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CREATIVE SINGAPORE: IMAGE AND REALITY

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ABSTRACT

Singapore has embarked on an ambitious program to make the city-state into a significant player in the global creative economy. The government agrees that in the creative economy, the environment must be conducive for experimentation and innovation. As a result, more social and political spaces have been opened up to spur Singapore's fledging creative economy and also to signal that the nation has become more transparent and tolerant. The authorities, however, still limit the freedom of public expression on political, ethnic and religious issues. Singapore remains a soft-authoritarian state; can such a country then be conducive for creativity and innovation? This paper shows how the Singaporean government: 1) introduces and implements a set of comprehensive policies to develop the creative economy; 2) re-images the city-state as an exciting creative nation; 3) communicates the new creative vision and engineers local acceptance of the creative economy; and 4) promotes the image of an open society and yet maintain tight social and political control. Only to a certain extent that Singapore has seen changes in the direction of more liberal attitudes towards social mores and values, as well as, tolerance towards criticism of authorities. The Singaporean experience shows that the creative economy functions within a set of social, economic and political circumstances. Policy makers can adjust and respond to the needs of the industry. The relationships between the political environment and the creative economy are complex and nuanced.

Keywords: *creative economy, democracy, freedom of expression*

The New York Times observed, "Singapore may be clean, efficient and manicured, but the prosperous island-state knows how to get down and dirty, too" (Kurlantzick, 2007). Much earlier in 1999, Time magazine declared on its cover story, "Singapore lightens up: Nanny state? Hardly. Once notorious for tight government control, the city-state is getting competitive, creative, even funky" (McCarthy and Ellis, 1999). The image of a creative environment often conjures up spaces of experimentation and innovation, with elements of quirkiness, untidiness and unpredictability. In such an environment, people are free to make choices and try new things. There is diversity, excitement and spunkiness. People push ideas and redefine boundaries. These are traits of a tolerant democratic place. Unlike a totalitarian regime, a democratic society allows people the room to experiment, to disagree with the status quo and to express their thoughts freely. To Richard Florida (2003), he found San Francisco to be an attractive place for the cultivation of creativity and innovation because of the city's open-minded and tolerant heterogeneous population; creative people will flock to places that allow them the spaces to think, express and create. A lively civil society and creativity goes hand in hand. Other researchers

are making similar claims (Healey, 2004; Hospers, 2003; Scott, 2006). Diversity, instability and a tolerant democracy generate innovative excitement in a place.

Singapore has embarked on an ambitious program to make the city-state a significant player in the global creative economy. The Singaporean authorities agree that in the creative economy, the environment must be conducive for experimentation. But according to the Reporters without Borders's Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007, Singapore was ranked "141" out of 169, one notch better than Afghanistan but one notch worse than Sudan (Reporters without Borders, 2007). In the 2007 Freedom House report on political freedom, Singapore was found to be "partially free". Scoring between "1" and "7", with "1" for the most free, Singapore scored "5" for political rights and "4" for civil liberty, same as Uganda and Lebanon. The status of the media in Singapore was rated as "not free" (Freedom House, 2007). Singapore did not fare better with the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy; Singapore was ranked "84" out of 167 countries (Kekic, 2006).

There seems to be a discrepancy between two sets of realities in Singapore: Singapore is a city that is increasingly cool, funky and creative but it remains a soft-authoritarian state. How can innovations and entrepreneurship bloom under undemocratic circumstances? To what extent can creative and fresh ideas be allowed to flourish? Between creative Singapore and democratic Singapore, which one better reflects the reality?

This paper shows through the case of Singapore how democratic practices can be selectively attuned to the needs of the creative economy. This paper offers a case study of the Singaporean attempt at promoting the city's creative economy. It addresses the relationships between freedom of expressions and the creative industries and questioned the conventional wisdom that the two are positively correlated. The relationships are more nuanced.

THE MAKING OF CREATIVE SINGAPORE

Singapore is a tropical island city-state with a population of only 4.5 million. It has no natural resources, and is only 700 square kilometers in size. Since its independence in 1965, the Singaporean government has taken an active role in transforming and ensuring the health of the economy (Neo and Chen, 2007; Low and Johnston, 2001). Although the Singaporean economy is doing well and is the wealthiest in the region, the government is steering the economy away from its manufacturing and electronic bases and towards the financial services, telecommunications, life sciences, tourism and the creative industries. The island-state is now recognized as one of the most active in pursuing the creative economy in Asia (Yusuf and Nabeshima, 2005).

