“Space of production and production of space – A comparative case study between the cultural creative industries in India and Hong Kong”

Reported by: Chan Ka-yi

Introduction:
Reason of the research
Under rapid growth of urbanization in metropolitan cities, urban renewal and land utilization policy is taking a major position to the daily lives. This research is to collect information from individual cases in the cultural creative industries in India and Hong Kong for further study of cultural policy in the notion of land use. Moreover, these examples would demonstrate how land policy is affecting the mode of production to art space and creative industry in the notion of space politics that would reflect the inter-relationship of human and space as described in “Space of production” by Lefebvre:

“(Social) space is a (social) product……the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it. The social and political (state) forces which engendered this space now seek, but fail, to master it completely; the very agency that has forced spatial reality towards a sort of uncontrollable autonomy now strives to run it into the ground, then shackle and enslave it.”

Henri Lefebvre (1974)³

Background of selected locations and art space:
The following art spaces are selected for this research because of their popularity in the creative industry and the involvement from the local community. Most of the space are performance art related organizations and production units (except The Loft at Lower Parel in Mumbai). And I would like to start this comparative case study report with outlining their information in 3 aspects: (1) how to start; (2) production of art; and (3) future plans...

---
How to start

Ranga Shankara was established in 2004 by Arundhati Nag as a memorial to her actor-director husband, Shankar Nag (1955-1990), who spent his whole life to theatre. He dreamed to create an inclusive space for theatre and theatre lovers in Bangalore. After his sudden death, his wife and friends picked up his dream and started a trust fund, the Sanket Trust, in 1992. They started negotiation with the government and convincing donors to setup the first art space which is dedicated to only theatre art in Bangalore.2

The state government sold the land to Sanket Trust at very low cost and Arundhati spent over 10 years to build Ranga Shankara. Hundreds of donors were involved and many helps from volunteers, Ranga Shankara was began with a festival that received grants from the government, cultural department and embassy’s supports. And now it is operating with “A Play a Day” philosophy that is presenting more than 300 performances a year with a 320-seat auditorium space and many open areas in the building for the community and public uses.

---

2 Ranga Shankara is the first pure theatre art space in Bangalore whilst the second in India. The first pure theatre art space in India is Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai.
Productions of art
Ranga Shankara produced a lot of art festivals when it started and received many grants and fundings from government and donors that allowed them to expand their productions to other directions instead of just providing a venue for performances. Inside the building, other than the auditorium, there are spaces for exhibitions, installations, free performances for public, a bookstore, a café, some workshops and training classes. They also went to schools and institutions to provide art education workshops to students and teachers which were conducted by famous actors and actresses. Furthermore, they organized sharing sessions with international theatre artists for cross cultural collaborations in India.

“A play a day” with open entrance to welcome community to join all kinds of activities inside

Exhibition area

Bookstore

Public performance space

Café
**Future plans**

When Ranga Shankara in the progress to build up their missions to theatre art, Bangalore city was also expanded in the past 10 years. Ranga Shankara is becoming more popular to the local community and overseas now. They will produce more workshops on art education for children and youths in schools. Recently, they started theatre training for toddlers (around 1.5 to 2.5 years old) on stage. They need to expand the number and age range of participants because government grants are difficult to get now. Their major incomes are coming from rental fee, selling tickets, funding and grants which can only make their expenses break-even every month. It would become more difficult to sustain if they cannot keep developing new projects and workshops to explore new participants and incomes. They will try hard to keep sustainable and wishing more performance arts and theatre space will spread all over the country. By promoting art education in schools, they want more people know that theatre art is part of their daily lives and get more involvements.

**Location 2: Bangalore**

**Art space: Jaaga**

**Address:** No. 68, KH Double Road, Opp. Corporation Bank, Next to the KH Road Bus Stand, Bangalore 560027, India

**Website:** www.jaaga.in

**Interview:** Kiran D – Facilities Manager (Co-founder)

**How to start**

Jaaga means “space” in Hindi and their team started in 2009. It was co-founded and directed by Archana Prasad who is a visual artist, designer and activist. With her
believe on “Space can be adapted, built, moved...it’s DIY”,
Jaaga is a community initiator for people to construct their own environment. With receiving special rent rate from the landlord, Jaaga constructed their building on a wasted land. The building is a rack supported building which is built from heavy duty shelving components called pallet racks. They provide space for artists, art workers, tech groups and social organizations to meet and work. There are meeting spaces, plenty of desks and seatings, a performance area, a banquet hall at top floor, rooms for residency, organic garden, organic food store and a café that runs by the landlord. Free wifi service is provided and recently they are building new space, e.g. the mud room for more events like screening and lectures can be held inside. So Jaaga is a space that is under modifications all time for the users and the needs of community to explore more varieties and possibilities within an art space.

