

IN FOCUS:

# SEADS FEATURE



## DRAPAC 2025: Tracing Data Trails

By Arran Ridley

At DRAPAC25, Arran Ridley led an 80-minute data walking workshop where participants explored how surveillance infrastructures shape everyday spaces.

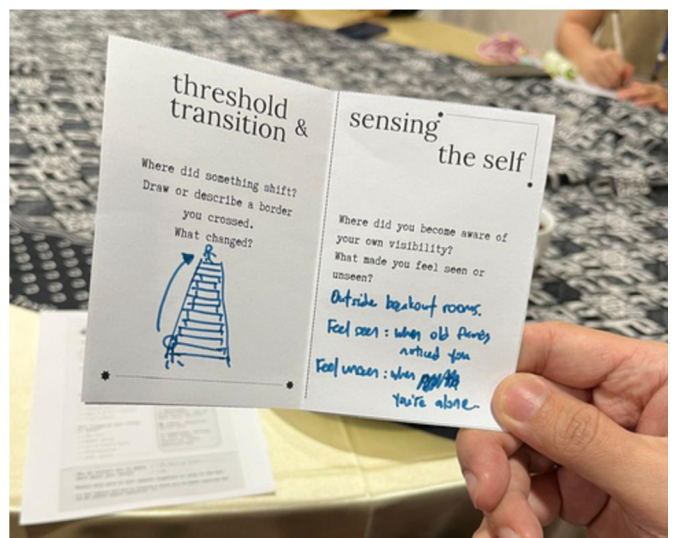
Using field guides, they documented both visible (CCTV, architecture) and invisible (Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, mobile tracking) systems while reflecting on how these infrastructures alter behaviour and perceptions of safety.

The method, rooted in critical data studies, transformed surveillance from an abstract policy concept into an embodied, lived experience.

Participants became hyper-aware of the contradictions: cameras as both protection and control, architecture as silent monitoring, and the myth of “private” spaces when phones continuously collect data.

### ● Key Takeaways

- Surveillance creates both safety and control.
- Privacy is fragile in digitally connected spaces.
- Embodied awareness makes data infrastructures visible.



## DRAPAC 2025: SEADS' Zine-making Workshop

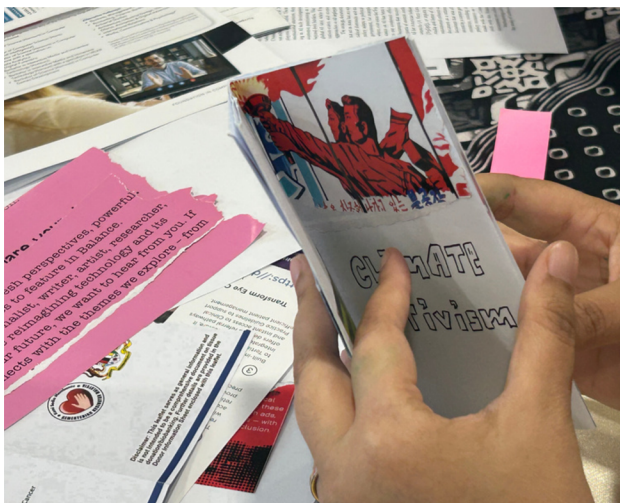
By Prof Emma Baulch

The current hype around Artificial Intelligence (AI) is everywhere - and so are the red flags that pop up when thinking through the consequences of current AI for society.

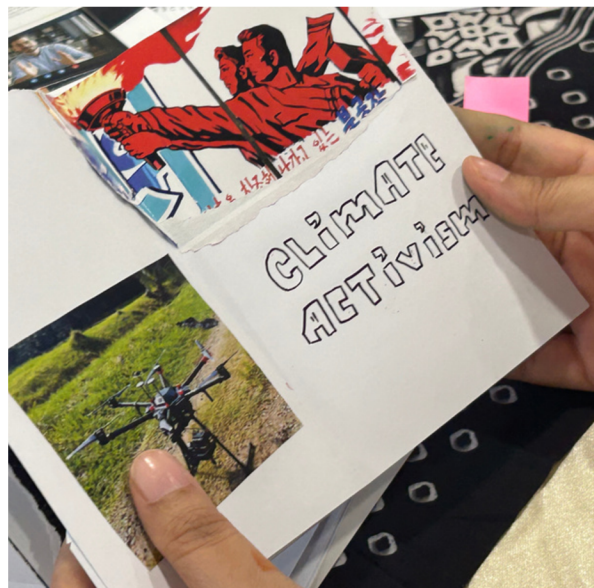
Bias, exclusion, privacy infringements, surveillance, environmental concerns, intellectual property theft, job destruction, manipulation, data colonialism, and unchecked corporate power all come to mind.

