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# Global aspirations and local talent: the development of Creative Higher Education in Singapore

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**Abstract**

This paper explores higher education development and policy shifts in Singapore over the last decade, within a landscape of an increasingly globalised creative economy and international cultural policy transfer. Using qualitative interviews with key players in policy and higher education institutions, the paper aims to explain the push and pull factors behind investment in creative higher education. It considers the emerging dynamics and diverse patterns, embedded in a society where higher education interactions with economic development have a long history and pragmatic rationale. While still in the early days of these investments, the paper argues that there are some global policy lessons to be learnt from the case of Singapore and the role that higher education can play in developing a creative economy, while striving to overcome issues of over-supply and innate vulnerability of creative careers.

## Introduction

Academic and policy research has studied the role of creative and cultural industries (CCIs) in the economy as an example of international policy transfer and globalisation (Wang, 2004, Gibson and Klocker, 2004, Chapain et al., 2012). From the early mapping documents developed in the late 1990s in the UK (DCMS, 1998) the CCIs discourse has reached international policy circles (EC, 2010, UNCTAD, 2008) and has created a wave of policy reports and interventions across East-Asia (Yusuf

and Nabeshima, 2005, Kong et al., 2006, Lee and Lim, 2014). This paper reports on some of these interventions in the specific context of Singapore (Yue, 2006, Ooi, 2008). However, within the broader impact of policy and creative economy discourse, it aims to address more specifically how higher education (HE) policy and higher education institutions (HEIs) have become key components of national creative strategies for economic development.

Whilst in the Western tradition, universities have played a historical role in developing, preserving and promoting cultural and creative practice in society, in emerging or new economic contexts, where the patterns of development have followed different trajectories, these relations and rationales follow diverse scripts and outcomes. The arguments behind the role played by HE in the creative economy develop from an interconnected framework of theories. Firstly, the creative class theory (Florida, 2002) highlights the role of human capital and talent in supporting local economic development (Scott, 2010). The location and investment in HE is a cornerstone of this theory. Secondly, there are creative clusters and agglomeration theories (Scott and Power, 2004, Pratt, 2004, Comunian and Faggian, 2014) which underline the role of knowledge institutions in retaining and developing specialisation in creative production. HE is again seen as key to developing specialist knowledge and positive externality (such as increased pool of specialised workers or specialised facilities) for the local creative economy. Finally, the theories around the role of national representation and cultural identity (Kong and Yeoh, 1997, Paschalidis, 2009) consider the importance of nation building through cultural activities and the role of HE in developing home grown talent, recognising it as the background to the push for internationalisation and globalisation in cultural production.

The paper uses the recent development in cultural policy and HE policy of Singapore as a case study to consider the broader question of the role HE (and HE policy) plays in the pursuit and development of talent and a local creative economy. In the last decade, Singapore has relentlessly sought to develop its creative economy. As reported in the international media, consultancy firm Solidiance found the city-state 'the most innovative city in the Asia Pacific', ahead of Sydney and Hong Kong (Feng, 2013). This paper highlights the pressure imposed by global discourses and international creative economy reports to conform and invest, while considering the difficulties of a young economically successful nation to create a footprint of value and opportunities for its future artists and creative communities.

The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, we highlight the relevant international literature on HE and the creative economy. Secondly, we explore the recent policy developments in Singapore from its 'creative renaissance' to its recent investment in creative HE. After a brief discussion of the methodology, we explore three key policy dilemmas in relation to HE and the creative economy using the case study of Singapore. The conclusions critically highlight the challenges of cultural policy in Singapore in trying to bridge global dreams and aspiration in the creative economy and local practices and politics.

## Cultural policy: bridging creative economy and higher education?

Looking at policy reports and frameworks in Europe and internationally, it is clear that the creative economy discourse has in the last decade taken centre stage in contemporary cultural policy. The often conflictual relationship between cultural policy and creative economy has been discussed at

length in academic circles (Galloway and Dunlop, 2007, Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005) and policy fora (UNESCO 2013; NESTA 2013). Both academics and policy makers have tended to focus their attention on cultural production and policy (Selwood, 2002, Markusen et al., 2008) and aspects of consumption and engagement (Bridgwood, 2002, Merli, 2002). However, less attention has been placed on the role of education, and more specifically, tertiary education in this sector. This is partly due to the fact that in most countries – in Europe as in Singapore - education and creative industries matters sit in different ministerial offices so coordination is not easy and often not considered a priority. It also relates to a lack of focus on the politics of/for work within cultural policy as highlighted by Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) and the need to recognise and better understand how HE impacts and contributes to changes in the creative economy and cultural policy (Buckingham and Jones, 2010). Comunian et al. (2013) consider the role of the triple helix paradigm in questioning the lack of interconnections between cultural policy/government, the HE sector and the creative economy and a recent growth of initiative in the UK, like the AHRC funded Creative Economy Hubs (AHRC, 2011).

There are different perspectives on the role of HE in the creative economy, which reflect some of the dichotomies and issues around work, consumption and production in the creative and cultural industries. Comunian and Gilmore (2014) highlight in their framework that there are three levels of engagement and impact generated via HE. The first, perhaps more basic, level is linked to the simple presence of HE in a specific context and the '*estate value'* it creates. In creative economy terms, this value is often translated into cultural production: as Chatterton (1999) underlines, in many cities universities have traditionally been well positioned in providing the city with cultural facilities (Ting, 2014), such as art galleries and theatres. More recently, however, they have taken this role further including a wider range of cultural facilities, such as media production facilities, recording studios or rehearsal spaces. Many countries, including the UK and US have seen the development of a range of cultural initiatives around their estates, such as the Creative Campus Innovations Grant Program (Lingo and Tepper, 2010) or the AHRC 'Creative Economy Hubs'(AHRC, 2011)

The second level relates to the 'creative knowledge' that is generated. Comunian et al (2015) highlight two dimensions of this 'creative knowledge'. One closely related to the idea of human capital, the other linked to the idea of 'knowledge exchange'. In relation to the importance of '*human capital*' Faggian and McCann (2006) argue that the primary role of the university is to bringing 'high quality human capital' into an area and that, therefore, having a highly skilled labour pool far outweighs the benefits generated by knowledge spillovers. Hence looking at this dynamics from the creative economy perspective, the importance of investigating creative (Faggian et al., 2013, Comunian and Faggian, 2014) and arts and humanities (Comunian et al., 2014) graduates and their contribution to national and local creative industries is paramount.

