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THE MAKING OF SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE/CULTURAL SPACE: CULTURAL INDIGENEITY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Prof. Lily KONG, Ph.D.
Professor of Geography, Vice-President (University & Global Relations) and concurrently Director of Asia Research Institute - National University of Singapore - SINGAPORE
lilykong@nus.edu.sg

ABSTRACT

Shanghai and Singapore are two economically vibrant Asian cities which have recently adopted creative/cultural economy strategies. This paper examines new spatial expressions of cultural and economic interests in the two cities: state-vaunted cultural edifices and organically evolved cultural spaces. The paper discusses the simultaneous precarity and sustainability of these spaces, focusing on Shanghai's Grand Theatre and Moganshan Lu, and Singapore's Esplanade Theatres by the Bay and Wessex Estate. Their cultural sustainability is understood as their ability to support the development of indigenous content and local idioms in artistic work. Their social sustainability is examined in terms of the social inclusion and community bonds they engender, while environmental sustainability refers to the articulation with the language of existing urban forms, and the preservation of or improvements to the landscape. While both Shanghai and Singapore demonstrate simultaneous precarity and sustainability, Singapore's city-state status places greater pressure on it to ensure sustainability than does Shanghai within a much larger China in which Beijng can quite well serve as the cultural hearth while Shanghai remains essentially a commercial centre.

Keywords: *creative and cultural spaces, sustainability, Singapore, Shanghai*

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, creative economy strategies have become attractive, even fashionable, in several cities in Asia, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, Taipei, and Seoul. A variety of factors motivated the diffusion to Asian cities of what was essentially the culture-driven strategies for urban regeneration popularly adopted in British, European and U.S. cities in the 1980s and 1990s (see Bianchini 1993; Kong 2000; Miles and Paddison 2005). The Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s prompted national and city governments to look for alternative economic strategies, particularly given their reluctance to abandon their aspirations to become global cities. At the same time, the culture-led strategies in the West had had “the most dramatic consequences both physically in transforming the urban landscape and in building their economic performance” (Miles and Paddison 2005, 833). While the exact manner in which knowledges about the creative economy have circulated and diffused has differed from destination to destination (Kong et al. 2006), it remains undoubted that a normative policy script has captured “official” imaginations within the Asian context. Such a policy script may be

characterized as follows: to compete in the new creative economy, cities should seek to implement particular initiatives such as encouraging creative industry clusters, incubate learning and knowledge economies, maximize networks with other successful places and companies, value and reward innovation, and aggressively campaign to attract the "creative class" as residents (Gibson and Kong 2005). Such an approach has been most marked in cities, though policies promoting growth of the creative economy as a competitive strategy have emerged at various scales and in increasingly diverse places from municipalities to national and even multilateral trading regions (Yusuf and Nabeshima 2005).

This recent popularity and proliferation of creative economy discourses amongst policy makers (and academics) has prompted the concerns on which this paper is based, and they are, to examine issues surrounding the environmental, cultural, and social sustainability of creative/cultural policy. The paper explores whether and how cultural policy consciously attempts to ensure sustainability even while pursuing economic goals and global city aspirations. At the same time, it examines how policy less wittingly impacts the sustainability of creative work and places, often in negative ways. I examine these issues within the context of two predominantly Chinese cities in Asia which are simultaneously cosmopolitan in many ways, Singapore and Shanghai.

CULTURE-LED URBAN REGENERATION, THE CREATIVE CITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

This paper contributes to the literature on culture-led urban regeneration, the creative city, and creative economy. Within that literature, the main focus has been on U.K. and U.S. cities. Writing in the context of U.S. cities, Richard Florida (2002) has argued that cities should focus on attracting creative people and promoting creativity as a way to successful regeneration. While severely criticized, his arguments have captured the attention of policy-makers in many different parts of the globe. In the context of the U.K., the British government's recognition of the value of cultural investment to urban regeneration is borne of a sense that culture is "a source of prosperity and cosmopolitanism in the process of international urban competitiveness, … a means of spreading the benefits of prosperity to all citizens, through its capacity to engender social and human capital, improve life skills and transform the organizational capacity to handle and respond to change … [and] a means of defining a rich shared identity … thus engender[ing] pride of place and inter-communal understanding, contributing to people's sense of anchoring and confidence" (Comedia 2003, no pp).

Just how much such strategies actually address local issues of identity, interaction, and understanding, apart from economic ones, is however often questionable. Stevenson (2004, 126) argues that "the 'social' of social inclusion has become synonymous with the economy to such an extent that participation in society (full citizenship) can only be achieved through participation in the economy." In this way, culture becomes implicated in reproducing inequalities as opposed to automatically revitalizing the public sphere (Miles and Paddison 2005, 836). In fact, Steven Miles and Ronan Paddison (2005, 837) go on to argue that "the most dangerous aspect of cultural investment is that it simply does not sit comfortably in the context for which it is intended." Others sounding caution include Graeme Evans (2005) who is concerned that the measures of impact are all too often focused on economic impacts rather than about long-term sustainability; Johnson and Thomas (2001) believe that effects such as enjoyment, appreciation and such "softer" aspects of the arts' impact are left insufficiently acknowledged and promoted. In fact, Keith Bassett (1993, 178) had made this argument as early as the 1990s, arguing that economic regeneration does not necessarily mean that there is also cultural regeneration, which involves community self-development and self-expression. In short, all of these critics argue for a sustainability that goes beyond economic terms, and considers issues such as social inclusion, social cohesion, and community development.

In this paper, I choose precisely to focus on notions of sustainability beyond the economic. Specifically, I am concerned with issues of environmental, cultural, and social sustainability. I treat environmental sustainability in terms of the sustainability of urban spaces as valuable repositories of human (personal and social) meaning, and simultaneously, liveable, rejuvenated

spaces. For example, a pertinent issue would be how historical spaces may be preserved and re-used without compromising development. At the same time, it is also necessary to consider how new urban spaces are introduced into the landscape, and how they integrate into the fabric of existing urban environments, revitalizing the cityscape or standing as jarring new symbols of modernity that do not articulate with the language of existing urban forms.

