POSITIONING THE CREATIVE CITY AGENDA WITHIN URBAN POLICY DISCOURSE: THE MALAYSIAN SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

As the hype of the creative city model transcends Western borders to Eastern settings, Malaysian cities are fast embracing it as sine qua non urban development strategy. The global creative city model, however, is fraught with conceptual and operational ambiguities when dissecting the notions of "cultural industries" and "creative industries". The "knowledge economy-based concept of creative industries" is widely critiqued as being void of cultural content. Malaysia is also caught in this conundrum due to national aspirations to be a knowledge and creative economy. The aim of this article is to examine how the Malaysian creative city agenda is positioned within urban policy discourse as the nation's structural base shifts from industrial to services and the creative economy. Based on qualitative research techniques (i.e. interviews, focus group discussions, fieldwork observations), primary data was collected in selected Malaysian cities from 2019 to 2021. The study indicated that the creative city strategy is still nascent in Malaysia and not systematically integrated and intersected across urban policy domains. This article recommends the need to integrate the elements of culture and creativity more distinctively across all urban policy domains in the quest to develop culturally sensitive and sustainable Malaysian creative cities.

Keywords: creative cities, creative industries, urban policies, urban development, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Global trends on creative city development reached Malaysia in the last decade despite fuzziness in assimilating the concept for Malaysian cities. As an aspiring developing nation, the lure to jump onto the "creative city" bandwagon is too inviting despite the lack of concerted efforts to first comprehend the viability of the concept. As argued by Karvelyte (2020) , the Western script of creative city should not be indiscriminately uprooted and transferred to the Eastern context. There is no "one-size-fits-all" model of creative city to fit all cities. Thus, efforts have to first go towards fathoming the variegated definitions of culture, creativity, cultural/creative industries of different contexts and geographies, and how they intersect with related urban policies. However, in Malaysia, defining these concepts and policies clearly has remained unaddressed. Terminologies are used loosely, which will result in inaccurate policy prescriptions.

To exacerbate the situation, the Western discourse itself is fraught with conceptual ambiguities when differentiating "cultural industries" and "creative industries", and further compounded by the tension between culture and economics that reside at the core of this terminology (O'Connor 2010, 8). When cultural industries were later relabeled as creative industries in the United Kingdom and Australia, scholars criticised the biasness of the "knowledge economy-based concept of creative industries" that disregards the unique characteristics of both cultural products and cultural creativity (Cunningham 2002 as cited in Galloway and Dunlop 2007, 17). This dilemmatic situation is aggravated when there is confusion in tracking the trajectory of a nation's economic structural base between cultural industries, which are activities and products laden with culture and symbolic meaning, as opposed to creative industries which tend to incline towards knowledge, information, communication and technology (Galloway and Dunlop 2007, 25–26).

In Malaysia, the appeals of creative city as well as creative and cultural industries development are gaining traction in the last decade with major Malaysian cities (e.g. Kuala Lumpur, Kuching) aspiring to be creative cities. Mirroring global trends, Malaysian cities are also globalising and undergoing urban restructuring, where culture and creativity are increasingly being perceived as catalysts for sustainable urban development. Similarly, the aforementioned conundrums surrounding creative cities in the developed world are gradually manifesting in Malaysian cities as urban neo-liberalism and capitalist governance unfold. This article attempts to examine the way the Malaysian creative city agenda is positioned within urban policy discourse as the nation's development trajectory shift from industrial to services and the creative economy. Given the dearth of research that investigates the Malaysian creative city agenda, this article fills this research gap. Underpinned

by key creative city discourse by seminal scholars (i.e., Landry, Florida, O'Connor) as well as supplemented by cultural development frameworks like the United Cities and Local Governments' (UCLG) "Agenda 21 for Culture", the discussions and debates in this article will provide a holistic and inclusive viewpoint of the way global creative city agenda is positioned within local Malaysian urban policy discourse—an angle largely underexplored so far in the Malaysian context. The findings from this article will steer the broader creative city vision and direction of Malaysian cities as elements of culture and creativity gradually gain cognizance and are integrated in Malaysian urban planning and development. The narratives were constructed from key informant interviews (i.e., policymakers, cultural and creative employees, etc.) and supplemented by systematic review of secondary resources (i.e., journals, national policies, government blueprints).

This article is organised into five sections. Section one begins by stating the problem statement, research aim and significance. In section two, a brief review of global literature on culture, cultural/creative industries and creative city is provided before outlining the methodology in section three. Section four provides an overview of Malaysia's background before positioning and juxtaposing the creative city agenda against diverse urban and public policies/initiatives. The final section concludes by providing recommendations for the way forward.

GLOBAL DISCOURSE: CULTURE, CREATIVITY, CULTURAL/ CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Much have been debated pertaining to the terminological clutter that surrounds the terms "culture", "creativity" as well as the delineation between cultural and creative industries. Undoubtedly, "culture" and "creativity" are different but they are sometimes fused together clumsily in the discourse (Cunningham et al. 2008 as cited in Kong 2012, 280; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt 2005). In the past decade, policy-makers have used the terms cultural industries and creative industries interchangeably with minimal formal delineation between them (Kong 2012, 280). Getting the concepts right at the outset is pivotal due to subsequent implications on theory, policy and the types of strategic interventions required for cultural and creative industries respectively (Garnham 2005).

The advent of technology (i.e., World Wide Web, new software, digital applications, etc.) has once again re-altered the meaning of traditional cultural industries that emphasised the "arts" and commercial media. Arguably, technological advancements during the early 20th century gave rise to "classic" cultural industries just as the rise of creative industries emerged due to technological innovation in

the late 20th and early 21st century (Galloway and Dunlop 2007, 19). The shift from cultural to creative industries contextualised within a wider knowledge-based, and services economy was a turning point for countries, administrations, policy directions and also scholarly discourse (Cunningham 2002, 55). The main concern about subsuming culture within a creative industries knowledge-based and economy-based policy is the manner upon which the uniqueness of culture and the cultural industries will be obscured and obfuscated (Galloway and Dunlop 2007, 19).