Finally, if we look at the arguments in favour to a role of HE in the creative economy from a knowledge exchange perspective, HEIs are expected to function as kinds of research and development (R&D) laboratories (Cunningham et al., 2004) and be part of the broader innovation system (Bakhshi et al., 2008). This has become increasingly important in making the argument that arts and humanities have a positive impact on society and provide good value for money. Some authors have seen this new pressure for knowledge transfer and exchange as an imposition of a 'techno-economic' paradigm onto the arts (Bullen et al., 2004), but most HEIs have embraced this new perspective, thinking of it as an opportunity to add value to their work (Lindberg, 2008, Powell,

2007). Although the evidence gathered is mostly anecdotal, there is an increasing pressure to show the importance of these dynamics (Hughes et al., 2011).

This brief literature overview has highlighted some key issues around the relationship between creative economy and HE and the potential role that cultural policy can play in bridging their interaction and activities. This is still an emerging international agenda and while there have been centralised policy interventions in the UK, the agenda seems less structured in other countries. However, we can witness examples of international policy transfer not only in general in relation to the concept of the creative industries and economy (Pratt, 2009, Yusuf and Nabeshima, 2005) but also more narrowly addressing the connection of HE with the creative economy, for example, the British Council organisation of a forum of Global Education Dialogue entitled 'Higher education and the creative industries: UK-Asian perspectives', held at the National Museum of Singapore in 2012. It is therefore interesting to consider the dynamics and engagement of a country like Singapore that has only from the late 1990s embraced the creative economy rhetoric and faces the challenges of linking this investment with a strongly science and technology-oriented HE system.

## Creative (higher) education in Singapore: tradition and recent developments

Singapore has emerged since the 1970s as a global economic development hub, swiftly rising from a small peripheral nation to a leading international economic player. Like Olds & Yeung (2004) the economic success and in general the policy interventions that we will explore are considered within two specific contexts of Singapore. Firstly, Singapore is a global city-state, and as such it has "the political capacity and legitimacy to mobilize strategic resources to achieve (national) objectives that are otherwise unimaginable in non-city-state global cities" (Olds, 2007, 961). This has an impact on the speed of decision making and implementation. Secondly, Singapore has been guided by an authoritarian /''soft-authoritarian'' government which has enabled stability and long-term planning. These two characteristics are an important background to both local cultural policy and HE policy.

From the perspective of a better understanding of creative HE in Singapore, it is important to consider two somewhat intertwined policy interventions: on one side the growing importance of Singapore as international knowledge economy hub since the late nineties, with key infrastructure and emphasis on the role played by its HE institutions in supporting and furthering the national economic success (Gopinathan and Lee, 2011, Olds, 2007); on the other, a new cultural policy framework, with strong emphasis on the creative economy developed since 2002 (Ooi, 2010).

The growth of Singapore as a 'global education hub' (Olds, 2007) has its origin in 1998 with the ''World Class University'' (WCU) programme that aimed at supporting the establishment of campuses and research centres as joint ventures and joint degrees with prestigious international universities. As Olds (2007) highlights, this aims to create a diversification of Singapore's labour market and also to create "opportunities for competition and synergy between foreign providers of education services, and indigenous institutions" (p.972). He further highlights that much of the emphasis on having international collaborations with a hub in Singapore was linked to the desire to foster production, innovation, R&D activities and linkages between university and industry mainly around science and technology. However, this is the baseline for a model of interaction and development that would be then taken further within the creative economy. Lastly Olds (2007) considers the value of these interventions in the "registering of Singapore in benchmarking venues,

especially the Financial Times, the Times Higher Education Supplement, and disciplinary-specific discursive fields" (p.973), and we can argue that similar aspirations could be seen in the investment in the creative HE infrastructure.

Much has been written in relation to Singapore's cultural policy and creative economy (Chang, 2000, Chang and Lee, 2003, Ooi, 2010, Wong et al., 2006, Kong et al., 2006, Ooi, 2008, Lim, 2012, Chang and Mahadevan, 2013, Lee, 2004, Chong, 2005). The emphasis on the creative economy and creative industries emerged in Singapore cultural policy with the Renaissance City Plan (MITA, 2002) emphasising the role that arts and cultural play (and could play) in further growth and future of Singapore (Ooi, 2010, Wong et al., 2006). Some would argue that it was only at the point that the nation could afford economically to do so that it actually started to venture into this discourse. So the language of culture policy statements in the late 90s was centred on the notion of *renaissance*. In 2001, the Singaporean 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 city-state. The ERC Sub-Committee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI) seeks ways to 'fuse arts, business and technology' (ERC-CI 2002: iii). The city-state must 'harness the multi-dimensional creativity of [its] people' for its 'new competitive advantage' (ibidem). This report includes specific plans to develop the arts and culture, media and design sectors (ERC-CI 2002; Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) 2008; National Arts Council (NAC) 2008). Unlike earlier cultural development strategies the vision of making Singapore into a city for the arts in 2002 is framed within the creative industries context.

But how does one seed and grow a national creative economy? From the very same report, a key element is the role of education (and specifically HE) as an integral part of developing and growing local creative economies and ecologies (Tan and Gopinathan, 2000). In one of the recent policy report (MICA, 2008) which reviews the achievements of the previous Renaissance City Plans highlighting the growth in provision and attendance to cultural activities, two key challenges remain open in relation to local talent and HE: "Creating and promoting original and home-grown Singaporean works that highlight our diverse and unique heritage and traditions" and "Developing future audiences by putting more emphasis on the arts in education and arts education in schools; improving Singapore's tertiary arts education to give it more depth, and providing better training for arts teachers in schools" (p.15) . In the framework to support a 'dynamic ecosystem' the report urges for "Enhance industry exposure and relevance in tertiary and pre-tertiary specialised arts education and training" (p.26) and "Enhance and enrich general arts and humanities education" (p.29). Similar arguments about enhancement of tertiary arts education and role of tertiary level arts institutions is put forward also by consecutive policy documents (MCCY,2012).

