

## Cultural urban regeneration – practice and policy in the UK and Singapore

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### **Keywords**

Arts, creative industries, culture, built environments, urban renewal

### **Abstract**

The notion of the creative economy has gained cognisance in many countries over the last decade as part of strategic urban revitalisation and marketing frameworks. Culture-led urban regeneration has been instrumental in many European cities for recapturing investment, rejuvenating built environments and as a transformation mechanism for a transition towards a skills base more in tune with the knowledge economy (Landry et al. 1996; Gomez 1998; Miles 2005). This progressive change has been exemplified by visionary policies introduced by cities such as Glasgow, Seoul, Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai, where the creative industries played a key strategic role. Following a review of the cultural regeneration policies and practices adopted in the United Kingdom (UK) and Singapore, with particular emphasis on the strategic role of the arts and culture, this study explores cultural regeneration practices in London and Singapore with particular emphasis on the balance between social and economic needs building on previous research by Kong (2000, 2009) and Miles (2005).

The research findings show that although broad regeneration themes still hold true transnationally (e.g. cultural identity, place-branding, community engagement, industrial development, and economic stability), there are also differences, which should be considered. For instance, the gentrification of specific creative clusters took a different turn in Singapore, where practitioners sought to preserve certain pockets in this highly-urbanised city-state for their ambient settings and unique physical features. Similarly, Singapore's use of strategic city branding as part of its urban revitalisation policy remains in sharp contrast to the UK's urban regeneration approach, which accorded heavier emphasis on community participation and skills development. Finally, it is argued that Singapore could benefit from adopting a similar approach to that of the UK by developing social support mechanisms within current urban revitalisation policies that address growing social issues likely to affect Singapore as well as Southeast Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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In her current role, develops and supports the creative enterprise framework across the University of the Arts London. Her experience ranges from creative industries development strategy, public-private partnership engagement to project management. Her interests include developing sustainable creative businesses and networks, and encouraging innovative practices in both public and private sectors.

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## **Introduction**

### **The creative economy**

As nations embark on a socioeconomic transition from more traditional forms of industry to the knowledge economy, the task of understanding the creative and cultural industries has become increasingly important, especially for policy-makers and key stakeholders in the arts and cultural sectors. Although the notion of a creative sector of the economy has been a contested one over the last two decades, the creative industries have been defined in the UK 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' (DCMS 1998).

Gaining currency and resonance, many cities worldwide, such as Glasgow, Seoul, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Dubai, have similarly paid more attention in understanding and crafting strategies for the development of the creative industries. Similarly, Singapore has also increased investment to support the creative industries.

### **The role of the creative arts and culture in regeneration**

Since the post-industrial period of the 1970s, creative and cultural activities have been used as strategic catalysts across cities seeking inward investment, a revitalisation of their built environment, and a transfer of skills from industrial heartlands to spur wider development regionally and nationally. This phenomenon was partly in response to declining traditional industries such as manufacturing, shipping and mining in European cities like Bilbao and Barcelona (Spain), Glasgow (UK) or Lodz (Poland) with a rich industrial heritage (Landry et al. 1996; Gomez 1998; Miles 2005; Coca-Stefaniak, Radominski & Ryczek 2009a).

The notion of culture-led urban regeneration has been discussed from a variety of standpoints, including cultural consumption (Zukin 1995), cultural and urban planning (Bianchini 1991; Bianchini, Greenhalgh & Landry 1991; Landry et al. 1996; Evans & Foord 2008), culture and economic development (Hall 2000; Throsby 2001; Potts & Cunningham 2008), as well as sustainable regeneration (Gomez 1998; Evans 2005; Lythgoe 2008). Although there have been several attempts to develop frameworks for various types of projects and activities linked to urban regeneration, two of the most widely cited ones include Shaw's (1999) and Evans' (2005), which broadly categorise the impact of regeneration activity into social, economic and environmental/physical.