In a zine-making workshop conducted on 27th August as part of Engage Media's Digital Rights in Asia-Pacific Assembly, Stefan and Emma invited participants to use their creative side to think up alternatives to the current, big tech corporate (business) model of AI.

What does a good AI future look like? What should AI do for future societies in the majority world? Who should have a say in AI futures?



## SEADS FEATURE



Participants used scissors, papers, scraps, stickers, glue, and post-its to cut and paste their way into imagining a better AI future.

They made zines (you know, that small, foldable, paper pamphlet thingy); and then used their zines as conversation starters with other participants.



## KL Smart Cities Expo 2025

SEADS will be hosting two panels as part of the KL Smart Cities Expo 2025, taking place from the **17th to 19th September 2025** at the KL Convention Center.

### Indicators: Pros and Cons

*Date: 19th September 2025 (Friday)*

*Time: 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM*

*Venue: Hall 4 (KL Convention Center)*

Smart cities produce and utilise data to improve the function and experiences of cities. These data are often represented as 'indicators' to determine how the city is performing. Some indicators draw on standard urban data that has been around for decades, some draw on new data generated from smart networked ICT technologies, and some indicators that would improve city life don't yet have reliable sources of data.

In this panel we ask: What indicators are most useful measuring KL's success in its journey towards smart city status? What future indicators would further the potential of smart cities? And what are some of the downsides of indicators?

### Panellists:

- **Chong Meng Nan**, Professor and Director of the Centre for Net-Zero Technology at Monash University Malaysia
- **Hazirah Mohd Ghazali**, C40 Cities
- **Duncan McDuire-Ra**, Professor of Urban Studies, SEADS

### Moderator:

**Meera Sivasothy**, Professor Of Practice, Digital Media & Communication at School of Arts & Social Sciences, Monash University Malaysia.

## You're Invited! SEADS Future Event

### Modelling: who should we emulate?

*Date: 19th September 2025 (Friday)*

*Time: 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM*

*Venue: Hall 4 (KL Convention Center)*

The spread of smart city ideas, including through expos such as this, are aided by modelling. Modelling refers to taking smart city technologies used in other cities, or other cities entirely, as models to emulate. In Asia, a very limited number of cities are used as models again and again, such as Songdo (Korea), Singapore, and Masdar (UAE). In recent years, digital twinning has become a way to model future versions of current cities, adding further complexity.

In this panel we ask: What kinds of cities can KL learn from in plotting its smart city journey? What value do some lesser known smart city cases have for KL, especially when it comes to retrofitting? And what are some of the downsides of modelling in Southeast Asia?

### Panellists:

- **Tham Wai Liang**, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
- **Peter Leong**, KLRA+SD
- **Norhafiza Shafie**, UNDP Malaysia

### Moderator:

**Meera Sivasothy**, Professor Of Practice, Digital Media & Communication at School of Arts & Social Sciences, Monash University Malaysia.

**Register for the expo via [this link](#).**

## Data & Democracy Dialogue 2025

Data & Democracy Dialogue 2025 will examine the urgent intersections of digital transformation and democratic governance in ASEAN. While digital connectivity expands participation, it also heightens risks from disinformation, algorithmic manipulation, and eroding public trust.

Following the 2024 dialogue on “Information Disorder during Election Period,” this year’s forum will focus on findings from a new ASEAN Disinformation Index.

Unlike global measures, this project addresses regional dynamics, tracking how disinformation impacts electoral integrity, participation, and civil liberties.

The 2025 Dialogue will connect research with policy and civil society, exploring ways to build digital resilience, restore trust, and strengthen democracy through inclusive, data-driven governance.

## You're Invited! SEADS Future Event



### DATA AND DEMOCRACY DIALOGUE 2025

30 SEP - 1 OCT 2025  
9AM-5PM  
MONASH UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

Come engage in dialogue with industry experts on the complex interplay between digital transformation and democratic governance in the ASEAN region.

Register via:  
<https://rb.gy/qcxn8c>



Monash University Malaysia Registration No. 199801002475 (458601-0) (D.A.N0028)

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Organised with SEADS, the event runs from 30 September to 1 October 2025.

**Interested?**  
**Register via [this link](https://rb.gy/qcxn8c).**

## Unpacking 'AI for Social Good'

By Prof Emma Baulch

One of the novel things about the effervescence of AI tech in recent years is the way it has been accompanied by the proliferation of the term 'AI for social good'. This proliferation signals an important new development in the way data industries present themselves publicly.

It marks a break with the ways data industries presented themselves when their 'distribution layer' - i.e. social platforms, were first being laid down in the 2000s. Then, libertarian Silicon Valley ideologies were ascendant enough to bake notions of social good into the platforms' very materials.

This 'baking in' was supported by considerable scholarly attention to the links between uses of platforms and the successes of pro-democracy movements, at least up until the techno-pessimistic turn around the Cambridge Analytica scandal and Trump's 2016 victory.

