

ANCER Research Camp 2025: A Bridge Between Research and Practice

Audrey Wai Yen Wong, Sunitha Janamohanam *

Abstract

The Asia Pacific Network for Cultural Education and Research (ANCER) is a regional network established to advance inquiry and scholarship in arts management, cultural policy, and associated pedagogical concerns primarily in the Asian context. Responding to the gap between academic researchers and arts practitioners, one of the network's activities is a Research Camp designed to facilitate exchange between research and practice. This article is a report and reflection on the 2025 ANCER Research Camp which centred on the theme of Arts and Advocacy. Recognising that arts advocacy and activism operate across multiple arenas—including political advocacy, community settings, the social enterprise sector and the NGO sphere—the camp adopted a multidisciplinary approach. Invited speakers contributed perspectives on research methodologies and the persistent challenges of assessing cultural value, and shared case studies demonstrating how research by practitioner-researchers can be mobilized for legal and policy change.

Several key themes emerged: the necessity of a strategy in advocacy work, the cultivation of allies, and the value of creative modes of data collection including participatory research methods. In view of the growing regional interest in arts for social action, there is an attendant need to develop sustained platforms for peer learning and transmission of embodied knowledge and skills for arts advocacy. The Research Camp offers a potential model for such capacity-building. Although modest in scale, it has potential as a site of knowledge production in Asian arts and cultural management and a catalyst for further research inquiry.

Keywords

Cultural policy, arts networks, arts advocacy, Southeast Asia

* Audrey Wai Yen Wong LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore.

Sunitha Janamohanam Independent Researcher.

2025 ANCER Research Camp: Arts and Advocacy

Date and Venue

14–15 February 2025, LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore

Convenors

Audrey Wai Yen Wong and Sunitha Janamohanam, School of Creative Industries, Faculty of Fine Arts, Media and Creative Industries, LASALLE College of the Arts

Speakers (in order of speaking)

- Dr. Justin Lee, Senior Research Fellow and Head of Policy Lab, Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore.
- Dr. Ann Lee, then-Chairperson of PEN Malaysia and Committee Member of ReformARTsi.
- Dr. Tully Barnett, then-Associate Professor in Creative Industries, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, Australia.
- Phina So, Director, Creative Industries of Cambodia Association for Development and Advocacy (CICADA).
- Braema Mathi, Researcher, Social Activist and Former Nominated Member of Parliament.
- Dr. Venka Purushothaman, then-Vice-President and Provost, LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore.
- Dr. Jerry Liu, Professor and Dean of College of Humanities, National Taiwan University of Arts.

Introduction

ANCER and the Aims of the Research Camp

The ANCER Network, or the Asia Pacific Network for Cultural Education and Research, was established by LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore in 2011. The network was initiated with the purpose of stimulating and developing inquiry and research into the field of arts management, cultural policy and related pedagogical questions primarily in Asia. ANCER functions as a fluid, project-based network or loose collective rather than a formal membership association: all who have participated in ANCER's events are considered members of ANCER.

The network organizes two core programs where members and new participants meet—the biennial ANCER Conference and the annual ANCER Lab. Conferences are gatherings of academics, independent researchers, arts managers, cultural leaders, arts educators, artists, creative practitioners and students, and are the main platforms for dissemination of ongoing research and taking the temperature of current concerns in the field. The ANCER Lab is a smaller-scale event comprising a one-day symposium in a selected Asian city co-convened with local arts practitioners, and study visits to arts spaces in the city. The Lab is a more informal networking and knowledge-sharing platform where local and regional concerns intersect, with speakers drawn from the local arts and cultural community and a few invited contributors from other countries. As it is co-organized with a local partner (art space, educational institution or collective), there are fewer participants than a conference—generally between 50 to 80 people. ANCER Labs have taken place in Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangkok, Yogyakarta and during the Covid-19 pandemic, a virtual lab in Manila.

A third and occasional program that ANCER runs is a Research Camp. The first camp took place in 2016 in Singapore on the theme of "Collective Creative Practices in Southeast Asia." Representatives from seven art collectives in four Asian countries participated, with four invited guest speakers / provocateurs: the goal was to unpack what "collectivity" meant and how it is practiced. The second Research Camp took place on 14–15 February 2025, almost ten years later, and had the theme of "Arts and Advocacy." This article is a report and reflection on the second Camp which was held at LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore.