Creative City: Concept, Interpretations and Debates

The way of (1) culture; (2) creativity; and (3) cultural and creative industries have intersected with urbanism has given birth to the creative city concept which is understood as the advocacy of culture and cultural planning in urban locales (Landry 2008). A concept conceived in Australia during the late 1980s, the focus started with integrating cultural policy into urban planning with clear emphasis of improving the material well-being of all citizens, especially marginalised groups. Subsequently, the concept flourished in the United Kingdom, Germany and other European nations in the 1990s. In the late 1980s and earlier part of 1990s, Charles Landry's independent research organisation (i.e., Comedia) played an integral role to advance the hallmarks of his version of a creative city, namely the search for new strategies to contest entrenched assumptions in urban planning and urban cultural policy as well as to urge urban policymakers to think differently and creatively act "out-of-the-box". The creative city concept was also influenced by scholars (i.e., Ake Andersson, Peter Hall, Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford) who advocated cultural policy and cultural industries as urban economic catalysts (Bianchini 2017; thus, the birth of culture-led urban regeneration initiatives (Landry 2008; 2017).

Examples of culture-led urban regeneration are also found in initiatives, such as the "European Cities of Culture" during the 1980s. In the West, many cities were experiencing de-industrialisation and inner cities were hollowed out (Landry 2017). To address the situation, regional cities (e.g. Glasgow, Liverpool, Bilbao) resorted to leverage their unique urban cultural endowments; thus, heralding the beginning of the "culture-led urban regeneration" epoch—a strategy that is widely debated due to its link to urban neo-liberalism and "cultural gentrification" (O'Connor 2010, 42).

The creative city notion, arguably, gained popularity due to Florida's creative class terminology, where he highlights the allure of urban locales to entice the creative class to cluster for local development (Florida 2004; 2008). This idealistic vision framed by economic innovation and the need for a certain cadre of "creative
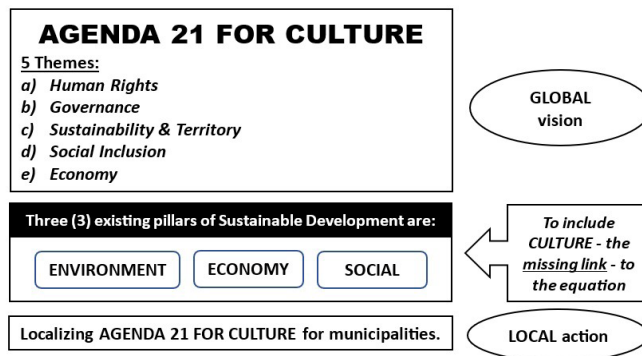
class" runs contrary to Landry and Bianchini's "grassroots-oriented idea" that advocates the creativity of ordinary citizens as a strategic endowment for urban policy (Bianchini 2017). Albeit heavily critiqued as being elitist, Florida's concept has been widely adopted by urban managers globally. Paradoxically, it became an urban development strategy heralded by urban managers who champion "entrepreneurial" urban governance and competitiveness of their cities but widely contested by scholars and grassroot cultural practitioners (Byrne 2012, 53; cited in Peck 2005) who argue that if carelessly implemented, it will be a strategy that will exacerbate urban exclusion and inequality (Pratt 2011). Such opposing orientations of the creative city concept should be made known and duly acknowledged by all urban stakeholders in the quest towards inclusive and sustainable urban development.

On the global platform, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s Creative Cities Network was incepted in 2004 to nurture partnership with and among cities that have earmarked creativity, culture and cultural industries as key factors towards sustainable urban development. On May 2004, to advocate urban stewardship and political will to emphasise and mobilise culture in urban development, the Agenda 21 for Culture blueprint was the first document with worldwide mission to set the groundwork of an undertaking by cities and local governments for cultural development (UCLG 2008: 3), with subsequent commitments in 2017 and 2019, respectively. The Agenda 21 for Culture document clearly illustrates the importance for local government to adopt the framework for local cultural development and sustainability based on five key themes: (1) human rights; (2) governance; (3) sustainability and territory; (4) social inclusion; and (5) economy. Adoption of this blueprint will feature the participation and undertaking with urban citizenry to ensure that culture assumes a pivotal role in urban policy discourse and implementation (UNESCO 2002 as cited in UCLG 2008, 4). From an academic standpoint, arguably, the recognition accorded to culture in urban milieus has reached great heights motivating scholars to investigate this cultural notion on cities from diverse historical, legislative, geographical and temporal contexts.

Against the above conceptual underpinnings, this article unpacked the scenario for Malaysia. The following section will briefly outline the methodology before discussing the Malaysian context.

METHODOLOGY

Given the way the research enquiry is framed, the interpretative paradigm was adopted to investigate how the Malaysian creative city agenda is positioned within urban policy discourse. To this end, qualitative techniques, like in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and fieldwork observations in selected Malaysian cities were administered to gather primary data. The dataset was robust given that it combined fieldwork conducted during two different time frames in different Malaysian cities, and datasets were collated and triangulated from two related creative city research projects. The first round of fieldwork (from project 1) was undertaken between July and August 2019, and subsequently, the second fieldwork (from Project 2) was conducted from March to August 2021. The interview questions were framed and formulated based on the conceptual notions in the literature review section and also the key themes of the UCLG Agenda 21 for Culture framework. The framework has five key themes (human rights, governance, sustainability and territory, social inclusion, economy) as illustrated in Figure 1. For the theme on culture and human rights, people's diversity in terms of backgrounds, gender, ethnicities, religion and creed should be acknowledged and respected. As for the theme on culture and governance, the practice of good urban governance should integrate the role of culture in society and legitimise cultural policies. With regard to culture, sustainability and territory, cultural diversity is pertinent for humanity, and the diversity of cultural expressions will result in wealth creation and human development. In the fourth theme pertaining to culture and social inclusion, it is important to examine the way upon which cultural initiatives, programmes and policies are inclusive and holistic to include all and sundry. Lastly, in the fifth theme, the economic dimension of culture and creativity for wealth creation and local economic development are duly acknowledged in a creative city.

AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE

5 Themes:
a) *Human Rights*
b) *Governance*
c) *Sustainability & Territory*
d) *Social Inclusion*
e) *Economy*

GLOBAL vision

Three (3) existing pillars of Sustainable Development are:

ENVIRONMENT   ECONOMY   SOCIAL

To include CULTURE - the *missing link* - to the equation

Localizing AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE for municipalities.

LOCAL action

Figure 1: UCLG Agenda 21 for Culture framework.

A total of five focus group discussions and 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants from the public and private sectors as well as civil society groups. From the public sector, the key informants included a town planner, heritage officers, an architect, development planners, a museum director, a state tourism manager and several state think-tanks. Those interviewed from the private sector sphere comprised of freelance creative and cultural practitioners, creative hub managers, creative/cultural business owners, culture-based organisation representatives and an urban planner, while those from the civil society realm were represented from a local clan association, several local heritage advocates and non-government/non-profit organisations. Each interview or focus group discussion lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and were recorded after obtaining informed consent from the informants. After transcription, the transcripts were analysed using both manifest and latent content analysis, where recurring themes that emerged were systematically categorised, coded and tabulated to decipher the conceptual notions of creative city, and the extent upon which this emerging agenda is positioned within broader Malaysian urban policy discourse.

Apart from primary data, extensive secondary data collection was conducted too. Secondary resources related to creative cities discourse from global, national and local perspectives were referred. These included academic journals, books, government blueprints, policies, guidelines, technical reports, and related internet resources. Both primary and secondary data were used simultaneously and further triangulated to provide answers in fathoming how the creative city agenda is contextualised in Malaysian urban policy discourse.

THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

The Malaysian scenario mirrors the above global conceptual debate to some extent as the nation's development trajectory gradually shifts from manufacturing towards services and a knowledge-based creative economy. This shift, in turn, has impacts on Malaysian urban development and urban policies. With major Malaysian cities (i.e., Kuala Lumpur, George Town) experiencing decline of their economic base as former industrial cities and port cities, urban managers started to turn to cultural and creative industries as a panacea to revitalise their inner cities (Khoo and Nurwati 2011 as cited in TCSB 2017; 2019a). Adoption of this new strategy would entail proper comprehension of the concept itself first,

followed by how it can be adapted and contextualised to the local setting so to avoid adopting a foreign strategy indiscriminately. While there are multiple other factors involved, the comprehension of the creative city concept itself among Malaysian stakeholders is questionable, where this strategy is undertaken without adequate understanding of the delineation between cultural industries, creative industries and the notion of creative cities within Malaysian policy contexts. This is evidenced through interviews with Malaysian municipal officials and state agencies, where some were unsure about what exactly defines a creative city, whilst others were clearly clueless when asked the difference between cultural industries and creative industries, and they conceived these concepts to be used interchangeably. Such indiscriminate use of terminologies will result in inaccurate urban policy prescriptions. More pertinently is the absence of a distinctive city-level cultural policy to steer holistic urban development. The following quotes serve to illustrate the scenario.

> [The creative industries] are not direct but act as fillers in programmes. If we look, we see it but it is not presented in the form of write-up. People are unclear about these creative initiatives. (City Council official, FGD, 6 August 2019)

Another private planner who used to work for the state government resonated the same viewpoints as follows:

> I would say, cultural context in policies—there is such element in, for example, the Special Area Plan (i.e., conservation management plan), certain planning guidelines, building guidelines are often mixed with cultural elements in it and they consider that, but it's not a distinctive policy. (Private planner, interview, 9 April 2021)

This similar question of whether there is existing creative and cultural policy available to integrate culture and creativity into development for good urban governance was asked when interviewing a state heritage planner on 29 March 2021: "So far, what I know is only the Special Area Plan (SAP)—George Town Special Area Plan".

For the George Town World Heritage Site case, although the SAP does have cultural elements/dimensions infused throughout the document, it is certainly not a distinctive cultural policy and many sections in the plan are in fact inclined towards built tangible heritage rather than intangible cultural heritage. In a separate interview, an architect from a local authority also highlighted that there is no specific policy related to culture and creativity.

> Polisi mengenai "culture" ini, dia tak ada sangat
> dekat Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan (PBT) kami.
> [There are no policies related to culture in our local authority.]
> (Conservation Architect, interview, 6 May 2021)

A representative from a think-tank echoed the same standpoint, where there is no cultural policy, especially for cultural arts. Even if there were cultural elements involved, they are discussed alongside economic or urban development agenda.

> If you're referring to independent (cultural) policy, for instance, to ask
> the policy maker to solely discuss cultural arts, then the answer is no.
> They always come with economics or other elements, especially urban
> development planning. (Analyst, state think-tank, FGD, 8 March 2021)

Additionally, the making of a creative city cannot be detached from analysing Malaysia's broader urban policies which are instrumental towards overarching urban cultural policies in each individual Malaysian state and city. The subsequent sections will first review Malaysia's National Urbanisation Policy 1 (NUP1) (2006–2015), National Urbanisation Policy 2 (NUP2) (2016–2025) and related policies, like the National Cultural Policy (NCP) and National Creative Industries Policy (NCIP), to illustrate how other policy domains can influence the creative and cultural agendas for Malaysian creative cities.

National Urbanisation Policy: How Culturally Sensitive and Creative is the Policy?