Conventional wisdom about cultural sustainability emphasizes the ability of culture to "forge a productive diversity for the human species" as well as to "nurture the sources of cohesion and commonality," recognizing culture to be "the glue of similarity ('identity,' literally) that grounds our sociability" (IJECESS website, 8 Jun 2008). In turn, social sustainability calls for systems, structures and programs that allow "our participation as autonomous yet social beings" (IJECESS website, 8 Jun 2008). Social sustainability suggests healthy social interaction, protection of the vulnerable, and respect for social diversity.

Cultural and social sustainability are closely intertwined in the context of this paper. Here, I refer to cultural sustainability as the ability to create local cultural content and embed indigenous idioms in cultural "products," and the possibility of creating unique cultural forms that underscore a local sense of identity and indeed, nationhood, particularly in the face of globalizing and potentially homogenizing forces. Such cultural sustainability should be able to nurture cohesion and develop common identity, without suggesting a simultaneous xenophobic rejection of external influences. Closely related would be the idea of social sustainability, emphasizing the social dimension of cultural activities, whereby a socially sustainable cultural policy/activity is one which enables social inclusion and the building of community bonds. Such social sustainability is possible or achieved when cultural activity has a strong social basis to begin with, or when it has the desired social effect.

SHANGHAI AND SINGAPORE

To address my research questions, I analyze the case of Shanghai and Singapore, two dynamic cities in Asia selected for their similarities and simultaneous differences. Both are predominantly Chinese, despite having significant migrant (long-term and transient) populations. Both have reputations for being bustling commercial centers though neither city is well-known for cultural vibrancy and leadership. Shanghai invariably plays second fiddle to Beijing, which has the reputation of being the cultural capital of China, and Singapore has long struggled to shrug off its cultural desert image. Both have aspirations to develop their cultural depth and standing, not least to gain the symbolic cultural capital necessary to shore up their global city status/aspirations. Both have also recently discovered the potential of the creative/cultural industries, with both Singapore's national government and Shanghai's municipal government actively pursuing the economic potential of creative industries (see Kong et al. 2006). Both have fairly recently (re)constructed their cultural monuments or are in the process of doing so. Singapore's Esplanade, National Library, and National Museum, and Shanghai's Museum, Library, and Grand Theatre, have given the cities some iconic cultural structures.

Yet, these two cities have different nation-building imperatives and political ideologies. Singapore is a young nation, having gained independence only in 1965, and is a small city-state, with about 4.5 million residents. Shanghai has a rich history within the much longer traditions of the larger Chinese polity and nation, and is now confronted with an explosive population of well over 16 million. Issues of environmental, cultural, and social sustainability thus mean similar yet different things in these two fascinating cities.

In addressing issues of environmental, cultural, and social sustainability in these cities, I have picked two categories of creative/cultural spaces. The first comprises the state-vaunted edifices of Shanghai Grand Theatre and Singapore's EsplanadeTheatres by the Bay, which offer space for the performing arts in the respective cities. The second comprises more organically-evolved visual arts clusters: Moganshan Lu in Shanghai with its artists, photographers, designers and architects, and Wessex Estate in Singapore with a similar mix. While these spaces had begun organically, state agencies have come to recognize their potential and have intervened to "assist" their development. Although these are not the only spaces of creativity and arts in the two cities nor do they fully reflect the range of creative/cultural policies in these cities, they are

selected because they represent two vastly different types of spaces the monumental versus the everyday; the state-initiated versus the organic.

I base my analysis mainly on primary data drawn from about sixty interviews in the four sites over two years (from 2005 to 2007, with artists, performers, playwrights, designers, photographers, directors and others in the “artistic class,” “ordinary” Singaporeans and Shanghainese, as well as with architects, managers, planners and developers responsible for the sites). I combine this with other primary textual data (mainly publicity material and annual reports from these sites) and from site observations. Secondary material in the form of newspaper reports also offered useful information.

PARADOXICAL SHANGHAI: A SIMULTANEITY OF (UN)SUSTAINABILITY

The contradictions of Shanghai's rapid development are multiple. Philip Bowring of the International Herald Tribune wrote in 2004, on the occasion of the debut of Formula One motor racing in China, that Shanghai was spending huge sums of public funding on infrastructures such as the Maglev and a grand prix track while China's many rural areas suffered (Bowring 2004). Indeed, within Shanghai itself, there is urban squalor alongside unprecedented prosperity. The contradictions are apparent too in cultural development and sustainability, manifest, for example, in the tensions between western liberal expectations of cultural freedom, on the one hand, and national practices of control and propaganda, on the other; the erection of grand cultural monuments as symbols of a global city with its requisite cultural sophistication, and simultaneous waning of interest in local cultural forms (such as the ping tan - 评弹 or traditional story telling) (Kong 2007). It is in this context that the two sites of analysis the Shanghai Grand Theatre and Moganshan Lu must be understood.

Shanghai Grand Theatre. Opened in 1998, the Shanghai Grand Theatre (Figure 1), a luminous structure of white steel and glass, offers state-of-the-art theaters and sound systems. It also occupies pride of place in 2.1 hectares in People's Square, centrally located in the older but still bustling Puxi (that part of old Shanghai, west of the Huangpu River). It sits by the side of the Shanghai Municipal Building, opposite the Shanghai Museum. The museum's and theater's location in People's Square is geographically and symbolically significant. They are situated very near the geographical heart of the city,1 and simultaneously occupy a symbolic political centrality, given the proximity to the Shanghai government's headquarters. That this is also one of the most expensive plots of land in Shanghai reflects the value placed on cultural development in Shanghai's quest for global city status. As Clément (2004, 148) suggests, this use of the city center is reminiscent of the placement of the “great public altars dedicated to the worship of the cult of ancestors and the gods of agriculture” in central sites, “consolidat[ing] the base of political power, accompanying and reinforcing it.” That these cultural facilities enjoy this prominence of location is a message to the world that Shanghai's new urban planning policy recognizes the centrality of culture. Simultaneously, the readiness to engage foreign expertise in the construction of the Shanghai Grand Theatre (designed by ARTE-Charpentier Studio, France and ECADI, Shanghai) is a reflection of the growing collaboration between foreign architects and the architectural institutes of Shanghai the intertwining of global and local in the production of space and meaning.