Singapore certainly shows a stronger investment in the education infrastructure for its creative economy in recent years. This is achieved both by catching up with other international players as well as developing local and importing expertise and talent. As *The New York Times* headlined *Arts Education in Singapore Moves to Center Stage* (Ang, 2013) there is a clear sense of change and investment. This is reflected also in the interests in careers in the arts as the prospects widen over the years with government funding for arts programmes and projects (Yang, 2014). In particular:

- **New pre-tertiary specialised education:** In 2008, Singapore's School of the Arts (SOTA) became the first pre-tertiary level dedicated arts school in the nation state.

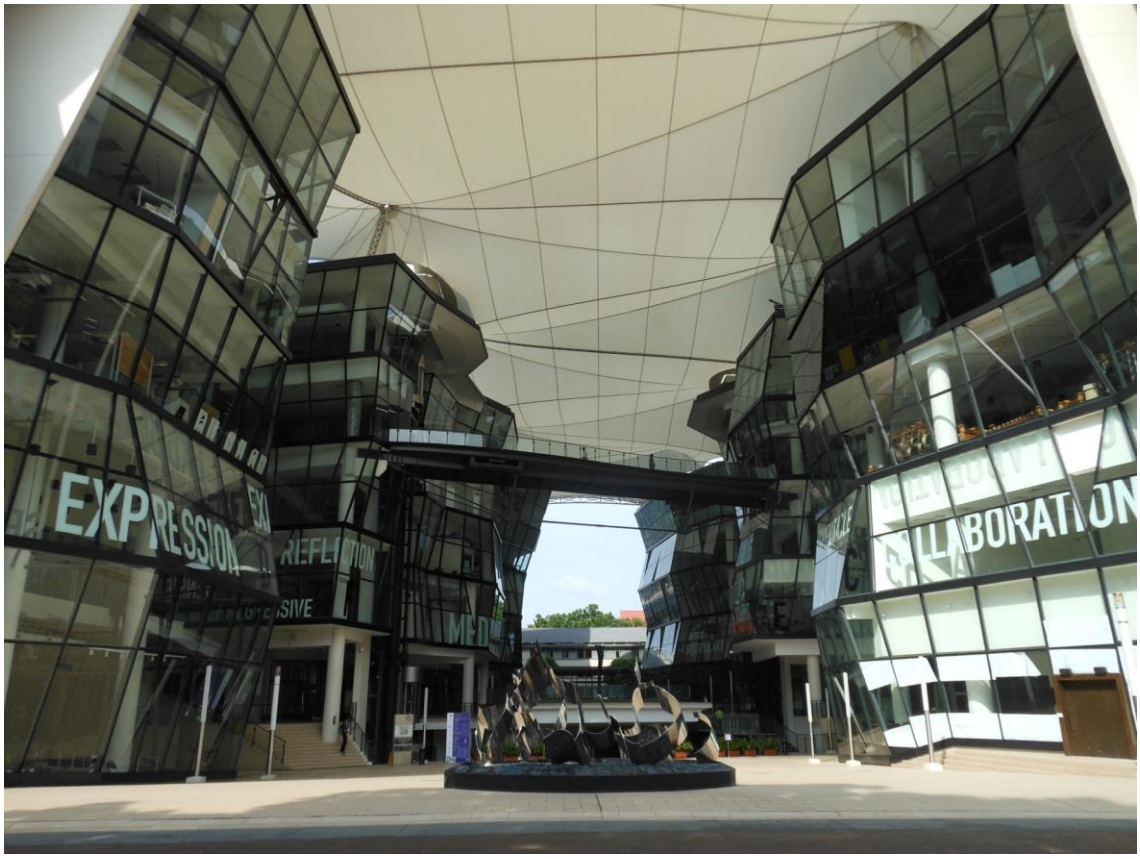
- **Funding & new status for existing providers**: since 1999 the government raised the status of the two existing arts schools offering diploma courses (LaSalle College of the Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts ) to be at the same funding level as polytechnics. This has meant that they are officially recognised and supported as tertiary education institutions.

- **New buildings and creative infrastructure at HE level:** The *Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music* was established in 2001 as Singapore's first conservatory within the National University of Singapore. Opened in 2006, it houses state-of-the-art facilities for training professional musicians. The new *School of Art Design and Media* (ADM) *Building* at Nanyang Technological University was completed in July 2006 at a cost of $38 million in SGD (corresponding to 30 million US Dollar or 25 million euros). The eco-friendly building houses some of the most advanced media facilities, including a variety of digital laboratories and photography, film, animation and media studios. LASALLE College of the Arts relocated in 2007 from the Goodman Road campus to the city area. Following an international architectural competition for the design of a 35,000 sqm new campus built on a 1-Ha city site, the award-winning new building (fig.3) is in the heart of Singapore's Arts, Culture, Learning & Entertainment hub.

Fig. 1 The *School of Art Design and Media* (ADM) *Building* at Nanyang Technological University (source: author's own)

Fig. 2 The *Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music at the National University of Singapore* (source: author's own)

Fig. 3 The LASALLE College of the Arts new building in the heart of Singapore's Arts, Culture, Learning & Entertainment hub (source: author's own)