Singapore is not alone in pursuing the creative industries. Countries around the world are transforming themselves into creative centers (e.g. see Bayliss, 2007; Hutton, 2003; Tallon and Bromley, 2004; Trueman, Cook and Cornelius, 2008). Singapore is already known to have a stable legal, political, economic, technological and social environment that is attractive to businesses. Industrial relations are controlled and harmonious (see Koh and Ooi, 2000; Mauzy and Milne, 2002). Tough punishments for seemingly minor uncivil behavior e.g. jay-walking, spitting and not flushing public toilets after use indicate the authorities' tendencies to micro-manage Singaporeans' everyday life. With the ruling party controlling 82 of the 84 parliamentary seats, and a mass media pliant towards the government, political freedom is restricted (Chua B.H., 1995; Gomez, 2006; Lydgate, 2003). Singapore is also often seen as a sterile cultural desert. The authorities acknowledge that Singapore is inadequate in offering cultural activities to draw highly skilled foreign workers to work in the city-state (Lee T., 2007; Peh, 2006; Tan, 2003). The Economist Intelligence Unit found that Singapore ranks behind Asian competitors Tokyo and Hong Kong as a sought-after place for expatriates because of its dearth of cultural activities (Burton, 2002). With the bludgeoning evidence that Singapore is boring but that the future is in the knowledge and creative industries, the Singaporean government set up the Economic Review Committee (ERC) in 2001, consisting of seven subcommittees, with the aim of developing strategies to ensure the continuous economic prosperity of the country. The ERC

Sub Committee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI) recommended that Singapore moves away from an industrial economy into an innovation-fuelled economy, seeking ways to “fuse arts, business and technology” (ERC-CI, 2002: iii). The city-state must “harness the multi-dimensional creativity of [its] people” for its “new competitive advantage” (ERC-CI, 2002: iii). The first creative-turn was actually taken after the release of the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts. Consequently, among other things, the National Arts Council was formed in 1991, more support was given to art groups, and schools started offering art programs. The government then started paying more attention to the arts and culture (Chang and Lee, 2003). To further develop the 1989 recommendations, STB (formerly Singapore Tourist Promotion Board or STPB) and the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA, formerly Ministry of Information and the Arts or MITA), took the initiative to make Singapore into a “Global City for the Arts” in 1995 (Chang, 2000; MITA and STPB, 1995; Ooi, 2007). In that plan, among other things, Singapore will develop its arts trading sector, get world famous artists to perform there and establish the Asian Civilizations Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and the National Museum of Singapore. The aim then, and still is, to make Singapore into the art and cultural capital of Southeast Asia (Ooi, 2007).

In 2000, MICA pushed the 1995 initiatives further and envisaged Singapore as a “Renaissance City” (MITA, 2000). Expanding on the 2000 Renaissance City report, the 2002 ERC-CI report produces the most ambitious and comprehensive blueprint yet on the creative economy, which includes explicit and specific plans to develop also the media and design sectors. Borrowing from the UK, the Singaporean authorities define the creative cluster as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (ERC-CI, 2002: iii, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2003: 51). Singapore is concentrating on three broadly defined creative sectors (ERC-CI, 2002: iii):

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

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

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

The Singaporean authorities are determined to re-make the city-state into a creative center. The plan will also help the authorities attract the necessary foreign investments and workers. To help realize the goals, there is also a set of comprehensive plans to achieve the vision. The Singaporean authorities tackle the challenge at hand on three fronts.

First Front: Signaling Creativity

Firstly, the authorities present a comprehensive brand image that tells a powerful story, so that outsiders can understand the country in a positive light. For example, the authorities argue that Singapore is different from other countries promoting their own creative economy because of Singapore's East-West combination. For instance, the Minister for MICA, Lee Boon Yang, referred to “Singapore's positioning as an open, multicultural society which is able to draw inspiration from our rich and diverse Asian heritage and at the same time link up with other international partners to widen market access and talent base”, and claimed that many companies found “Singapore's unique confluence of eastern and western cultures as a key reason for collaborating with Singapore” (Lee B.Y., 2005).