Malaysia, as a developing nation, is building its competitive edge as it integrates into the global economy. To this end, Malaysia attempts to leverage on urban agglomerations and have earmarked urban areas as engine of economic growth (EPU 2010, 116). Cities are perceived as *de facto* growth engines where 75% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is concentrated in cities (DTCP 2016) making the importance and appeals of cities profound. Globally, urban dwellers are projected to increase from 3.3 billion in 2014 to 5 billion by 2020. In Malaysia, the urban citizenry is forecasted to grow from 20.29 million (71%) in 2010 to 27.30 million (79.6%) come 2025 (ibid.).

To steer Malaysia towards sustainable urbanisation, the NUP1 was approved in 2006 and has six major thrusts, namely, Thrust 1 (efficient and sustainable urban development); Thrust 2 (vibrant, dynamic and competitive urban economy); Thrust 3 (integrated and efficient urban transportation system); Thrust 4 (quality urban services, infrastructure and utilities); Thrust 5 (enhanced urban well-being and identity); and Thrust 6 (effective urban governance) (ibid.). Subsequently, the

NUP 2 was formulated to serve as continuation to NUP1. The NUP2 was formulated based on five principles: Principle 1 (good urban governance); Principle 2 (liveable city); Principle 3 (competitive urban economy); Principle 4 (inclusive and just urban development); and Principle 5 (green development and clean environment).

However, a closer look at both NUP1 and NUP2 has shown that elements of culture and creativity that underscore a creative city is largely absent in both policies. Despite global tenets to acknowledge culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development (UCLG 2018; n.d.; UNESCO 2016) and sustainable urban development (Duxbury, Hosagrahar and Pascual 2016, 9), this emphasis is largely missing and not systematically incorporated in the NUP1 and NUP2. While Malaysia's broader economic development agenda has earmarked the pivotal role of the creative economy, but the emphasis of the creative economy is not reflected in tandem, like in this case, Malaysia's national urbanisation policies. Despite this cavity in national level policies, selective state government endeavours though ad-hoc in most cases, have attempted to embark on the "creative city route". Examples include Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Johor Bahru, to name a few. Except for Kuala Lumpur, which produced a Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District (KLCCD) Strategic Master Plan in August 2019, the other Malaysian cities are less organised or lack the capacity to systematically mobilise creative city as a sustainable urban development strategy. Noticeably, many Malaysian cities (e.g. George Town, Johor Bahru) and their respective city authorities are enthusiastic to adopt creative city and culture-led urban regeneration strategies as panacea to reinvigorate their decaying inner city (TCSB 2019a; 2019b; 2016a). Though a viable strategy, caution needs to be exercised when trying to replicate Western models of creative city development to Asian cities considering the variegated local nuances (Karvelyte 2018). Such cautionary notions were also highlighted by Minty (2021). He argued that there is tendency for Asian creative cities to unknowingly copy or adopt a "Xerox policy" mode by simply embracing Western creative city models by privileging Western cultural knowledge and cultural values, without adequate "self-reflexivity" or detailed adaptation to local contexts (Minty 2021, 229).

Due to unfamiliarity with the creative city concept amongst Malaysian policymakers, and the lack of acknowledgement of culture in urban planning and sustainable urban development; hence, the potential of the creative city concept was never systematically conceptualised in the NUP2; thus, the absence of motivation to advance cultural creativity in national level blueprints. Nevertheless, the existing city-level attempts by selected cities (i.e., Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Kuching)

to embrace the creative city concept are ad-hoc in nature and dependent on the preparedness of each city's leadership to integrate culture into urban planning.

NCP: Shifting Notions Amidst Globalisation

The creative city agenda in Malaysia cannot be detached from understanding its links to the NCP. Nonetheless, for a culturally varied and ethnically diverse nation like Malaysia, the NCP often becomes contentious (Mandal 2008). The original aim to formulate the policy was to nurture national unity among Malaysia's multi-ethnic society as means to consolidate the Malaysian identity. Broadly, the NCP is underscored by three principles. First, the culture of the indigenous groups, which is the Malay culture that forms the policy's basis. Second, the policy recognises the multi-cultural dimensions of Malaysians by incorporating appropriate and acceptable cultural aspects of other ethnic groups (i.e., Chinese, Indians, etc.). Finally, as Malaysia's official religion, Islam is a pivotal component in the NCP. The NCP courted controversial disputes over the years of its implementation. Malaysian scholars stood on opposing sides with some arguing that the policy should continue to champion Malay identity as the basis of national identity (Aziz 1986; Ismail 1990), while opponents contend that the policy ought to portray a Malaysia way of life reflective of a pluralistic and multi-ethnic Malaysian society (Rowland 2004; Zawawi 2004).

The above backdrop has its bearing on Malaysia's art, cultural and creative sectors. Scholars contended that the centrality of Malay culture had influenced the Malaysian government's direction of arts and cultural funding endeavours (Rowland 2004). During the 1980s, priority was accorded to Malay language cultural activities with higher accessibility to government support seen through funding and promotional activities (i.e., awards, competitions, festivals). However, from 1991 onwards, the new Bangsa Malaysia (Malaysian Nation) ideology was incepted and promoted by then Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. The aim is to build a more efficient and buoyant Malaysian nationalism that emerges in collaboration through inter-ethnic alliances, internationalisation and globalisation. Ever since, the NCP's centrality for Malays has been contested (Mandal 2008).

However, the post-millennium era promises a new lease of life for Malaysia's cultural scene. Acknowledging the changes and demands necessitated by sciences, technology and globalisation, Malaysia's NCP was revamped, and a new NCP was scheduled to be launched back in March 2020. As reported by the *Borneo Post Online* (2019), the refinement is based on the 1971 NCP where the new policy will provide guidelines to address the influx of foreign culture in Malaysia.