### **Evolution of the role of arts and culture in the UK and Singapore**

In this review of the evolution of the role of the arts and culture in regeneration, it is important to first understand and contrast the differing roles of culture in the UK and Singapore, as well as how the thinking behind cultural policies evolved over time to shape practice in the field. In the UK, spending in regeneration contributed towards the cultural sector, especially in the 1990s, when cultural development began to be accepted as an element of urban regeneration programmes (Symon & Williams 2001). Specifically, the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), which was one of the main funds from the central government for urban regeneration across England, contributed to the cultural sector, alongside other sectors like housing and physical infrastructure. The cultural sector also benefited from funding by other organisations such as English Partnerships, English Heritage and the Groundwork Trust (Symon & Williams 2001). On the other hand, Singapore opted for a more centralised funding system for the arts and culture, by relying on a single body – the Ministry of Information, Communications and

the Arts (MICA). Parallel to this, urban development agencies like the Urban Redevelopment Agency (URA) accorded much lesser emphasis on culture per se. It is partly as a result of this that this study considers cultural regeneration primarily through the evolution of the role of arts and cultural policies from the 1950s onwards (see Figure 1), and the part it plays in regenerating the economy at local and national levels.

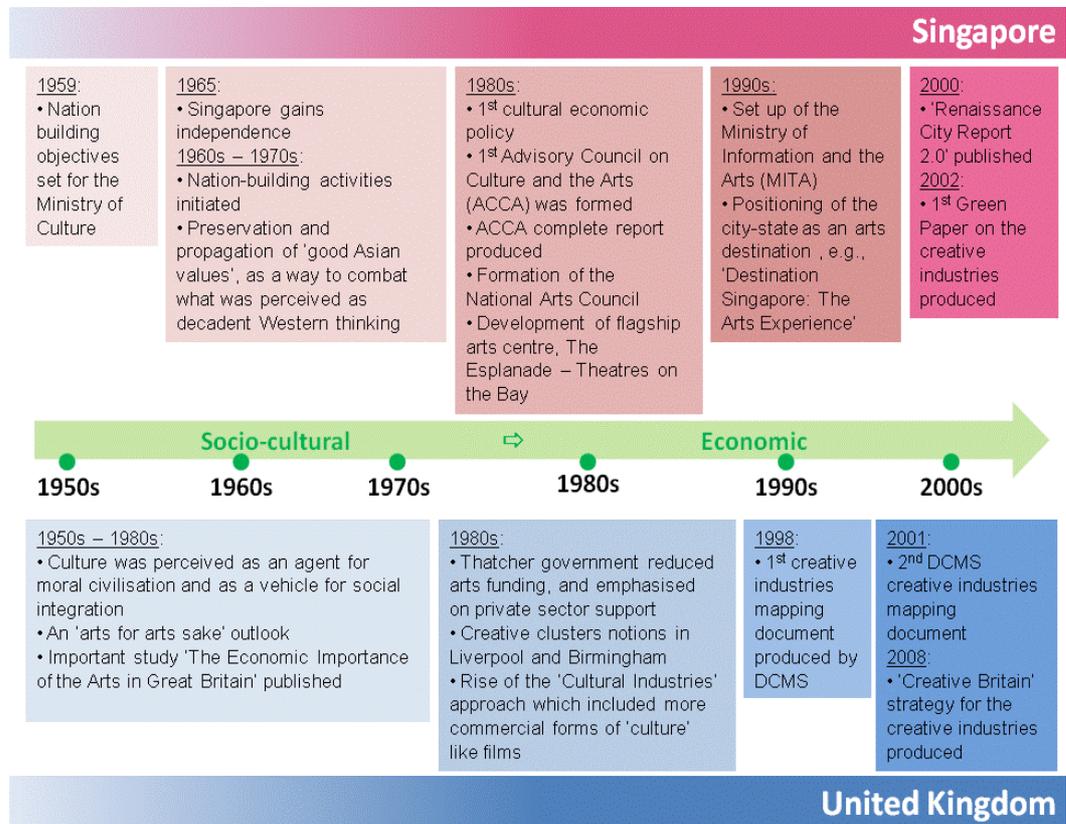


Figure 1. Progress of the role of arts and culture in the UK and Singapore (adapted from Bianchini, Greenhalgh & Landry, 1991; Bassett, 1993; Kong, 2000; Bereson, 2003; Yue, 2006)

### From socio-cultural objectives to the rise and dominance of economic approaches

Historically, arts and culture policies have not been linked directly to economic development strategies in urban areas. In the UK, from the 1950s to mid-1980s, culture was perceived as a vehicle for social integration (Bianchini, Greenhalgh & Landry, 1991; Bassett 1993). However, culture began to be progressively perceived as an important element in other sectors such as tourism, services and advertising, especially from the late 1980s. The rise of the 'cultural industries' notion (Hesmondhalgh 2002) further accentuated the importance of popular commercial creative forms, such as publishing, film and media, as drivers for economic, social and cultural change.