In the early days of social platforms, ideological conditions supported the naturalising of data industries' social good. Today, the prominence of social good visions for AI suggests that these conditions have changed, as have the ways the data industries discursively construct themselves.

## Sowing SEADS: Words From the Team



Nowadays data industries cannot plausibly present themselves as a singularly or naturally liberal force, so instead they present an image of themselves as labouring to counter a sea of 'bad actors'.

This transformation makes sense if we understand that the data industries now operate in an environment in which the libertarian vision is no longer singular. Just as we enter the phase of internet development that Athique refers to as the 'transactional layer' (involving the expansion of e-commerce powered by AI) the libertarian vision encounters two challenges that may explain the proliferation of AI for Social Good projects.

First, not only in Europe but in Southeast Asia too, states are newly keen to play a role in regulating platforms. This regulatory turn can be seen in the prominence of governance and ethics, regulation and safety in the framing of Malaysia's National AI Action Plan, currently under development.

The regulatory turn is not necessarily something that works against the interests of platforms because, as Hardaker argues in her study of Alibaba's role in Malaysia's Digital Free Trade Zone, platforms are in a position to exert infrastructural power to shape regulatory outcomes. However, it is still something that platforms need to anticipate and strategise around in ways that can be packaged as 'social good' outcomes (because they involve the exploitation of state resources). For example, in Malaysia Alibaba receives government support to deliver e-commerce training for brick and mortar retailers.

The second challenge to the libertarian vision is presented by the important presence of Chinese e-commerce capital in the Malaysian e-commerce sector and the alternate visions of the social good associated with Chinese AI futures.

How these competing visions play out in the Malaysian context was made clear in May 2025 when the Deputy Communications Minister announced Malaysia's first sovereign full stack AI infrastructure: "an important step in the country's AI development as localising large language models like DeepSeek and hosting servers domestically would enhance AI sovereignty by ensuring data is processed locally, thus safeguarding user privacy and data security".

At the same event the Minister launched Malaysia's first sovereign generative AI environment powered by Huawei GPUs. Two days later, the Deputy retracted her remarks that the sovereign stack involved Huawei GPUs without giving a reason, but Bloomberg reported that the retraction followed Trump's AI advisor, David Sack's post about the announcement on X. Sacks claimed that the development justified Trump's rescinding of Biden's AI Diffusion rule, which limited exports of NVIDIA chips to Tier 2 countries like Malaysia to 50,000 units. Critics argued that the rule encouraged countries to look to China for support in developing AI infrastructure.

The controversy over the Minister's statement and the subsequent withdrawal reveals how these contestations are taking place in Malaysia. The Chinese approach to AI governance emphasizing sovereignty, and the ascendancy of the state in determining norms, can be distinguished from both the US model of multi-stakeholderism and the EU supranational approach. In a context in which global AI governance norms are not fixed, contrasting models compete for dominance, especially in contexts like Malaysia, where Chinese capital plays a significant role. It will be interesting to keep an eye on how these competing models generate competing notions of AI for social good.

*Emma Baulch is Associate Professor of Media and Communications at Monash University Malaysia and also the Director of SEADS. Emma researches media and popular culture using cultural studies approaches, focusing specifically on the co-constitution of media technologies and societies in Indonesia and, more recently, Malaysia.*



## Grant Announcement



(2026)

Katrien Jacobs, has been awarded a Senior Research Fellowship at the Maison de la Création et de l'Innovation (MaCI) – Université Grenoble Alpes (UGA), by the International Excellence in the Humanities Programme Scientific Committee for a research project entitled “Alterhumans, Deepfakery and Sex-Gender Politics”.

She will be full-time resident at the MaCI in 2026 from 15 January 2026 to 15 June 2026.

## The Myth of Slacktivism

By Preevena Devi

Digital activism is often dismissed as slacktivism. But what if it's actually the frontline of twenty-first century protest?

From #EndSARS in Nigeria to #MeToo across the globe, movements that began with a hashtag spilled into the streets, courtrooms, and policy debates. Tweets became testimonies. Instagram posts became evidence.

Livestreams became shields against state violence. Far from being lazy clicks, these actions translated into physical demonstrations, legal reforms, and shifts in collective consciousness.

The myth of slacktivism ignores who is speaking and what they risk. For activists in authoritarian states, a single post can mean surveillance, harassment, or imprisonment. For marginalised groups, digital platforms are often the only space to mobilise and be heard.

### ● Get In Touch With Us

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## Myth or Reality?



Are likes and shares superficial, or are they signals of solidarity that scale movements beyond borders?

Right now, they are both. Digital activism is messy, imperfect, and uneven, but it remains a force that blurs the line between the virtual and the real.

Until we stop trivialising online dissent, we will keep underestimating one of the most powerful tools for social change.