Lighthouse Programmes for Sustainability Research: why they are needed

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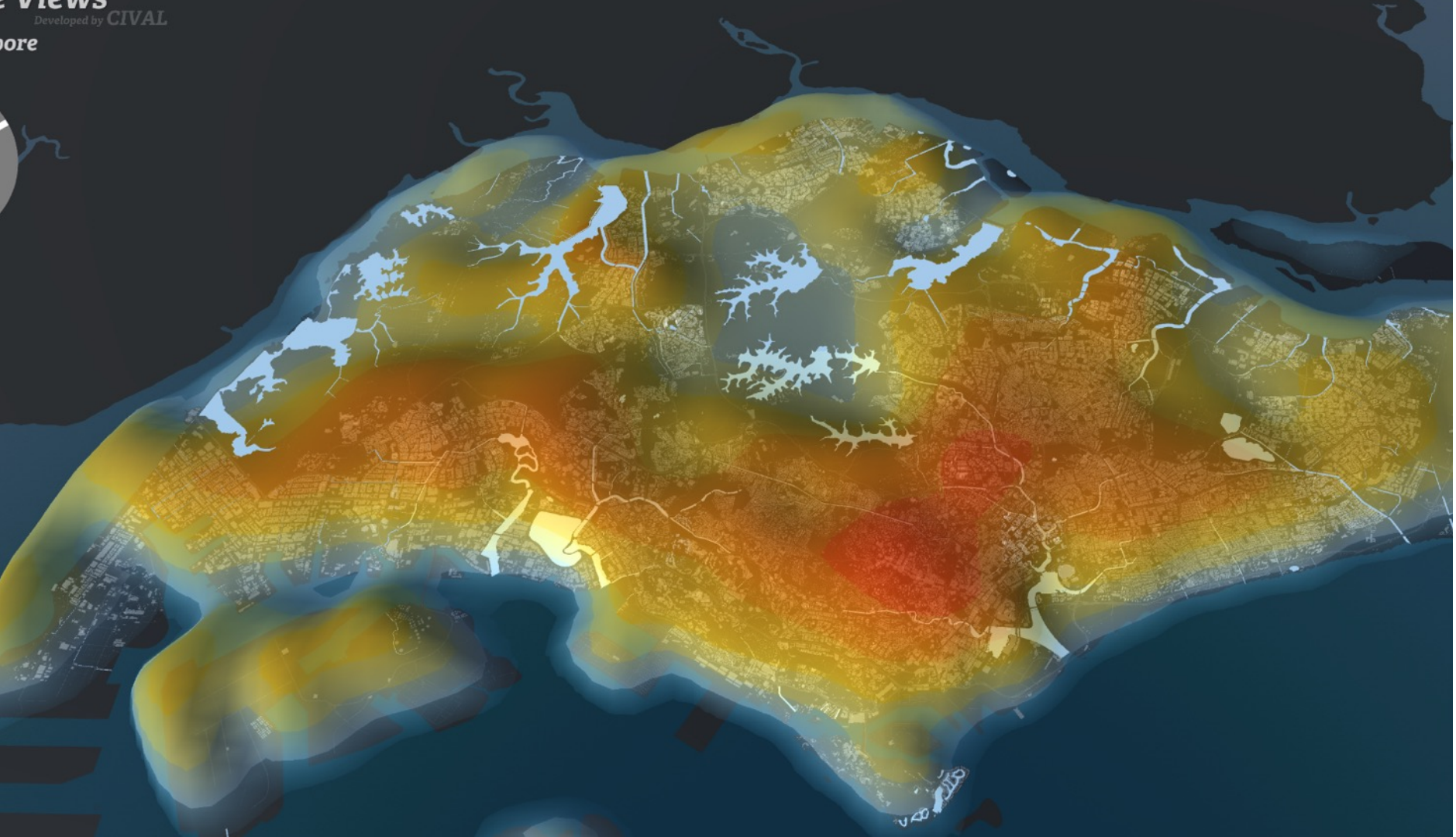
Cooling Singapore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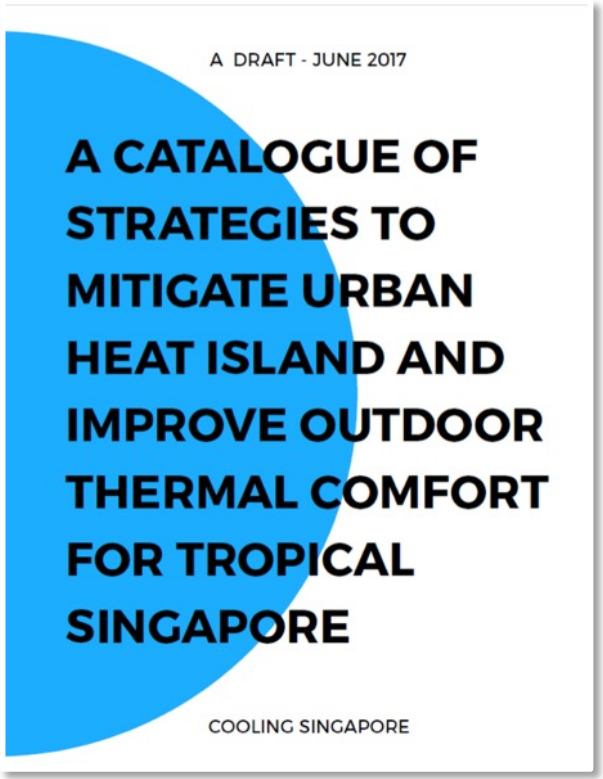