The evolution of the role of arts and culture in the UK over this period somewhat mirrored that in Singapore – a young city-state which had gained independence in 1965. In line with this, bolstering community bonding and facilitating nation-building activities became key strategic priority areas. As a result of this, culture was largely influenced by a socio-political agenda. However, with the advent of the 1980s and 1990s, cultural agendas started to intersect with economic imperatives in Singapore and the first cultural economic policy emerged as a result of the financial recession in the mid-1980s. The promotion of Singapore as a vibrant hub in Southeast Asia and as

a magnet for talent, higher-level tourism and inward investment was first resonated through the Economic Development Board (EDB)'s pursuit of well-known foreign performing arts companies to establish their Asian headquarters in Singapore in the 1990s. During that period, many popular foreign musicals, such as *Les Misérables*, *Cats*, or *Aïda*, also performed in Singapore. The city-state's plans to become the 'theatre hub in Southeast Asia' (STPB & MITA 1995, p. v) through the import of cultural content and investment in cultural facilities could be interpreted partly as a deliberate strategic diversification move away from homogenising globalisation trends at the time.

Much of the effort invested in revitalising Singapore's economy and its socio-cultural scenes has become apparent in the nation's recent public and private sector investments in arts and cultural infrastructure (e.g., National Museum of Singapore, National Art Gallery, School of the Arts), the hosting of prominent events (e.g., *Formula One Grand Prix*, *First Youth Olympic Games*, *World Bank & International Monetary Fund Board of Governor's meeting*, *Singapore Biennale*), the use of 'starchitects' in private property development (e.g., CapitaLand residential project by Zaha Hadid) and the creation of the Arts and Heritage district which all converge towards the 'pragmatics of creativity' (Lee 2007 p. 53). However, unlike in the UK, these have not been articulated deliberately within the context of regeneration, choosing instead a more integrated approach to policy-making.

Although the development and evolution of the role of the arts and culture in Singapore's approach to urban regeneration would appear to be almost parallel to that of the UK, it should be noted that its impetus could be vastly different. In contrast to Singapore, the UK retained a stronger focus on tackling complex social issues through urban regeneration projects. This study aims to examine these points of divergence trans-nationally in more detail through an in-depth comparative analysis of the role of culture in regeneration in the UK and Singapore by focusing on three key stakeholder groups – businesses, local authorities and cultural organisations. In order to do this, a brief overview is provided first of different models of cultural regeneration using Evans's (2005) framework of regeneration – namely that of 'Culture-led Regeneration', 'Cultural Regeneration', and 'Culture and Regeneration'.

## **Models of cultural regeneration**

### **Culture-led regeneration**

Flagship construction projects, such as Tate Modern in London and The Baltic in Newcastle-Gateshead, as well as mega events such as *The Olympics*, *European City of Culture (ECoC)* and the *Edinburgh Festival*, have been examined in-depth by scholars in the field of culture-led regeneration (Booth & Boyle 1993; Evans 2003; Miles 2005; Garcia 2005). Whilst one might expect such city centre-based 'prestige' projects to attract large volumes of investment, publicity and visitors, it has been difficult to determine if they have necessarily translated into a positive impact on the local communities that often play hosts to these events (Bianchini 1990; Bassett 1993; Evans 2001; Evans 2005, Jiwa et al. 2009). An extensive study on the impact of Liverpool as the ECoC 2008 suggested that, whilst there has been evidence of positive cultural, city improvement, community and commerce impact and outcomes in the short-term (one year on) (Garcia, Melville & Cox 2009), a subsequent longitudinal research study carried out (Meville et al. 2010) revealed the scale of scepticism among local stakeholders with regards to the event's actual impact on their neighbourhoods. Other research studies have advocated the importance of the creative industries from an economic standpoint (Throsby 2001; Yusuf & Nabeshima 2003; UNCTAD 2004; Barrowclough & Kozul-Wright 2008; Potts & Cunningham 2008) and emphasised the new opportunities that these industries often create for developing countries to