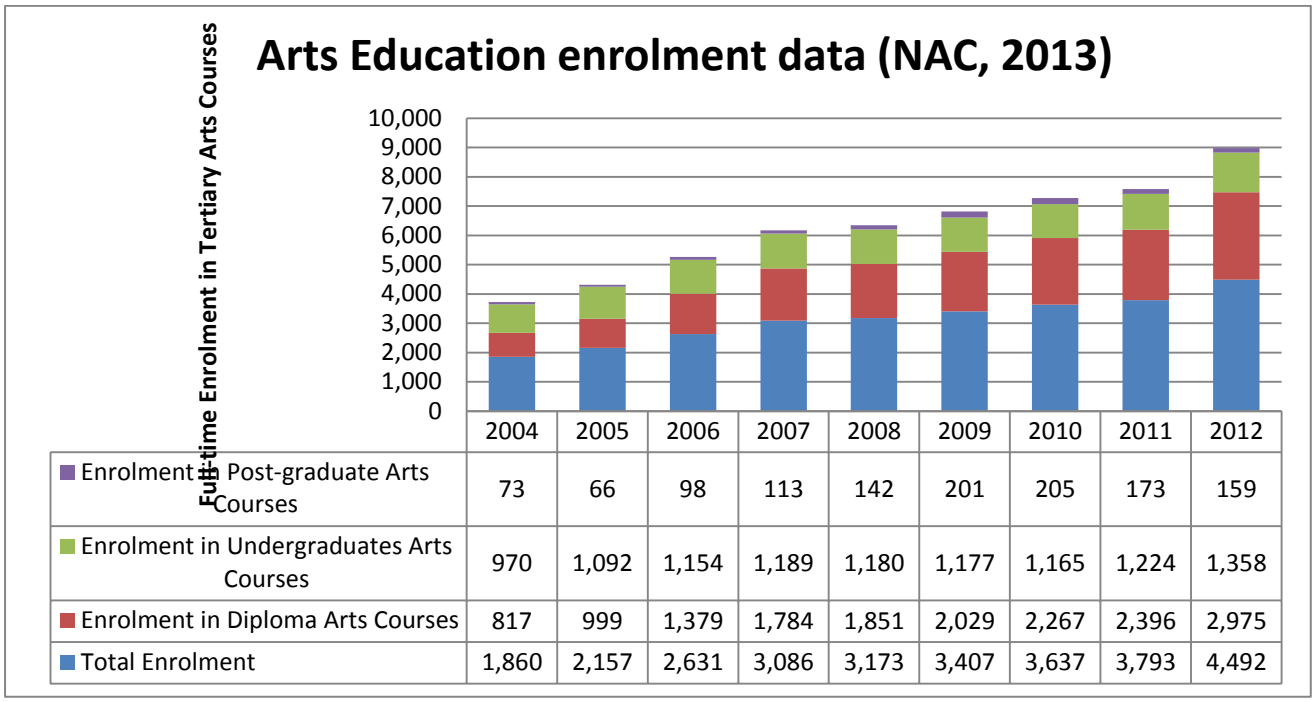



- **New partnership with international universities**: In September 2012 the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) opened its first overseas campus, in partnership with the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) in Singapore. It delivers programmes in "Communication Design" and "Interior Design" in Singapore. The SIT proudly states: "*A GSA education is practice based, face-to-face, professionally oriented and socially engaged – Design Week magazine placed the GSA into its "Hot 50" list as a Global Leader in its field […]. All GSA degree programmes are validated by University of Glasgow, a member of the prestigious Russell Group of leading UK research universities (Singapore Institute of Technology, 2014).* Quality and international recognition matter for the authorities. Also in 2012, LASALLE and the Goldsmiths College of the University of London inked, at the presence of the Prime Minister of Singapore, a five-year deal to offer 14 public-funded arts degree courses (Wong, 2012).

- **New courses introduced by a variety of traditional and new providers**: new courses have been introduced in 2000s, such as diplomas in arts management and theatre production design (NAFA) and more MAs programmes and bachelor degree courses at LaSalle. Nanyang Polytechnic started offering a new diploma in motion graphics and broadcast design, and Temasek Polytechnic a new diploma in retail and hospitality design (Liaw Wy-Cin, 2007). Alongside the usual provider expanding their portfolios, new providers such as Hyper Island have been encouraged to provide new courses (Chew, 2012)

The investment has also been reflected in the growth of graduates undertaking tertiary education courses in these disciplines (National Arts Council, 2013) as shown in table 1.

Fig. 4: Full-time Enrolment in Tertiary Arts Courses from National Arts Council (2013) p. 35. Singapore Cultural Statistics 2013




| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Enrolment in Post-graduate Arts Courses | 73 | 66 | 98 | 113 | 142 | 201 | 205 | 173 | 159 |
| Enrolment in Undergraduates Arts Courses | 970 | 1,092 | 1,154 | 1,189 | 1,180 | 1,177 | 1,165 | 1,224 | 1,358 |
| Enrolment in Diploma Arts Courses | 817 | 999 | 1,379 | 1,784 | 1,851 | 2,029 | 2,267 | 2,396 | 2,975 |
| Total Enrolment | 1,860 | 2,157 | 2,631 | 3,086 | 3,173 | 3,407 | 3,637 | 3,793 | 4,492 |

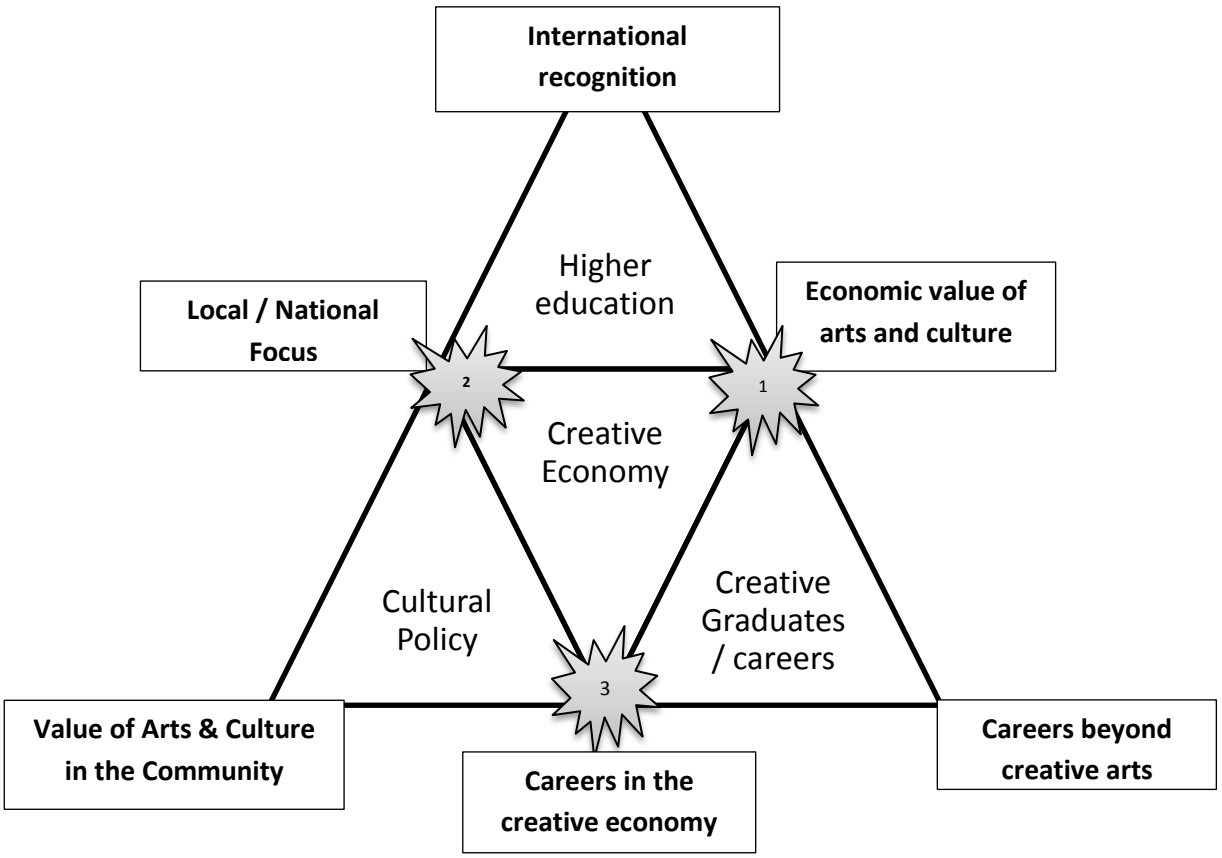
## Higher education & key policy dilemmas in the development of the Singaporean creative economy