One of ANCER's goals is to act as a bridge between academia and practice—between those who are professional researchers, and the arts practitioners and managers on the ground. The Research Camp serves this purpose. ANCER recognizes that research and practice inform each other, and that research occurs in different forms with arts practitioners often undertaking independent research in response to real-world problems. Yet the professional researcher/academic and the artist/practitioner often work in silos. The Research Camp therefore brings researchers, educators, students and practitioners together, fostering peer and professional networks while acting as a site of new knowledge production and capacity-building.

A Southeast Asia Focus

The Research Camps and Labs have focused on the Southeast Asian region, where governments have taken an active interest in developing their cultural and creative economies (ASEAN Secretariat 2016; 2021) but there is not much published academic literature on the region's arts management practices, systems and cultural policies. ANCER's various gatherings have revealed shared concerns about the education and training of arts and cultural managers, the social role of the arts, the precarity of artists and organizations, the need to sustain arts advocacy and activism, the distance between policymakers and artists, and the dynamics of local political and cultural contexts in shaping policy and practice (Terui and Chao 2021; Janamohan, Sasaki and Wong 2021).

Looking at Asia more broadly, the landscape of arts and cultural management training, cultural policy development and research is uneven. Given the broad geographical expanse of the Asian continent (without even taking the wider "Pacific" region into consideration), this is not surprising. In certain locations like Korea and Taiwan, arts and cultural management and cultural policy are established fields of study, there is focused policy-making on the arts, and a well-developed research and education agenda supported by professional bodies and intermediaries. There has been less attention paid to nurturing the specialized knowledge, skills or research needed in the management and governance of culture and creativity elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Lim and Shaw 2020).

Perhaps because of such gaps in the provision of arts management training and education, practitioners in Southeast Asia have a great desire to connect with colleagues, to develop capacity in solidarity and understand arts management practices in other countries. Regional practitioner-initiated networks such as the Mekong Cultural Hub which organizes capacity-building programs and the Asian Dramaturgs Network attest to a dynamic ground-up landscape of peer learning and deepening inquiry into practice. The Research Camp and Labs are thus among the ground-up collective efforts to build capacity, while seeking to encourage the production of new knowledge and research in the field.

The Research Camp: Why Arts and Advocacy?

An Ethos of Learning Together

A report on the 2016 ANCER Research Camp written by the Camp's co-facilitator Mitha Budhyarto was titled "Unlearning Together" (Budhyarto 2019). The title referenced not just how art collectives in Southeast Asia seek to "unpack" the hierarchies and structures underlying education systems, but also Budhyarto's own experience at the Camp where the two co-facilitators—herself and Aleksandar Brkic—became "co-actors in knowledge creation" where questions and notes were jointly produced with the Camp participants despite individual differences in perspectives and preferences. The 2025 ANCER Research Camp sought to capture a similar spirit of collaborative learning and curiosity. Following the model of the previous camp, the co-facilitators did not sit apart from what was happening in the room but also participated in some of the Camp's group activities.

As co-facilitators, we were conscious not to fix an agenda and theme at the start but decided to seek input from others in the network. Two online research meetings with network members were convened in November 2024 to allow the surfacing of common themes that could subsequently be the theme for the Camp. The meetings showcased a wide range of research topics, methodologies, and forms of research output among the 18 participants—academics, educators and arts managers—who came from different countries including Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Taiwan, Australia and Singapore. Among the common threads we identified were: the translation of policy into practice and participants' interest in influencing cultural policy; the kinds of frameworks that could be used in research about arts and culture at the grassroots level; notions of cultural value; a growing interest in care practices; documenting the histories of arts management in different Southeast Asian countries; and the prevalence of embodied knowledge and "learning-by-doing" in arts and cultural management. There was also a lively discussion on questioning established knowledge hierarchies and epistemological regimes inherited from western education frameworks, and the idea of "vertical (global) versus horizontal (local) knowledge" as expressed by one of the participants.

After the meetings, we decided that the theme of "Arts and Advocacy" would address many of the concerns, and that the Camp would explore different ways that research is used in arts advocacy. In addition to inviting guest speakers (as in the previous Camp), group discussions and workshopping would be key elements in the program.