How is the Shanghai Grand Theatre to be judged in relation to issues of cultural, social and environmental sustainability? I draw on a variety of evidences to conclude that the Grand Theatre project represents for Shanghai another contradiction of simultaneous sustainability and unsustainability.

While the earlier description of the physicality of the Shanghai Grand Theatre demonstrates the city's determined investment in a new urban landscape, evidence points to the concomitant absence of models of cultural and social sustainability. Two dimensions of the Shanghai Grand Theatre's everyday functioning demonstrate this: first, its program of performances; and second, its audience profile. Together, they demonstrate how the construction of a cultural monument does not occur concomitantly with a city's cultural development. If cultural sustainability entails the nurturing of a local cultural idiom and a sense of local identity and

community, and if social sustainability requires social inclusion, the Grand Theatre does not yet herald sustainable social-cultural development in Shanghai.

Data was collected on the performances at the Shanghai Grand Theatre at quarterly intervals over about a year, straddling 2006 and 2007 (September and December 2006, April and July 2007). In these various months, the vast majority of performances were foreign in origin, dominated by Carmen, Swan Lake, Beauty and the Beast, La Bayadere, the Spanish National Ballet, and Mamma Mia. Less frequent were performances with a more local flavor, such as that by the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra or a Chinese drama. In this sense, while the Grand Theatre may have been an achievement in some ways, it has nevertheless not had the effect of stimulating production of original creative content in Shanghai. Perhaps this was not even the intention of the cultural monument. Nevertheless, its presence has not helped to contribute to the nurturing and development of significant local cultural content. This is consistent with other evidence relating to Shanghai's cultural life. As a professor with the Shanghai Theatre Academy laments:

> *For years the city hasn't had a film which could excite or convince an audience, and the situation is the same with TV dramas. Last year the city won only one prize out of a total of 58 "Five-One project" awards. This is a nationwide project for exemplary works in each of five cultural areas including essays, books, films and TV shows, songs and operas. More and more film stars, TV stars and producers are leaving Shanghai for other areas to find more opportunities.* (Shanghai Star, 18 Mar 2004)

This lack of creative originality may be due to a lack of openness of cultural perspective, and the use of culture as propaganda tool for the nation (Yatsko 2001; Kong 2007), which has resulted in strict government control over cultural life. It is not yet clear that there is the necessary freedom to foster creative productions and sustain a vibrant cultural life, despite the existence of state-of-the-art cultural infrastructure. The Shanghai Grand Theatre is thus symbolic of the current paradox of cultural sustainability and unsustainability that accompanies the making of a grand cultural monument in Shanghai. On the one hand, Shanghai is able to boast of “world-class” acts, on par with many other global cities, and thus can claim a certain cultural capital for itself. On the other hand, because these performances essentially showcase imported cultural products, their contribution to the long term sustainability of an indigenous cultural life can be called to question.

The paradox which characterizes Shanghai recurs when considering issues of social sustainability. Given the types of performances at the Shanghai Grand Theatre, it is no surprise that the audiences are mainly expatriates and visitors to Shanghai, as well as “work groups.” This quickly became evident from participant observation in September 2006 corroborated by interviews with audiences. As an American and Singaporean couple living in Shanghai observed:

> *As far as we can tell, every time we go to the Grand Theater, it is full. But if you look at the people there, 70% are the work groups. They work for the company and they get the tickets. But they don't necessarily relate to this. No way they will pay two, three hundred RMB for these performances … even though Swan Lake and all that is politically correct for this setting.*

What are the implications for social sustainability under these conditions? On the one hand, the Grand Theatre's existence and its approach to cultural programming create the conditions for two kinds of social inclusion and networking. First, it is one way in which the expatriate community in Shanghai is inserted into a global circuit of cultural consumption, and connected with cultural elites in other parts of the world, particularly other global cities. This is one kind of social inclusion, premised not on a local and “territorial” community, but on an imagined one made up of transnational elites connected via the cultural capital they share. Second, through the work groups, segments of the Shanghai population have access to cultural forms that they would not otherwise experience. This introduction to the global circuit of cultural consumption may be considered a form of social induction, if not yet full inclusion, and represents early

tentative steps towards turning local Shanghainese to global cultural consumption practices and thence to a form of global citizenship
.
On the other hand, for many Shanghainese, the Shanghai Grand Theatre remains an alien space in the new urban landscape. As Kong (2007) illustrated, even a new generation of independent young workers are unlikely to have ever been in the Grand Theatre, demarking it as a place for the "high class." In fact, some even had difficulty telling apart the Grand Theatre from the other monumental buildings in People's Square, evidence that it was non-inclusive space to the city's ordinary people.

Separately, the erection of the Shanghai Grand Theatre in People's Square also raises questions about urban environmental sustainability. Has this structure in the new urban landscape of Puxi become a jarring new symbol of modernity, or does it articulate with the language of existing urban forms? Is it a symbol of urban pride or a nemesis to local communities displaced? Has it contributed to the revitalization and regeneration of the city centre, or has it been imposed as an alien object, parasitically draining away the city's resources?

Unsurprisingly, from this perspective too, Shanghai's Grand Theatre is symbolic of a simultaneous sustainability and unsustainability. Its construction, together with that of the Shanghai Museum and the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, all in the vicinity of People's Square, has contributed to a sprucing up of the cityscape with open green spaces, clean, well-maintained structures, and interesting, imageable architectures. Despite the fact that many residents have not visited the Theatre, its mere existence seems to be an important symbol for some Shanghainese that their city is progressing and reclaiming some of its former glory. In the words of a private transport provider, "People's Square, with the museum and theatre, can be said to be a source of Shanghai people's pride as the city progresses." On the other hand, other interviewees were simply ignorant of the revitalization of the cityscape in that part of Shanghai. Reflecting a circumscribed habitus, a domestic helper living and working in the Jingan District to the west of People's Square seemed oblivious to these cultural developments of the last decade. At the same time, as with many other projects of urban regeneration in multiple parts of the world, displaced populations are reminders of the environmental costs incurred in the making of new urban landscapes (Kong 2007).