The core data used in the paper have been collected as part of an intense research period in Singapore over the summer of 2013. However, findings from earlier research fieldwork more broadly engaging with the creative and cultural development of Singapore post 2002 are also included. During the two month period, alongside ethnographic observation and policy analysis the authors conducted twenty interviews with directors and managers involved in the key HEIs and other providers of creative education in the city. The interviews included also representatives from key policy organisations in the education and arts sector and one local cultural partner. The study used the broader framework of the creative and cultural sector, thus including both creative education (such as reflections on design or film and media courses) as well as education in the arts in general (towards public cultural sectors jobs or careers in the arts) looking for example at arts school and conservatoire education. Using Singapore the paper explores the role that HE can play as part of developing a local creative ecosystem with skilled creative and cultural workers.

At the boundaries and interconnections between HE, cultural policy, the creative economy and creative graduates/careers, there are some key policy dilemmas and push-pull factors which emerged in the interviews and are core to our analysis. These key issues are: the importance of international recognition; the need to balance this with local and national perspectives; the economic versus community value of arts and culture, and finally the value of creative graduates and

careers within and beyond the creative economy. All of these issues are highly interconnected and can be seen as critical nodes or pressure points (fig. 5), where different push and pull factors within cultural policy, HE and creative graduates/careers should be discussed and considered.

Figure 5: Diverse demands of higher education, cultural policy and creative workers in the Singaporean creative economy have generated a number of tensions that need balancing, including: 1) using the arts to serve the needs of the broader community and serving the economic demands of specific creative industries; 2) using resources to develop creative contents that draw international recognition and contents that primarily reflect local strengths and appreciation; and 3) enhancing the perceived value of specialised creative careers, in contrast to perceiving creativity as mundane, and is also necessary in other jobs and aspects of life.




These three critical nodes/clash points are at the core of our analysis and have emerged in the discussion with local education managers and policy makers:

1. **The value of creative careers in the arts and beyond arts and culture.** The need to support creativity within the broader educational system and seeing creativity as part of everyday practices versus supporting specialised creative careers;
2. The need to **balance the development of international recognition** via international expertise and exposure **with recognition through the local strengths and local creative development** and investment;
3. **The value of creative education** investment for the benefit of community development (Arts Council Strategy) versus investment for the benefit of a specific economic / industrial (creative industries) strategy.

### *1. Building Creative careers in and beyond the arts*

The first level of our analysis explores the individuals in the context of the role of HE in the creative economy, i.e. the creative graduate. The understanding of HE's responsibility in shaping employment patterns and opportunities in Singapore is quite structured and in some way problematic for students in the creative disciplines. As one of the interviewees highlighted, Singapore has had a relatively short five-decade history of independence, and the focus of early nationhood-building then was on economic development and social stability:

"*so when we started, the focus of our education system was to make sure that graduates were in jobs […] But as we moved down and we realised that actually we had gone past that age [early stage of nation-building], our economies had higher value, as well as we have student aspirations at many different things […] that's when creative arts started to grow. I think we also realised that as society matured we cannot do without creative arts, and we know that arts matter a lot, especially in expressing about our society and what our identities are about*" (HE, Policymaker).

Following the city-state's pragmatic approach to the governance of the country, the education system is first and foremost geared towards the production of a useful workforce (Ooi 2010). The advent of the creative economy resulted in changes in the education system. So for many institutions the end of the 1990s saw a change in the government understanding and investment in creative careers and in the need to build capacity in the sector "*a fundamental value change to ensure that there are creative courses and that there are opportunities to ensure that there are employable graduates emerging*" (School of Art, Faculty member).The need for a 'highly-qualified talent pool' in the creative industries is acknowledged by the authorities and funders (MICA 2008, pp. 25-27). However, there is recognition also within academia that the kind of HE planning that takes place in Singapore cannot stretch to creative tertiary education, therefore the main challenge for academics and university managers was recognised as trying to match the supply of graduates with a real demand.

*"In this context, once you introduce tertiary training, the expectation is it leads to a job. So in certain fields in Singapore, the number of places in the university is directly linked to the vocational and professional opportunities that exist afterwards. […] and one of the great challenges we have is how many jobs are there really for artists in Singapore"*. (University, Faculty member)

During the interviews there was a clear acknowledgement that the education is to be relevant for the graduate's employment in the fledging creative economy. With the big investment that the government was making, some of the faculty and managers seem to recognise the opportunities that this would bring to their graduates: "*they're investing in infrastructure for which students, graduated students, will be needed to fill the posts that are opening".* (University, Faculty member). There was a strong rhetoric of employability, and a belief that these graduates would be able "*to create their own jobs*" (University, Faculty member) in the future, despite the challenges of creative careers. This goes alongside the rhetoric of flexibility and freedom which again charges the individual of the responsibility to creative his/her own work and opportunities "*art and design students are not your standard Singapore students, and they are willing to make these changes much faster than the traditional areas that we have today. And that is something that we should commend"* (University,

Faculty member) and the statistics about employability measures how many have been hired in full time positions at regular companies "t*he thing is, a lot of our students don't do that, they start their own companies and they work freelance because it's more freedom*" (Polytechnic, Faculty member)