Advocacy vs Activism

The Camp took place over two days in the LASALLE Library's "smart room" which was well-equipped for discussion with touch screens around the room and tables arranged to seat the participants in small groups. As the room is situated in a rather hidden corner of LASALLE's campus, it was a conducive environment for working intensely together. The program comprised presentations by five guest speakers, group workshopping, and networking activities.

Through an open call, 24 participants from Asia joined the Camp, along with a few academic colleagues with an interest in civic engagement. Participants included current LASALLE Masters students and alumni from the MA programs in Arts and Cultural Leadership and Arts Pedagogy and Practice. The participants embodied a range of professional experience: independent researchers on social causes and cultural policy, activists affiliated with NGOs (including activists working in women's rights and climate change), leaders of arts non-profits, independent arts producers, socially-engaged artists, curators, educators. Many are actively engaged with communities on actions for social change.

The use of the word "advocacy" rather than "activism" in the title of the Camp was a deliberate choice. There is often confusion between the two terms and people interpret them in different ways (Crawford et al, cited in Parsons 2016; Jessani et al 2022). A general definition of "advocacy" is to speak, write or argue "in support or defence of a person or cause" (Parsons 2016, n.p.) while an "activist" is defined as someone who believes strongly

in a particular cause, raises public awareness of it—for instance, through public protests—and takes actions to make that change happen (Parsons 2016; USIDHR 2021). The term "activist" has been associated negatively with aggressive and even militant stances and actions often directed towards political change, while "advocates" are seen to be more passive or work within the system (Parsons 2016; Jessani et al 2022; USIDHR 2021). The US Institute of Diplomacy and Human Rights (2021) proposes an explicit distinction between the two terms: advocacy is about listening and working with others, using information and education to influence policymakers and governments, while activism is about "making noise" and drawing attention to an issue. In a study on action research in the education context, Arthur (2021) offers a continuum of awareness-advocacy-activism where awareness refers to being aware of and identifying pertinent social justice issues; advocacy seeks outcomes to mitigate these issues; and activism means being an "agent of change," directly addressing injustices in the system (Arthur, cited in Feldman 2025).

Sensing that many participants would be operating as both advocates and activists or locate their work at points along the continuum suggested by Arthur (2021), we settled on the word "advocacy." This decision was also made in consideration of the history of civil society in Singapore's political environment. Here, any public gathering for a cause requires police permission and heavy scrutiny from the authorities. While the government has encouraged citizens to play a more active part in improving their communities and addressing social issues, it takes a more hardline stance on actions that oppose public policy and are perceived as confrontational to the state and governing authorities. Hence the government prefers the term "civic society" to refer to ground-up networks of citizen initiatives for social causes and prefers them to be aligned with the government's agendas, rather than the term "civil society" which describes a condition where multiple interest groups with different goals, purposes and ideologies could lead to a fracturing of society (Chong 2005; Mathi 2008; Koh and Soon 2012).

The Research Camp in Action

A Multi-Disciplinary Lens

The makeup of participants reflected how arts advocacy is a cross-cutting practice where the concerns of artists intersect with concerns of communities impacted by political, social, economic or environmental challenges. Arts advocates and activists work in intersecting spheres—in NGOs, the political advocacy space, the social enterprise sector, in arts and cultural institutions, in education, and so on. While they may work on issues specific to a particular community, place or domain, there can be overlapping interests with advocacy groups in other domains. Furthermore, some activists who use arts or cultural practices as a channel for animating social or political change might not perceive themselves to be within the artistic sphere but identify with a different domain such as the social enterprise sector. Still, a common interest in influencing social change suggests that a shared space to discuss approaches and strategies from different domains can be productive.

With this in mind, we invited five speakers from different disciplines and advocacy/

activism domains for the Camp and asked them to present either frameworks or case studies. They were: Justin Lee, a policy researcher who is Senior Research Fellow and Head of Policy Lab at the Singapore think-tank Institute of Policy Studies and a board member of an arts non-profit; Ann Lee, a playwright and researcher with a PhD in Southeast Asian Studies, then-Chairperson of PEN Malaysia, and committee member of ReformARTsi, an independent coalition of 120 arts organizations and arts workers in Malaysia; Tully Barnett, then-Associate Professor in Creative Industries at Flinders University, Australia; Phina So, Director, Creative Industries of Cambodia Association for Development and Advocacy (CICADA); and Braema Mathi, a researcher, trainer and social activist whose work has covered education, journalism, healthcare, gender, migrant worker rights, HIV, civil society structures and refugees and who was a founder of several societies in Singapore's civic space including TWC2 (Transient Workers Count Too).

