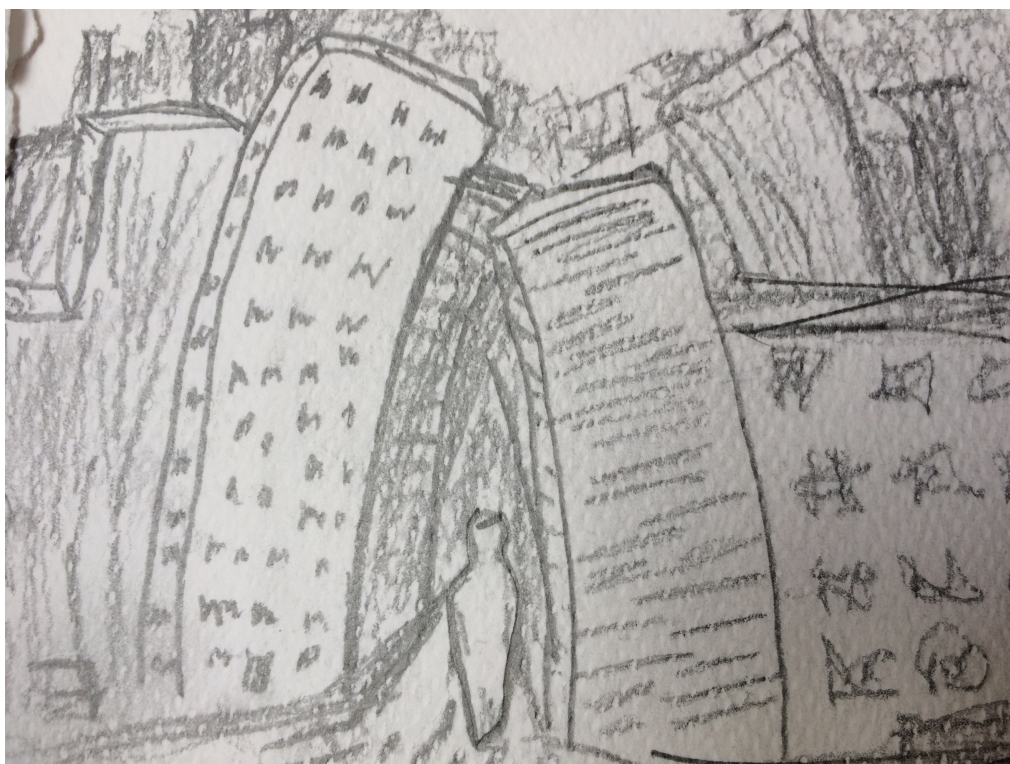


Travel Fellowship Application



Living in Accordance with My Values: An Exploration of Japanese Intentional Communities

Applicant: Boden Franklin

Project Details

Introduction

Looking back at my first few months in Singapore, I am struck by how incredibly difficult that time in my life was. I could not overcome a prevailing feeling of discontent, and I struggled to pin down what was making my experience so difficult. After winter break I returned for second semester with a much clearer picture of what made this place difficult for me. These last months, I have been unable to live a life that falls in line with my value system. Environmental sustainability, limited consumerism, free-expression, and community-oriented thinking are all integral aspects of my core set of beliefs. However, I was unable to actualize these values in my day-to-day life. I felt myself increasingly immersed in habits that emphasized individualism and excessive consumption.

My Week 7 Project, *Spaces of Globalization* with Anju Paul, played an important role in revealing what was going on. During this project we explored the spaces in Singapore where globalization manifests. We saw how global trade and large-scale capitalism has a direct impact on the lives of individuals on the ground. Ideas of individualism, consumerism, and productivity are imposed on people immersed in these systems. This made me realize that I am being subjected to the values that large-scale capitalism conveys. It is this tension between the values of the system I am immersed within, and my own personal values, that I have been struggling to reconcile. It is this discrepancy between values that made my time here difficult.

Keeping this discrepancy in values in mind I have been exploring Singapore, attempting to find spaces and communities that uphold values that oppose the norm. I have been fortunate enough to enter numerous art, music, and freegan communities that promote environmentalism, free self-expression, and community thinking. The inspiration, energy, and knowledge I have gained from these communities inspired me to pursue a travel fellowship centered around intentional community building.

Project Plan

I will conduct ethnographic immersion-based research in Japan, studying how people build and maintain intentional value-based communities.

