

Report:

Singapore and The Netherlands: Innovators driven by Scarcity

MNDAuditorium
16 March 2016



Highlights at the lecture:



Water- past the tipping point?



Environmental issues: strategies
to deal



Collaboration starts from the
ground up



Rebuild by design



Collaborations for a better
world

Collaboration must start with the community: Ovink

By Alvin Chua

"A process of collaboration has to involve all from the beginning. We start with professionals first all the time...(and end up with) half-baked or not fully fleshed-out solutions that you need buy-in from. That's not collaboration, that's an insult. If we can't close the gap between professionals and people, we will fail."

Building urban resilience is a constant challenge and demands collaborations that start from the ground up, says Henk Ovink, the Netherlands' Special Envoy for International Water Affairs.

At a CLC lecture, Ovink spoke of his experiences in environmental management, including working with more than 500 local and professional groups in New York as part of the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force.

"The collaboration of federal agencies, local and state governments, public and private partners, design teams, innovators, NGOs and activists had transformative capacities (for the region)," he said.

"The collaborative process is about getting a better understanding amongst all, (including) among professionals of what real local needs are, to inform designs and innovations."

Resilience to issues such as extreme weather and climate change must be culturally ingrained within a society to be sustainable, added Ovink, citing examples from his homeland's long history of water management. And for collaborations to have a lasting effect, they have to be truly inclusive.

"If you take collaboration seriously, you have to be able to be vulnerable at the beginning and (have) at this table government, researchers, private sector that perhaps don't work together...you also invite the others that normally would not be at the table, to inform the process. You need to create room in a political and policy process, for a little thinking out of the box, outside of legal frameworks, outside of policy barriers. You need to think of the past, as much as of the future, to inform current decision-making."

Ovink noted four cornerstones of dealing with environmental issues: a long-term approach, funding through transparent, accountable benefit-cost analyses, inclusive collaborations and building capacity amongst institutions, individuals, NGOs, businesses and other groups.

"You need to... through research, get an understanding of inter-dependencies, vulnerabilities and opportunities. Long-term approach needs to be connected to short-term interventions, real projects on the ground. Funding only comes if you are transparent and accountable, so we need better benefit-cost analyses that can capture long-term resiliency questions."

“Right now, we only have simple approaches that deal with short-term infrastructure, across the world we fail in monitoring and evaluation, learning and turning that feedback loop in,” he highlighted.

Ovink also raised the prospect of countries like the Netherlands and Singapore collaborating to work on problems in regions where expertise is lacking and sorely needed.

“A lot of the time, the vulnerable places in the world often do not have the capacity to rethink and invest, research and implement. Why don’t we work together towards that, and present collaborative solutions? Not so much to showcase how good we are, but to reach out a hand to the world and say, we want to be your partner in solving water crises because we can bring to bear the knowledge, experience we collectively have and bring that capacity for change not just in Singapore and the Netherlands, but around the world.”

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About the Speakers



Speaker:

Mr Henk OVINK

Special Envoy for International Water Affairs
The Kingdom of the Netherlands

Mr Ovink was appointed as the first Special Envoy for International Water Affairs by the Dutch Cabinet in 2015. He previously served as a senior advisor to the American Federal Government and the former Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Taskforce instituted by President Obama. For the reconstruction of the New York and New Jersey region, he developed and led the 'Rebuild by Design' contest, which was awarded by the Obama Administration as first and most groundbreaking Federal Challenge. Prior to this, Mr Ovink held the position of Acting Director-General of Spatial Planning and Water Affairs at the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, and Director of National Spatial Development.

Moderator:



Mr CHUA Soon Guan

Deputy Chief Executive (Policy & Development)
PUB, The National Water Agency

Mr Chua oversees the formulation and implementation of strategies, policies and infrastructure plans to ensure reliable, sustainable and affordable water supply for Singapore. He also oversees strategies and programmes on growing the water industry and R&D ecosystem, and within PUB on governance, people and organizational development. Chua Soon Guan was previously Director (Strategic Policy) at the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, developing policies on sustainable development, environmental management and pollution control.

About CLC

The Centre for Liveable Cities was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, based on a strategic blueprint developed by Singapore's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. Guided by its mission to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, the Centre's work spans three main areas - Research, Capability Development, and Knowledge Platforms. The CLC Lecture Series is a platform for urban experts to share their knowledge with other practitioners. For more information, please visit: <http://www.clc.gov.sg>