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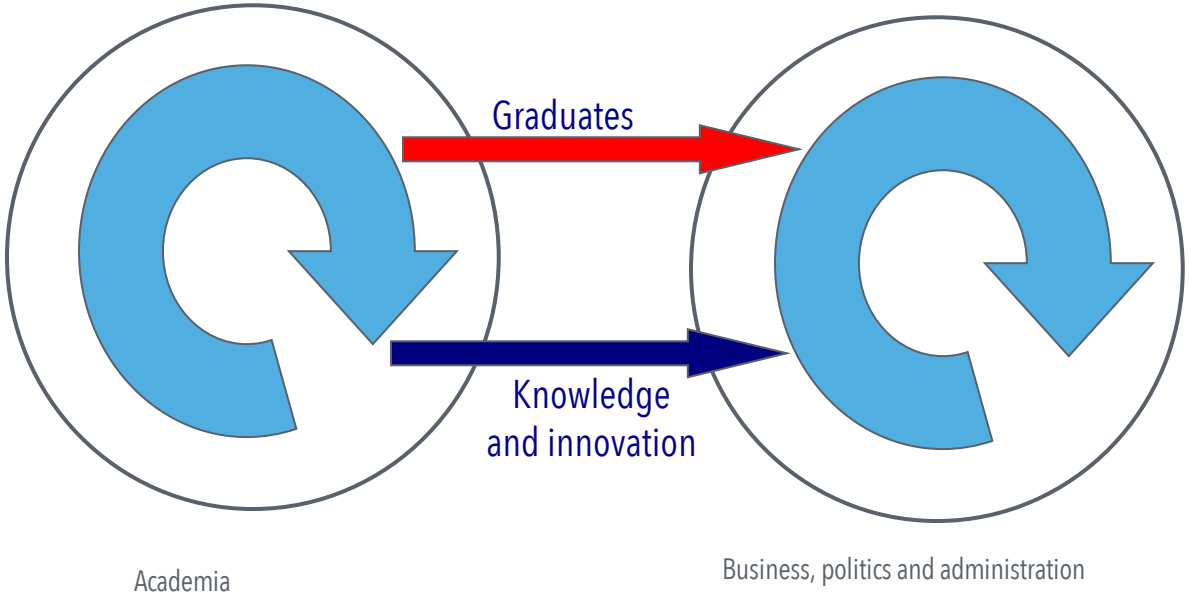
...you have to work things out
together!

The role of universities

Supporting a growth-based economy (model 1)



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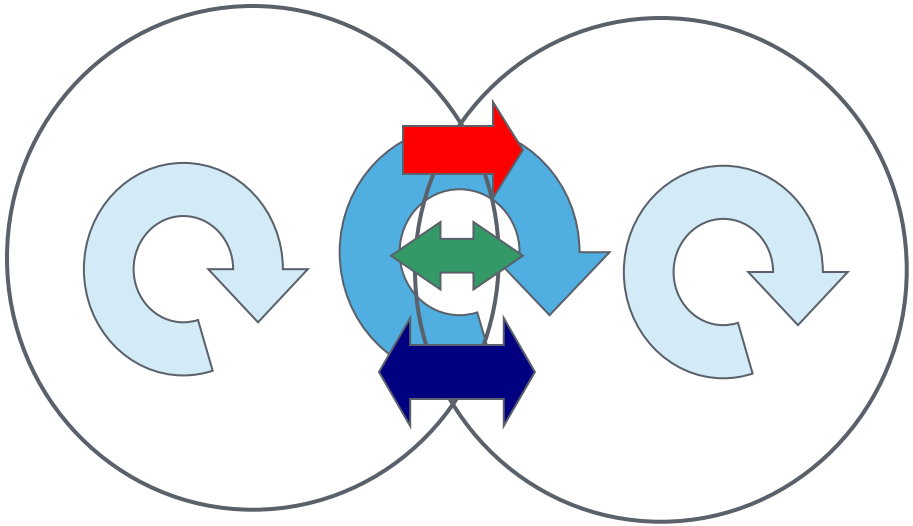
Supporting societal transformation (model 2)



Graduates
Staff mobility
Co-production of knowledge

Academia

Politics, administration and business

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Lighthouse programmes

Large, integrated funding programmes designed to support impact-oriented research and innovation for sustainable development

Goals of lighthouse programmes

Scientific goals

- Work on sustainability problems in their broader contexts
- Develop new theoretical and methodological approaches
- Provide actionable knowledge on case-based, specific problems
- Develop metrics and monitor progress towards sustainability
- Track changing research needs (and respond at short notice to emerging issues)
- Provide a scientific underpinning for more focused research