Clifford Geertz states in his essay entitled *Thick Description*, “the aim of anthropology is the enlargement of the universe of human discourse” it is a process of “seeking, in the widened sense of the term... to converse with [other cultures]”. Ethnographic research holds this potential, the potential to expand human discourse through cross-cultural interactions. The fusion between personal engagement and academic analysis offered by ethnographic research, provides opportunity for personal growth and scholarly challenge. I have chosen this method of engagement with the hopes that it will enable critical individual growth in an academic and social sense. Through the research I hope to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to build intentional communities at Yale-NUS and in wider Singapore, while simultaneously developing my ability to write and research.

The project will be separated into two primary parts. I will live in Tokyo, immersing myself into street art and freegan communities. I will then work as a volunteer at the Konohana ecovillage outside of Fujinomiya.

Street Art

Graffiti art is built on the principle that free expression within the public space is a needed form of dialogue, contestation, and competition. This principle directly contradicts the prevailing norms of a globalized capitalist city such as Tokyo that emphasizes private property. In this way street art communities in Tokyo have built spaces and networks of resistance that oppose the prevailing value system. I believe that through in-depth study of these graffiti communities I can better understand how value-based communities are created and maintained.

With the guidance and assistance of Zulkarnaen Othman, the founder of the art collective RSCLS and a prominent graffiti/street artist in Singapore, I will contact street art communities in Tokyo. My ethnographic method will be two-fold. First, through participant observation I will collaborate and create with local street artists. Second, I will conduct recorded interviews that focus on: 1) the value-systems of the individual street artists and 2) the relationship between these values and the dynamics of the wider community.

Freegans

Freeganism is a practice and ideology that strives to limit participation in the conventional economy. Freegans recover wasted goods like food, clothing, and furniture, using these to support themselves rather than purchasing goods from an exploitative and wasteful economic system. These principles are a very clear rejection of consumerism, and thus directly oppose globalized capitalism. I have already learned so much from the freegan community in Singapore, and I believe that immersive participation within the Tokyo freegan networks will help develop my understanding of how to build intentional communities in spite of external opposing pressures.

Through the Singaporean freegan networks and international web-based freegan platforms I will contact Tokyo freegan communities. I will conduct both participant observation and interview research with these communities, exploring their understanding of consumerism, recycling, and environmentalism. More specifically, I plan to participate in food rescuing and urban foraging activities, learning how these people navigate the Tokyo urban environment. Through interviews I will investigate: 1) people's motivations for joining the freegan movement and 2) the community beliefs and how they are actualized in practice.

Konohana Ecovillage

I chose the Konohana Ecovillage because it stands out as one of the most intentional, successful, and sustainable eco-communities in East Asia. The Konohana believe all things are inherently one, and only through community-oriented thinking and love for all beings can we achieve peace. This value system is heavily environmentally focused and is inherently a rejection of ideas of individualism. I believe that I can learn much from the Konohana, about how to create a supportive and sustainable intentional community.

I have contacted the Konohana Family Ecovillage and have received permission to conduct a month-long work stay. For the time I am living with the Konohana, I will be working as a member of their community in exchange for room and board. By living and working in their community I will conduct my participant observation research, constantly documenting the dynamics that I observe. During my time there I will also conduct interviews with members of the Konohana family. The purpose of these interviews will be to reveal: 1) the values of this community and 2) how this value-based community was built and maintained.

Deliverables

1. I will produce two ethnographic pieces documenting my experience. One will address either the street art or freegan communities in Tokyo, the other will document my experience with the Konohana. These short ethnographies will borrow Katy Gardner's style of ethnographic self-examination. I will continuously document my changing biases and opinions, incorporating my personal development into the text. Additionally, I will borrow Geertz's concept of thick description, using surface level observation in combination with cultural analysis in order to more accurately depict my experience.
2. I will create a collection of poetry and audio recordings that creatively document my travels. I hope that these pieces of art can help express my experience in a less academic way, allowing for my emotional and personal development to come forward.
3. I will post on the CIPE Travel Fellowship Blog once a week, uploading both written testimonials about my experience and pieces of my creative documentation.

Gauging Success

I will conclude that this project is a success if I achieve the following three outcomes:

1. I create meaningful and genuine relationships with at least a handful of members from each of these communities.
2. I finish my trip with a renewed sense of passion for living in accordance with my core values in spite of external pressures.
3. I return to Singapore with a new understanding of how to build and maintain intentional value-based communities.

Contacts and Advisors

- Prof Marcia C Inhorn: provided advice on ethnographic methods, explained ethics approval process, remains as a point of contact.
- Prof Matthew Schiender-Mayerson: suggested project revisions, provided information on the Konohana ecovillage, remains as a point of contact.
- Prof Anju Paul: provided guidance on concepts of globalization, remains as a point of contact.
- Prof James Jack: Has been based and practicing in art communities all over Japan, can serve as an important source of guidance.
- Kei Franklin: established contacts with the Konohana, remains as a point of contact.