Moganshan Lu. In contrast to the Shanghai Grand Theatre, 50 Moganshan Lu is a cluster of old buildings along the banks of the Suzhou River in Shanghai's Puxi. The buildings span the 1930s to the 1990s. In the 1970s, they were mainly engineering and textile factories, the first mixed use industrial space in Shanghai. Today, the 41,000 square meter of space houses more than 130 studios and workshops, of which about 60 percent are art galleries, featuring artists and exhibitors from seventeen countries (e.g. France, U.S.A., Israel, England, Italy, Canada, Switzerland, Japan, China, and Taiwan). The rest of the space houses other kinds of design studios, e.g. media, fashion, and product design. There is also an advanced art education institution. Of the 60 percent of art galleries and design workshops/ studios, about 75 percent are purely workshops/studios while the rest are galleries. The leases are for two to three years, and rentals have increased particularly in the last two years.

These old factory spaces at 50 Moganshan Lu have become the creative spaces for avant-garde art in Shanghai. The first batch of artists set up their work studios here in 2001 because of the spaciousness and affordable rentals. There was no deliberate planning but rather, a natural evolution over time. Within two years, the area turned into an important site for contemporary art in Shanghai, with numerous art galleries, design firms, art organizations, and artists. The phenomenal transformation of these old warehouses caught the attention of local and foreign media. Through their extensive reporting, the fame of 50 Moganshan Lu has spread significantly. The growing phenomenon also attracted the attention of the municipal authorities and has led to the area being identified as one of the creative districts2 in Shanghai, and a new name "M50."

Questions about sustainability are inevitably asked whenever evidences of rapid economic

growth in China are advertised. Like the Shanghai Grand Theatre, issues of cultural, social and environmental sustainability call for analysis and understanding in the context of Moganshan Lu.

From a cultural perspective, Moganshan Lu's art galleries mainly exhibit works by Chinese contemporary artists rather than foreign artists. To that extent, it supports the development of indigenous art, and has the potential to contribute to the longer term sustainability of Chinese art and culture. In fact, some of the artists themselves believe that many of the cutting-edge artists in Shanghai are gathered at Moganshan Lu, testimony to the importance of this space to the development of Shanghai's world of art. The presence of art galleries and work studios in the former factories and warehouses form a critical mass, and the close proximity with one another affords opportunities for interaction and exchange of ideas. On various site visits, it was apparent that Bandu Music Café was an important site of social interaction, as discussed later.

Moganshan Lu is also thought to be a cluster that has “real content,” as opposed to the many “creative clusters” that the Shanghai government has publicly identified, some of which are sites of consumption rather than artistic creation. As one gallery owner put it:

> *There is a discrepancy between using a creative cluster and having a creative cluster. I do not see many real creative clusters in Shanghai. A creative cluster is not something that you can name and it will come into being just like that. It needs serious content and most important, really creative people... something that is missing most of the time.* (Personal interview, 22 Nov. 2006)

Moganshan Lu represents for him a real space for artistic work. On the other hand, as another gallery owner indicated, its longer term contribution to cultural sustainability in Shanghai hangs on a fine balance between commerce and art. With its success in attracting artists has come a danger of excessive commercialization:

> *It is becoming a bit too commercial and the artistic levels are sometimes too extreme (including the very good and very bad stuff)*. (Personal interview, 22 Nov. 2006)

An established artist in Moganshan Lu agreed about the dangers, citing the example of a site identified by the municipal authorities as a creative cluster at Pudong, which was in effect a commercial development rather than a creative cluster:

> *There are still arts-related activities, but these are more commercial than creative in nature, such as retail and trading of art works. Such commercialization further discourages artists from going to that area to set up work studios.* (Personal interview, 1 Nov. 2006)

Several artists and gallery owners have thus warned against a similar fate for Moganshan Lu.

However, from a new artist's perspective, the increasing popularity of Moganshan Lu as a site for visitors is a good thing precisely for the commercial opportunities that it represents. One of the pioneering artists in the area observed:

> *For the younger and lesser-known artists, being based here gives them more opportunities to meet potential buyers and sell their art works. They keep the doors of their work studios open and welcome visitors to walk-in. Although this can be a distraction to the artistic process, there is the possibility that one (or more) of these chance visitors may end up liking their work and buying it, and perhaps, even becoming a regular patron.* (1 Nov. 2006)

The sustainability of Moganshan Lu as an artistic cluster, and as a space for creative work and interaction among artists is thus double-edged. On the one hand, the clustering of artists, galleries, and related visual arts and design activities has given it an identity and momentum that augurs well for sustainability, attracting new artists and art lovers. On the other hand, the commercial activity (albeit arts-related) that has come from its very success poses a danger that can threaten to erode the cluster's cultural sustainability. And yet, paradoxically, for others, it is

also this opportunity of incorporating cultural consumption that the site can be sustainably reproduced as one of artistic production.

The issue of social sustainability in Moganshan Lu centers on questions of the social symbiosis between the artists at Moganshan Lu and the larger community. One of the original artists in the area offered insights into the search for work space that many of them undertook, and how location in the city became a critical factor in their work. He said:

> *As Shanghai develops and becomes more urbanized over time, the demand for more and more living and residential space keeps going up. Artists found that there were fewer and fewer spaces available in the city to use as independent work studios. In our search for bigger work spaces, we ended up looking for properties in the rural areas. In 1998, I bought a townhouse in the suburbs and used the 3rd-storey of the townhouse as my work studio. Although the problem of space constraint was resolved, there were other problems associated with living in the suburbs. We could not get used to the way of life there. Over time, we found themselves becoming more and more detached from city living. This sparked our "reverse migration" back to the city, where the abandoned warehouses and factory spaces became our solution.* (Personal interview, 26 Nov. 2006)

His comments draw attention to three issues of social sustainability that are significant to the artist community. First, the social integration with the city is an important factor that shapes the perspectives and work of these artists. While moving out of the city solved problems of space constraints, the relative detachment from the rhythm of city life posed a challenge to artistic production, particularly in post-reform Shanghai, where the rapid changes to the cityscape affect nearly every aspect of everyday life. The lack of stimulation from urban life affected the works produced, and sparked the "reverse migration" back to the city. It became evident that urban social and cultural integration was critical to social sustainability for these artists.