Arguably, the meaning of culture is not static but fluid. While safeguarding local cultures entails traditional, long-standing and evolving cultures of a territory, it should also integrate the cultures of new arrivals to a place, which contributes to the evolutionary and amalgamated transformations due to collective living in a culturally diverse setting (Duxbury, Hosagrahar and Pascual 2016, 9). In many culturally diverse developing societies, with Malaysia as no exception, culture is oftentimes framed and interpreted by the state as being static, inherent and race- or ethnic-based, rather than something fluid and contested, which forms the more contemporary understanding of culture. Such interpretations and priorities might not be emphasised in creative and cultural industries policy formation, particularly the policy agendas adopted from the West.

In Malaysia, when attempting to connect the broader NCP to policy matters at the city level, it became apparent that the NCP did not intersect with urban affairs directly. Perhaps the NCP was never formulated to go in that direction in the first place. The NCP was more of a nationalistic and patriotic policy blueprint, especially during the time when it was initially incepted, and its force never really permeated into urban realms.

NCIP: An Absentee Role?

The next related policy that emerged is the NCIP following the Prime Minister's 2010 Budget Address in 2009. The NCIP was issued by the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture (MICC), and the policy aims to align the Ministry of Tourism and Heritage (now known as Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia), the National Department for Culture and Arts, National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS) and Multimedia Development Corporation (MDEC) to form a national creative industries platform, where individually these agencies handled a smaller sub-sector of the newly-defined "creative industries". The NCIP is conceived to subscribe to the aspirations of the Vision 2020 that aims for Malaysia to achieve developed nation status by 2020 (Barker and Lee 2017, 22). This is a defining moment where creative industries as a label started to overshadow the tag cultural industries—a segment that never flourished to its full potential in the first place.

In Malaysia, the creative industries are defined as the production of capacity as well as individual or group talent based on creativity, innovation and technology inclined towards economic resource and high income for the nation. This is undertaken alongside emphasis towards arts and intellectual properties rights in line with the diverse cultures and values of Malaysia's pluralistic ethnicities (MICC 2010, 4). The scope of creative industries based on the NCIP is divided into three

main categories: (1) creative multimedia industries (i.e. film and TV production, advertisement, animation and digital content); (2) creative arts industries (i.e. crafts, visual arts, music, performing arts, creative writing, fashion and textile); and (3) creative cultural heritage industries (i.e. museums, archives, preservation, conservation).

The rationale for Malaysia's NCIP is to advance the economic and sociocultural elements of the nation for wealth creation, talent identification/development, internationalisation of local creative outputs and create societal awareness to expand local/international markets. Though the NCIP outlined in detail 11 strategies and a myriad of action plans to develop and advance Malaysia's creative industries, the policy has remained as a mere blueprint without running its actual course. The fact that it is published only in Malay language is also a deterrent to stakeholders who are less proficient in the language. The NCIP has invited critiques from both academics and practitioners alike as being a policy with "no traction" (ASM 2018) and "non-optimisation of adoption of the policy" (ibid.). Additionally, industry players also encountered issues of bureaucracy, poor coordination, mistrust and a perception that components of the industry are being marginalised from national development (ibid.). Despite being progressive and holistic in its scope on paper, the NCIP has dwindled in importance and is less influential in informing creative industries policy that were introduced since 2009 (Barker and Lee 2017), and as of Malaysian Budget 2014, the NCIP has vanished entirely from the government's policy domain (Malaysia Today 2013, as cited in Barker and Lee 2017, 33).

When contextualising NCIP within urban domains, the situation is somewhat similar to the analysis with the NCP. The NCIP was never referred and perhaps barely remembered by urban policymakers when formulating action plans to introduce the creative city agenda. This point was verified when interviewing officials at the various municipalities, where a majority of them shook their heads indicating either they have not heard about NCIP or never attempted to contextualise NCIP at the city level.

The Big Picture: Connecting the Dots

Just like the myriad ways that a creative city is understood in the literature, Malaysia has not operationally deciphered a creative city though attempts have been made to define the creative industries and creative economy. As seen above, the creative industries/creative economy definition and taxonomy by various agencies (i.e., Akademi Sains Malaysia [ASM], Department of Statistics) differ, and this will cause inconsistency in data collation. Presently, the fuzzy conceptualisation of the cultural/creative industries concept depends on the ministry, agency or

official's capacity in fathoming the conceptual notion. Though the creative city agenda never featured distinctively in any national Malaysian policies as discussed above, the idea nonetheless has crept into institutional action plans and undertaken individually at the state/city level by various government agencies. Hence, it is fair to say awareness is emerging and efforts are forthcoming but in a fragmented and ad-hoc manner. Malaysian cities that are fast hopping onto the creative city bandwagon seem to have strong state intervention to drive the creative industries/ creative economy in these cities. These scenarios imply a supply-side situation that is welcomed at the outset, where there is strong government intervention seen through channeling of enormous funds to selected urban areas to develop the creative industries. Such indiscriminate investments supplied by the government, however, might not be sustainable in the long run. A case in point is Iskandar Malaysia in Johor where massive infrastructural developments were channeled there by the government to develop the creative industries, which have been earmarked as one of the nine economic pillars to transform Malaysia into a high-income, value-added, innovative and diversified economy. Launched in 2013, the Pinewood-Iskandar Studios in Johor is a joint-investment between the Pinewood-Shepperton company (UK) and Khazanah Nasional Berhad (Malaysian government's investment arm) with a construction cost of USD170 million (RM550 million). To date, the Pinewood-Iskandar Studio is akin to a white elephant, where the use of space has been sluggish, and the aspiration of transforming the site into Asia's centre for international film production never turned into reality.

Insofar, key government agencies that facilitate the growth of cultural and creative industries in Malaysian cities are the Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) and Think City (a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional). The following sections will illustrate the milestones, promise and perils as Malaysia policymakers opt for the creative city pathway.

