise, such as which programmes are supported? Who decide? How should resources be allocated? What products should be chosen for

promotion? As discussed earlier, the holistic and comprehensive approach by the Singaporean authorities of bringing tourism into the creative economy has brought about positive results, at the same time, there are challenges.

The first challenge is the general concern about quality. How would tourism influence the types of creative and cultural products? For instance, there are criticisms against theatres in London as “being geared towards the tourist market, resulting in standardization, blandness and the emphasis on spectacle” (Hughes, 1998: 447). So-called serious plays are being squeezed out by long-running commercial-oriented musicals. The STB involvement in the creative industries is driven by the tourism values it can attain from its involvement. As a result, the STB would like to promote well known products, such as the musicals *West Side Story* and *Mama Mia*. It has successfully lobbied for bringing in the internally renowned Crazy Horse Revue from Paris – with topless women dancing on stage, it caused a stir in Singaporean society. While tourism resources are used to promote the arts and culture in Singapore, it is still debatable the types of art and culture products brought in are what locals and other stakeholders desire. Furthermore, there may be longer term consequences for the arts and cultural scene in Singapore when more tourism-oriented productions and cultural activities are lauded in the local media for their commercial successes. This concern is particularly salient in Singapore because the Singaporean authorities always use economic reasoning to convince people towards policy changes in the country (Chua, 1995; George, 2000; Koh & Ooi, 2000). Based on the Renaissance City vision, the government is quite aware that less commercially oriented arts must also be nurtured; the NAC supports less commercial forms of art and culture. This does not stop criticisms, as artists and quarters of the public still think that much more could be done to allay the negative influences of commercialized cultural products.

The second related challenge deals with the functional and economic manner STB raises social causes, so as to further commercialize and commodify creative products in Singapore. As discussed earlier, many Singaporeans are unhappy with the liberalization of social spaces to spice up the cultural life of Singapore. The changes are, on the other hand, also welcomed by many other Singaporeans. Among those who welcome the changes, many of them remain ambivalent towards the commercial logic behind the STB-lead policy changes. For instance, an unregistered gay activist

group in Singapore, People Like Us, is unhappy that gays are given more social spaces only because the authorities want to signal to the world that Singapore has become more open and tolerant. It is still, however, a criminal act to engage in homosexual activities in Singapore, and People Like Us could not be officially registered. The Singaporean authorities do not find it necessary to give formal rights to gays because there are no economic benefits and there may be political costs. To People Like Us, the authorities are treating gays as economic units, not as citizens deserving equal rights.

The third challenge arises from the need by the Singaporean government to manage creative expression in the city-state. It seems that cultural products that are politically and socially sensitive – and lacking in tourism and economic values – are likely to be curtailed. For instance, some plays and movies are not allowed; the authorities have banned the play *Talaq* in 2002 by P. Elangovan. The play dealt with rape within an Indian Muslim marriage, and some members of the local Indian community protested. P. Elangovan lamented, “It makes a mockery of Singapore’s aim to be a Renaissance City” (“The renaissance starts here?”). In 2005, Martyn See, a young local film maker saw his film, *Singapore Rebel* banned because it is considered to be ‘political’. The 30-minute documentary is about Chee Soon Juan, leader of the Singapore Democratic Party. See was interrogated under the Films Act which states that it is an offence to import, make, distribute or exhibit a film which contains “wholly or partly either partisan or biased references or comments on any political matter”. A “party political film” is an offence punishable by a maximum fine of S\$100 000 (€50 000) or a two-year prison sentence. His film equipment and copies of his film were confiscated. Such incidences are difficult to grasp for artists; creative expressions often reflect the embedded social, cultural and political environment. A consequent for some creative workers is self-censorship. For instance, as reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a local publisher published the book *Crows* by a mainland Chinese author, *Jiu Dan* but not before removing reference to the protagonist’s affair with a former Singaporean politician (“The Renaissance starts here?”). The book might be considered semi-autographical because *Jiu Dan* lived and studied in Singapore for many years. The soft authoritarian Singaporean government will continue to micro manage creative expressions, and that may not bode well for cultivating a creative climate. On the other hand, all countries social engineer their

own societies to bring about their own visions of social stability. Singapore is not unique in that manner but it is unique for a society with such a high level of economic development to have such tight political control.

In the promotion of the creative industries, there is a general worry that the creative push is not much more than a means to market the place (Leslie, 2005). Such a concern is partly reflected in the three challenges discussed above, e.g. the opening up of social spaces is only a means to signal a more tolerant Singapore, only tourist-friendly local art events are promoted to the world and some non-commercially oriented creative expressions are banned. Possibly more controversial, the creative push in Singapore is implicitly shaped by the STB. As already seen, the STB marketing messages are taken seriously in Singapore. A destination brand identity is, however, engendered by marketing interests; it is not meant to be an honest reflection of the local society. At the same time in Singapore, the STB has inadvertently provided the brand identity framework for many Singaporeans to uncritically imagine themselves. While Singapore is promoted as unique, the formulation that Singapore offers the best of the East and the West, the traditional and the modern, marginalizes many other realities in Singapore. The brand messages were organized into images that foreigners can understand. They are attempts to assert Singapore's Orientalness for the long-haul tourism markets and are endeavors by the STB to self-Orientalise Singapore (see Ooi, 2002; Ooi, 2005b). As mentioned, such marketing messages have infiltrated into the general psyche of local residents, politicians and also governmental agencies. These marketing messages are generally taken as accurate. In taking an emergent view of cultural change, one may argue that the adaptation and acceptance of commercialized cultural products and marketing messages can only be expected, if they become meaningful to the people (Cohen, 1988; Ooi, 2004).

### **Concluding remarks**

Many countries and cities are pursuing the creative economy. Each country has its own strategy and model. This paper has presented the case of Singapore. Tourism in Singapore plays a particularly important part in cultivating the arts and cultural sector. Not only do the tourism authorities market cultural products, the STB also takes the initiatives to create and shape the cultural scene in Singapore. With the cooperation of



other state agencies, resources are used to realize tourism goals. As can also be seen in the discussions above, the STB is involved in other creative sectors, e.g. setting up regional headquarters, hosting industry events and making films in Singapore. Such initiatives can only take place with the generous support of the government. Just as other state agencies see the value of promoting tourism, the STB also sees the value in promoting the Singaporean creative economy. Together, these various agencies and authorities aim to realize the creative dream for Singapore.

Can such a model work in other countries? It makes organizational and economic sense for agencies to cooperate. In Singapore, however, little efforts are needed to eliminate the political bickering between agencies and resistance from the public. The Singaporean leaders have ensured cooperation, thus reducing the transaction costs between stakeholders. With the control of the mass media and education system, civil servants, workers, employers and the citizenry in general are often mobilized towards the goals set by the government. Singapore offers a model to integrate diverse commercial and creative interests. But many other countries will not be able to push through their creative dreams in the same manner

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