In the East-West mix framework, Singapore showcases its modern efficiency and Asian attractiveness by hosting high profile events. For example, Singapore will host the first Formula One night races in September 2008 and the first Youth Olympics in 2010. Earlier high profile events include the 2005 International Olympics Council meeting and the 2006 International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank annual meetings. In line with the pursuit of placing

Singapore in the global media limelight, Singapore is enhancing its status as a regional hub for the global media industry; MTV, Discovery Channel, HBO and BBC have already made Singapore their regional headquarters. It is also hoped that Singapore-centered contents will be promoted in the international media as a result. Just as a lively media industry alludes to a vibrant creative economy, architectural icons signal an environment that celebrates creativity. For example, Esplanade Theatres on the Bay, with the spiky roofs make the dome-shaped buildings look like a pair of durians is one of the newest icon of Singapore.

There are also a number of cultural diplomacy outreach programs to enhance the creative image of Singapore. These programs include the Singapore Season in London in 2005 and in China in 2007. According to the Minister in charge of MICA, Lee Boon Yang, The showcasing of Singaporean art and artists outside Singapore aims “to promote cultural relations and also reinforce awareness of the arts and creativity in Singapore” (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2007).

Second Front: Committing to Creative Singapore

Besides the just mentioned signaling ploys, the Singaporean authorities are also demonstrating their resolve to promote the creative economy. The government is showing strong resolve by offering incentives to attract investments into the creative industries. For instance, the Economic and Development Board has allocated S\$500 million (US\$ 350 million) to develop the digital media industry for 2006 and 2010 (Balakrishnan, 2005). Subsequently, another S\$500 million is intended to be made available for 2011 and 2015. Media production companies, such as Lucasfilm Animation (makers of Star Wars) and Electronic Arts (makers of the computer game The Sims) have already set up studios in Singapore. Companies are offered tax incentives, resources to set up shop, free schemes to train local workers and given freedom to hire foreign professional workers. For the arts and the Renaissance City Plan, the government spent S\$10 million (US\$ 6.7 million) per year between 2000 and 2003. The amount was increased to S\$12 million (US\$ 8 million) between 2004 and 2006. And from 2007, MICA has allocated S\$15.5 million (US\$ 11 million) a year for the next phase of the Renaissance City Plan (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2007).

Cultural institutions are also being established and supported. The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music was set up at the National University of Singapore. Art schools the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts have been expanded and their profiles increased. Arts festivals and performances have not only become more abundant but have become more accessible; for instance, the Esplanade offers hundreds of free concerts annually. The Singapore Biennale was launched in 2006. The myriad of cultural developments shows Singapore's commitment to becoming a vibrant and exciting city.

While a large part of Asia, including China, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia, is not known for the protection of intellectual property (IP), Singapore stands out in the crowd. Singapore wants to be seen as taking the creative economy seriously and respecting the protection of IP rights. The authorities constantly take the opportunity to mention that the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy found Singapore to be the “most IP-protective country in Asia” (see EDB, 2005; Lee B.Y., 2005). Companies can file for protection for their intellectual property globally from Singapore as it is a signatory to major IP conventions and treaties, such as the Patent Cooperation Treaty, Paris Convention, Berne Convention and the Madrid Protocol.

Third Front: Living Creative Singapore

Besides getting Singapore into the global psyche through marketing messages and demonstrating the country's resolve in nurturing the creative economy, the creative Singapore message is strongest when Singaporeans are also living the brand. In wanting to make Singapore into a Renaissance City, the authorities see the arts and culture as necessary to: “enrich us as persons”; “enhance our quality of life”; “help us in nation-building”; and “contribute to the tourist and entertainment sectors” (MITA, 2000: 30).

Enlivening the cultural life of the city requires changes to regulations and policies. These changes affect various aspects of social life in Singapore. As a result, during a parliamentary

sitting on 13 March 2004, Members of Parliament voiced their worries about the loosening up of regulations in Singapore to attract expatriates and to present a more creative image of Singapore. The then-Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Vivian Balakrishnan, replied (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2004):

There was an article that Professor Richard Florida wrote, entitled "The Rise of the Creative Class". [...] His research found that cities, which are able to embrace diversity, are able to attract and foster a bigger creative class. These are key drivers in a knowledge-based economy. The larger lesson for us in Singapore is that we need to shift our mindset so that we can be more tolerant of diversity.

According to four indicators, the Minister for MICA argued that Singapore is in fact fast realizing the goals of the Renaissance City (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2007). One, there is a large number of art performances and exhibitions in the city-state, for instance in 2006, there were over 6,000 art performances and exhibitions, averaging 16 events a day. Two, the number of registered arts companies and societies reached 670 in 2006, an increase of 45% over 2005. Many art groups such as the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Dance Theatre and TheatreWorks are said to have acquired international recognition. Three, the local arts audience has also grown significantly. A 2006 National Art Council survey showed that one out of three Singaporeans participated in at least one arts and cultural activity a year. Ten years ago, it was only one Singaporean out of 10. Also since 2002, ticketed arts attendances have crossed the one million mark. In 2005, museum visitorship crossed the two million mark. Four, the arts going audiences consist of younger Singaporeans, which augur well for the future. All these point to a growing proportion of residents supporting and consuming the arts and culture, which is a pillar of the creative economy. The fledging creative Singapore economy has taken off.

THE UNDEMOCRATIC REALITIES OF CREATIVE SINGAPORE

There are signs that Singapore is a culturally vibrant and creative city. But as mentioned earlier, Singapore is also a soft-authoritarian regime. The balance between the interests of promoting the creative economy and the interests in maintaining the social political status quo is sometimes difficult for the Singaporean government. There are at least three anti-creative indications. These indications raise questions on the Singaporean quest to be a creative city.

Anti-Creative Indication 1: Restrictions on Local Socio-Political Issues

Every so often in Singapore, someone will be arrested or reprimanded for behaviour that are considered threats to the ethnic and religious stability of the country. For example in recent years, people were reprimanded, even jailed, for posting racist comments on their blogs. Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, maintained that the government is willing to listen to different views from "responsible people" but the government will have to "maintain the integrity and security of the State" (Chua H.H., 2008). The Singapore government is "hypersensitive to any threats against our racial and religious harmony" (Chua H.H., 2008).

This hypersensitivity extends into creative expressions in the arts and culture. While it is expected that artists will make social and political references to Singaporean society, the government is wary of such expressions. For instance, as reported in the Far Eastern Economic Review, the authorities banned the play *Talaq* in 2002 by P. Elangovan. The play dealt with rape within an Indian Muslim marriage. The ban came about after some members of the local Indian community protested. P. Elangovan lamented, "It makes a mockery of Singapore's aim to be a Renaissance City" (Webb, 2002).

Often observed but not officially acknowledged is the restriction on challenging the political leadership in Singapore. Martyn See, a young local film maker, has his film, *Singapore Rebel*, banned in 2006 because it is considered to be "political"; the 30-minute documentary is on Chee Soon Juan, leader of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party. His next documentary *Zahari's Seventeen Years* faced a similar fate in 2007. Zahari, who was a political prisoner of 17 years and was never charged or faced trial, was blatantly critical of the government in the

documentary and made potentially slanderous remarks against leaders of the ruling party. In yet another incident, popular blogger, Mr Brown, was censored by the authorities because he questioned the government in his feature column in the local newspapers, Today (Lee U.W., 2006; Today, 2006). He pointed out the increasing income gap in the country and ranted about the increase of electricity tariffs and taxi fares immediately after the 2006 general elections. The authorities lambasted him, resulting in him being suspended by Today. Journalistic freedom has its limit in Singapore even though the media industry is aggressively promoted. As a consequent, many creative workers exercise self-censorship (Gomez, 2002). As a result, one of Singapore's celebrated theater director, Ong Keng Sen artistic director of TheatreWorks explained why he spends most of his time living outside Singapore: "The soil is still not viable enough to encourage an artistic and creative sensibility. It's about Singapore's urgency for or relevance to me." (Martin, 2008)

Anti-Creative Indication 2: Limiting Public Expressions and Crippling Civil Society

As alluded to in the first point, civil society and the arts are often intertwined. So, as some social and political commentaries are disallowed in Singapore, the means of expression are also curtailed. The curtailment affects the development of civil society and also the freedom of creative expression in the art and cultural arena. But the international media industry which is considered part of the creative economy may still report on the struggles of civil society in Singapore. For example, while Singapore hosted the September 2006 IMF and World Bank annual meetings, it was widely reported that the Singaporean authorities tried to suppress protests during the meetings (Arnold, 2006; Elms, 2006; Burton and Donnan, 2006). To the IMF and World Bank, the refusal of entry of some accredited civil society representatives (whom the Singaporean authorities claimed are security threats) was a setback because these institutions want to improve relations with non-governmental organizations that accused them of disregarding the plight of the world's poor. Also during the IMF and World Bank event, opposition party leader Chee Soon Juan and six supporters tried to stage a march, protesting against the curbs on the freedom of expression and assembly in Singapore. They were duly stopped by the police at the starting point. The Financial Times reported that the "stand-off attracted a small crowd of supporters and a larger group of journalists who were filmed by plainclothes members of Singapore's Internal Security Department." (Burton and Bhattarai, 2006). The Singaporean government responded in the International Herald Tribune through the Minister of State (Finance and Transport) Lim Hwee Hua. She argued that maintaining the security of the event was of paramount importance. Singapore has always banned outdoor demonstrations and the authorities had no intention to change the rules just for the meetings (Lim H.H., 2006).

Such rules affect public expressions, even for the sake of creativity and the arts. Consequently, street performers need to be auditioned and get permission to perform at designated places. Flash mobs, a growing movement around the world, during which strangers come together to perform something strange for a short period of time e.g. people freeze for several minutes in a busy place have to be careful because members of the mob could face persecution if they do not have a public entertainment license (Koh, 2008).

Anti-Creative Indication 3: Gay Rights and Entrenchment of Intolerance

In 2006 and 2007, there were two very controversial decisions made by the government. In 2006, the Singaporean Government made a U-turn in its decades-long principle of not hosting any casinos in Singapore. After a prolonged public engagement, the decision is to have two casinos. The debate was originally on having only one. A new term integrated resort is to be used for the casino complexes as the two mega complexes do not only house casinos but also conference facilities, hotels, theme parks, museums and entertainment facilities. After the decision was made, the government introduced the Casino Control Bill. During the parliamentary debate of the bill, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, Wong Kan Seng, reminded Members of Parliament that the government has to stop acting as the nanny for the populace. With reference to suggestions like not having any cash dispensing machines in the integrated resorts and making it outrageously expensive for Singaporeans to enter the casinos, the minister cautioned against being too careful (Boo, 2006; Lim L., 2006). In the light of economic competition Macau monopolizing the gambling markets in the region, and new casinos are planned in neighbouring countries - the government has decided not to err on the side of caution and shield Singaporeans from harm. The minister said, "I think we should not

micro-manage every measure. There will be no end to the number of ways to stop people from visiting the Integrated Resorts” (Boo, 2006). He also maintained that the Casino Control Bill should not impact on personal freedom” (Lim L., 2006). This suggests that the authorities are now willing to accept that residents in Singapore have to make personal decisions that may be detrimental to their own well-being.

This approach contrasts against the retention of Section 277A in the Penal Code. It is criminal for gay men to engage in sex in Singapore, even if it is consensual. In September 2007, Parliament debated on proposed changes to the Penal Code (Soh, 2007). One of the least controversial changes to the Penal Code was to de-criminalize “unnatural” sexual acts oral and anal for heterosexual persons. The most controversial non-change was to continue criminalizing gay men's sexual activities but with the promise that this law will not be enforced actively (there is no reference to sexual acts between gay women in the Penal Code). The resulting protests from those who want to repeal the discriminating Section 377A were enthused. There were also very strong reactions from those who want to keep Section 377A. Earlier in 2003, the then-Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, made a shock revelation in Time magazine (Elegant, 2003). He said that the Singaporean civil service has started employing professed homosexuals, even to sensitive positions. That seemed to be a turning point for gay rights in Singapore. The announcement was made as part of the effort by the government to attract talent and nurture the creative economy. The change in policy was part of the strategy not to exclude talented foreigners who are gay, and was implemented without fanfare, so as not to draw flakes from more conservative Singaporeans (Elegant, 2003; Nirmala, 2003a; Nirmala, 2003b).

These mixed signals upset many persons who believe in equal rights for persons regardless of their sexuality. And with the government reference to Richard Florida and the need to be tolerant towards diversity in promoting the creative economy, Section 377A entrenches the law in the opposite direction and interferes with the bedroom activities of male homosexuals.

THE SINGAPOREAN MODEL

In a regime that allows only limited freedom of expression, can a program that aims to make Singapore a global player in the creative economy work? To the authorities, there is a trade-off between maintaining a stable social political environment and promoting diversity and chaos that befits the image of a vibrant creative economy. The Singaporean authorities embrace a number of principles, demonstrating a nuanced approach to cultivating the creative economy. These principles challenge some of the arguments propagated by scholars like Florida (2003), Healey (2004) and Scott (2006), who hold the view that creativity can only prosper in a tolerant and democratic environment. But creativity spring up in different circumstances, does not take place in a social economic political vacuum. Creative ideas solve problems and express ideas; the solutions and ideas are embedded in contexts and circumstances. As will be discussed next, the Singaporean authorities want to promote some types of creative processes and not others. They are trying to formulate policies that would drive creative ideas and processes in particular directions. The authorities do not see a need for complete freedom of expression and total acceptance of diversity in nurturing the creative economy. There are at least four principles that the Singaporean authorities take.

Firstly, there is a distinction made between the creative process and the contents that come out of creative processes. The separation between creative processes and contents is difficult, if not impossible, to make. The Singaporean authorities encourage a free run of the creative processes but want the people to steer away from publicizing certain views. Most activities in the creative economy, like web design, architecture and producing MTV shows, are unlikely to generate contents that will cross into out-of-bounds areas. The authorities are careful that ethnic and religious conflicts are not stirred up. The authorities are also particular that their leadership is not undermined. Arguably, all countries have laws that limit some form of expressions, for example, on pornography and hate-crimes. To the authorities in Singapore, lacking the freedom of expression in certain quarters does not mean that a city cannot pursue the creative economy. Many creative products are apolitical and asocial.

Secondly, the Singaporean authorities also make a tacit distinction between economically valuable and economically insignificant creativity. As already alluded to in the case of having casinos in Singapore and retaining Section 377A, social policies are more likely to change because of their high economic significance. In another example, foreign workers are welcomed because they are to produce certain types of products. But during the 2008 M1 Fringe Festival, the Complaints Choir Project, which was to sing complaints about Singapore during the festival, had to cancel its public performances because there were non-Singaporean residents in the choir, including the conductor (Hussain, 2008). The deputy director of the Media Development Authority, Amy Tsang, explained: "As the content touches on domestic affairs, it is preferred that only Singapore citizens participate in the public performance" (Hussain, 2008). Arguably, the role of foreign performers would be better appreciated if the Complaints Choir Project was to serve much more than small local audiences.

Thirdly, the Singaporean authorities take the view that although chaos and experiments are only expected in a creative environment, the environment must also be stable and orderly enough to drive the creative industries in the desired direction. Governmental guidance and intervention is seen to be the foundation of the Singaporean economic miracle (Low and Johnston, 2001; Neo and Chen, 2007). For instance, former prime minister and founder of modern Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew recently argued that the Chinese model has challenged the Western view of development, which concentrated on open economies, minimal state intervention and the superiority of democratic politics (Li, 2008). The Chinese model, like the Singaporean model, has shown that "order, certainty, consistency, hard work, market-friendly policies, savings and investments, trade, education and training" (Li, 2008) are central for economic development. The Singaporean authorities see that even for creative activities, some strict form of regulation is required.

Fourthly, the Singaporean authorities have accepted that creative spaces will sprout despite attempts at control. Singapore residents have access to the international media and Singapore is one of the most wired countries in the world. People in Singapore complain and the government does not clamp down on most dissent. For example, there is a volume of articles reflecting critically on Singapore's Renaissance City plan by prominent academics and commentators (Tan, 2007).

The discussion thus far highlights how the Singaporean authorities are reactive and calculative in their attempt at nurturing Singapore's creative economy. They calibrate the openness of civil spaces, trying to prevent some contents from entering public spaces. They also determine which creative activities are preferred and which are not, based largely on their economic and political values. A stable environment is still considered desired by the creative industries. Despite all the controls, the authorities acknowledge that they cannot have total command. Instead they react to the situation as people negotiate and challenge the status quo.

CONCLUSION

There are limits to the freedom of expression in Singapore and yet the Singaporean creative economy is growing. The official social and political openness of the city-state has been calibrated. The authorities are responding to the needs of the fledging creative economy.

Although cities have the propensity to be the crucible for creativity and innovation, there is no one strategy that will definitely work. The same scholars who argue that democracy and tolerance are essential for a creative environment also mention that each city has to find its own creative economy strategies and solutions (Bayliss, 2007; Florida, 2003; Healey, 2004; Hospers, 2003). Creative solutions are needed to fashion a creative hub.

The Singaporean government believes that gradual democratization goes hand in hand with a developing creative economy. Total democratization is not necessary at the moment. To what extent is creative Singapore a reality? Singapore may yet be a free-wheeling creative hub but it is moving in that direction. Social and political policies are geared towards that end in a gradual manner.

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