Cultural and Creative Cities in Malaysia: Some Milestones

The aspiration to transform Kuala Lumpur into a Cultural and Creative City was widely showcased by CENDANA in 2018. Established by the Malaysian government to develop a dynamic, sustainable and ambitious cultural economy for the country, CENDANA has three key focus sectors, namely performing arts, visual arts and independent music. Broadly, CENDANA strives to enhance Malaysia's art and cultural scene by professionalising local arts talents, increase empowerment, market access and networks in cultural economy for wider investment opportunities, and advocate a framework to support and develop sustainable growth in Malaysia's art and cultural sector. Evidently, the role and functionalities of CENDANA are predominantly for artists and cultural workers in the art and cultural sector. As a

platform for funding and capacity building for Malaysian creative and cultural practitioners, CENDANA is indeed an avenue to advance the tenets of cultural inclusion, cultural rights, cultural democracy, cultural sustainability and freedom to express one's cultural expression as espoused in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. These are achieved through CENDANA's three strategies: (1) energise the arts; (2) empower the communities; and (3) reorganise policies. In achieving (1) and (2), CENDANA functions as a conduit to generate more demand for the arts by making arts more easily accessible through public programming, centralised online portal for cultural events and public relations campaigns. Malaysian artistic expressions will also be marketed both domestically and internationally. On the supply side, CENDANA also focuses on capacity building in the art in addition to providing assistance in spaces, supporting international residencies, and incepting an arts investment initiative to finance creative projects. In ensuring cultural sustainability, all existing policies and frameworks are reviewed and refined by CENDANA to ensure that they are more efficient, holistic and inclusive (CENDANA n.d.a). Cultural diversity is particularly significant in a pluralistic society, like Malaysia, that is still undergoing the acculturalisation process with the influx of foreign migrants and expatriates entering Malaysia. As argued by Duxbury, Hosagrahar and Pascual (2016), a culturally varied setting that involves collective living will need to integrate the cultures of new arrivals to a place as part of contributing to the changing dynamism of the place. This process, inevitably, begs the question of acceptance and respect for cultural diversity and will have ramifications for Malaysia's creative and cultural policies.

Though CENDANA's priorities are inclined towards art, heritage and culture, and less towards technology-based creative industries (i.e., animation, gaming, etc.), the agency has attempted to intersect cultural endeavours with city-making. Through a project initiated by Think City (a local urban regeneration think-tank) and British Council Malaysia, CENDANA aimed to mobilise Kuala Lumpur's cultural endowments and utilise arts to transform the outlook and atmosphere of a city. These aspirations were captured in their "Kuala Lumpur as a Cultural and Creative City report" published in 2018. The report focused on six sectors: (1) music, performing arts, visual arts; (2) museums and archives; (3) literature and publishing; (4) crafts; (5) design, fashion and textiles; and (6) film, broadcasting and digital content. While these sectors differ from those proposed by ASM and the NCIP taxonomy, they are earmarked as being vibrant and dynamic cultural sectors found within the parameters of Kuala Lumpur. This sheds light towards reconstructing the creative city concept based on "city boundaries/parameters" because different urban milieus will possess and showcase different sets of assets. Arguably, a city cannot be hardwired into accepting the generic definition coined in the West or even by Malaysia's own state agencies.

Subsequently, the cultural and creative prowess of Kuala Lumpur were again spotlighted when Think City collaborated with Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and National Heritage Department to produce a KLCCD Strategic Master Plan (CENDANA n.d.b.). Although Kuala Lumpur never underwent the de-industrialisation process like most Western cities, the way Greater Kuala Lumpur is rapidly developing has inevitably caused Kuala Lumpur's historic core to struggle as traditional enterprises and original urban dwellers are evicted and displaced as the inner city hollows out and the population plummets. To turn this around, the KLCCD Master Plan adopted the Historic Urban Landscape approach to create inclusive, creative and viable cultural places within Kuala Lumpur's existing historic structure to enhance liveability, attract visitors and also facilitate social, cultural and economic benefits for inner city Kuala Lumpur (TCSB 2019a). Similarly, Think City in collaboration with Penang Institute (research arm of Penang state government) and Universiti Sains Malaysia embarked on a study to collect baseline data of Penang's creative and cultural sector in 2015, which involved George Town (capital city and historic core) and selected suburbs (i.e., Bayan Lepas) in the state that have high clustering of creative industries. Key findings revealed that although there were developments in the past five years, traditional cultural industries in the heritage core are at risk, and the creative content industry is fragmented and small. The study also highlighted that there is no comprehensive state creative/cultural policy to develop and incubate Penang's creative and cultural sectors in an integrated fashion despite federal and state government commitment of the sectors and acknowledgement of their socioeconomic value (TCSB 2016a, 3).

Additional evidence that the creative city agenda is gradually gaining traction in urban policy sphere is during the recent Malaysian Urban Forum held from 28–30 September 2020. As an inclusive platform for all stakeholders to converge and exchange viewpoints/solutions to redress urbanisation issues/challenges, the forum is aligned with United Nations-Habitat's National Urban Forum framework that promotes inclusive discussions as ways to enhance Malaysia's urbanisation strategies, policies, programmes and actions to advocate the sustainable urban agenda. It is noticed that culture and creative cities was earmarked as one out of the five sub-themes highlighted for the forum (Urbanice 2020) although creative city development was never mentioned before in broader macro policies, like the NUP1 and NUP2. This is purportedly amongst the Malaysian government's maiden endeavours to formally recognise culture, creativity and the importance of cultural planning in urban development at a national level event.

Generally, there seem to be variegated expressions of the creative city in Malaysia with a majority of cities fusing both Landry (culture-centric) and Florida's (econo-

centric) orientations, suggesting a hybridised form playing out in Malaysian cities but in varying scale and magnitude. Examples include George Town, Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur (Khoo and Chang 2021). However, within these cities too, there are signs of infusing "creativity" (akin to technology and innovation adoption/ adaptation) to revitalise old heritage businesses and trades, whilst at the same instance herald the entry of gentrifiers who bring along new forms of businesses and activities. In George Town's recent Population and Land Use Survey 2019, the study recommended the need to leverage the cultural and heritage assets in inner George Town, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to attract activities aligned to technology and creative industries plus the requisite talent to support them. Selected parts of George Town are earmarked to become innovation and digital hubs for the intersection of culture, heritage and technology (TCSB 2021, 65). As for city-regions like Iskandar Malaysia, it tends to be more technology-driven in espousing the creative city concept, where economic activities that subsume within their development blueprints are less culture-centric and more technology-oriented (i.e., gaming, animation, etc.).

Creative hubs in Malaysia

Apart from city-based initiatives, the Malaysian creative city agenda is in fact in existence all this while but subtly manifested, for instance, through the label of creative hubs.In advanced economies, the creative hub concept as engine to drive the creative economy towards creative city development has garnered attention in policy circles (Virani 2015; Gill, Pratt and Virani 2019). The importance of creative hub is attributable to its position within the broader city setting. As elucidated by AuthentiCity (2008), the clustering of creative hubs in urban settings forms the subset, and will collectively facilitate the growth and sustainability of creative industries, creative economy and ultimately the development of a sustainable creative city. In Malaysia, while systematic identification and use of this concept is still lacking, it does not mean a homegrown Malaysian creative hub concept does not exist. There is growing presence and variations of creative hubs in Malaysia today.

For instance, in British Council's study of connecting creative communities by which creative hubs in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines were identified and mapped out, there is evidence that creative hubs existed in Malaysia albeit manifested in sub-forms like arts and community spaces (i.e., Rimbun Dahan, The Actor Studio), networks (i.e., Malaysian Writers Community), clusters (i.e., Zhongshan Building, Kilang Bateri) and even as event convenors (i.e., George Town Festival, Art for Grabs) (British Council 2017, 3). Broadly, Malaysian creative hubs can be delineated into two categories (i.e., science

and high-tech versus arts and culture). This delineation is shaped by national aspirations and policies. Following then premier Mahathir Mohamad's vision during the 1990s, creative hubs tended to be tech-laden and futuristic, where the government channeled massive investments into digital technology and the formation of Cyberjaya (a Silicon Valley-inspired area), which subsequently boosted investment in technology and the start-up sector. However, about the same time too, arts practitioners and enthusiasts formed their own spaces like the art residency Rimbun Dahan in 1994 and trans-disciplinary theatre collective Five Arts Centre in 1995. These spaces were alternative avenues amidst government censorship and restrictions on the arts. At the turn of the millennium in 2000s, creative arts festivals like Urbanscapes kicked off in Kuala Lumpur providing new possibilities for the city's cadre of youth and creatives. This was also the time that blogging and new media culture set in. Spaces like The Annexe Gallery transformed into a communication space between activists and artists (British Council 2017, 2).

UNESCO-centric affiliations and aspirations

Creative and cultural pursuits in Malaysian cities thus far seem to have UNESCO-centric affiliations or aspirations. On a broader perspective, this is viewed as the way the dynamisms of global cultural governance (predominantly by global entities like UNESCO) and local cultural planning intersect, connect and unfold. The dynamics are observable in three forms. First, international bodies (i.e. UNESCO, UN) will try to reach out to the local level through different programmes and initiatives. Second, individual cities view international "designation" or affiliations as being appealing for "symbolic value" purposes, a mark of distinction and subsequent prospects for economic revenues. Third, the locally-based networks of local authorities who collectively endeavour to shape global cultural policies that eventually cascade down to support local initiatives and endeavours. This encompasses "glocalization" actions based on city-to-city networks and collaboration (Duxbury and Jeanotte 2013, 517–518). Undoubtedly, UNESCO's role, their programmes and presence are gradually permeating into Malaysian urban realms. But the way these three elements and their dynamics unfold in Malaysian cities vary in scale, magnitude and manifestation. Though there are emerging interests of cultural planning and development in selected Malaysian cities (i.e. George Town, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh), systematic integration of culture in all realms of urban planning and sustainable urban development is still at its infancy.

In Malaysia, the confluence of cultural/creative industry development and cities is shown through UNESCO endeavours like World Heritage Site designation or network of cities. For instance, George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site

that was inscribed on 7 July 2008 is leveraging the city's cultural diversity and eclecticism to stimulate local economic development. Since the 2008 accolade, the George Town Festival (GTF) was organised annually in honour of the city's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and to celebrate local/international works of art. After more than a decade, GTF has gained recognition as a global festival. GTF is a project by George Town World Heritage Incorporated (World Heritage Office) and predominantly funded by state coffers (i.e. Penang State Government). Though George Town's UNESCO-designation is meant to foster conservation practices and advocate community-based policies to drive local development whilst conserving the city's cultural heritage and providing guidance to local communities to manage the site for sustainable tourism, but recent evidences have shown that gentrification have caused uncontrolled mass tourism and undermined George Town's intangible living heritage (Foo and Krishnapillai 2018). The importance of harnessing George Town and Penang's creative economy is obvious with the state's recent revamp of state portfolio from Penang Tourism, Arts, Culture and Heritage (PETACH) to its new acronym PETACE (Penang State Exco for Tourism and Creative Economy), where arts, culture and heritage are parked under the creative economy (*Buletin Mutiara* 2020). For George Town historic city, while the city has credence to be considered as a UNESCO Creative City (Khoo et al. 2015; Khoo and Nurwati 2014), caution is needed to balance the downsides of creative city development such as cultural gentrification, over-tourism and social exclusion (Khoo 2020).

