

**PETER EDWARDS****Director, Singapore-ETH Centre**

Peter Edwards has been the director of the Singapore-ETH Centre since 2013 and is currently the principal investigator of the Ecosystem Services in Urban Landscapes project under the Future Cities Laboratory. In Singapore, he is also adjunct professor in the Asian School of the Environment at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU). He has been professor of Plant Ecology at ETH Zurich - the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich since 1993, where he has also served as Chairman of the Department of Environmental Systems Science. Prior to this, he was a Lecturer/Senior lecturer in Ecology at the University of Southampton, England, from 1973-1993.

Peter Edwards took the natural science tripos at Cambridge University, specialising in botany, and graduated in 1970. In 1973 he obtained his PhD degree, also from Cambridge, for a thesis entitled *Nutrient cycling in a New Guinea montane forest*. He has always had a strong interest in the application of science and technology for better policy. He was a founder and first Executive Secretary of the Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management, a professional organisation for environmental practitioners. He was on the Executive Board of the Alliance for Global Sustainability, a research partnership between several leading universities.

**Technological myopia**

Innovation is good; disruptive innovation is better! We live at a time when many countries, fearing to be left behind in the technological rat-race, are promoting technological innovation as the greatest virtue. At the same time, most governments are curiously incurious about the possible wider consequences of those new technologies, were they to be successful. They may set regulations to ensure that the invention is safe and does not cause pollution or interfere with privacy, but rarely do they seriously consider other social or demographic or economic impacts. Yet there are many examples to show that truly disruptive technologies – the new crop varieties of the green revolution, the oral contraceptive pill, the internet – may change everyone's life, either directly or indirectly, and not always for the better. In this talk I will explore some of the unforeseen consequences of disruptive technologies and ask why it is that we have such difficulty anticipating them. I conclude with some open questions – does it matter? and, if so, what can we do about it?