generate higher value-added services and create employment. However, these studies have often neglected to consider other crucial 'softer' elements, such as social inclusion and community empowerment. Similarly, little in-depth analysis had been provided on the quality and sustainability of jobs created by these initiatives. In fact, Bassett (1993) and Zukin (1995) have argued that a considerable proportion of jobs created have been low-paid with poor career mobility prospects. Similarly, Bianchini (1990) criticised prestige arts-led models as zero-sum games whereby competition, instead of employment has been created amongst the various sectors with a consumerist approach towards cultural tourism. Drawing on experiences from cities in the USA and in Western Europe, Bianchini and Parkinson (1993) asserted that cultural policy-led regeneration strategies may entail few benefits to disadvantaged social groups. Unfortunately, there have not been many longitudinal studies in this field, and thus meaningful comparisons cannot be drawn from the literature.

### **Culture and regeneration**

In contrast with culture-led regeneration projects, which took centre stage in the urban regeneration arena in Britain from the mid-1980s, more recent studies (Landry et al. 1996; DCMS 2003; ACE 2007) have placed a stronger social emphasis on the role of arts and culture in terms of their impact on individuals and communities. Landry et al. (1996) argued that, compared to high-cost capital cultural projects, participatory arts projects often offered much higher levels of flexibility and adaptability to local needs with lower costs as residents and communities became the principal target of interventions. From a social perspective, the arts and culture have been recognised to generate a positive impact through direct participation, increasing levels of confidence, creativity, transferable skills, social commitment and social cohesion leading overall to more vibrant communities (Matarasso 1997; Shaw 1999; DCMS 2003; ACE 2007). Contrasting this 'softer' aspect with 'harder' (physical-led) interventions, culture and the arts have often been recognised as much-needed *software* to complement the *hardware* provided by physical regeneration projects.

### **State investment and tourism**

In an evaluation study of the Tate Modern as a regeneration initiative in South London, Evans (2001) questioned the project's success in terms of visitor numbers, or whether it resulted instead in a cannibalisation of audiences, especially with reference to the Tate Britain, which had yet to experience success at similar levels. This critique echoed Bianchini's (1990) earlier reflections on prestige culture-led developments as a zero-sum game that often leads to the gentrification of very specific areas in detriment of local communities. Unwittingly, 'culture becomes implicated in reproducing inequalities as opposed to automatically revitalising the public sphere' (Kong 2009 p. 3).

In a similar vein, Singapore's flagship arts centre, The Esplanade, met with strong reservation among local stakeholders in the early stages of its development. This was particularly evident among local practitioners who questioned the project's relevance to supporting local experimental art forms, highlighted in studies by Chang (2000), Kong (2000) and Wee (2003). Two of its main features, a 2,000-seat theatre and a 1,800-seat concert hall, appeared to target large-scale international events (e.g. musicals, orchestras, concerts) and regional tourists, to the detriment of local productions, which tend to attract smaller audiences. On a wider context, Kong's analysis of state policies and research with key informants in Singapore, highlighted the 'primacy of the state's economic agenda which was at odds with the views and intents of arts practitioners' (Kong 2000, p. 23). Yet, despite the considerable debate, Kong's (2009) revisit to this flagship arts centre eight years after it had opened its doors, concluded that it had made tremendous efforts to encourage community participation and social

integration, which 'augurs well for social sustainability even though the arts may be incidental to these activities' (Kong 2009, p. 20).

### **Cultural quarters and gentrification**

In London, a 'gentrification' phenomenon has been observed and it is sometimes referred to as 'the Hoxton effect' (Evans & Shaw 2004). Hoxton used to be an area commonly associated with crime and antisocial behaviour. However, due largely to affordable rent levels, various creative practitioners found a home in this area leading to a progressive improvement in its potential and appeal to more affluent socioeconomic groups, which eventually led to its 'regeneration'. Today, Hoxton is a sought-after residential area with a wide offer of attractive bars, cafes and galleries. Ironically, due to the resulting increase in property prices, artists who had acted effectively as the catalysers in this regeneration process have had little option but to move on, often seeking other disused spaces instead. In parallel to this phenomenon, Singapore's conservation master plan in 1986 (Kwok & Low 2002) brought about a similar gentrification effect to its cultural districts. Today, it is possible to discern almost immediately a neatly-segregated urban landscape across Singapore with different pockets of the city designated for different purposes, which vary from commercial, to residential, heritage or industrial. From an urban planning perspective, arts and culture have not been woven effectively into the daily fabric of life. Instead, they prevail only in selected parts of the city-state, which include the widespread use of public art in Singapore's financial district or the Arts and Heritage district in the city centre, where key museums, galleries and art institutions are located. In fact, Singapore's Arts and Heritage district most closely illustrates Zukin's (1995) assertion that culture can be used as a means of controlling cities through the consumption of images.

