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Another cool idea for Singapore

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The second, three-year phase of the Cooling Singapore project is under way with a "digital twin" of the Republic being built which will allow researchers and policymakers to find out the various factors that affect outdoor temperatures, be it traffic flow, the type of land surface, or the proximity of a water body. They can also use the model to see how new strategies can be devised to make it more comfortable for people to be outdoors. Data on Singapore's buildings, traffic, vegetation and land surfaces will be incorporated. Other factors, such as the direction and amount of wind that a particular area gets, or the relative humidity, will be incorporated in the model, called the Digital Urban Climate Twin, or Duct.

The Cooling Singapore project, which is funded by the National Research Foundation, addresses a key issue: Singapore has become warmer in recent years because of what is termed the urban heat island (UHI) effect. The UHI effect, which is the air temperature difference between rural and urban areas, helps explain how urbanisation and human behaviour contribute to higher temperatures in a city. In tropical Singapore, increased temperatures owing to the UHI effect have an impact on liveability, not least in the form of thermal comfort outdoors. Thus, reducing the effect will clearly improve people's quality of life. The Cooling Singapore website warns that many of these problems are likely to become more severe, partly because of urban growth but also because of the impact of climate change on cities.

The Cooling Singapore project aims to assess and measure cooling strategies, develop a decision support system, and design climate-responsive guidelines. The project is an example of the development of technological research and of scientific metrics and tools, and their use as part of a whole-of-government approach. This is important since policies will impinge on a range of areas, including planning, transport, construction and patterns of individual consumption. The project's first phase, which began in 2017 and has ended, came up with 86 strategies to cool the city. Phase two will no doubt help finesse plans through simulation that employs real-life parameters.

Exciting as these scientific explorations of reality are, they need to be complemented by public awareness of the fragility of ecological life. Climate change in general and global warming in particular are existential threats that are recognised widely and deeply today. However, personal and organisational responsibility for intangible but genuinely destructive change - such as activities that contribute to growing the carbon footprint - is not treated seriously by all. Everyday behaviour, manifested in the consumption of single-use plastic bags, for example, does leave an incremental scar on the environment. Singaporeans need to be better environmental citizens.

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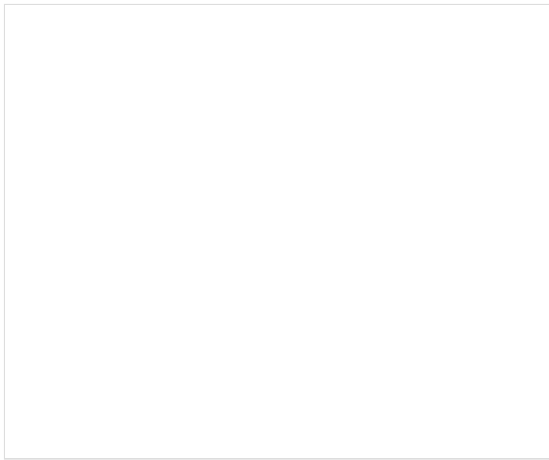
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