

## Photo Journal – Campus Asia Social Innovation field study in Singapore

**Theme:** Planning at the heart of every action



*View from Merlion Park*

Singapore is often presented as a model of rapid development. Before visiting, I mostly associated this reputation with infrastructure, efficiency and impressive skylines. After the field study, I started to see something deeper. What stood out to me was not only what Singapore has built, but how intentionally it seems to build it.

Throughout the visits, lectures and independent explorations, one idea kept coming back to my mind: planning. Whether we were discussing financial markets in a classroom, observing inclusive entrepreneurship, or walking through carefully designed urban spaces, planning appeared to be at the heart of every action. In this journal, I reflect on the lecture at NTU, our visit to Dignity Kitchen, and my own observations around the city, through the lens of this theme.



### *1. The Beehive at NTU*

#### ***Lecture at NTU: Expectations shape reality***

At NTU, Professor Yeow Hwee Chua delivered a lecture titled Economic Expectations and Financial Markets. What I expected was a technical explanation of markets. What I received was something more conceptual. The focus was on expectations and how they influence economic behaviour.

One sentence stayed with me: nothing changes, only beliefs change. Financial markets do not react only to events. They react to what people think will happen next. We discussed naïve, adaptive and rational expectations, and the difference between objective expectations based on models and subjective expectations shaped by beliefs. Trust was presented not as an abstract moral value, but as an economic variable.



## *2. Professor Chua and me after the lecture*

Here is my take on that: managing an economy also means managing expectations. Inflation targeting, for example, is not only about numbers. It is about credibility. If people believe that prices will remain stable, they behave differently. If they lose trust, behaviour changes. What I observed is that Singapore's development cannot be separated from this discipline of signalling and anticipation. Planning, in this sense, is about shaping how the future is imagined.

### ***Dignity Kitchen, inclusion as a structured opportunity***

Our visit to Dignity Kitchen left a strong impression on me. The project is known as the first hawker training centre in the world, aiming to equip persons with disabilities and disadvantaged individuals with culinary skills. What struck me most was its inclusive character. Having a disability was not treated as a limitation that automatically excludes someone from economic life. Instead, it was something that the system adapts to.

Here is what I appreciated: opportunity was not based on pity, but on training. People were given structured learning, certification and clear

roles. Economic activity became possible because the environment was designed to make it possible.



### 3. Facade of the Dignity kitchen location

On the day of our visit, elderly participants were attending a cooking class focused on Lunar New Year dishes. They were learning, laughing and engaging with cultural traditions. Age was not a reason to step aside from social participation. It was another dimension to be included.

This made me reflect on the idea that social innovation is not always about creating something entirely new. Sometimes it is about reorganising existing practices in a way that restores dignity. Planning, once again, was visible in how inclusion was made operational.

## ***Singapore development: planning at the heart of every action***



### ***4. Singapore city gallery***

Beyond the official program, the city itself became a classroom. When I visited the Singapore City Gallery, I was able to see a detailed scale model of the entire urban area. It was not just a display. It was a visual representation of coordination. Residential zones, business districts, green spaces and transport networks were arranged with precision. What I understood there is that land in Singapore is limited. Development cannot be improvised. Every square meter seems to carry intention. Planning is not a background activity. It is central.



*5. View of the city from the top of an hotel*

The illuminated structures at Gardens by the Bay also reflect this mindset. Technology and nature coexist in a carefully engineered space. Sustainability is not presented as an afterthought. It is integrated into the design.