Besides the integration between artist and city, a second dimension of social sustainability relates to the interaction amongst artists within the cluster at Moganshan Lu. Reflecting some of the arguments that have emerged within the cluster literature (Mommas, 2004; O'Connor, 2004), artists and others in the area speak about the increased interactions amongst themselves by virtue of their proximate location. For example, some tenants were observed to gather at the open courtyard during exhibition openings. Many come together at Bandu Music Café set up within Moganshan Lu, and acting now as a gathering place for artists who are especially interested in traditional Chinese music to enjoy performances that are held there regularly. Artists also meet up to drink tea, chat, and have a meal.

A third dimension of social sustainability relates to the ways in which the larger community is brought into Moganshan Lu. Artists interviewed remarked that oftentimes, visitors would just push open their doors and enter their work studios. Some teachers visit with their students, others are tour guides bringing tourists, while yet others are passersby, seeking to satisfy their curiosity. Of course, there are also art lovers who frequent the area. When faced with all these pairs of curious eyes, the artists would often rest their paintbrushes to either answer the visitors' questions or accede to their request to pose for photographs. As one of the pioneer artists said, many of his fellow artists welcomed this exhibition to the general public of the birthplace of their artworks, testimony to recognition of their contributions to contemporary Chinese art. Insofar as Moganshan Lu had gained recognition as playing a pioneering role in (re)shaping the contemporary Chinese art scene in Shanghai, artists and others there were gratified to receive visitors. However, another pioneer artist also acknowledged that there was little interaction with the community immediately surrounding the artist cluster, though neither artists nor their neighbors seemed more socially impoverished by it. Social inclusion, social integration, and thus the possibility of social sustainability are thus not necessarily reliant on a locative sense of territorial community, but a broader possibility of engagement.

The transformation of Moganshan Lu into an arts enclave has also had positive implications for the environment. Several artists and gallery owners believe that the environment was saved

from dereliction and possible demolition because the artist community moved there and lobbied to save the factory space. As one of the artists recalled,

> *When we first moved into M50, the factory spaces were dilapidated. We had to invest time and money to repair and do up our individual work studios. It was worth it because of the cheap rentals.* (Personal interview, 1 Nov. 2006)

Despite this positive contribution, three indicators do not augur well for the long term sustainability of the space. First, the uncertain lease and the short term tenure mean that tenants do not invest too much in renovation and refurbishment. As a pioneer artist revealed, the rental contract of his work studio was for two years when he first moved in. Subsequently, with uncertainties about whether the factory spaces would be preserved or demolished, his contract was renewed on an annual basis for the following two years. His latest contract, signed at the end of 2005, was for three years. He nevertheless was uncertain about the future of the area and did not invest too much into the refurbishment of his studio.

Second, in 2006, some of the external areas were spruced up and new landscape features added, such as a water feature at the entrance to the site and some renovation and conservation of the facades (Figure 2). This has not always elicited positive support in relation to the authenticity of the environment. One gallery owner lamented:

> *They have made it a bit like Xintiandi ... This kind of fake old but stylish renovation is only conservation of old architecture in name.* (Personal interview, 22 Nov. 2006)

Third, the increasing rentals may make for less sustainable long term existence as an artist cluster. Whereas the rental in 2002 was approximately RMB 0.4 per square foot (psf) per day, in 2006, this had multiplied to about RMB 2 psf per day, and even RMB 3 4 psf per day for some of the better locations. While there are concessions for the pioneer artists, the fact remains that they are likely to be the more established artists whose need for subsidy is less than for the newer artists. It is thus unclear how sustainable this environment for art is.

SINGAPORE'S EVOLVING BALANCE OF SUSTAINABILITY

In as much as Shanghai's development is one of contradictions, Singapore has long been characterized by a developmentalist philosophy, privileging economic development above other considerations. It is in this milieu that cultural policy must be understood, from the early post-independence days when artistic and cultural activities were considered good for nation-building purposes (if the negative influences associated with “yellow culture” of the “decadent West” could be avoided), to the more recent emphasis on creative industries and their potential contribution to a knowledge economy, and the place of cultural activities in the making of a vibrant global city (Kong 2000; Chang 2003; Kong et al. 2006). Certainly, the development of a “world-class” theatre space in the form of Esplanade Theatres on the Bay, and the development of “bohemian” Wessex Estate (Straits Times, 2 Mar. 2002) must be understood in the context of contemporary Singapore, hoping to compete with the most economically prosperous and culturally vibrant cities in the world.

Esplanade Theatres on the Bay. Esplanade Theatres on the Bay officially opened on 12 October 2002. Its iconic structure covers six hectares of prime waterfront land, and is made up of the two distinctive domes with spiked sunshades, which has earned it the favorite colloquial name of “Durian,” for its likeness to this well-loved tropical fruit (Figure 3). It is sited within Singapore's civic district, just by Marina Bay at the mouth of the Singapore River.

The Esplanade's two main venues are the 1,600-seat Concert Hall, with acoustics by Russell Johnson of ARTEC Consultants, and the 2,000-seat theatre, which is an adaptation of traditional European opera houses in horseshoe form. It also has smaller spaces, such as a 245-seat recital studio (for chamber music and solo recitals, cabarets and jazz concerts), and a 220-seat theatre studio (for experimental theatre and dance presentations). The Esplanade's outdoor spaces are also available for use. The roof terrace, for example, may be hired for private

performances or functions, and offers spectacular views of the bay and city skyline. Finally, the Esplanade also has a dedicated visual arts space (Jendela) for exhibitions.

The Esplanade probably represents the state's most ambitious and expensive venture into the production of spaces for the arts, and it represents what Singapore hopes to achieve: the vision of a global city, acting as a hub not only for banking, finance, manufacturing and commerce, but also for the arts, thus helping to "create new ideas, opportunities and wealth" (George Yeo, Minister for Information and the Arts, quoted in Singapore: Global City for the Arts 1995, 5).

In its early stages of development, cultural practitioners in Singapore expressed serious reservations about the Esplanade (Kong 2000). These cultural practitioners playwrights, actors, directors, dancers, and other artists felt strongly about the need for "community self-development and self-expression" (Bassett 1993, 1785), privileging a cultural paradigm that celebrates indigenousness of expression. In seeking to develop a Singapore idiom and an original voice in their cultural products, they endeavor to draw from local cultural resources as well as to contribute to community life, so much so that artistic and cultural activities may become part of the warp and woof of daily life, generating a pulse and rhythm in the city. The cultural spaces that they seek are those in which "[a]rt, artists and art-lovers mingle, muse and meditate", and where there is room "for eloquent failures as for resounding successes" (T. Sasitharan, 8 June 2008). The Esplanade was not this kind of space, in their view.