In Malaysia, Kuching is the first Malaysian city to be listed as UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2021. Additionally, other Malaysian cities are recognised regionally, for example, George Town which is a member of the Southeast Asian Creative Cities Network. Concurrently, efforts are underway to form a Malaysia Cultural and Creative Cities Network (MCCN) by CENDANA. On 28 April 2019, the inaugural meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur in collaboration with Penang Art District and Think City. The MCCN can function as an avenue for local governments and city councils to network and exchange best practices among Malaysian cities on culture and creative assets for social, environmental and economic development (CENDANA 2019). Despite this platform, efforts towards systematically developing Malaysian creative cities are still at its infancy given the lack of capacity and human talent to mobilise this agenda nationwide. Interviews with state officials revealed that local authorities like the Penang Island City Council had submitted its applications to be admitted to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), but was unsuccessful. Similarly, Ipoh City Council also aims to leverage Ipoh's creative and cultural assets, and this endeavour is clearly spelt out in their Special Area Plan. While the Iskandar Malaysia Comprehensive Development Plan 2005 envisioned downtown Johor Bahru as a centre for

heritage, culture, urban tourism, education, creative services, retail, administrative and financial services (TCSB 2019b), but a recent baseline study of the historic core revealed that the city's cultural, creative and knowledge economy activities are limited, and the residential population is small and predominantly made up of low-income households (TCSB 2016b, 66). Worse still, Johor Bahru often pales in the shadow of neighboring Singapore which is a vibrant UNESCO Creative City of Design.

THE WAY FORWARD

As more Malaysian cities aspire to emulate the creative city pathway, this article argues that the concept may be vaguely understood and the outcomes unevenly achieved due to the ad-hoc manner that the concept is embraced—without clear strategic directions except for major Malaysian cities (i.e. Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru). The conceptual conundrums between culture and creativity as Malaysia embraces the knowledge and creative economy trajectory further compound this. Though scholars acknowledge the tensions between culture and economics (O'Connor 2010), leveraging cultural and creative industries to drive urban regeneration does highlight the economic value of culture and how it can be valorised. However, the dearth of human capital, knowledge and capacity building to incorporate and operationalise the roles of culture and creativity within Malaysia's urban policies and broader policy domains underscore the issue. This is further exacerbated when national level policies (i.e. NUP1 and NUP2) never mentioned culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. The interconnection between culture, creativity and sustainable development is also insufficiently fathomed in Malaysian urban development discourse, and this is further exacerbated by the conceptual and operational ambiguities surrounding the concepts/terminologies across state agencies and among/within Malaysian cities, which are socio-spatially uneven. These conceptual/taxonomy/operational conundrums resonate the arguments by scholars in the field (Karvelyte 2018; Galloway and Dunlop 2007). The value of culture and cultural creativity in urban milieus are also largely divorced from industry policy and other public policy domains in Malaysia.

Nonetheless, with city networks gradually proliferating like the emerging MCCN and aspirations/applications to be admitted into UCCN by some Malaysian cities, it is clear that labels like "network of cities" and "UNESCO affiliations" are indeed instruments and mechanisms of global cultural governance shaping cultural planning practices at the local level, though responses and actual implementation vary across Malaysian cities due to contextual differences and cultural politics

at the local level. As argued by Duxbury and Jeannotte (2013, 517), the reality of bridging theory to practical aspects between mechanisms of global cultural governance and cultural planning practices at the local level is both stimulating and frustrating. The Malaysian scenario resonates this paradox. With a developing nation mindset and the constant need to be competitive, many Malaysian cities are carrying the competitive mode mindset to enhance their urban competitiveness thus global recognition/designations are much desired. Such global accolades will not only enhance the city's symbolic cultural value and etch their distinctiveness globally, but also forecasts monetary rewards as the eventual outcome. No doubt that the UCCN has highlighted creative tourism as part of tourism-based returns following the designation, however, a sustainable and inclusive model of creative and cultural tourism needs to be in place and be aligned with place-specificities and local nuances. In Malaysia, the conundrum surrounding cultural tourism is felt across Malaysian UNESCO historic cities like George Town where there is constant fear and resistance by civil society groups towards the existing cultural and heritage tourism model that purportedly disregards sustainable development tenets (i.e. carrying capacity, limits); thus, risking urban cultural endowments that were instrumental towards the city's inscription/designation (Foo and Krishnapillai, 2018).

Except for several major Malaysian cities like Kuala Lumpur, George Town, Johor Bahru where there are clearer strategic directions, otherwise, the question of "where" and "how" does the creative city agenda position itself within government narratives is unclear given that the endeavour is not clearly fathomed by urban managers. The way forward for policy approaches is towards cross-thematic integration of culture and creativity across all policy domains and interconnections with civic spheres interlinking human capital, socio-spatial planning, housing, transportation, mobility, inclusion and governance. While global entities like UNESCO will assist state parties to develop comprehensive management plans for designation as a creative city, it will largely rely on partners at the national, sub-national and local levels to implement and manage the plans. Aspiring Malaysian creative cities still have much to be reckoned with when connecting theories and practicalities of global cultural governance vis-à-vis mobilising cultural planning in Malaysian urban settings. Steps need to be taken to instrumentalise and legitimise the nation's cultural or creative policy with other policy domains. More holistic understanding and concerted efforts have to be partaken by the state and relevant stakeholders to first comprehend the multiplicity of meanings, interpretations, debates, upsides and downsides attached to the notion of creative city, particularly in a culturally diverse nation like Malaysia. In the current epoch of urbanisation, most Malaysian cultural and creative development endeavours will be planned in urban settings. Apart from urban policies, other related public policies like culture,

education, industry, economics, environment, social inclusion and such, need to be considered and integrated in the discourse in order to develop culturally sensitive and sustainable Malaysian creative cities in the long run.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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