Similarly, a member of University faculty highlighted *"in all of those fields people will essentially have to manage their own portfolio"* and quoted a Chinese saying "*the weak wait for opportunities, the strong seek opportunities, and the wise create opportunities"* considering that part of his role was about "g*etting students to recognise that they're going to have to create opportunities rather than wait for them (*University, Faculty member). In contrast with the current critical views on the neo-liberal agenda of creative work (Banks, 2010, Taylor and Littleton, 2008) a very similar argument was put forward by a HE policymaker:

*In the creative arts you create the job, right. So we train you first, if you are good you create your audience. So actually a lot of power is in the graduate. And so we can have a little bit of a buffer knowing that, yeah that actually we can train these guys and they can create their jobs. (HE, Policymaker)*

There was another related common thread in the recognition that jobs in the creative economy are precarious. Maybe also due to the yet limited development of Singapore creative economy, many CCI jobs – across a variety of sectors – will be based around projects and portfolio rather than long-term employment opportunities. There was an awareness of the peculiarity of the notions of employment and employability in the creative sector, especially as every school was doing an internship or a placement of sort "*I think there's also an emphasis on the fact that as an artist you'll be managing your own career, […] well for an artist even more so. The management of one's personal environment is a life skill"* (School of Art, Faculty member). Of course the question whether universities were teaching those life skills did not find a straight forward answer and the role of HE and policy in this area seemed blurred. But there is an assumption that it is the personal responsibility of the individual graduate to find or create one's job, albeit in a fledging creative economy.

Following which both polytechnics and university faculty have a clear vision that creative education should serve beyond the creative industries, seeing creativity as part of everyday practices versus supporting the development of specialised creative careers and professional development in HE. This vision was shared by academics – who highlighted how important it is to "t*o be able to be creative and understand the creative processes that emerges into many industries"* (University, Faculty member) *[…]* and policymakers.

However, for others there was a recognition that the wishful creative development of Singapore does not provide opportunities for all graduates and corresponding to their aspirations, for example as this faculty member highlights sometimes even the reality of working in these sector is not understood fully by students which are attracted by an 'unrealistic' image of the sector but find the sector tougher than they thought or feel exploited by the low pay it offers.

The issue arising from this is that if the student changes careers or cannot find a job in the arts, for all purposes the degree in the creative arts becomes just a general degree. However, this needs to be contextualised with the fact that pursuing the creative arts in HE has negative connotations (Ooi 2012). Parents are concerned about the career prospects of their children, and students are aware

that their heavy school workload in different subjects would not allow them the time and resources to practice and excel in their art discipline (Ng, 2008). The general Singapore education system gives limited attention to the cultivation of interests in the arts, as compared to mathematics, languages and science subjects. Furthermore, the belief that creativity should be practised in people's everyday life seems to push for a vision of; creativity that is mundane. Should one pursue a skill that is so general and mundane? Besides that, state-founded local universities are prestigious and are now offering courses and programmes related to creativity and the arts, e.g. SUTD is geared towards design and innovation, and NUS has established a liberal arts education programme with Yale University. Graduates from less prestigious HE will face fierce competition as creative skills are now promoted in all universities.

*even if there's no job in the creative arts sector for them it doesn't mean that they can't do a lot of other things […] because as a degree graduate you have trained minimally to a certain level of cognitive ability, and being able to think creatively you can apply your skills in many sectors (HE, Policymaker)*

There are many reasons why students go beyond the arts when they search for a career. And when they do so, they will face competition from graduates who may be better trained in the careers they pursue. Therefore, within our framework there was a clear clash between the aspirations of Singapore HEIss to offer creative courses and their understanding of the opportunities that students would have after graduation, with the risk that the nature of creative work and creative careers is used as an policy excuse to justify the misfit between students' ambitions and their poor results in the creative labour market (Comunian et al., 2010). There are other push factors for graduates to go beyond the arts. Even though the cultural sector is expanding, jobs are scarce and are not always lucrative. And even within the wider creative industries, artists are considered economic "laggards" in the creative economy; they are considered economically less productive than those programming video games and auctioning antiques. Furthermore, the arts are highly regulated in Singapore. Even for street performers, they need to audition and seek a license to perform at selected places. Their proceeds should also go to charity. Performers should not use their artistic craft as a form of begging (Othman, 2009). The Media Development Authority wanted to introduce a self-classification scheme to get arts groups to give age-appropriate ratings to their own works in line with the MDA's classification code. More than 45 art groups rejected the scheme, knowing well that it is a programme that will lead to self-censorship, as arts groups take on responsibility to perform within the censorship guidelines or be punished if they classified their works wrongly. Consequently, the scheme was dropped because of the protests (Tan, 2014b). Award winning film maker Tan Pin Pin's documentary *To Singapore with Love* is banned in Singapore because it documents views of political dissidents who are in exile. The authorities found the film to 'contain untruths about history' even though it is critically acclaimed in international film festivals (Tan, 2014c).

### *2. Between international recognition and valuing Singapore*

Within our framework another critical point (2) is the need for external recognition both in HE (international ranking) and the creative economy, as it provides a benchmark to know how good the performance of institutions is. However, there is a risk that this 'international agenda' overpowers the local/national agents and their efforts to develop a voice nationally and internationally. As this University faculty member highlights, in the government investment and focus towards the creative

economy, it is possible to read a struggle and dilemma of Singaporean cultural policy development. As on one side there was the recognition of the limited professionalization of the field (and therefore its limited international reach) on the other the original strength and value of arts in the community which was an amazing amateur involvement in many artistic forms prior to the year 2000.