In particular, the Esplanade did not sufficiently encourage Singapore art and local expression, as one playwright put it, because with such heavy financial investment in the infrastructure, there would be a need to "go for surefire successes" which will cover the cost of renting the spaces and eventually recovering the investment. He, along with other practitioners, all recognized that few local groups could afford to use the spaces because "profit-making theatre" will be favored above "exploratory, indigenous forms", with the result that "those creative artists willing to explore new forms will feel the pressure to abandon more of those projects and produce more audience-determined plays instead so that they can justify their work." (Kong 2007, 297).

There was anxiety therefore that urban cultural entrepreneurialism would create a city in which cultural substance was lacking while "aesthetics replace[d] ethics" (Harvey 1989, 102). What the artist community was seeking was support for local expression, and implicitly, an assurance of long term cultural sustainability.

The Esplanade has worked hard, after initial criticisms, to be inclusive. If "cultural entities - as places where people meet, talk, share ideas and desires, and where identities and lifestyles are formed" (Bianchini 1993, 12) should afford social inclusion of different communities, then the Esplanade has sought to create occasions for social participation and integration. In an explicit statement of intent, the Esplanade aims to be a performing arts centre for everyone, and its programs aim to cater to diverse audiences.

In concrete terms, two types of inclusive efforts have been introduced at the Esplanade, which contrast with the situation at the Shanghai Grand Theatre. First, in terms of programming, the early fears about exclusion of local groups have turned to their greater involvement over time. For example, the "Theatre Studio Season," which is held at Esplanade's Theatre Studio, features smaller-scale exploratory theatrical works by local and foreign theatre companies, involving local and international actors. There are also regular performances series such as "Coffee Mornings & Afternoon Tea" held at the Recital Studio, featuring local artists/performers; "Beautiful Sunday" held at the Concert Hall for free; "Lunchbox" (lunchtime concerts), also for free; and "At the Concourse," which provides new musical experiences provided by young musicians at the Esplanade Concourse.

Second, from the perspective of social inclusion, the Esplanade actively organizes activities for community groups held in and around its premises, which may incorporate elements of the performing and visual arts, though only as a part of larger events and activities. In other words, in turning itself into a site of social activity and interaction, the strategies do not always foreground the artistic and cultural. Two examples illustrate. Every year, the Mid-Autumn

Festival is celebrated at the Esplanade with an annual Lantern Walkabout. About 1500 members from community clubs and voluntary welfare organizations will be invited, and families and friends will stroll with lanterns along the Esplanade's waterfront under the bright, full moon. The artistic element in the activity is provided in the form of music by two dizi and sheng musicians, while volunteers add to the festive mood by dressing in traditional Chinese costumes and mingling with the crowds. The event is one of several successful efforts to turn the Esplanade into a site of active participation, even if the performing arts is not the primary reason for such participation.

Another example, which draws more firmly on artistic contributions is the invitation of various communities to performances. For example, the Performance of Calonarang in early 2007 was a collaboration between master of Javanese Bedaya dance, Retno Maruti, and internationally-renowned Balinese Legong dancer, Bulantrisna Dielantik. With the support of a philanthropic foundation, over 400 members of the nursing community, children as well as senior citizens from Jamiyah Home (a Muslim Home), were invited to enjoy the performance. In this sense, there is more commonality with the work groups in Shanghai whose attendance at the Shanghai Grand Theatre are sponsored.

Apart from the direct efforts by the Esplanade to bring people to its spaces and activities, for the general population, it is observable that many visit the venue for events and activities that are not related to the performing or visual arts. Instead, many are engaged in social activities, spending time with friends and family, which very often involve patronage of the F&B outlets there. Many in the local population also go there to enjoy the waterfront atmosphere and the scenery and sunset. To that extent, the success of the venue in integrating the local community and stimulating social interaction and activity augurs well for social sustainability, even though the arts may be incidental to these activities.

Wessex Estate. Turning from the state-vaunted space of the Esplanade, a parallel to Shanghai's Moganshan Lu may be found in Singapore's Wessex Estate. This is a residential neighborhood located in undulating greenery on the southwestern part of Singapore. It comprises fifty-eight semi-detached houses and twenty-six blocks of three-storey walk-up apartments, all in a characteristic black-and-white style that marks a particular period in Singapore's colonial history (Figure 4). Indeed, the blocks share one feature they are each named after places such as Aden, Gaza, Gallipoli, and Khartoum, all of which refer to military feats of British history (de Koninck 2003). Wessex Estate is separated from public housing in Queenstown (one of the oldest Housing and Development Board satellite towns) by the Malayan railway track on which runs a slow train between peninsular Malaysia and Singapore a few times a day. Close by is Biopolis, a purpose-built biomedical research hub where researchers from the public and private sectors are co-located. Wessex Estate, Biopolis and various other educational and other institutions in the vicinity together constitute a planning and development area called one-north, a 200 hectare site that is envisaged to be an “intellectually stimulating and creative physical environment where a critical mass of talents, entrepreneurs, scientists and researchers would congregate, exchange ideas and interact” (JTC press release, 4 Dec. 2001).

Within Wessex are those who live there only, others who work there only, and yet others who live and work there. Many are engaged in the creative/cultural industries photographers, artists, designers, architects and the like, sufficient for the area to have the character of a cultural/artistic cluster. It was not always like this, but its character evolved as more and more from the “creative class” moved in. When the landlord JTC Corporation, a statutory board responsible for offering industrial and business facilities, noticed the growing agglomeration, it decided to support and develop the trend, and actively sought to fill vacant units with occupants from the creative industries. To further support the work of the cultural/creative workers, JTC Corporation even converted some of the apartments into worklofts by tearing down a wall between rooms to create a bigger space within the apartment.

Some locally well-known artists live and/or produce their art in Wessex Estate, for example, sculptor Han Sai Por, Cultural Medallion winner Tan Choh Tee, and young, budding artist David Chan. An amateur theatre group, The Stage Club, comprising British expatriates, also has its home and rehearsal space in two of the semi-detached houses (converted into one).