Setting the theme for the Camp was the first presentation by Justin Lee, which unpacked the rationales and uses of research as well as the different forms of research that can be applied to the social sector. Justin's talk showed how research and creative practice do not need to be mutually exclusive, while challenging the group to expand their views about when and how to conduct research and who should be involved. Beginning with questions of who the research is for, the archetypes of research and the "evidence-production ecosystem" that includes those who produce and consume research, Justin went on to show how applied research is used in the social sector to assess and analyze social problems, propose and implement solutions, and evaluate them. He led the audience to consider key issues in the social research process such as research capability, agenda-setting and where research is shared. He reminded the group that assessing problems is often led by experts while social services beneficiaries are often seen as mere data, and challenged us to consider how beneficiaries and subjects of the research can take on a more agentic role. Finally, while the evidence-based practice is prevalent, Justin asked whether creative and community-based solutioning could be just as productive, for instance using game design, design thinking, action research and arts-based community development as research methods.

Following Justin's framing presentation, Ann Lee then shared a case study in Malaysia in her talk cheekily titled *1,367.5 Tips to Staging Performance in Malaysia*. Both exemplify how arts advocacy and research cross disciplinary boundaries: Justin as a policy researcher with a background in the social sector, Ann as an artist (playwright) and a researcher.

The research project presented by Ann was part of advocacy for legal reform in the regulation of the performing arts in Malaysia. With humor and wit, she explained the complexities of the research project. She began by listing the many disparate Acts that could be used by the authorities to control the staging of live performances in Malaysia, how the laws present a complicated and unpredictable minefield for arts presenters, and how there has been a history of bans and censorship in arts and entertainment. Citing Edward Aspinall's *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance and Regime Change in Indonesia*, Ann noted that individuals, groups and artists can adopt different methods to resist authoritarianism, ranging from organized collective action to more individual

actions such as satire and passive resistance. In the Malaysian context, advocacy alliances have been challenging authoritarian behavior and offering important "counter-narrative capacity" and equally significantly, transcending social boundaries in class, religion, ethnicity and gender.

Ann then gave an account of how the research project for legal reform was carried out through a partnership formed by ReformARTsi—a collective advocating for arts education, arts funding and freedom of expression—and LexisNexis, the database that provides business and legal information for corporations and institutions. The project began by scoping research questions through sourcing for initial information from ReformARTsi's membership base of 151 members representing 56 arts organizations. The research output was eventually a publication on *Guidelines on Staging Performance in Kuala Lumpur with Highlights of Key Acts and Case Studies*, with the goal of assisting the arts sector in navigating the web of legal regulations. After a nearly two-year research process, the publication was launched in December 2024.

This case study illustrated how research on an ambitious scale can be undertaken by independent arts practitioners with little funding, and how research can result in an output of practical use in the arts. It was also an account of how challenging it is for independent practitioners to undertake research and argued for the importance of alliances in advocacy—a theme that would emerge again in other presentations.

The rest of the day was allocated to workshopping in small groups. The workshops focused on the participants reflecting on their existing or past research and advocacy projects, with the intention of supporting them to structure these and find ways to actualize the projects. The first workshop, The Refinement Room, had the participants sharing objectives, research questions, methodology or approach, and goals. The second workshop, The Strategy Room, encouraged participants to brainstorm ideas to actualize their projects and formulate a strategy towards achieving their goals.

After a full day of work, Day One closed with a Valentine's Day-themed networking event with food and drinks. Participants were invited to share anecdotes on their "love affair with the arts", posting notes on a story wall of how they fell in love with the arts or how the arts broke their heart. Because breaks and receptions at conferences and seminars are productive spaces that spark off ideas and collaborations, ANCER tries to create convivial environments at all its events to facilitate cross-cultural, transnational connections and friendships.

From Theory to Strategy

Day Two of the Camp continued with the multi-disciplinary perspective, featuring presenters from academia and ground-up advocacy practice.