Goals of lighthouse programmes

Societal goals

- Build a platform for co-production between academia and society
- Create an information hub in support of science-based decision making
- Provide a forum for public debate on issues of sustainability
- Establish a dialogue with decision-makers
- Support societal transformation

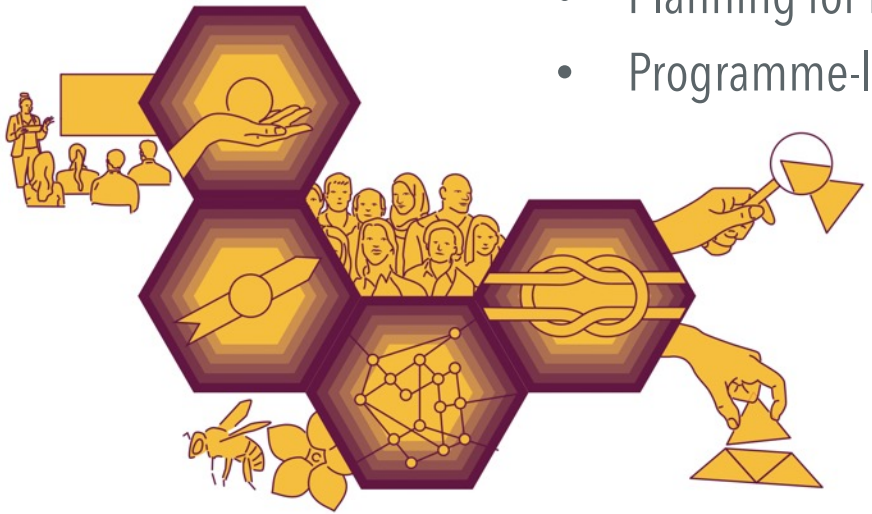
Goals of lighthouse programmes

Institutional goals

- Strengthen the institutional capacity to address questions related to sustainability
- Establish true interdisciplinarity across faculties, departments and institutions
- Develop strong capacities in transdisciplinarity and science–society–policy dialogue
- Establish enduring networks with non-academic stakeholders
- Build strong international collaborations
- Provide a model for future transdisciplinary research structures within institutions

Ch. 2: Essential features of lighthouse programmes

- Embracing the complexity of sustainability questions
- Ensuring societal pertinence
- Planning for impact
- Programme-level support for sustainability projects



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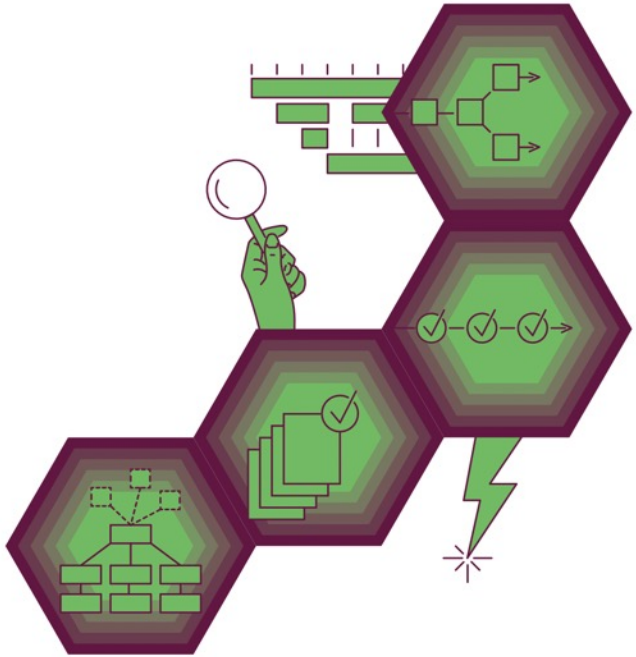
Ch. 3: Programme development, governance, and impact evaluation

- Redefining programme development
- Expanding programme leadership
- Redesigning proposal assessment
- Integrating formative impact evaluation



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Ch. 4: Implications for research institutions

- Making sustainable development an institutional priority
- Fostering cross-cutting structures
- Building capacity
- Developing careers

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Funding lighthouse projects: why a new approach is needed

- Lighthouse programmes need substantial funding
- Some important elements can be difficult to fund adequately, e.g., project development, supporting stakeholders, dialogue with policy and society, implementation
- Existing instruments such as NRP's are too short and usually too sharply focused on specific problems
- Sustainability research has to compete with other thematic areas for access to these funds
- Most funding agencies are already stretched

Collaboration amongst funders: a possible way forwards

Partners: a group of organizations that commit to supporting lighthouse programmes, e.g., SNSF, government agencies, Innosuisse, universities (e.g. EPFL), cities and cantons, private sector, trusts & foundations, etc.

Mission: promoting research and innovation for a societal transition to sustainability

Main activities:

- Continuing dialogue with policymakers to identify research priorities
- Issue calls for proposals
- Assemble funding consortia for individual programmes
- Programme approval and oversight

With thanks to the many experts who contributed in different ways to the preparation of this report

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Thank you for your attention!

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