Europe and Singapore have a long history of excellent relations in various fields - from business to culture. In the area of education, research and innovation the exchanges are also well established. Numerous European companies have research centers in Singapore; European scientists are working here and Singaporean students spend time at European universities. These are just a few examples of the “brain circulation” that is taking place.

The increasingly borderless world we live in is more apparent in Singapore than anywhere else. According to official statistics from 2009, around 5,000 of all research scientists and engineers working in Singapore are foreign citizens (non-permanent residents). The mobility of the research community is increasingly global.

The EU recently launched its “Innovation Union” to boost competitiveness and make research and innovation the motor for growth in Europe. It will also make mobility for scientists and entrepreneurs in Europe easier. Furthermore, the European Research Area will become more attractive to the rest of the world.

So what opportunities exist in Europe and Singapore for both companies and researchers? A central pillar is the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) for research collaboration – the largest funding programme in the world – and its predecessor Horizon 2020, which will run from 2014 to 2020. The FP7 presents various possibilities for research collaboration and exchanges and calls are continuously published. An example is the Marie Curie fellowships that are already familiar to many researchers and will continue to facilitate mobility. The European Research Council (ERC) has several highly competitive research grants open for scientists regardless of nationality, whether they are at the beginning of their careers or at a more advanced stage. Moreover, at the national level in Europe, numerous grants, fellowships and other initiatives are open to researchers from all over the world, including Singapore.

EURAXESS is a community of researchers which has grown to also encompass thousands of individuals in Europe, the US, Japan, China, India and Singapore. In Singapore alone the total membership is approaching 900. What the community can provide is continuously updated information about jobs, fellowships and funding, as well as research news from both Europe and Singapore. EURAXESS also has a network of service centers, which assists foreign and European researchers when pursuing a career in Europe. The objective of the initiative, which was launched by the European Commission in 2006, is to increase collaboration and simplify mobility of researchers within Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world. Membership is free of charge and open to all - so join today!

Pierre Herges

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Two senior EU decision makers will come to Singapore in the first quarter of 2012. The President of the European Research Council (ERC), Prof. Dr. Helga Nowotny, will be in Singapore early February to introduce ERC’s fellowship schemes to Singaporean researchers and meet local research organisations, and the European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Mrs. Máire Geoghegan-Quinn will come in March. With a reinforced cooperation with the EU, Singapore could take advantage of a more diversified choice of partners for R&D.

Mr. Christophe Forax, Counsellor ICT and Audiovisual, EU Delegation to Singapore

“Why is Singapore a good environment to do research for European companies”?

A good example of research collaboration between Singapore and Europe is the S$14 million Fraunhofer IDM@NTU Project Centre that officially opened on June 20th 2011 and conducts research on Interactive Digital Media (IDM) technologies covering a range of key topics in the area of Visual Computing. They explain that Singapore is building on a knowledge-based future for longer-term economic sustainability with emphasis in the area of manpower development, especially for the Science and Technology industries. Nurturing a rich Research & Development (R&D) ecosystem with strong respect for intellectual property rights, Singapore has naturally attracted world-class researchers to settle down.

The National Research Foundation (NRF) was tasked with leading Singapore’s R&D development with a fund of S$5billion to support development of three strategic research areas, which includes Biomedical Sciences - Translational and Clinical Research, Environmental and Water Technologies and Interactive Digital Media (IDM). A combination of state-of-the-art research facilities, sufficient public sector support and an environment conducive to research have propelled Singapore as a first choice destination for scientific innovation and a talent destination for R&D. Moreover, scientists are encouraged to cut across conventional boundaries and collaborate together to solve complex multi-disciplinary real world problems. These dynamic synergies have transformed Singapore into a vibrant R&D ecosystem with a growing research community that is closely plugged into trade and industry.

Fraunhofer IDM@NTU summarizes the aimed cooperation desired between Europe and Singapore. It serves as a bridge to Europe by providing the opportunity to local entities to link with numerous overseas universities and industries leveraging on their expertise in EU ICT themes. Further to this, this ecosystem allows the extension of existing networks in Europe to Asia and promotes closer ties between the people from the two regions to collaboratively conceptualise, co-create and test-bed new solutions for commercialisation in Asia and globally.

Mr. Gerald Lui, Senior Assistant Director, Fraunhofer IDM@NTU