Once again, the day began with theoretical framing. Tully Barnett from Australia's Flinders University spoke about the longstanding debates over cultural value. Many participants were already familiar with reporting mechanisms prescribed by policymakers for the purpose of "capturing" cultural value, and had experienced the limitations and challenges of such mechanisms. Tully discussed the policy contexts of evaluation,

reminding us that the measurement of value is a persistent wicked problem that is also impacted by power dynamics in the arts and cultural sector. While economic impact measures are commonly sought, this is only one aspect of the contributions of arts and culture to the lives of individuals, communities, societies and even nations. Tully challenged us to look beyond economic metrics and consider other alternatives. She introduced new strands of critical discussion around concepts of cultural value that are animating researchers including Tully and her colleagues in the Reset Arts and Culture collective comprising academics, practitioners and policymakers from the three universities in South Australia. Tully then discussed Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics model as an alternative paradigm for structuring human economic activity, where the reality of an ecological ceiling for growth on this planet means a need to consider a more just and regenerative economy that can support life on earth – of which healthy societies are a crucial part. She illustrated this with a report from Australia, *Towards a Regenerative Melbourne*, that was produced through a community-focused research process by an alliance of organisations and individuals interested in catalyzing Melbourne as a liveable city for future generations.

Having inspired us to think about other ways of measuring cultural value, Tully then invited everyone to participate in a hands-on activity: to make their own zine illustrating their thoughts on the topic and how it applies to their projects. This device offered us something to take home as a reminder of our work at the camp.

The Camp then moved into the realm of strategy for the actualizing of advocacy. This was the focus of the final two case studies, on CICADA—the Creative Industries of Cambodia Association for Development and Advocacy, and the ground-up campaign for a Day Off for foreign domestic workers in Singapore.

Phina So, Director of CICADA, presented a detailed case study on CICADA's work in grassroots organizing. Formed in 2020 by representatives of six Cambodian cultural organizations, CICADA's purpose is to represent and advocate for the cultural and creative industries in order to develop a sustainable and inclusive infrastructure for the future development of the sector, and to advocate for the sector's role in political, economic and social decision-making. Research is an important dimension of CICADA's work, because data is needed to persuade the government to take the voices of the cultural and creative sector seriously. CICADA makes efforts to reach out to cultural and creative practitioners and organizations from different regions in Cambodia in order to be a more effective representative for the sector and equally importantly, to gather information and data on the sector and its needs. The research methodology used by CICADA includes information-gathering from consultation workshops with practitioners and collection of data through surveys. In 2022, CICADA undertook a mapping survey of the cultural and creative industries using surveys and workshops with cultural and creative practitioners in different parts of the country. With such data, CICADA could approach the government to advocate for their sector. A project that Phina presented was a *Know Your Rights* pamphlet to raise awareness among creative and cultural practitioners on their rights to social protection under the Cambodian national framework as well as their rights to intellectual property,

employment contracts and the freedom of artistic creation. Findings in CICADA's research had revealed that 90% of cultural and creative work was informal, 90% of workers had no contracts and 78% had no access to Cambodia's social protection scheme despite the majority having completed high school. CICADA shows how an organization uses research and data collection to raise awareness among those it represents as well as to advocate their cause to the government.

The concluding case study was from Singapore and was presented by Braema Mathi, a longstanding advocate for human rights. Braema's presentation focused on the 2008 campaign in Singapore to advocate for a Day Off for foreign domestic workers which resulted in legislative change ensuring that foreign domestic workers had a rest day each week. However, the campaign required stamina and understanding that change takes time, as the campaign was launched in 2008 but legislation was only introduced in Parliament in 2012. The new legislation required employers of domestic helpers to give the helpers a day off each week or to provide monetary compensation if there is an agreement with the worker to work on their rest day. With over 150,000 domestic workers from other countries working and residing in Singapore homes and reports of abuse by employers, the question of ensuring just work conditions for foreign domestic workers had been a longstanding issue.

Like Ann, Braema emphasized how collaboration and partnerships were an important part of the advocacy strategy. The Day Off campaign was helmed by three NGOs: UNIFEM Singapore (now United Women Singapore), HOME—Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics and TWC2 (Transient Workers Count Too). It was crucial to craft a nuanced and multi-pronged strategy as the campaign was about changing people's mindsets and behavior and not only about changing a statute. One important consideration was to advocate in support of domestic helpers without blaming or vilifying employers, because in order for change to occur, employers had to be willing to change too. Hence, gaining support from employers and the public was key. Furthermore, as the Singapore government is traditionally resistant to confrontational advocacy that challenges their public policy decisions (Mathi 2008; Koh and Soon 2012), the tone of the campaign was calibrated to ensure that channels for speaking to the government remained open, and public sentiment on the campaign would not be negative. Rather than framing calls for a day off as a human rights issue, the campaign framed the issue as one of dignity for workers.

