

**Hong Kong Arts Development Council  
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2016**

**Panel Discussion of Plenary 2: The Change of Arts Spaces  
[Transcript]**

**Moderator: Mr Vincent NG, President of Hong Kong Institute of Architects**

**Panellists: 1) Ms PARK Myung-jin, Chairperson & CEO of Arts Council  
Korea  
2) Mr Euan UPSTON, Director of Central Police Station**

Vincent NG: It is time for the floor to ask questions, give comments and raise issues for discussion.

MUI Cheuk-yin (ADC Council Member): I would like to ask Ms Park from Arts Council Korea (ARKO) about abandoned schools. How can you make use of the abandoned schools?

Myungjin PARK: The school buildings have auditorium, classrooms and a variety of facilities. Therefore, the auditorium could be used as a practice room without much remodelling. At the same time, it could be used as a performing space. The school buildings have a lot of benefits for that use. In case of classrooms, they were used as studio. Sometimes, beds were fitted and artists could stay there. Without spending too much money, the shut-down schools were used as arts space.

Vincent NG: Any follow-up questions? Yes, Ms Mui, please.

MUI Cheuk-yin: How difficult is it to get these abandoned schools?

Myungjin PARK: What I meant was it is a very economical way to create space. The shut-down schools had a lot of advantages to be used as arts space in a very economical way. I believe it could have been easier than the closed-down factories.

Vincent NG: I think the issue is, is it because the Korean government has a policy to support arts and culture, and incidentally there were a lot of abandoned schools? Is it the government decision to give these schools for use in the field of arts and culture?

Myungjin PARK: At the beginning, the government did not suggest or recommend it.

However, if I tell you about the experience in the 1980s, that was more like voluntary, a will from the artists. Artists actually thought of that option. They thought of making use of shut-down schools as artists' space. It was not really strongly recommended by the government or government agencies. However, in the 2000s, local governments were more active in attracting artists to their regions. In some cases, local governments rented the shut-down schools and provide the space free-of-charge to the artists.

Vincent NG: You have to let the government know that arts and culture is really important. Any other questions?

Rupert MYER  
(Chair of Australia  
Council for the  
Arts): I would like to know more about the financial model, in particular, in the community organisations and others that use the facilities. Would they be expected to pay a market rate or subsidised rate for their programmes? How does it work in the overall arrangements?

Euan UPSTON: Good question. Basically we are looking at non-commercial access. I have three levels of partnership. One would be a partner who come and help me activate the site. They are actually giving me something that I want, so I am not charging those people. Another one would be people who come in, perhaps owning an NGO, and would probably be charging, so we will work out some sort of box-office relationship. Over my experience as a theatre practitioner the killer in bringing a theatre show to anywhere comes from rental. If you can do a box-office turnover, that would be much easier for everyone to manage. We will then just need to cover our cost because we will have staff operating the auditorium.

Then I want to look at commercial rights, and I want to charge twice the price we charge at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA). In other words, the financial model is that we have a unique space. If someone wants to use it, e.g. a corporate, a product launch and a cocktail party, then we want them to pay. We are in partnership with food and beverage organisations, because that is what drives revenue so that you can create more cultural offerings. The successful mix we found in Australia was that if you have seed funding coming from either the government or some other sources, it might arrange 20% or 25%, and you might raise another 75% yourself. You become a much more self-owned operation. I find the reality we are facing in the world today we cannot be constantly looking at the Jockey Club or the government to provide on-going, sustainable funding. We, as arts entrepreneurs, have to take our own responsibility, to find our revenue sources.

But we have to come back to the basics of why we are there, so you don't charge the people, the communities etc. You don't levy them because they are the reason for you being there. You leave it to everybody else who wants to use your space. The more we work with our operators in terms of F&B

and retail, the more we can build up revenues from them as well, because we are going into an emerging space. We actually don't know how it is going to run. What happens in 2016 might not be happening at the end of 2018. We have to have an organic approach, so we have the ability to listen and change. They are two fundamentals. To answer your question, free admission is possible, plus NGO cost recovery and commercial rights. Mark it right. Thank you.

Vincent NG: Ms Park, do you have any further comments for the question? How do you make arts space financially sustainable?

Myungjin PARK: What is a sustainable arts space? We can start from this point. Not sure if I had mentioned it in my presentation, an arts space is called arts space but not an art gallery. An arts space is the place where artists can interact with audience and offers the opportunity for the good future. Also they can think together how they can contribute to the socio-economic development, and how they can contribute to the well-being and happiness of the public. I believe, in this way, an arts space can become sustainable.

I am not sure if it can be economically sustainable. At this stage, I cannot say yes definitely. But I have a very bright perspective in the case of media. There was a profit, a revenue. The salary was given to the members. It was subsidised by the local government. However, the most important point is the local government and the community residents participating very actively with the artists. It means they are contributing financially to the artists, because they are doing their activities in their region, which attracts tourists. They can also be helpful to the social economy. They firmly believe, and I also believe, that it can contribute to social and economic sustainability. We have successful cases already.

Euan UPSTON: You can't. In a small scale, yes. But in a large scale, I can't see, with the present costs we are seeing, put your hands up truly and say this is 100% sustainable. It can be a goal, and that's very admirable. But I am probably a pragmatist and a realist. As an arts administrator, you give me some core income. For every dollar you gave me, I will raise another four or five. For the government and me, that is a win-win.

Vincent NG: In the interest of time I will have to take the last question from the floor.

Mr. Jong-ryul Kim (Secretary General of Gwangju Cultural Foundation): I have a question for Mr Upston. Your explanation on Tai Kwun is quite impressive. Due to the technological development, rather than visiting physical arts spaces, young people especially try to do things in the digital arena. In Tai Kwun, do you have any special plans to cater to such needs and development in the future?

Euan UPSTON: Yes, we do. First of all, they are not of our critical task at the moment, but

we are making things like the digital lab and the backbone database so that you can research heritage on a searchable database. We are talking to the University of Hong Kong about that. They have developed some very interesting programme. The app is a must because we need young people to find their own way around. What we have to do is to make sure the backbone of the site is actually capable of responding. That means the hardware, root cables, is plugged in. The hardware would be there at the end of 2016, but the software won't be. It is going to be an ongoing adventure. I think it is what it should be. Otherwise we are building a mausoleum. Thank you.

Myungjin PARK: ARKO is researching different options to develop IT infrastructure. In case of digital space, we do not want to use it as a means to disseminate the arts. We don't think that is the only purpose for it. We rather think of it as a mutually supportive tool between the artists and the audience. This is our focus. We are therefore paying attention to the local communities in terms of IT infrastructure. We are thinking of different options.

Vincent NG: Thank you. I would announce the end of this section. I hope you have a lot of things to take away. Arts space in Hong Kong is really an issue. The high land price, high rent, as the government always says, everything is a land supply-related problem. Things are actually competing for space. If only the arts and culture community has the influence in government, they could ensure that there is a strong, supportive policy. Arts and culture are really essential for the development of a city. Thank you very much.

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