### **Contrasting the approaches of Singapore and the UK**

Singapore has enjoyed historically a geographical advantage by means of its location at a crossroads of trade and communications, which has been branded a 'gateway to Asia'. Its 'renaissance' effectively commenced in the boom decade of the 1990s, as the government strove to shed the nation's stoic and over-regulated image in order to attract inward investment and global talent. In the early 1990s, the notion of an 'East Asian renaissance' was propagated by Minister Yeo, evincing Singapore's ambition to become East Asia's first-mover in the cultural scene, harnessing the potential of the arts to stay competitive (Bereson 2003). The nation state's push for the arts (and sport) was often driven by city branding agendas, in order to establish itself as a regional creative hub. In fact, one of Singapore's main targets for 2012 was to 'establish a reputation for Singapore as a New Asia Creative Hub' (CIWG, 2002). Well-known local playwright, Haresh Sharma, was quoted in *Time* magazine saying that 'the [Singapore] government may not be more liberal ... but it sees the positive effects of being seen to liberalize' (McCarthy & Ellis 1999).

In contrast to this, the UK's approach to cultural regeneration stemmed more from the need to tackle complex social issues, especially in the post-industrial period, when major traditional industries entered a stage of decline. In this respect, although physical redevelopment and economic development prevailed in the 1980s, the emphasis of urban regeneration initiatives (e.g. City Challenge, SRB, English Partnerships) turned to collaboration, partnership and community involvement in the 1990s (Symon & Williams 2001). In terms of policy-making, there was also greater evidence of public consultation practices in the UK than in Singapore.

In summary, it is relatively evident that, as in the case of place management schemes (Coca-Stefaniak et al. 2009b), regeneration strategies need to maintain a firm understanding of the needs of places and communities, and forge an integrated and

networked approach in terms of policy-making in order to improve their chances of success. In a holistic and integrated manner, arts and culture needs can and should be coupled with economic, trade, education, access and social policies to bring about greater leverage as well as more effective and sustained development in the target area/community.

### **Research design**

This study has adopted a qualitative research approach in line with a research tradition in this field that used strategies of enquiry which included ethnography (Kong 2000), discourse analysis (Bereson 2003) and content analysis (Wee 2003). However, there have been few comparative studies undertaken and existing ones have often involved vastly differing methodologies, such as longitudinal studies (LDA 2004), quantitative (Gomez 1998), and qualitative (Wu 2005) research.

As this study focuses specifically on the perspectives of practitioners in the creative and cultural industries, the strategy of enquiry adopted has been an ethnographic one in line with similar previous research by Kong (2009) and Miles (2005). The study involved fieldwork in the UK and Singapore with semi-structured interviews and observation, which sought to conceptualise practice in regeneration and contrast it with existing theory in this field. The field research aimed to address a number of objectives of enquiry, namely:

- a understanding the overarching approach and perception towards cultural regeneration, with special attention towards balancing socioeconomic objectives;
- b discussing/assessing how likely the approaches can/have holistically fulfilled the needs of the community; and
- c finding out the main challenges facing regeneration efforts and how they can be/have been addressed.

In order to achieve a holistic perspective on the issue, two groups of interviewees were selected – public sector organisations and publicly-funded agencies in charge of regeneration; and practitioners in the creative and cultural industries (artists, entrepreneurs, arts managers, etc.). Using purposive sampling, the sample group of interviewees was chosen primarily through an analysis of their professional profiles. The analysis followed an inductive process, with the researcher generating meaning from the data collected in the field. Using a bottom-up approach, all the interviews were sieved through and coded using open coding followed by axial coding (Gibbs 2007 p. 50).

### **Research findings**

A total of thirteen interviews ( $N=13$ ) were carried out in London ( $n=5$ ) and Singapore ( $n=7$ ), with a total of 51,175 words transcribed. Interviewees spoke about their approaches and experience with regards to their creative practice. Some interviewees directly involved in cultural regeneration voluntarily shared their strategies as documentary evidence to supplement their interview answers. The interviews mainly revolved around the interviewees' experiences and perceptions on the use of culture as a key strategic element for urban regeneration interventions, as well as challenges encountered in practice or yet to be confronted in impending projects. By and large, although interviewees in London and Singapore shared similar broad views on the broad themes, which emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts, important divergences soon appeared with regards to perceptions and project priorities.

## **Cultural identity and place branding**

Strong cultural content was cited as important (n=5) in regeneration projects by both groups of respondents. Yet, social issues such as crime reduction and community cohesion became more apparent in interview data gathered in London with responses that identified artistic activities (e.g., music events, public art) and good urban design as key tools to improve the perception of safety of a place (n=3). Contrastingly, in Singapore, there appeared to be a greater attention on creating identity and a cultural brand (n=2), building better arts education, and developing more robust, critical arts discourse (n=2), in order to improve the overall creative ecosystem. There was a clear concern from the Singaporean interviewees regarding the consumerist approach by developers and changes in cultural consumption of the society (n=4). Closely-related to this was the issue of gentrification (n=4), which the London-based respondents saw as inevitable, and saw opportunities to address, through the ownership of property leases as well as closer cooperation with local authorities.

## **Engagement and networks**

The notion of engaging stakeholders and creating meaningful partnerships emerged from interview transcripts as an instrumental approach towards a successful cultural regeneration strategy, as it was very much about the process of getting people involved and generating mindshare and ownership of the people (n=7), attaining greater leverage through the partnership approach (n=6) and creating empowerment (n=4). The interviewees also expressed process-based concerns, such as having more robust mechanisms for public consultation (n=7) with a greater critique on existing public consultation mechanisms evident among Singapore-based interviewees. The interviewees also mentioned the importance of attracting project partners with the right mindset and understanding in order to remain collaborative (n=5).

## **Industry development and economic stability**

This final theme revolved around industry development, from both perspectives of generating jobs and GDP *in* the creative industries (n=6), as well as *using* the creative industries for strategic development in other sectors such as tourism and property development (n=3). The importance of industry development and challenges in developing a more holistic mechanism for assessing tangible and intangible key performance indicators struck a chord in the two groups. There was a shared sentiment amongst the London and Singapore interviewees that the measurement of achievements has often been inclined towards that of economic and direct tangible results, and that one 'tended to be funded by outputs rather than outcomes' (interviewee).

The Singapore respondents identified economic and political stability as paramount, and there was a concern about the sustainability of the cultural strategies, especially during an economic downturn. However, the issue of sustainability was expressed in a different vein, as one interviewee cautioned about cultural regeneration as being a victim to political fashion, citing ex-Mayor, Ken Livingstone's ideals and legacy of the creative industries agenda.

Overall, although the central ideologies of cultural regeneration may be similar in London and Singapore, the approaches and concerns may take diverging paths, largely due to the differing socio-economic environments (Figure 2).

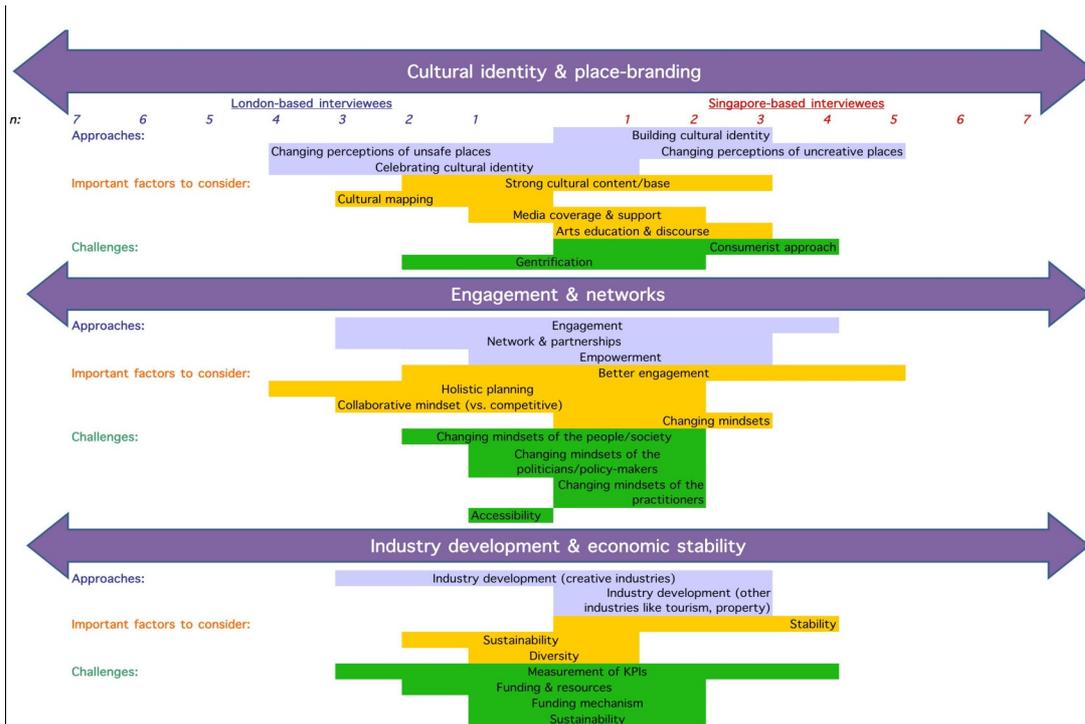


Figure 2. Illustration of the convergence and divergence in themes between the London-based and Singapore-based interviewees

## Discussion

One of the key aims of this study was to explore the balance between social and economic needs through the collection of primary data. What was found through the interviews with key informants from the business community, local authorities and cultural organisations, was that social and economic motives were often inter-mixed. Although the slant of certain approaches may have lent towards either economic or social targets, the overall project objectives of regeneration interventions often appeared intertwined. Whilst a number of Singapore interviewees (n=4) lamented the pragmatic economic stance that Singapore has traditionally tended to take, they appeared to concur that this was the right approach; 'For Singapore, there is no other city within the Republic, and sustainable social and cultural development must take place alongside economic priorities' (Kong 2009, p. 26).

On the basis of field data gathered in this study and existing literature, it can be inferred that in the UK, cultural regeneration strategies have been deployed mostly to target areas suffering from socioeconomic deprivation, and social issues were largely perceived to be of top priority, whereas in Singapore, the cultural renaissance has instead impregnated regeneration projects to revitalise the image and brand of areas, as 'rather than some organic form of cosmopolitanism, it is very much about deliberately "branding" Singapore as the kind of place that would attract global capital and cosmopolitan elites' (Velayutham 2007, p. 135). Kong (2000) noted that whilst English cities such as Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester or Liverpool found the need to regenerate themselves due to the decline of traditional industries, Singapore's implementation of her cultural economic policies occurred during a period of economic expansion and globalisation. However, in the absence of an audit of cultural assets and resources, as well as a sound ecosystem comprising robust discourse on the arts, the pursuit of culture-led strategies may be unsustainable. This is echoed by Chang (2000) in the case of Singapore: 'to be a Renaissance City, Singapore must provide a

nurturing ground for home-grown talents and not just be a venue of world-class events. Otherwise, Singapore will be a 'Global city for the Borrowed Arts' (Chang 2000, p. 826).

Unlike clusters in London, which have been pursued largely for their affordability, such spaces in Singapore are located in prime districts. Often, the entrepreneurs have to fight for space and invest their own money to refurbish these state-owned buildings, even though the leases are predominantly short-term ones (two to three years). In the highly urbanised city-state of Singapore, such creative enclaves are highly sought after due to their unique location and ambient settings, and serve as artistic oases in a landscape dominated by urban sprawl. Arguably, this phenomenon could be interpreted as a reversal of gentrification.

Singapore's arts and cultural development has not been couched in terms of regeneration, but as renaissance. In terms of discourse, these are significantly different standpoints. In 2000, MITA (now MICA) published the *Renaissance City Report 2.0* which indicated the government's investment plans for the arts over the next five years. By calling for a Renaissance Singapore, the government attempted to capitalise on the spirit of creativity, innovation, multi-disciplinary learning, socioeconomic and cultural vibrancy that prevails in this highly skilled society. This vision constitutes effectively a projection of the type of aspirational Singapore citizen, society and nation that the government is trying to build (MICA 2000).

In the context of Singapore, the term 'renaissance' is often associated with re-branding, which may take the form of tourism campaigns like *Destination Singapore: The Arts Experience* and its positioning as the 'theatre hub in Southeast Asia' and 'global city for the arts'. Hence, the concept of 'regeneration', which refers to the production of something new through the use of *existing* resources, finds little significance in Singapore's strategies. Contrasting this with Britain's recent strategy document on the creative industries, *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*, by the DCMS, the emphasis is instead on nurturing talents. As pointed out by some Singaporean practitioners (n=2), the lack of critical arts discourse and discussions in the ecosystem has a profound impact on the dissemination of information, arts education and also the funding mechanism as there is a lack of a 'strong grounding in assessing arts or assessing the value of art and culture' (interviewee), which in turn affects the quality of the art produced. In contrast, this was not expressed as a concern by the London-based interviewees, perhaps due to London's already-established reputation as a cultural capital, in comparison to Singapore's still embryonic creative industries.

As a nation driven by the ideology of pragmatism, largely due to the paucity of natural resources, the 'hard branding of the culture city' (Evans 2003) becomes Singapore's strategy to gain recognition and its desired outcomes in an increasingly globalised world. However, beyond the glossy façade accomplished by 'gestural' changes (Lee 2007, p. 63), more focus needs to be given to nurturing its own talent and creative expressions. In light of this, greater attention and legitimacy need be given to the voice of the people, including practising artists, entrepreneurs and arts managers, to develop mechanisms that can effectively buttress the creative process and contribute to building a meaningful local and national identity, as 'fluidity and flexibility of your [Singapore's] cultural positioning is still very much in flux' (interviewee).

## Conclusion

This study has examined the various cultural regeneration strategies undertaken by Singapore and the UK, primarily through exploring the role of arts and culture in urban regeneration. Taking an overall view, the issues and concerns brought up by the London-based and Singapore-based interviewees appeared similar and resonated with

the key points in the literature. However, upon closer investigation, sharp divergences appeared between the two respondent groups, largely due to the difference in socio-cultural and economic environments. On the one hand, the Singapore-based interviewees, though lamenting the oft-pragmatic stance of the Singaporean government, appeared generally to appreciate and acknowledge the economic and political stability that comes with it. In turn, London-based interviewees expressed more social concerns, such as promoting community bonding, building cultural identity, discouraging crime and lowering perceptions of danger.

Taking a leaf from UK practice, where there appeared to be a higher emphasis on public engagement and openness, Singapore could possibly benefit from adopting a similar approach. In a nation-state where most assets are state-owned and initiatives state-orchestrated, the government plays an incredibly important role in the country. In Singapore's pursuit of a 'vibrant and self-sustaining creative cluster' (MICA n.d.), support mechanisms need to be more in tune with the needs of the people, and deeper engagement is a vital ingredient towards realising that.

The competitive mindset, which had fostered Singapore's economic success, had also likely engendered a competitive rather than collaborative environment. Thus, more (published/open-source) research, knowledge-transfer and exchange platforms need to be set up to encourage greater knowledge and communication amongst these players. Although they often critiqued the government for not being sufficiently aware of what is on the ground, they themselves need to possess an open mind.

Major areas for further research still remain, including the development of effective creative clusters, as well as funding and support mechanisms for cultural regeneration projects and sustainable city branding strategies that add a new dimension to urban regeneration using a community-driven bottom-up approach of stakeholder engagement. Similarly, the socioeconomic, branding and environmental impact of culture-led events on the revitalisation of disadvantaged urban areas remains an area where clear methods of measurement and evaluation are required in order for funding bodies to continue investing in the midst of a global financial downturn (Coca-Stefaniak et al. 2010). Furthermore, it would be desirable for further comparative studies to be carried out comparing Singapore to cities with similar traits, including those with a relatively small population or known to possess a strong economic (but not cultural) brand, such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, both of which have recently pursued creative-led strategies for revitalisation, and other Asian cities, such as Seoul, which has a burgeoning creative economy.

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