Hence, the Day Off campaign had multiple dimensions as it needed to shift ground sentiments. These were: a public education campaign including talks and fora held in partnership with educational institutions, community and other organizations; a media communications plan where the organizers cultivated strong relationships with the main media companies so the issue would remain in the public eye; engagement with other groups and non-profits in the social sector; and back-channel engagement with government officials out of the public eye. The campaign also proposed alternative policy options which positioned them as positive champions for change rather than opponents to public policy. All these were possible due to the experience and expertise of the people helming the campaigns. In the constrained political environment of Singapore, the multi-pronged

strategy proved successful.

The Day Off campaign was an inspiring culmination to our explorations over the two days. It showed how applied research, strategy, expertise and partnership-building come together to effect legal and social change.

Following a break, the Camp concluded with further intellectual engagement on topics in cultural policy. The final session featured the founder of the ANCER network, Venka Purushothaman, then-Deputy President and Provost of LASALLE, and Jerry Liu, Professor and Dean of College of Humanities at National Taiwan University of Arts, presenting the upcoming issue of the journal *Culture: Policy, Management, and Entrepreneurship* (CPME), published by the Taiwan Association of Cultural Policy Studies. They then handed the time over to two of the contributing writers in this issue which would be titled "The Policy Paradox: The Changing Face of Cultural Policy in Asia": Ku Shu-shiun, Associate Professor from the Department of Cultural and Creative Industries, National Pingtung University and Melody Yiu Hoi Lam, Research Assistant Professor from the School of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Shu-shiun and Melody presented their recent research on independent bookstores as a creative cluster in Taiwan and a review of Hong Kong's cultural planning since the late 20th century, respectively.

Concluding Reflections

The ANCER Research Camp, although only an occasional activity for the network, offers an alternative space for research to be discussed, and for ANCER to carry out its mission. To conclude, we share some reflections from our experience as co-facilitators of the event.

Firstly, the Camp fulfils ANCER's mission to connect researchers, academics and practitioners who often work in siloed domains. There is common cause between researchers working in the social sector and artists and arts managers interested in arts for social action. Justin Lee's presentation of applied research in the social sector context reflects an increased interest in "engaged scholarship" in academia where academic researchers are keen to share their findings with a wider audience, particularly those who are directly impacted by the problems being investigated, and policymakers who are in a position to take the proposed solutions further (Jessani et al 2022). At the same time, arts practitioners are themselves conducting research in their own form of engaged scholarship as they hope to influence policy.

Research for advocacy and strategies for advocacy are not formally taught in most training and tertiary institutions including arts schools and colleges. Yet the field of arts advocacy and arts for social action is growing, with more Asian practitioners in this field as evidenced by practitioners' interest in taking part in Mekong Cultural Hub's *Meeting Points: Art and Social Action* capacity-building event. It is now planning a fifth edition for 2027 (Mekong Cultural Hub). The Research Camp complements such platforms, with an additional element of providing space for researchers to share approaches, methodologies, theoretical frameworks, projects and findings.

For us, the Camp was also a space to reflect on how ANCER can address one of the

questions raised in the pre-Camp research meetings: the prevalence of "learning-by-doing" where knowledge and skills are embodied and there seems to be a lack of formal platforms to transmit such skills and knowledge to younger practitioners. Effective advocacy relies on soft skills of alliance-building and reading the temperature of the political environment, as shown in the presentations of Ann, Phina and Braema. These skills are often embodied in the person of the advocate/activist—that is, the "how to" comprises a set of "not consciously known rules" as Polanyi (2002, 62) puts it in his observations on tacit knowledge, and these are not easily conveyed even by the one in possession of these skills. While the Camp provides a structured platform for practitioner co-learning, there is still much to be done. Is there a way to distill the knowledge of experienced practitioners into some useful form that can be used in other training contexts? Can we create opportunities for mentorship where such "unconscious" knowledge can be transmitted, and if so, on what scale and in which region(s)? We suggest that adopting the co-learning ethos that animates the ANCER Research Camps should be a consideration when developing such knowledge- and skills-sharing platforms.