The fact that creative education provision – especially in certain disciplines like music – has only a recent tradition in Singapore (with the Conservatory only having been funded in 2001) there is also a strong bias towards the value of an international education in the arts "*before 2003 if you wanted a degree in Music you had to go abroad. So there is a culture of need for international exposure historically"* (University, Faculty member). In the interviews there was a recognition of the limited development of the arts scene and economy in Singapore and therefore of the need to tap into international networks and expertise. However, there was an emphasis on thinking of these interventions as the development of a local ecosystem rather than the imposition of external frameworks and practices. For some, the international HE strategy – including the drive to bring foreign universities to Singapore – was not seen as a recognition of Singapore's limitation but rather as a strategy to cope with the limits in space and opportunities available for training its own students. Faculty members recognised that the presence of new international providers was improving the international awareness of students rather than creating competition amongst institutions. This *" has made the local environment much more aware, more globally aware, so it's not just linked to one part of the world, you know, they're watching the world in a much more proactive way. (University, Faculty member).* In the case of partnership with international universities, all involved (Singaporeans and international) were keen to point out that there was a degree of reciprocity: "*is a two-way partnership, it's not a one-way partnership, it's not just a validation relationship but really looking at what kind of opportunities are there for both sides to learn and create new knowledge, create new transnational relationships"* (School of Art, Faculty). However, from a broader HE policy perspective there was recognition of some dependency being created *"the disadvantage is that you are a price taker [i.e not influential enough to alter the price or conditions in a transaction], and as a price taker you are more subjected to the terms of the partners, (HE, Policymaker)*

However, the choice seems to be to compete and provide in specific fields – such as for example with the establishment of a conservatoire focusing on classical Western music – rather than simply embrace Singapore cultural traditions:

*But if you look at the model […] this is very much geared just to classical Western music. Now that's complicated because in fact there's so many different arts and music within Singapore that embracing the world would have actually been much more tricky ironically than in some other places. And we do reach out into the Indian and Chinese communities particularly, and Malay communities to a certain extent (University, Faculty member)*

In the voice of academics and HE executives there was an emphasis on the need for a joined up creative ecosystem, where HE needed to work across industry and policy but where the existing networks and infrastructures are valued, for example the network with alumni *"is one of our selling points, you know, this network with alumni*" (*Faculty, Polytechnic*) or the establishment of new opportunities to showcase "*there are a lot more avenues for the exhibition of films than previously*

*[…] we have had the Singapore Film Festival […]Substation are screening works done by first directors […] there are more production houses that have been set up, so I guess that would mean that the industry has developed in some sense"* (*Director, Creative Course, Polytechnic*). However, there is also an awareness of how long it takes for this investment to creative a new ecosystem, through graduates

*So if you go back before 2003 there's a lot of music going on in Singapore, there's a lot of teaching going on in Singapore, but there's really only the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in terms of professional practitioners […] there was a perception to put the institution there first, have graduates, and that the graduates would evolve a professional sort of network and environment, sort of ecology if you like*. (University, faculty member)

The role of this investment in HE seems also linked to a will to have more confident 'home-grown' talents and of recognition of this talent at the international level.

*And having been an observer of Singapore over the last 20 or so years, it's a real sea change, a capacity to talk about it, rather than "tell us what you do and we'll learn from you". I mean it can be an exchange but it's at least on equal basis [...]. Now you can actually make your name here and go out.* (School of Art, Faculty member)

Within the international discourse there was also a strong argument for the integration of Singapore creative HE within the Asia and South Asia context, where possibly a balance could be found between the unique cultural dynamics it is embedded with and international aspirations. However, there are many examples of Singaporean artists leaving the country because of its artistic limitations. For instance, a Canada-based Singaporean sculptor was a recipient of the highest arts accolades in the city-state, the Cultural Medallion in 2014. Similarly, Boey Kim Cheng, a poet left Singapore for Australia after winning the NAC's Young Artist Award (1996) in 1997. Conceptual artist Lim Tzay Chuen represented Singapore in the 2005 Venice Biennale, and his controversial work of moving the tourist icon of Singapore, the Merlion, to Venice was eventually disallowed on the official ground of costs; he is now based in Beijing. Han Kee Juan is the Director of the Washington School of Ballet left Singapore for the Australian Ballet School in Melbourne in 1976 found opportunities lacking in Singapore and has thus not pursued a career in his home country (Tan, 2009).What this means is that Singaporean artists can be recognized overseas, albeit they do not practice back home. The current internationalization process is to make Singapore a physical crucible for generating internationally-acknowledged creative work.

**3. Questioning the value and scope of a creative (higher) education in cultural policy**

Another important node to address is the issue of value – of creative education and having a creative HE system/provision – within the Singapore cultural policy. Partially, we can see the importance of this in the framework of developing an industry which is still in its infancy but of course the argument of why this industry is valuable – whether for its economical or cultural contribution – is key.

As many interviewee highlighted, the investment of Singapore in its HE infrastructure needs to be understood within it economic development and its nation building policies *" it is a developmental shift in nation building, and then an appreciation that societies are made up of people and meaning*

*making through the arts is as vital as economic prowess […] a society which is wealthy enough to purchase all sorts of things but then needs to manifest in its outward form, its artistic expression*" (School of Art, Faculty member).

Many interviewees highlighted how the investment in tertiary HE is a swift from the traditional role and value of arts in Asian society to a professionalization of the sector. So the value of the art had been embedded within the individual training for a long time but not specifically within their careers trajectories. Does this change the overall value placed on arts in society? It is interesting to notice that the role of arts within a society which clearly recognise their contribution but does not recognise them as valuable career choices adds complexity to the picture This is recognised by other interviewees who highlighted the difficulties in understanding policy interventions and the new investment in creative HE within a political value system. The promotion of the arts and arts education are lauded and celebrated (Hoe, 2013, Leong, 2013, Tan, 2014a), however there are also concerns from academics about the economic potential of the creative industries. Some of them questioned the fact that although many of these investments were made with economic arguments (and returns) in mind they did not completely grasp the precariousness of the creative industries

*So the arts, the humanities, while maybe they capture the soul of the people, this doesn't translate into dollars […]. And creative industries don't make that kind of money –to bring in foreign investments and companies*. (*Faculty Member, Polytechnic*)

None of the interviews could really articulate the relationship between creative HE and the sector in reference to knowledge transfer or knowledge engagement, beyond internships or placement. There was an admission of the lack of experience but also of the lack of maturity of the sector to be able to engage with HE at that level. It can be argued that the translation of these kinds of initiatives is also difficult partly because they remain top-down initiatives, where somehow authorities are both trying to support HE institutions while also trying to create that market locally and internationally for Singapore creative and cultural outputs. Within the value system of a traditional economic driven economy, employability remains the paradigm for government and it is also married by the HE leadership, so talks of knowledge transfer and exchange over the interview were often very brief or inexistent

*Because creative arts research is really not strong yet, I don't think we've seen a lot of ideas, and so the knowledge transfer of our institutions in the creative arts to the industry, I'm not so sure that it is so tangible at this stage aside from the students being well trained and contributing to the sector (HE, Policymaker)*

Even from the HE policymaking perspective there was a clear discomfort in defining and recognising the value of research in these areas. In a successful leading world economy, arts education seems therefore to pose broader questions about a new value system

*we might have to detach from our value system, measuring our value system. […] If you ask these students who have founded their own company, the value they say is that they're pretty satisfied with what they're doing, they do what they want to do, and the money is not the biggest drive* (University, faculty member)

From the perspective of value, the framework of HE planning in Singapore seems to still industry-led rather than about the value of creative education per se. As a HE policy maker explained *"In terms of performing arts, fine art, I think it start small, you don't need a lot of them actually, but when it comes to say other technical forms of arts, like design, we do need more of them because they also ground certain industries, such as industries in animation,"* . So this is the reason why creative arts studies are not supported at the vocational (not HE) level, as

*we haven't been that adventurous to let students train in creative arts […] We are worried that if they train in creative arts then creative arts can have more volatile economic prospects. These people who are trained only in certificates can become more vulnerable because they are less mobile compared to a diploma holder or a degree graduate (HE, policy maker).*

Here again the drive remains employability and the value is the contribution of the individual to the economy rather than to the arts and society. The challenges of balancing the value of creative careers across professional and community engagement as very much linked to the size and nature of Singapore which with a small and very localised population can only offer limited opportunities for example for a career in high end music performance.

**Conclusions**

The interviews and data collected highlight the strong emphasis that Singapore has placed on knowledge and education to support and sustain the growth of its creative economy. However, they are critically engaged with key policy dilemmas, which transcend the specificity of Singapore and provide a useful framework for other countries to reflect on the relationship between their HE system and their cultural policy. In these respect, there are three key conclusions that emerge from our findings in reference to how countries need to reflect on in relation to establishing or development their creative education provision. This is particularly relevant as the value of education in creative and artistic disciplines has been recently put under scrutiny in many countries (Budge, 2012; Bennett, 2009)

Before we list out the three key conclusions, we would like to highlight the Singapore context. Unlike in many other countries, the authorities in Singapore see the creative economy as a central pillar of economic growth in Singapore. The case of Singapore however differs from many other places in the sense that Singapore was perceived and admittedly lacking in providing exciting creative products and services. The promotion of the culture and creative industries is partly an attempt at re-branding the city-state. The speed from which Singapore has turned its image around is not just on marketing and changing people's perceptions. As we discussed above, there are real changes. The speed of change, with the introduction of the creative industries blueprint in 2002 till today, is breath-taking. This can only take place with political will, allocated state resources and deft social engineering. And the soft-authoritarian regime, with the ruling party in power since self-government from the British in 1959, has committed itself to creating a system and society conducive to the creative economy. The heavy-handedness and strong dedication may not be founded in many other more democratic countries. And with a relatively small population of 5.5 million, all residing on an island of just about 700 square kilometres, the social management of the populace and physical spaces are quite unique to Singapore as a country. Human resources, in terms of labour power and creative skills, are widely accepted in the country as essential for the future economic development of Singapore. With these in mind, three conclusions can be made from this study.

Firstly, the expansion based on a brick-and-mortar and investment-driven education needs to balance sustainable growth for the benefit of both students and research. It seems that investment is a straight forward decision – often pushed by international comparisons and pressure to attribute value of the creative economy and its production system. However, it this does not come together with confidence in research and cultural production within the HE setting and the intangible value of cultural investment even within HE, the investment can feel very short-sighted. It is important to question how much can these investments play a role (or maybe help disguise) the powerful hierarchy of competences and knowledge which is embedded within the Singaporean society where culture (and arts and culture education) is seen as less important, futile, leisurely in comparison with scientific knowledge. Similarly, expansion in students' number needs to be grounded in confidence in the growth of the sector, not simply justified with the push towards neoliberal unregulated discourses of flexibility and entrepreneurialism of creative work, because the same discourses are not applied to students in scientific fields. While Singapore follows a specific trajectory here, the focus on built investment and growth in student numbers resonate also with recent UK development (Noble and Barry, 2008; Comunian et al. 2014)

Secondly, it is important to consider how much the investment in HE & creative economy is economically driven, creating an argument for the spread of added-value / innovation driven services rather than for the development of a local ecosystem of creative and cultural production. It is clear that the two arguments can coexist but clear policy narrative needs to be built to provide a pathway for these two to interact. The development of local creative ecosystem needs to be a priority on the overall argument of creative in the economy otherwise this investment could be associated with a new form of 'enlightenment' with Singaporean characteristics which aims simply argue for the value of creative education as an add-on and as luxury rather than core to its cultural and economy development. These issues are particularly relevant also for countries, like the UK, where the aspiration to develop regional creative economies (rather than the London-centric reality) have been based around investment in HE but have had relatively low impact in supporting graduates retention (Comunian and Faggian, 2014)

Finally, while the planning framework adopted for creative careers in Singapore is very place specific - in contrasts for instance, with the individual fee-paying UK student reform - it opens up for very interesting questions about the value of art education which we have tried to put forward. It is easy to see the argument that "*it's easy for student interest, because of student interest alone, that everybody flocks to areas like the creative arts, but in reality that's limited to how much industry can really cope*" (HE, Policymaker) However, it is harder to justify from the voice of the same policy maker "*that in the natural bell shape of things, artistic talent may be actually more focused in a small proportion of students, then it doesn't make sense if we become a mass education in the creative arts*" . The relationship between lower salaries in the creative occupations and oversupply has been put forward by many economists in different geographical contexts (such as Towse Popović and Ratković, 2013; Towse, 2001; Alper and Wassall 2006) so these issues seem to be globally relevant.

However, it is refreshing to think about the changes happening in Singapore and a national testing and probing the value of creative HE. "*I believe these are some principles we are still thinking through, I don't think we have decided on them, but that's why we will constantly think about these principles and deciding how big the sector should be and how many places to fund*" (HE,

Policymaker). Ultimately, while testing and framing creative HE the value of arts and culture should take central stage. There are lessons to be learnt in the way Singaporean invest and test these issues which should be of concern to many new and old nation states.

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