Production of Art
There are many regular programs held in Jaaga like: DesignNow, Digital Wednesdays, Travellers Thursdays, TEDxDouble Road, Poetry Across Borders, Pecha Kucha Nights and Second to None Flea Market which produced a lot of exposures and opportunities of collaborations for art workers from different art fields. Jaaga is the co-organizer of these programs that they work with different initiators and organizations that receiving supports from volunteers and donors. They did not expect any funding nor grant from the

government since there are too many restrictions and regulations that might affect their creativities and possibilities. But sometimes they still received some funding to individual projects from the government. Their major incomes are membership fee of co-workers, donation, rent from the space and residencies. So to minimize their expenses, there are only 3 full-time staffs employed to take care of 8,000 square feet space and daily maintenance. Their production is highly focusing on produce an art space for all kinds of art productions.

**Future Plan**
Since Jaaga is a non-profit non-government organization in Bangalore, their future plan is to keep sustainable by itself. They started a new learning practice calls Jaaga U to facilitate online learning. Members can join different study groups with different topics (mainly are related to arts and culture) and there are remote expert mentors answering problems by fixed online hours and emails. Furthermore, from January 2013, any Jaaga members can be a host of an event by renting a space at Jaaga for more public recognitions.

Besides, they had started a project, The Jaaga Media Centre, to explore more possibilities from virtual space by helping local people use digital media to become better informed and more effective in supporting themselves. Moreover this
project could help to generate public awareness in the arts, technology and socio-cultural space. The founders of Jaaga noticed that the land and landlord’s decision on the use of land are important. They need to generate more popularity and exposure to the city and all over the country that people will aware that space and the use of space are important to their lives. They need to re-create the space together for themselves. If they did not get support from the land owner and the community, they would not be able to sustain.

Location 3: Mumbai
Art space: The Loft at Lower Parel
Address: New Mahalaxmi Silk Mills, Mathuradas Mills Compound, Tulsi Pipe Road, Lower Parel, Mumbai 400013, India
Website: www.theloft.in
Interview: assistant of Anupa Mehta

How to start
The Loft at Lower Parel was initiated by Anupa Mehta in 2008 and located in Mahalaxmi Silk Mills where is inside an industrial estate. Anupa is an arts consultant, arts manager, a published writer and columnist. She wants to promote art and young artists with her varied experiences and interests by using this art space. It is a commercial gallery that provides exhibitions by curators, working space and residency arrangement in Mumbai city centre. The gallery is privately owned by Anupa and she rents a showroom with office space in Mathuradas Mills Compound at around 1,000 square feet. It is self-sustainable with adequate art projects, collectors, local and international artists.

Production of Art
The Loft at Lower Parel is a gallery and the office for Anupa to do her art administration works. Usually, she will use this location for meetings with her...
clients and artists. Artists will display their best artworks on the walls and sometimes artists can use the space to make some artistic installations. They will prepare some folders and catalogues of their collections for clients to look through their stock if they want to purchase some of the artworks from them. So The Loft at Lower Parel is an agent and art dealer in the creative industry of Mumbai and this kind of art agency is very common in a cosmopolitan city like Mumbai.

Usually, artists will produce their artworks at home and send their artworks to galleries and exhibition space for promotion and sell. They can produce any types of artworks style subject to the market needs or self preferences. And they will need curators, critiques and galleries to promote their works that can enter the art market for art consumers. Some artists can get rich from selling their artworks that can provide them enough capital to buy a big space in city centre. So the artworks of famous artists can be made in larger scale whilst young artists and less well-known artists would need to stay further away from city centre before they get famous and wealthy.

**Future Plan**

Anupa is very busy with many art projects at the moment that she is not too worried about the sustainability of her gallery. Gallery business of creative industry in Mumbai is getting popular and profitable in the international art scene also. With more supports from private companies and commercial brands, The Loft in Lower Parel will become more popular and famous in international art scene and creative industry.
Location 4: Hong Kong
Art space: Loftstage
Address: Block A to D, 8th Floor, Chinachem Industrial Building, San Po Kong, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Website: www.loftstage.com
Interview: Horace Tse Kin-man (founder)