Going beyond learning, as regional networking is also part of ANCER's mission, another outcome of the Camp was the furthering of connections between participants and opportunities to extend professional networks. One participant organized a seminar on ecological activism and invited another participant from a different country to speak at the event, thus fostering the Asian network in their shared advocacy space. Co-facilitator Sunitha Janamohanam was invited by Tully Barnett to speak at the Adelaide Festival Centre's Arts Leadership Program 2025. Four participants presented papers at the 2025 ANCER Conference co-organized with the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Finally, the Camp's focus on case studies from Asia allowed participants to keep pace with developments in the arts and cultural sectors in the region and the emerging questions being asked by practitioners and academics, particularly the needs of arts and cultural managers or leaders engaged in advocacy. As briefly mentioned above, these needs have yet to be properly addressed. A further step that ANCER could take is to collate and disseminate case studies of advocacy projects, beginning with the case studies presented at the Camp and building up a resource library which would produce "vertical knowledge" from those doing the work in the field. There are plans to convene a follow-up meeting with the Camp participants to track their progress on the projects shared at the Camp. The Research Camp, although a small-scale regional event, offers potential as a site of knowledge production on Asian arts and cultural management and the possibility of generating further research inquiry.

Reference

- Budhyarto, Mitha. 2019. "Unlearning Together: Collective Efforts are Key in Art Education for the Future." *Asia Pacific Network for Culture and the Arts*. <https://www.ancernetwork.org/mainap/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Article-by-Mitha-Budhyarto.pdf>.
- Chong, Terence. 2005. "Civil Society in Singapore: Popular Discourses and Concepts." *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 20 (2): 273 – 301.
- Feldman, Alan. 2025. "Action Research for Awareness, Advocacy, and Activism." *Educational Action Research*, 33 (2): 225–232.
- Janamohanam, Sunitha, Sari Sasaki and Audrey Wong. 2021. *Backstage: Managing Creativity and the Arts in South-East Asia*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNESCO Office in Bangkok.
- Jessani, Nasreen S., B. Ling, C. Babcock, A. Valmeekanathan, D. Holtgrave. 2022. "Advocacy, Activism, and Lobbying: How Variations in Interpretation Affects Ability for Academia to Engage with Public Policy." *PLOS Global Public Health*, 2(3): e0000034. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0000034>.
- Lim, Benny and Shaw Hong Ser. 2020. "Cultural Management Education in Southeast Asia." *International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching*, 4 (1): 10–25.
- Mathi, Braema. 2008. "Growing Civil Society in Singapore." *Social Space*, 80–83. Lien Centre for Social Innovation. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0000034> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2026).
- Mekong Cultural Hub. 2025. "Meeting Point 2025." *Mekong Cultural Hub*. <https://www.mekongculturalhub.org/meeting-points/> (Accessed Apr. 8, 2026).
- Parsons, E.C.M. 2021. "'Advocacy' and 'Activism' Are Not Dirty Words—How Activists Can Better Help Conservation Scientists." *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 3: 229. DOI: [10.3389/fmars.2016.00229](https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2016.00229).
- Polanyi, Michael. 2002. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Terui, Takao and Karin L.F. Chau. 2021. "Navigating Disruption in the Southeast Asian Arts and Cultural Sectors: the ANCER Conference, 17 to 20 September 2020 (Online)." *Cultural Trends*, 30 (3): 296–299. DOI: [10.1080/09548963.2021.1929076](https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2021.1929076).
- The ASEAN Secretariat. 2016. *ASEAN Strategic Plan for Culture and the Arts 2016– 2025*. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Strategic-Plan-for-Culture-and-Arts-2016-2025.pdf> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2026).
- The ASEAN Secretariat. 2021. *The ASEAN: Creative Economy: Culture, Identity and the Business of Creativity, Oct-Nov 2021*. <https://asean.org/serial/the-asean-magazine/> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2026).
- USIDHR. 2021. "Activism Versus Advocacy: What is Human Rights Advocacy?" *US Institute of Diplomacy and Human Rights*. March 29, 2021. <https://usidhr.org/activism-versus-advocacy-what-is-human-rights-advocacy> (Accessed Apr. 2, 2026).