Evidence suggests that Wessex Estate is a community with a strong sense of identity and belonging. A long-time resident in one of the houses believes firmly that “there is an organic, naturally evolved sense of community here.” (Interview, 5 February 2007). In part, this is built around ColBar (or Colonial Bar), a small eatery dating from1953, located at one edge of Wessex Estate. Several interviewees pointed out how ColBar offers opportunities for interaction. As one resident said: “You will see the same groups of neighbours hanging around there. They will be in contact with one another, and call on one another to have drinks or a meal” (Personal interview, 11 Jan. 2007). Even a new resident observed, “At the informal level, I find the people living in the estate to be very friendly. When people meet one another when strolling around the estate or walking the dogs, they would wave at each other, or stop for a chit chat. There is a genuine curiosity about and interest in the neighborhood and the other people living here” (Personal interview, 16 Jan. 2007).

This sense of community not only marks the potential for social sustainability, but has cultural implications. One of the artists shared as follows: “It is great to have a group of creative people to do things with. All are supporting each other in a way. I enjoy the company of other artists. We could get together maybe once a month and look at each other's work. Artists tend to work alone a lot, and it's good to have the possibility of getting together” (Personal interview, 29 Dec. 2006). Another artist envisaged that “Wessex Estate could turn into a fully-functional artist village and a living support system for the entire local arts community.” In fact, she thought that “it is better to concentrate all the local artists here at Wessex, instead of having them spread all over Singapore, such as in Little India, Telok Kurau etc.,” (Personal interview, 20 Dec. 2006) to give it a critical mass, and a strong presence and impact.

Several artists also offered suggestions for greater interaction amongst artists within Wessex Estate, such as open houses, joint exhibitions, and art classes. One artist proposed: “What might be helpful would be weekends when people can come and see the art and interact with the artists, or a few open houses a year to get people to know the place. Most of the artists are open to that” (Personal interview, 20 Dec. 2006). Another artist suggested more joint exhibitions and professional exchanges with like-minded creative individuals to generate more awareness of and interest in the estate. A third artist felt that activities should be co-ordinated as an arts village and was keen to draw in other social groups. For example, she suggested that it was important “to inculcate in schoolchildren the understanding that art is about so much more and not merely a subject in school” (Personal interview, 21 Dec. 2006). She wanted to use Wessex Estate as an arts village to promote and enhance art appreciation amongst the youth in Singapore, because “the village setting is also more informal and less intimidating than, say, visiting a museum.”

The potential for greater social and cultural integration with neighboring areas is not yet fully realized though the goodwill and willingness abounds. A photographer who works from his studio in Wessex Estate commented that the neighboring institutions (such as research institutes and schools) may need photography for their work, or the neighboring Temasek Club (a clubhouse for army men) may consider photography classes for its members. A theatre group located in Wessex Estate was also looking forward to the completion of Fusionopolis3 where a performance space would be available. The President of the group had already visited the developing Fusionopolis, and had received an invitation “to participate in their weeklong opening performances when they are finally open” (Personal interview, 18 Dec. 2006). Given the focus on media and ICT in Fusionopolis, the theatre group was excited about the possibilities of some of their productions using “a variety of media.” To that extent, the real and potential social and cultural sustainability of Wessex Estate seem promising.

Turning from the social and cultural to questions of the environment, the draw of Wessex Estate is strong: all interviewees to the last person expressed the unequivocal attraction that the environment offers. A photographer revealed that his decision to locate in Wessex Estate was governed by “the unique features … its greenery and type of housing. People who come here are first amazed by the trees. It is a tranquil setting. I like that” (Personal interview, 18 Dec. 2006). An artist attributed her decision to locate in Wessex Estate to the green environment: “It is

an inspiring space look at the space outside and the vista (waves towards the green rolling slopes and tall trees). There is so much green around" (Personal interview, 19 Dec. 2006). Another artist, a Dutch, compared Wessex's greenery to Bali, attributing her decision to locate in Wessex Estate to the salubrious environment: "Another reason is that we have lived in Bali previously and like the lush vegetation and greenery there. Wessex, although different from Bali, somehow evokes that same feel for us" (Personal interview, 17 Dec. 2006).
The heritage factor was also an attractive one for some residents. A new resident indicated that his decision to live in Wessex Estate stemmed from his desire "to live in a black and white bungalow4 because I like the heritage feel of these buildings" (Personal interview, 16 Jan. 2007). He felt that Wessex Estate was a unique place and deserved to be preserved for its heritage. Comparing the area with a museum ("To me, heritage should be living, rather than the construction of yet another museum"), he advocates that Wessex "should be about the heritage of the neighborhood where people used to live for generations, where people are still living now, and where they will continue to live in the future." In short, the environment in Wessex Estate serves as an important source of attraction to the cultural/creative workers and is a source of sustenance and inspiration for their work and life.

However, despite the positive attributes of the environment that drew these tenants to Wessex, several wondered whether those very factors were being destroyed. A long-time resident cited the environment as her prime motivating factor for locating there though she also recounted how the environment had changed over time:

> *It was very peaceful back then to sit outside in the evenings - much less so now that we are overlooked by huge buildings with their lights on at night and air conditioners humming. We enjoyed the green environment to the full. I feel that now we have maybe only half the birds that we used to have, but I'm glad for the ones that do still come here.* (Personal interview, 17 Dec. 2006)