How to start
Loftstage is a space filled with rehearsal rooms for all kinds of performance arts since 2001. It was founded by Horace Tse Kin-man who is also a theatre actor and producer. More than ten years ago, he found there was lack of rehearsal space in Hong Kong and many of them were occupied by well known art groups with better resources most of the time. There was not enough rehearsal space for small and young groups to produce better and more professional performances in the city. So he started to explore the cheapest rental space in the city and found it in a building of an industrial district. The building was located at the boundary of an industrial district and it was abandoned for quite a long time. It was not attractive to the factory business because the space is not big enough for large machines and there is no loading bay for trucks and lorries. But Horace found it was very suitable for rehearsals since the rent was low and it was easy to access from public transportations. He paid the rent and modified the space from his own pocket and turned it into rehearsal rooms with different sizes. Without receiving any sponsors or grant from any person nor the government, Horace decided to run Loftstage on his own which he thought it was the easiest way to operate. He sub-leased the rooms to performance artists and theatre groups to keep Loftstage being self-sustainable. And he became an administrator and facilitator to take care of the daily maintenance of the space.

By receiving more demands from performance art groups and artists, he expanded Loftstage in 2005 and 2007. Now he has 18,000 square feet to take care and
employed two full-time staffs to help his daily works. Since there are more activities and more people coming to Loftstage, they provide more facilities like: bathrooms, washrooms, self-service pantry and rest area for common use as well. And they setup a membership scheme to keep record of the users and audiences. Today, Loftstage is a very popular and well known performance art space in Hong Kong art scene and it was started by the passions from Horace only.

**Production of Art**

In Loftstage, since 2001, many activities with short term leasing were produced, e.g. drama classes, dancing classes, yoga classes, music classes, indie theatre performances, seminars, discussion forums, artists sharing sessions, etc. Besides, there are long term leasing tenants that will use the space for performance practicing, rehearsals, online radio stations, offices for art magazine publishers and art administrators. All users can gain full flexibility to use the space and only very basic house rules and regulations that are required to fulfill. To encourage more creative ideas when using the space, Horace always discusses with tenants and listens to their feedbacks while they come to Loftstage. He keeps modifying the space to create a better atmosphere for tenants and to generate more inspirations when they work here. Interestingly, there is a “common area effect” created when art workers from different art groups met at the common area in Loftstage. They will sit together and chat about new possibilities and future projects to work together. Some new ideas of projects and performances were created from this kind of situation. So the common area is part of the art production (and quite an important) space to the users and visitors.
Future Plan
Horace is not making a big amount of money from Loftstage since he understands small art groups cannot afford expensive rental rate. For him, Loftstage can only make small profit and keep low maintenance cost each month. But what makes him keeps running this space is he wants to work as a demonstration (or prototype model) to other passionate people and especially the Hong Kong government who owns resources of space. He is disappointed that he is the only person in Hong Kong who is providing an applicable space for the needs of practicing performance artists and considers nurturing small art groups. “The Hong Kong government should consider the needs of art production space for local art groups when they are spending tons of investments to build many theatres and performance stages at international standard. And Loftstage is an example of what they (the local artists) really need.” Horace said. By keeping Loftstage survives, he keeps the voice to express the needs of performance art to the Hong Kong government.

Location 5: Hong Kong
Art space: Hey Theatre
Address: Unit L6-07, Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, 30 Pak Tin Street, Shek Kip Mei, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Website: www.etdrama.org.hk, go.to/heytheatre
Interview: Karley Ng Ka-hai (founder)
How to start
Karley Ng Ka-hai is the founder of Exploration Theatre since 1982. He graduated from Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts with a major in directing in 1988. With his extensive experience and awards winning in Hong Kong and overseas theatre, he is an advisor, accessor and examiner for the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (Drama) and a member of Ad Hoc Committee on Drama-in-Education Curriculum of the Education and Manpower Bureau from 2002 to 2004. In recent years, he focuses on drama education that made his decision to move his office into Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre (JCCAC) in 2008 since the location is closer to local community and schools. JCCAC is an old and abandoned industrial building built in 1980s and converted into an art centre to accommodate different kinds of art forms and artist workshop studios in 2008. The space that Karley rented (for his office originally) is about 600 square feet and Hey Theatre is a black box theatre built inside his office. “This might be the smallest black box theatre in Hong Kong.” Karley said during our interview, “And we have many professional equipment and theatre lightings that need to fit into a small space which is a challenge.”

