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Shining the spotlight on cultural policy

Tarn How TAN

Su Fern HOE

Singapore Management University, sfho@smu.edu.sg

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Shining the Spotlight on Cultural Policy

By Tan Tarn How and Hoe Su Fern
IPS Senior Research Fellow and IPS Research Fellow

Singapore has come a long way since its days of being described as a “cultural desert”. The credit goes to an aggressive arts and culture development policy backed by significant funding. To fulfil its vision of Singapore as “a global city for the arts” and a “Creative City”, the government rolled out masterplans such as those for the Renaissance City and creative industries. Most recently it called for accessible community arts for every Singaporean through the Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR) of 2012.

The result has been rapid growth of arts and culture in the last 35 years. The number of arts groups has risen rapidly together with the number of local and foreign arts events. Audience numbers have also climbed though not as rapidly. The economic contribution of the arts shot up from \$841 million in 2003 (the first year this statistic was available) to \$1.6 million in 2012. However, the value of the arts goes beyond contributions to culture and the economy. The arts is also a vital space for exploring issues of national interest such as citizenship, social inclusion and cohesion.

While there has been some scholarly research and critical analysis of the arts and cultural policies and landscape in Singapore, it remains relatively scant. What, for instance, has been the impact of the various masterplans? Where has the conceptualisation and implementation of policies worked, where has it failed, and why? What can be learned from the successes and failures? Looking ahead, how can policy best respond to the changing cultural landscape in terms of the diversity of arts groups, practitioners and private sectors and of the audiences and publics? What are the strengths and weakness in the arts and cultural ecology in terms of the public, private and people sectors, of their knowledge and know-how, of hard and soft infrastructure? What is the relationship between cultural policy and other policy areas such as social services, education, finance and taxation, globalisation and nation-building?

To fill the gap, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) is launching a series of roundtables and conferences with venue sponsorship from the Singapore Art Museum. Called the IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series, the events will provide a platform for free and robust discussion of arts and cultural policy. The goal is to assess current policies and offer recommendations for the future. Each event will bring together members of the arts and creative community, policy-makers, academics and other stakeholders to discuss a specific topic.



The series will kick off on 29 May 2015 with a [roundtable](#) on the state of literature education and its implications for culture, education and nation-building. Other events being planned include roundtables on creative place-making and arts housing, creativity and policy, and community arts. The series will be capped by a conference on community arts in the second half of next year.

Tan Tarn How is a Senior Research Fellow with the Arts, Culture and Media Cluster at IPS, and Hoe Su Fern is a Research Fellow supporting the IPS Director in his publications and research. They are convenors of the IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series. For more information, please email Su Fern at hoe.sufern@nus.edu.sg

If you have comments or feedback, please email ips.eneews@nus.edu.sg



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