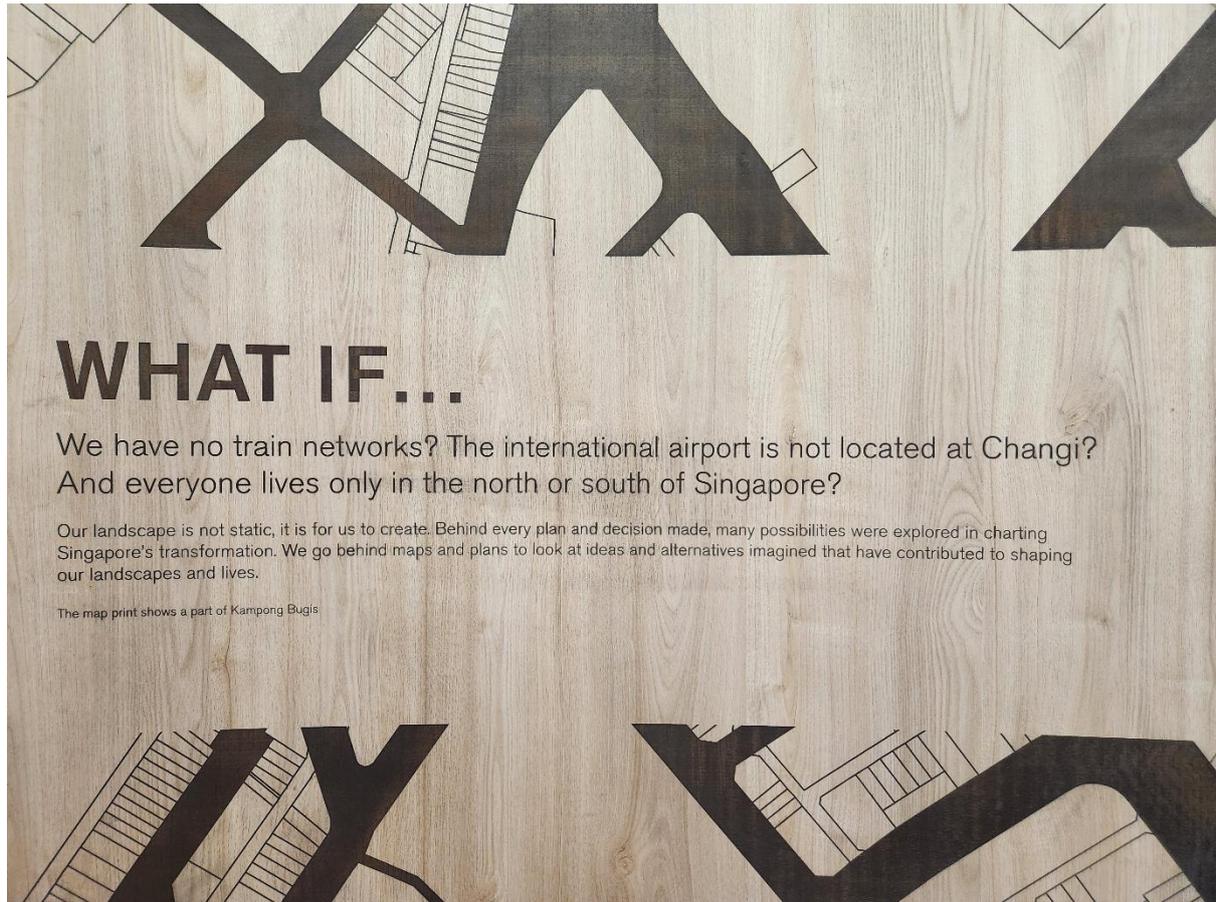
*6. Super tree grove by night*

At the same time, heritage is preserved. The facade of Raffles Hotel Singapore stands as a reminder that modernity does not require erasing the past. Old and new are balanced rather than opposed.



### *7. Facade of Raffles Hotel, first hotel in Singapore*

Here is the broader lesson I take from this experience. Rapid development is not only about speed. It is about coherence. Economic expectations are managed through credible institutions. Social inclusion is organised through structured training. Urban growth is guided by long term spatial planning.



## *8. Social innovation starts with the question: WHAT IF?*

In many ways, this is connected to cultural intelligence. Living in a diverse society requires anticipating different expectations, values and behaviours. Planning, therefore, is not only technical. It is relational. It shapes how people coexist, work and imagine their future together.



### *9. Waterfall at Jewel Changi Airport*

What I am taking with me from this field study is a deeper awareness of intention. Behind each building, policy and initiative, there seems to be a deliberate choice. Singapore's development appears less like a spontaneous miracle and more like a disciplined commitment to thinking ahead.

I am leaving this field study with one main takeaway: planning is not only something governments do on paper. It is something a society can practise, daily, through the way it organises expectations, space, and opportunity.



### *10. Bells at Mount Faber Peak*

The NTU lecture helped me see how strongly beliefs and trust shape behaviour. Dignity Kitchen showed me that inclusion does not happen automatically, it happens when people build structures that make participation possible. And walking through the city, from large scale urban models to carefully curated public spaces, reinforced the same idea: Singapore's development is not a coincidence, it is a habit of anticipating.

What I want to keep from this is a small change in how I look at "successful development." Instead of asking only what outcomes a country achieves, I now find myself asking what kind of thinking produces those outcomes. In Singapore, the answer I observed repeatedly was planning at the heart of every action.