Hey Theatre started their first performance in 2012 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Exploration Theatre. Karley converted half of the office space (around 350 square feet) into a black box theatre with around 30 seats for the audience. Due to Exploration Theatre is a well known theatre group and drama education provider in Hong Kong, they received fundings from government...
continuously since 1990s. It helped them to establish a resourceful network with different institutions and audience in Hong Kong. Karley, as an experienced director in Exploration Theatre and Hey Theatre, can manage to run a project by himself whilst all staffs and actors are working as project based for him. He can keep all expenses as minimal as possible to his projects. After he moved into JCCAC, he thought he could make use of the as-build facilities and space (e.g. the black box theatre at bottom floor, the space in atrium and common area at every floor) for his performances that allowed him to rent a small space for his office. But after 4 years of observation and liaisons with JCCAC management, he found that the as-build facilities are not feasible for his performances due to many restrictions and management reasons. So he decided to create his own black box theatre inside his office at the 4th year of his rental period. And this smallest black box theatre, Hey Theatre, in Hong Kong becomes one of his major incomes beside government fundings, sponsors from private corporate and drama education in schools.

Production of Art

In past 30 years, Exploration Theatre produced over 2,000 performances and workshops, more than a hundred drama projects, reach more than 650,000 people from the works they did. They also trained thousands of young people, teachers and professionals. Karley keeps being creative and always explores new possibilities. After moved into JCCAC, he tried collaborations with other artists in different art forms to explore and create new artworks, e.g. painters, dancers, musicians, sculptors, Chinese paper cutting art, improvising performance, interior designer, graphic designer, animator, film maker, puppet maker, photographers and whoever he could meet in the centre. Everyone in the centre knows Karley and he enjoys living in the community with lots of innovative people around.

The second performance in Hey Theatre will be launched in Jan 2013. Karley found there are a lot of possibilities can be created inside his own black box theatre and he keeps creating new performances and writing more scripts for the space. Moreover,
other performers are welcome to use the space if they found it is also suitable for them.

**Future Plan**
Drama education is still the major works in Exploration Theatre in future because Karley thinks nurturing new artists and audiences are important to Hong Kong art scene. And he is the only person in Hong Kong that promoting drama education that integrated into popular school syllabus. He will train more trainers/teachers to spread his idea more widely.

Beside showing more performances, Hey Theatre will also be a drama education venue for small and experimental performances in future. Karley will keep it as a small and alternative art space for more variety of choices to create art.

**Conclusions**

A.  Problems of the art groups
Ranga Shankara became the only organization that could sustain with pure theatre art in Bangalore since government’s land policy and cultural policy did not recognize their success and the needs from daily lives of the community. Lands became more expensive and profit making if the landlords decided to invest and re-develop their capitals into commercial buildings and shopping centers. The government is reluctant to provide more land just for cultural development whilst there is no specific land policy to allow provisions for cultural use. Art space becomes less significant in community because of the policy making process makes it become a lower priority to their daily lives.

Jaaga thought they are lucky that the government is too busy with other issues (not about art and culture issues) in the city and takes less attention to them. And they wish to keep good relationship with the land owner that he/she can keep supporting them with low rent and open the space for public use. They will be careful when talk about social and political issues that would not draw too much attention from the government. They know their building is an illegal structure and it might cause danger if any emergency happens. But they want to keep this space as flexible as possible to allow more imaginations to the community. So they do not mind to break the laws sometimes if the community and more people can come to enjoy the space.
Different from other visited art space in India, The Loft at Lower Parel is staying in a quiet and low profile studio space inside a commercial and industrial area. Since Anupa runs around the city all the time, it is convenient for her to allocate her office at the heart of Mumbai. The only problem is she does not know the city planning in future. There are a few construction sites around her space that might bring more customers to her gallery but might affect her rental becomes higher in future. This situation becomes a norm to all metropolitan cities and creative industry (especially movie industry) in Mumbai is a market with demands and supplies that could live with the economic growth.

The major problem that Loftstage is facing in Hong Kong is their corridors do not pass the requirements of fire regulation. Horace and his landlord keep receiving warning letters from different government departments in recent years. But he never allows the government supervisors to go inside his premises that no further actions can be took. His landlord is also trying to protect him with being un-cooperative to the supervisors’ requests. Horace understands his landlord cannot protect him all the time but they will try their best to keep Loftstage survives because this place is meaningful for Hong Kong performance art. And ignoring “unreasonable” laws is the only action they can do at this moment until they have enough power to ask for changes to the government and law.

Hey Theatre is the youngest theatre space established by the most experienced theatre director. Karley used to solve different kind of problems with Exploration Theatre in past 30 years but new problems keep coming up when new ideas rise. He found there are more fundamental problems with the education system and teaching materials that make young people disregard the importance of art and culture to their lives. When there is lack of cultural policy in the government, every aspect in the society (including decisions on use of land) are lack of visions on nurturing local arts and culture.