Another long-time resident felt that the neighboring Biopolis was a "disastrous intrusion." The greater part of her fear arises from the feeling of being threatened by Biopolis' large-scale development impinging upon her property: "So long as our house is not demolished we won't want to move, even though we are right on the edge of all the new construction which made our lives rather hellish for 24 hours a day the past 21/2 years" (Personal interview, 7 Jan 2007). Another resident commented that "the best thing to do is to just leave the estate alone. By all means, put on new coats of paint, fix the internal fittings, modify the internal layout to create worklofts, but leave the rest as it is. Just keep the estate clean, and that will be great" (Personal interview, 3 Jan. 2007). Yet another tenant, an artist who works there only, spoke strongly against some of the Biopolis developments, stating that "in fact, when I think of Biopolis, I sense that the place kills art. To me, it is unlikely that the place will nurture art or allow it to blossom" (Personal interview, 18 Dec. 2006). In short, those at Wessex Estate believe the environment, while still attractive, have already been diminished by the encroaching construction near it and are concerned about further modifications in and around it.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have examined specific creative/cultural spaces for the performing and visual arts in two Asian cities, Shanghai and Singapore, particularly in terms of the environmental, cultural, and social sustainability of these sites. In both these cities, I have illustrated the paradoxical precarity and sustainability of creative/cultural space.
For Shanghai, the symbolic capital associated with global city status is translated in paradoxical ways, environmentally, culturally, and socially through the Shanghai Grand Theatre a centrally-located modern state-of-the-art edifice. While enabling the large transnational population in Shanghai to remain "connected" with global cultural consumption and drawing pockets of the local population into this aspect of "global citizenship," it is simultaneously alienating and displacing local populations. While introducing multiple and varied cultural performances "global" in origin and "world-class" in standards it is simultaneously neglecting (or at best, not stimulating) local arts and culture.

For Singapore, the same symbolic capital is sought through the Esplanade Theatres on the Bay. The same concerns about alienation of the local population and discouragement of local cultural development emerged strongly throughout its construction and in its early days of existence. Over time, things have evolved, and the Esplanade now stands as a more socially inclusive space and an icon on the landscape, with programs and strategies to facilitate local performances within its theatres and other spaces. Not all the events and activities that bring the local population to the Esplanade are necessarily about the arts first, but a socially inclusive space is one in which there is support for and celebration of different aspects of social life.

While less obvious and probably less well-known as cultural/creative spaces in aspiring global cities, sites such as Moganshan Lu and Wessex Estate nevertheless form part of a growing phenomenon in cities such as Beijing, Hangzhou, Chongqing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore. They are cultural and spatial expressions of changing conditions in prospering East Asian cities. These changing circumstances may be cultural or economic. In both Shanghai and Singapore, economic growth bolsters interest in artistic products and serves as encouragement to the cultural/creative class. Further, official interest in and support of the creative industries has served as added impetus to artistic activity. Simultaneously, as old manufacturing spaces (in the case of Moganshan Lu) or old residential space (in the case of Wessex Estate) become available with economic restructuring, they are taken over by the artist/creative class, and have evolved as organic expressions of changing urban cultural and economic interests. Indeed, they belie a certain depth and soul not quickly or easily observable in these rapidly transforming cities more commonly associated with commerce than culture.

What this paper has sought to explore is how sustainable such re-used spaces are in environmental, cultural, and social terms, and the likelihood of their continued presence as embodiments of these cities' deeper spirit and character. The case of Moganshan Lu suggests that the rapidly transforming circumstances in Shanghai significant rental hikes, demolition of large parts of the urbanscape, dramatic social change, and growing cultural consumption offer contradictory conditions for simultaneous sustainability and precarity. The only certainty under these circumstances is further environmental, cultural, and social change that will impact on the evolving complexion of spaces like Moganshan Lu. This matters less for Shanghai than for Singapore, given that it is part of a far larger country with many other commercial and cultural centers. Beijing's focus for Shanghai is to develop it as a symbol to the outside world of China's rapid growth and commercial successes, and far less so as the centre of China's cultural hearth. That, Beijing itself, can fulfil. The environmental, cultural, and social sustainability of Shanghai's arts and arts spaces are therefore unlikely to be too critical a part of Beijing's priorities for Shanghai.

In the case of Singapore, the feverish pace of change that characterizes Shanghai is behind the island-state now, but it can by no means be described as static or stagnating. Its historical landscapes such as Wessex Estate are occasional pockets -- reminders of times past -- that puncture new urban spaces often characterized by modern edifices to science, technology and economy, in a state that can best still be described as developmentalist. Under such circumstances, the sense of precarity and uncertainty remains. Even an organically evolved cultural/creative cluster with a socially cohesive community, matched by an enthusiasm for artistic and cultural production and collaboration, feels encroached upon and threatened by developmentalist ideals, despite support by state agencies willing to consider conservation alongside development, culture alongside commerce. In this regard, Shanghai and Singapore share common ground, despite different stages of development. But there are divergences. Whereas Shanghai is one of many cities in China - albeit a materially and symbolically important one - Singapore is a city-state. For Singapore, there is no other city within the Republic, and sustainable social and cultural development must take place alongside economic priorities. Thus, while the Shanghai Grand Theatre has a long way to go in terms of being a truly socially inclusive and integrative space, the Esplanade has gone a little way along in putting in place programs to promote social inclusion, and has met with some measure of success. While Singapore needs to ensure that Wessex Estate or places like it succeeds if it is serious about developing the arts, Shanghai's Moganshan Lu may fail, but there's still Beijing's 798 or Chongqing's Tank Loft or Hangzhou's Loft 49.

Whether it is state-vaunted space or organically evolved communities, the cases of Shanghai and Singapore illustrate the complexities of cultural/creative spaces. This paper has demonstrated that understanding their workings and analyzing their sustainability require that we move beyond the clusters themselves to examine the broader historical and contemporary contexts of their cities and countries, for historical and place contingencies shape the relative urgency of the sustainability agenda and the relative importance and viability of environmental, cultural, and social sustainability.

Notes

[1] In November 1950, in order to unify Shanghai's surface coordinate system, Shanghai Bureau of Land Administration took a full survey of the whole city, and defined the central flag pole on top of Park Hotel as the Zero Center Point of Shanghai (Shanghai Surveying and Mapping Administration, Shanghai Park Hotel, April 1998 plaque). Park Hotel sits on Nanjing East Road by People's Square.

[2] Part of the push to develop creative industries in Shanghai has entailed the identification of creative districts, beginning in 2004 with eighteen, rising rapidly to thirty-six in 2005, fifty in 2006, and targeting more than seventy in 2007.

[3] Fusionopolis is currently under construction and scheduled to be ready in 2007. It is to house research institutes in the infocomm and media sector, as well as companies and start-ups to boost the science and technology capabilities of the country.

[4] The black and white bungalows are distinctive bungalows painted white with black trimmings. They used to house the British colonials when they were in Singapore. Many have been preserved, some for residential use, others for retail, dining or other commercial use.

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