Afterall, all the art spaces I visited in India and Hong Kong are facing the problems of cultural policy being absence in the progress of policy making on the use of land. So I would like to raise this issue and suggest a detail study on the relationship between land policy and cultural policy as an extension of this research.
B. Land policy and cultural policy

In India, there is no specific cultural policy to allow certain facilities for cultural space during allocation of urban planning. I interviewed Raghu Tenkayala who is a lawyer that received an overview of legal system for cultural policy making and providing information on main legal provisions in the cultural field. “When people saying Indian culture, they will image that is full of diversities and filled with long historical background. But if we look into the details of cultural policy in India, there is only limited ‘types’ of art forms are claimed as Indian culture and will be considered as part of basic needs under the plan of urban development.” Raghu said.

Similarly, cultural policy is also absence in Hong Kong. There are a lot of urban renewal projects undertaking in the city and many districts are being re-developed. Space for cultural facilities is indicated as part of the Comprehensive Development Area (CDA) which means part of community facilities.\(^4\) Besides, only art venues and libraries are mentioned in the guideline as cultural facilities. There is not any standard indication nor requirements to allow certain floor area for cultural facilities. The needs from the community are subject to the assessment and advised by the Secretary for Home Affairs which public consultation can be optional to certain districts. Therefore, no guarantee is made to allocate cultural facilities in a society.

In this research, I asked every interviewee the same question, “Do you think we need a cultural policy to indicate certain percentage of land use for creative industry and cultural productions?” I got different answers from different cities. In Bangalore, they said they need a cultural policy to provide more resources which include funding and space. In Mumbai, the gallery owners and artists think the commercial market will allocate the use of land “naturally” since they are living in a city that all consumable things are based on the needs of the market. In Hong Kong, the interviewees think they will need a cultural bureau that can solve their existing problems on use of industrial buildings by integrating all related government department to provide more concerns on cultural rights in the community.

\(^4\) From “Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines – Summary” by Planning Information and Technical Administration Unit, March 2011. Community facilities includes: sensitive community facilities, educational facilities, medical and health facilities, police stations, magistracies, correctional facilities, fire services facilities, ambulance services facilities, cultural facilities, community halls and social welfare facilities, post offices, public mortuaries and funeral facilities,
Afterthoughts

After this research project, I started to think what kind of cultural policy do we need when we asked for it?

I attended a seminar by Ashok Vajepyi (born 1941) a former civil servant and a noted cultural administrator, who shared a lot of experience about negotiations between policy makers and advisors from cultural sector in Bangalore. He spent a long time to use many kinds of tactics and strategies to change the governor’s mind set and open for more possibilities. And then, I met an international well-known artist couple in Mumbai, Sharmila Samant and Tushar Joag, who were the initiators of an art group called The Open Circle since 1998. They set up Open Circle without any physical space and cash incomes. By receiving many supports of services and space from different organizations and facilitators locally and internationally, Open Circle ran for 10 years and both of them felt exhausted for becoming full time art administrators. And they decided to step down and not being active in the group again.

If I try to link up the experiences from the art administrators and practicing artists in different cities, I imagine they would need a creative art administration agent or a cultural policy that is totally flexible and be able to explore new possibilities to the creative industry. So that more variety of art forms can be produced and also provide more opportunities on art education to their communities. “Cultural right” is a new term raised by a new art concern group calls “Hong Kong Culture Monitor” recently. The group was formed by artists, art administrators and policy researchers
in 2012. And they raised all kinds of social and policy issues that related to cultural rights to general public which including sustainability of small art groups and nurturing of individual artists. Their actions include meetings with government departments, councilors, policies advisors in art field, writing newspaper articles, writing thesis on policy analysis, building networks with small art groups and individual artists and even factory owners, etc. They try to make cultural right becomes a popular civil right to all Hong Kong citizen and more people realize the important of art and culture in their daily lives.

All the people that mentioned in my research are creative people with creative solutions to their cities and environment when no specific cultural policy told them what are sustainable for them. But policies in other aspects may affect their living environments. I would take this description from Charles Landry, “Creative people and institutions are willing to rewrite procedures or principles and so to imagine future scenarios, conditions, inventions, applications, adaptations and processes. They look for common threads amidst the seemingly disparate, bringing together unthought-of combinations that solve a problem. Most important, perhaps, is the capacity to look at situations in an integrated, holistic way, laterally and flexibly. Creative people and organizations think flexibly but with a focus and a readiness to take measured risks.”

This summarized the people I met in this research. And if there is a cultural policy coming up, it should be a policy made and operated by creative people.

I would like to share three major questions and afterthoughts from this research:
1. Who are the creative people and what are their roles in a metropolitan city?
2. How to identify a space that is applicable for art production?
3. How to set up the cultural policy in existing context? What kind of cultural policy do we need to help the development of creative industry?

---

Reference: