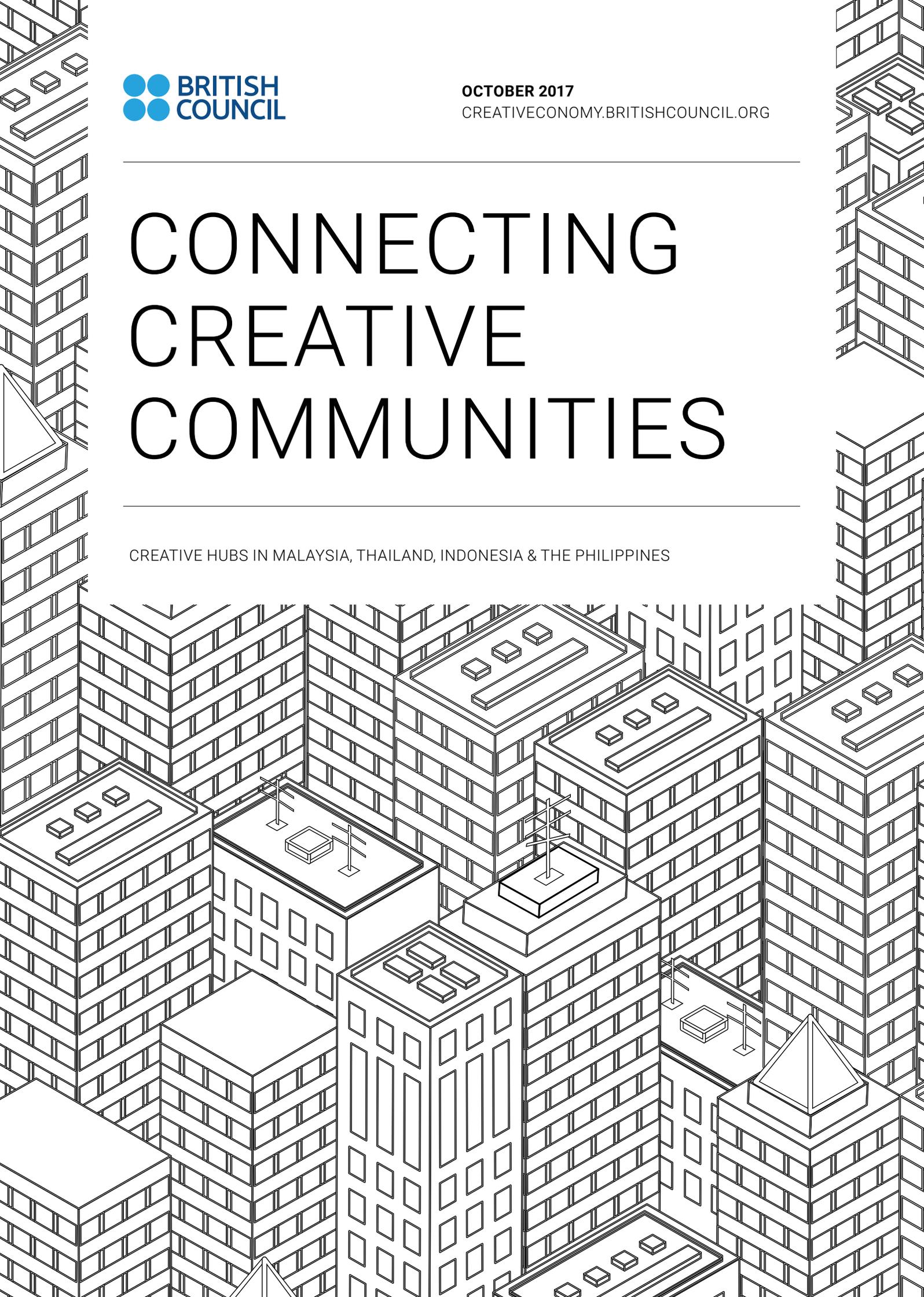

CONNECTING CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

CREATIVE HUBS IN MALAYSIA, THAILAND, INDONESIA & THE PHILIPPINES

The background of the entire page is a detailed isometric line drawing of a city skyline. The buildings are rendered in a clean, geometric style using black lines on a white background. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down at the city. The buildings vary in height and are arranged in a dense, interconnected pattern. Some buildings have flat roofs with small rectangular structures on top, while others have more complex rooflines. The overall effect is a sense of a vibrant, modern urban environment.

CONNECTING CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

CREATIVE HUBS IN MALAYSIA,
THAILAND, INDONESIA &
THE PHILIPPINES

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INTRODUCTION



Earlier this year, British Council commissioned a series of reports to map creative hubs in Southeast Asia. Beyond simply identifying and indexing creative hubs, the research was intended to find out about the challenges they face, the impact they make and the ways they operate.

The resulting studies carried out in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines show many shared threads, as well as a larger, complex picture. A broad definition of “creative hubs” can cover a range of groups, organisations, spaces and ideas. Among the four countries, an initial challenge was to define a “creative hub” according to local context.

1
Art For Grabs,
Malaysia

Globally, the term “creative hub” is used broadly, and can be taken as an umbrella term. The HubKit published by British Council describes a creative hub as:

A place, either physical or virtual, which brings creative people together. It is a convenor, providing space and support for networking, business development and community engagement within the creative, cultural and tech sectors.¹

Such hubs can be for-profit, non-profit, or social enterprises. They can range from an arts programme for teenagers, to a co-working space for startup entrepreneurs, to a makerspace with the tools to build a robot. Some hubs have sprung up in the age of internet connectivity, others date back decades and are based on the enduring practice of community spirit.

We can already see how many paths such research might take. And indeed, it did. In the Philippines and Malaysia, the researchers chose to focus on creative hubs that are primarily artist-led community spaces. In Thailand and Indonesia, the focus was co-working spaces, which have mostly emerged from the tech and startup sector.

Ultimately, the compiled research shows that the four countries are diverse within and among one another. If the initial mapping project is a starting point, then this summary report is at best a spotlight: highlighting various creative hubs across the region, and illuminating a few commonalities and opportunities.

DEFINING CREATIVE HUBS

In mapping “creative hubs”, the researchers from each country loosely categorised different kinds of groups and spaces. Each country presented its own reference points. In the Philippines, for example, it was noted that physical spaces are necessary to the definition of a creative hub, and so virtual networks were not included. In Malaysia, on the other hand, the survey of “creative hubs” included event convenors such as festivals, since these play a large role in the development of the country’s artistic communities.



For ease of reference, the following information shows the main categories for different spaces, with creative hub examples drawn from each country’s research.

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND



ARTS & COMMUNITY SPACES

Spaces for the practice and support of the arts and community development, founded by individual practitioners or patrons, usually with a grassroots and organic development. These spaces seek income from a range of sources.

- PSP
- 98B COLLABORATORY
- LOS OTROS
- CASA SAN MIGUEL
- SIPAT LAWIN ENSEMBLE
- GREEN PAPAYA PROJECTS
- BELLAS ARTES PROJECTS
- C20 LIBRARY
- RIMBUN DAHAN
- LOSTGENS
- THE ACTORS STUDIO
- SENI TEATER RAKYAT



CO-WORKING SPACES

Spaces set up for startups and freelancers to rent a desk or office unit, with a focus on the technology industry. These are usually run by entrepreneurs with the backing of the private sector, but can also be open to a wider community.

- HUBBA
- GLOWFISH
- C ASEAN
- CO.LAB
- DILO
- CODE MARGONDA



NETWORKS

These spaces – sometimes virtual – bring together individuals and organisations with shared interests, facilitating networking and information exchange.

- MALAYSIAN WRITERS COMMUNITY
- BANDUNG CREATIVE CITY FORUM
- COWORKING INDONESIA



INSTITUTIONAL SPACES

Spaces for learning and development set up by an institution or by the government, with the aim of providing facilities and opportunities for the creative economy.

- MIRIAM COLLEGE, HENRY SY SNR. INNOVATION CENTRE
- TCDC



CLUSTERS

Neighbouring spaces that are rented out to creative businesses, often owned by a landlord who aims to create a sense of community.

- 33SPACE
- ZHONGSHAN BUILDING
- KILANG BATERI



EVENT CONVENORS

Rather than being tied to a specific space, these event organisers bring together groups of creative people at events such as festivals.

- GEORGE TOWN FESTIVAL
- ART FOR GRABS



MAKERSPACES

Spaces equipped with tools that bridge design and technology, often based on a blueprint originating from the US.

- FABCAFE
- MAKEDONIA

MAPPING

It is unsurprising to find that in the four Southeast Asian countries surveyed, the capital city is where we find a high density of creative hubs. This is where young people are drawn for education and jobs, and it is also where access to technology, cultural events and supporting international institutions are most prevalent.

However, the four research projects also note that creative hubs are having an impact in many places outside of the capital. Indeed, the very absence of cultural activity is what sometimes leads to individuals starting their own movements and collectives. This section explores the geography of creative hubs in each country, as well as the broader national context.

- 2 George Town Festival 2015
- 3 Reading room on fourth floor at TCDC building
- 4 TCDC library

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

M In the 1990s, then-Prime Minister of Malaysia Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad channelled national investment into digital technology, establishing a Silicon Valley-inspired area known as Cyberjaya.² Malaysia has continued to invest in technology and the startup sector in the decades since.

At the same time, various artist practitioners and patrons set up their own spaces in the 1990s, including the art residency Rimbun Dahan (1994) and the cross-disciplinary theatre collective Five Arts Centre (1995). Such groups sought to provide alternative platforms in the face of government censorship and strictures on the arts.

In the early 2000s, the creative arts festival Urbanscapes was launched by an independent media company. The festival channelled a new sense of possibility for Kuala Lumpur's young artists, writers and musicians just as blogging and new media culture emerged. The Annexe Gallery also became a space for exchanges between artists and activists.

Co-working spaces began to appear following 2010, with more digital nomads and freelancers in search of a space to work. Not all survived, but a few have remained steadfast and others continue to open. WORQ, one of the latest, is backed by members of 500 Startups and Cradle Fund among other investors.

In the past decade, the government has begun to recognise and support the creative economy: MyCreativeVentures was established to provide loans to creative businesses, while Think City was set up to focus on revitalising urban areas and heritage buildings. Just this year, the government established a Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA).³

Outside of Kuala Lumpur, Penang has rapidly developed as an arts hub, with a boost from George Town's UNESCO World Heritage Site status (awarded in 2008). In other state capitals such as Ipoh, Johor Bahru, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching, creative hubs are building local arts scenes and business opportunities for young people.



T At the turn of the new millennium, the Thai government initiated a raft of policies and structures to develop its mission of moving the country towards a knowledge, innovation and value-based economy. In 2001, the Office of Small and Medium Enterprise (OSMEP) was founded to promote local entrepreneurial firms, followed by National Innovation Agency (NIA) in 2003. The Office of Knowledge Management and Development (OKMD) and Thailand Creative and Design Centre (TCDC) were established in 2004.⁴

TCDC became a premier resource centre and an early model of a co-working space. In 2017 it established a permanent home in Bangkok in the former Grand Post Office. Between 2010 – 2015, several entrepreneurs founded their own co-working spaces and makerspaces in Bangkok.

Beyond Bangkok, Chiang Mai is also notable for its creative enterprises. A branch of TCDC was set up in Chiang Mai in 2013. Prior to that, the initiative Chiang Mai Creative City was established by local groups "with the goal to develop Chiang Mai as a creative city through cooperation between government organizations and private organizations."⁵ The online platform Handmade Chiang Mai, a collaboration with British Council, highlights artisans and makers in the city.⁶

T

BANGKOK, THAILAND
Thailand Creative Design Centre (TCDC)

FOUNDED	2004
NO. OF MEMBERS	30,000
TEAM / EMPLOYEES	N/A
FINANCE STRUCTURE	Non-Profit

TCDC was established by the Thai government as a learning and resource centre for the design industry. The new space, now located in the former Grand Post Office, offers a makerspace, library, co-working space. Approximately half the members are university students.

tcdc.or.th

📍 No. 2 Charoen Krung Rd, Khwaeng Bang Rak, Khet Bang Rak, Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, Bangkok

I

BANDUNG, INDONESIA

Bandung Creative City Forum

<p>FOUNDED 2008</p> <p>NO. OF MEMBERS 50 Organisations 22,000 Online</p> <p>TEAM / EMPLOYEES N/A</p> <p>FINANCE STRUCTURE Non-Profit</p>
<p>Bandung Creative City Forum (BCCF) was established by 50 independent creative organisations based in Bandung. It has since grown to hold an advisory role to the local government. BCCF's co-founder Ridwan Kamil is currently serving as Mayor of Bandung. BCCF connects the public, creative organisations, commercial stakeholders and institutions. It is registered as an association, or <i>perkumpulan</i>.</p>
<p>facebook.com/groups/BandungCreativeCityForum</p> <p>📍 Simpul Space #3, Jalan Taman Cibeunying Selatan No. 5, Bandung</p>

I During the period leading up to and following Indonesia's Reformasi in 1998, several independent art collectives were established. Providing a community for artists to develop and express themselves, these included Cemeti Art House (1995, Yogyakarta), Kedai Kebun Forum (1997, Yogyakarta), ruangrupa (2000, Jakarta) and the Common Room (2001, Bandung). These spaces and others like it gained strength from 2005 – 2010, becoming embedded in an alternative cultural discourse that included not only the arts, but also urban activism. ⁷

In 2010, the first co-working spaces in Indonesia were founded in the major cities of Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya. These spaces answered a need for the burgeoning workforce of young freelancers and tech entrepreneurs. A few years later, there was a boom in these kinds of spaces, as global tech companies also moved into Southeast Asia, with Indonesia – the most populous country in the region – being an attractive gateway.

Bandung, Surabaya and Yogyakarta have grown strong creative, artistic and digital communities. The location of major universities in these cities, with their student and graduate populations, is likely to be a contributing factor. ⁸ Bandung also benefits from local government support through Bandung Creative City Forum. Other cities such as Depok and Makassar are also seeing creative hubs appear.

P The roots of today's art and community spaces in the Philippines can be traced back several decades. In 1974, the alternative art space Shop 6 was founded. But it was in the late 1990s that such spaces really took off, with active collectives and spaces such as Big Sky Mind, Surrounded by Water, Third Space Art Laboratory and Future Prospects. At the beginning of the new millennium, Cubao in Quezon City was also transformed by an influx of new, creative businesses such as boutiques and art galleries. ⁹

By contrast, co-working spaces geared towards the tech sector are a more recent development. Co.lab was founded in 2011, and A Space in 2016. Meanwhile, makerspaces have mostly been set up within schools, colleges and museums. The non-profit organisation, Communitere, set up a makerspace and resource centre designed to assist the rebuilding of its local community in Tacloban, Leyte, following Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

Manila aside, other cities in the Metro Manila area are home to creative hubs, including Quezon City and Pasig City. Some hub founders have consciously chosen to move out of Manila, in order to make the arts more accessible to a wider public. Casa San Miguel, an arts centre, was established in San Antonio, Zambales for this very reason. The town's economy was affected by the closure of a naval air base in the 1990s, and the centre aims to reach local young people as well as those from nearby low-income areas.

IMPACT



The “creative economy” has garnered increasing attention from policymakers around the world. This can refer to a diverse range of industries, from food to films, or advertising to architecture. But the focus is – as the term suggests – economic output. Starting in the 1990s, governments began to pay attention to these sectors, recognising their potential to create jobs and generate intellectual property. ¹⁰

British Council's research into creative hubs is part of a broader initiative to understand and promote the creative economy. However, research from around the world soon showed that the impact of creative hubs cannot only be seen through the lens of economy. As one British Council report puts it, “ultimately ‘a hub is a hub’ when it unites, inspires and promotes a community.” ¹¹

The impact of creative hubs is in fact wide-ranging, and often the impact is more qualitative than quantitative. John Dovey and Andy C. Pratt write in “Creative Hubs: Understanding the New Economy” that the success or failure of creative hubs can only be assessed with “multi criteria evaluation.” ¹²

In Southeast Asia, the tangible impact of creative hubs can be seen in the cultural and commercial platforms they create for creative individuals and enterprises. They also offer career

development through workshops, training or mentorship; and they connect individuals to networks – local, regional, international.

But there's more. Creative hubs can create spaces for belonging, and for self-development. They may be the places where a child learns about music, or where a student can find an alternative archive of films. They can be support networks for writers trying to publish a book, or for aspiring coders to develop an app.

Creative hubs can be catalysts for revitalising a neighbourhood. Sometimes, they repurpose vacant buildings and create a new attraction for locals and tourists alike. Sometimes, they breathe new life into heritage areas, and therefore raise the urgency of conserving and preserving of old buildings. In “secondary cities”, they develop and draw in new talent, offering a home for those who cannot or do not wish to live in the capital.

5
 C asean, Thailand

T



BANGKOK, THAILAND
Hubba



FOUNDED
2012
NO. OF MEMBERS
N/A
TEAM / EMPLOYEES
30
FINANCE STRUCTURE
Profit

Hubba is one of Bangkok's earliest co-working spaces, founded by two brothers who wanted to create an environment for startup entrepreneurs. The co-working space earns revenue from renting office space to members, as well as sponsorships. Hubba also organises various workshops geared towards the digital sector. In 2016, Hubba established two more branches: a makerspace, and a design and fashion focused space.

hubbathailand.com

No. 19 Soi Ekkamai 4,
Sukumvit 63 Rd. Prakanong
Nua, Wattana, Bangkok

A PLACE TO LEARN

Across the creative hubs surveyed, learning and development was a recurring theme. While we might have expected this from arts and community spaces and makerspaces, it was also mentioned by the founders of co-working spaces for startups.

"Will our community learn something and be able to develop professionally? If it is good for them and for their business we will do it," says Amarit Charoenphan, co-founder of Hubba, Bangkok. ¹³

Hubba started out as a co-working space, created by two brothers who wanted to work in the startup industry and realised that Thailand lacked a space that could help people such as themselves. However, Hubba has shifted to become an "ecosystem builder", helping to foster learning and development. Every two months they organise a Hackathon, as well as having 5 – 10 workshops per week and networking events.

Since then, Hubba has gone on to establish two more branches beyond its flagship tech co-working space: Discovery Hubba, for fashion and design, and Hubba-to, which is for art, design and crafts.

Creative hubs like Hubba offer members a chance to learn new skills which can then be used to develop their business. Similarly, makerspaces such as Makedonia in Jakarta and FabCafe in Bangkok offer workshops and the use of tools such as 3D printers, laser cutters and vinyl cutters.

FabCafe also aims to engage with broader social issues: for example, it organises the "Farm Hack" project which aims to tackle issues in local agriculture. For co-founder Kalaya Kovidvisith, FabCafe is also about social and civic engagement. "If we give kids hand skills they would know that it is difficult. They would notice the difference between buying things and making things. Then they would value the time that makers spend on thinking and making the product," she explains. ¹⁴

While some hubs have a membership register, others maintain an open-door policy. This means that members of the public can also benefit from workshops. C asean in Bangkok organises a Hump Day learning session on Wednesdays, which has been running for two years and has grown from 15 participants to 200.

"The youngest participant was 15 years old and the oldest one was 72. Both of them wanted to learn about digital marketing," says Dr. Karndee Leopairrote, director of C asean. ¹⁵

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Beyond technical and professional skills, creative hubs also create a sense of community, allowing people to develop personally. The results may be intangible, but they are nonetheless invaluable.

In Malaysia, the art collective Projek Rabak has helped several young writers and artists kick-start their careers. Co-founder Mohd. Jayzuan has emphasised that personal mentorship is very important to the creative hub: "we offer not just entertainment, but education as well," he explains.

One of Projek Rabak's members, Jack Malik, described the impact of belonging to the community: "I've met so many wonderful people, I've gone places. If it weren't for Projek Rabak, I think I wouldn't expand that much as a poet, as an artist." ¹⁶

In the Philippines, the violinist Alfonso "Coke" Bolipata decided to start a community music project in his hometown of San Antonio, Zambales. The town was not affluent, and he gave violin lessons to gifted children whose families would not have been able to afford such a luxury. Later, this project became Casa San Miguel: a full-fledged art centre, including music, dance and visual arts.

"What are treasured by the students are the self-confidence, personal identity and confidence instilled [by the programme]," note the researchers. Students themselves go on to become mentors as part of a "play it forward" initiative that also instils a sense of leadership. ¹⁷

In Indonesia, C20 Library and Collabtive was set up in in Surabaya in 2008 as a community space, with a range of books and films, as well as a space for people to work. "We want to create a library as a place for knowledge production. People can share their ideas to each other here. Our first initiative was driven by this condition: inequality access to knowledge resources among young people in Surabaya." ¹⁸

Although Surabaya is one of the largest cities in Indonesia, its cultural events did not necessarily match up to its size. C20 was founded by Kathleen Azali, a researcher, designer and developer, with a group of like-minded people. It has since developed into a venue and festival organiser, becoming a hub for young, artistic communities.

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

M



JOHOR BAHRU, MALAYSIA
Kilang Bateri



FOUNDED
2015
NO. OF MEMBERS
180 Vendors
TEAM / EMPLOYEES
13
FINANCE STRUCTURE
Profit

Kilang Bateri is a platform for small scale entrepreneurs and creatives. The space is a converted former factory on industrial land in Johor Bahru. With a market-style layout, the space offers retail stalls for vendors selling clothes, crafts, food and more. Kilang Bateri is also a music venue and has a skate park and climbing wall. It is owned by ForeverReady Sdn Bhd., a company of four young entrepreneurs and an angel investor.

bateri.my

No. 83, Jalan Tampoi,
Johor Bahru

P



QUEZON CITY, THE PHILIPPINES
Los Otros

Los Otros

FOUNDED
2005
NO. OF MEMBERS
N/A
TEAM / EMPLOYEES
5
FINANCE STRUCTURE
Non-Profit

Founded by two filmmakers and artists, Los Otros began as a gathering space for a community of filmmakers. Located in the residential home of the founders, Los Otros is a studio, film laboratory, library and alternative platform for talks, workshops, performances and residency programmes. Los Otros also maintains an archive of experimental films made in the Philippines.

facebook.com/losotrosfilms

📍 No. 59 Mahabagin Street,
Teacher's Village East,
Quezon City, Philippines

DEVELOPING THE ARTS

Creative hubs help to connect the arts to audiences. For the artist, they are a platform; for the public, a means of discovery.

Artist collectives and residencies are particularly crucial in this role. These spaces help artists to develop a body of work, as well as providing guidance on curation, exhibitions and sales. They can also be a rare alternative platform, pushing boundaries in countries where censorship presides over mainstream art and media.

Such spaces include Rimbun Dahan and Lostgens in Malaysia; 98B, Green Papaya, Project Space Pilipinas (PSP) and Los Otros in the Philippines; and Lifepatch, Cemeti Art House and ruangrupa in Indonesia.

6
A performance at Butterworth Fringe Festival 2016 for George Town Festival

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

M Other hubs focus on engaging the public. Every year, George Town Festival in Malaysia brings together local and international performances, exhibitions, talks and other events for a festival that celebrates the city of George Town in Penang. The festival is funded by the Penang state government, but it is also notable for its national impact: people from around the country travel to the festival.

"I think we're still a long way from building an audience for the arts in Malaysia," says Joe Sidek, director of the George Town Festival. Yet the festival – now in its eighth year – is undoubtedly proof of a growing audience, and is a reason that the audience keeps growing.¹⁹

George Town Festival makes a point of giving away tickets to schoolchildren each year, in order to increase public access to the arts. This highlights the festival's broader purpose: to develop the arts landscape and improve access to the arts, even if it means making a commercial loss.



P Sipat Lawin, a theatre ensemble based in Quezon City in the Philippines, works closely with the public in their artistic endeavours. They seek to break the barrier between performer and public, and choose to perform in a range of public spaces, as well as working with schools. They have implemented a policy of allowing the audience to choose how much they pay for the performance.²⁰

CITY CATALYSTS

Creative hubs like C20 in Surabaya, Indonesia, and Projek Rabak in Ipoh, Malaysia, can have a transformative effect on secondary cities, become leaders in the cultural landscape and provide a place for creative people to come together.

At a more local level, creative hubs also have a huge impact on their neighbourhoods. While some hubs revitalise abandoned or derelict spaces, others have reinvented heritage buildings. Some provide unique services to neighbourhoods that might otherwise be marginalised due to their location and class stratification.

7
98 COLLABoratory, the Philippines

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

M Kilang Bateri in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, is a former factory on brownfield land which has become a retail and event space. A group of entrepreneurs leased the land and turned it into a place for almost 200 vendors to sell their wares, as well as a venue and skatepark.

"Basically, we use 'recharge' as a term. We didn't want to use 'rehabilitation' or 'rejuvenation', so we used 'recharge'," says Johan Ropi, co-founder of Kilang Bateri. "We always tell people that we are the 'soul planters'. We find a place, plant in soul, bring in economy, bring activities."²¹

He estimates that their creative hub has created 350 jobs, as well as providing a social and cultural alternative to the shopping malls and theme parks that were previously seen as the state's primary attractions.



P In the Philippines, the artist collective 98B COLLABoratory is currently based in a 1920's art deco building in Escolta, Manila, known as the First United Building. Their move to this location took place in partnership with heritage activists, and has led to 98B becoming "a pivot for the heritage district's transformation".²²

By running a range of programmes, ranging from art exhibitions to vintage markets and block parties, 98B both reaches out to the local community and also invites them into the hub as participants.

P



MANILA, THE PHILIPPINES
98B
COLLABoratory



FOUNDED
2012
NO. OF MEMBERS
7
TEAM / EMPLOYEES
7
FINANCE STRUCTURE
Non-Profit

98B started as an informal group of artists in a rented house, set up as an alternative space for artists to live and work together. It is now located in the First United Building, an art deco heritage building in Manila, where the group run exhibitions, art residencies, film screenings, weekend bazaars and more. 98B aims to connect visual artists, designers, and creatives together with the general public.

98-b.org

📍 No. 413 Escolta Street,
Mezzanine Level,
First United Building, Manila

Besides the value brought to the local economy by tourism, such creative hubs also help to shift local perceptions of neighbourhoods and cities, creating new possibilities for how residents see themselves and each other.

T In Thailand, TCDC has set out to establish Charoenkrung district as a “creative district”. Charoenkrung is one of the oldest areas of the city. However, it has long been considered difficult to access, and it is a stark contrast to the high-rises of commercial areas such as Sukhumvit.

By relocating to this area, TCDC’s aim was to “stimulate the district’s economy and increase different form of investments in the area and also the areas nearby.”²³ It has worked in partnership with the Creative District Foundation to encourage creative businesses such as art galleries to take up residence in the area, as well as to raise the profile of existing traditional businesses.

NETWORKS

Creative hubs thrive on exchange and collaboration among members. But they are also the starting point for members to make wider connections beyond the hub. This is true for spaces led by artists as well as co-working spaces focusing on technology.

In co-working spaces, the networks arise through the proximity of the various businesses and freelancers who share a space. The hubs can also offer regional and international exposure through their events.

T C asean in Bangkok was set up precisely in order to create more connections between startups in the ASEAN region. It has already run its Hump Day event in Vietnam, and plans to do so in Malaysia and Singapore in the future. Hubba in Bangkok is a founding partner of a co-working space alliance across Asia Pacific, in which there are 200 – 300 members.

FabCafe in Bangkok also benefits from an international network, having been started by a group of friends who graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and decided to start FabCafes in their own cities. Other branches include Toulouse, Strasbourg and Tokyo.

P In the arts scene, networks are also considered essential. Artistic circles have recognised the need to support each other and grow the landscape together. The research from the Philippines notes that several creative hubs are closely collaborative, with overlapping members, “perpetuating ideals of *bayanihan*”, or “communal spirit”.²⁴

I Some creative hubs function primarily as networks, existing in order to forge connections. Bandung Creative City Forum (BCCF) is an example of such a network. Founded in 2008 by a group of 50 organisations as an interest group for urban creativity, it has since evolved to hold an advisory role to local government.

BCCF sets out to be the meeting point for creative entrepreneurs, government and industry sectors. According to the researchers, “the forum has successfully connected several sectors in order to collaborate and co-create.”²⁵

Valuable networks are also created when creative hubs work with international institutions such as British Council, the Japan Foundation, Hivos and the Goethe-Institut. It’s worth noting that several creative hubs founders have also been inspired to start their own projects and hubs following an international exchange programme.

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

CHALLENGES



“Creative hubs in Indonesia are generally resilient, as they are established in times of socio-political change. They have learned to be adaptable from the very beginning, many times in a hard way,” write the researchers Fajri Siregar and Daya Sudrajat.²⁶

8
Bataan craftsman,
the Philippines

A similar pattern is seen in the other countries. In Malaysia and the Philippines, creative hubs are often set up by individuals who recognise the need to fill a gap in the creative and cultural sector, and take the task on themselves. The result is creative hubs that are led from the grassroots, often started by a group of friends. In these countries, as with Indonesia, creative hubs cannot rely on government policy or funding for support.

In Thailand, the context is somewhat different, because of the government’s Creative Economy Policy and initiatives

such as TCDC. Yet even in such circumstances, creative hubs have learned that they need to be self-sufficient. For example, Kalaya Kovidvisith set up FabLab in 2008 as a government-funded project within Thammasat University. However, after seven years, FabLab closed down due to “policy problems”. That was when Kovidvisith and her friends decided to start an independent initiative, FabCafe, which did not depend on government funding.²⁷

Even as creative hubs develop their own business models and resilience, they still face multiple challenges along the way.

M KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
Lostgens



FOUNDED
2004

NO. OF MEMBERS
4

TEAM / EMPLOYEES
2

FINANCE STRUCTURE
Non-Profit

Lostgens is a contemporary art studio and collective which also works actively on community projects such as cultural mapping and oral histories, and sometimes branches out into other art forms such as music. It started as a group of friends who organised a festival, Not That Balai Art Festival. Lostgens offers residences to visiting artists, and their space also comprises a simple café and shop selling books and crafts.

lostgenerationspace.blogspot.my

No. 8C, Jalan Panggung,
Kuala Lumpur

MONEY

Financial sustainability is a key issue for most creative hubs surveyed. Because so many hubs arise from passion and the desire to provide a public service, they often don't start with a strong business plan. When faced with rising operational costs, they are forced to close.

I Comma.id was a pioneering co-working space in Indonesia, founded as an experiment during a time when the concept was still very new. It opened in south Jakarta at the end of 2012 but closed in 2016, after the landlord raised the rent.²⁸

Creative hubs which focus on the arts community have an added strain. Co-working spaces for the tech sector can at least charge their members for their facilities. But many art collectives work with members who can't afford to pay much for their services. These creative hubs often end up relying on their founders to subsidise the running costs.

M In Malaysia, the art collective Lostgens relies on its co-founder Yeoh Lian Heng to dip into his own funds to keep operations going. According to Yeoh, Lostgens rarely breaks even, let alone makes a profit.²⁹ The theatre group The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat is also subsidised by its two founders.

P In the Philippines, Project Space Pilipinas' founder Leslie de Chavez opened his own home, and later his family's property, for art exchanges. Currently, "de Chavez subsidises daily operations, monthly production of exhibitions and programmes, and resident artist allowances with personal funds earned from his artistic practice."³⁰ Bellas Artes Projects also depends on one of its founders for patronage.

Creating a strong financial dependency on the founders can place a personal strain on the founders and managers. It also diminishes the sustainability for hubs that don't have a clear business model.



9
Bellas Artes Projects, the Philippines

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

HUMAN RESOURCES

Due to lean finances, many creative hubs are not able to hire many employees. In some cases, this means that founders remain involved in daily operations.

I Fajri and Daya write of Indonesian hubs: "As many spaces are run without a fixed long-term plan, they evolve and become a steady process 'in the making'. This is often time their biggest challenge as well: as the whole vision is centred within their founders, it is more prone to unsustainable management and decision-making is not the most democratic."³¹

Founders can become burnt out by managing every aspect of the hubs, especially if they are not trained in administration matters. Without a structured team, it's more likely that a creative hub will close down when the founder decides to move on.

P In the Philippines, "the fluidity in structure seen in these groups and spaces allows for ease in adapting to the different needs and circumstances they face," write the research team. "However, it also becomes a limitation in the efficiency of their operations."³²

Artist-led creative hubs may have no desire to adopt corporate ways of working. However, founders have expressed a need to get to grips with administrative tasks such as tax returns and registering as non-profit organisations.

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SPACE

Physical spaces are not only gathering points. They also allow creative hubs to be more visible, and offer the social contact that is particularly valuable for individual freelancers. Moreover, space provides valuable ways of earning revenue, which in turn helps a creative hub to be sustainable.

P As researchers from the Philippines note, "To [the founders], the visibility and identity that having a physical space brings legitimises the hubs' presence among audiences and communities."³³

T However, many creative hubs also find themselves based in neighbourhoods where gentrification and commercial development lead to rising rent. FabCafe in Bangkok was faced with a 100% increase in rent this year, but managed to negotiate down to a 50% increase. Because of its location in the rapidly developing Ari district, it anticipates that the rent will only keep rising.³⁴

I JAKARTA, INDONESIA
Makedonia



FOUNDED
2013

NO. OF MEMBERS
1500

TEAM / EMPLOYEES
7

FINANCE STRUCTURE
Non-Profit

Makedonia was one of the first makerspaces to be established in Jakarta. Run on voluntary and community principles, the space provides a range of tools for workshops and projects. The running costs are covered through sponsorships, which keeps their membership free.

makedonia.co

Jalan Pangeran Antasari,
No. 44, Jakarta

T



BANGKOK, THAILAND
FabCafe



FOUNDED
2014
NO. OF MEMBERS
N/A
TEAM / EMPLOYEES
3
FINANCE STRUCTURE
Profit

Part of a global network, FabCafe is a makerspace and café which integrates art, design and technology. The members range from school children, to university students and professionals. Facilities include a 3D printer, laser cutter and vinyl cutter. Various workshops are run throughout the year. First established in Ari, FabCafe will set up two new branches within TCDC and in the Charoenkrung district.

fabcafe.com/bangkok

No. 77/1 Soi Ari 1, Bangkok

MINDSETS

Lack of recognition or buy-in from the public can be very disheartening for hub managers and founders, especially those that set out to be independent. Creative hubs often have an uphill task of reaching out to the public. In the arts sector, creative hubs may invest in developing the work of actors, artists, writers and filmmakers, but struggle to market this work to the public.

- INDONESIA
- MALAYSIA
- PHILIPPINES
- THAILAND

I In Jakarta, co-working spaces backed by venture capitalists "are often established in major commercial districts with an eye on potential customers. As a consequence, the high-rising prices affect membership fees and create the image of the co-working space as an exclusive, premium office space for affluent freelancers."³⁵ Whereas creative hubs aim to be inclusive, this price stratification leads to exclusivity.

M In Kuala Lumpur grassroots creative hubs have little hope of renting buildings in the city centre unless they are in out-of-sight locations such as the upper stories of shoplots. While this arguably helps to decentralise creative spaces, it can also be seen as a kind of marginalisation. Overtime, "unseen" creative spaces perpetuate a culture where their contribution is overlooked and undervalued.

Co-working spaces also have to battle perceptions. In Indonesia, "the second most common challenge [after financial sustainability] is educating the market. As the industry is still very much in an infant stage, the services are only well-understood among small target groups. Creative hubs are often mistaken for an upgraded coffee shop, providing nothing more than a working table and speedy internet connection."³⁶

At the same time, creative hubs sometimes lack the foresight or resources to properly document their own work. This lack of documentation and marketing creates further issues when creative hubs apply for sponsorship and corporate grants.

According to the research from Indonesia, "all spaces [are] impactful, but none are really aware of what they have created. Hubs need to document and archive their activities more seriously."³⁷

SUSTAINABILITY



This section will explore how creative hubs have found a way to be sustainable through a variety of business models. However, it's worth noting that sustainability must also be taken with a pinch of pragmatism.

Creative hubs that do not survive still end up contributing to an ecosystem. A hub's closure does not necessarily equate to failure. As the research from Malaysia notes, "even if hubs are not sustained, their contribution still makes an impact in the long term."

"As some spaces and hubs have died out, others have sprung up. Because so many individuals have connected through their artistic interests, they are also able to take forward new challenges, crossing over to other hubs or starting something new."³⁸

However, planning for sustainability does help creative hubs to thrive.

10

Zhongshan Building at
Kampung Attap, Malaysia

M



KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
Zhongshan Building
at Kampung Attap



FOUNDED
2016
NO. OF MEMBERS
40
TEAM / EMPLOYEES
3
FINANCE STRUCTURE
Profit

The Zhongshan Building is a series of restored 1950s shoplots in the quiet commercial enclave of Kampung Attap, near central Kuala Lumpur. The building is anchored by a gallery space, OUR ArtProjects. The same team owns the building and leases out units to other creative groups and businesses, including a record store, design archive, library and more.

[facebook.com/thezhongshanbuilding](https://www.facebook.com/thezhongshanbuilding)

No. 80, 82 & 84 Jalan Rotan, off Jalan Kampung Attap, Kuala Lumpur

EVENTS, RENT & RETAIL

For co-working spaces, renting out physical space and facilities is the core business model. Freelancers or small businesses will pay a membership fee to use office space either in the short or long term. Makerspaces can charge members for usage of their equipment.

Clusters in the region can be seen as up-scaled versions of co-working spaces. For example, 33Space in Bangkok was a motel until the landlord and manager decided to repurpose the low-rise block into office units for businesses in the art, design and IT sectors. Similarly, Zhongshan Building in Kuala Lumpur rents out its space to a

variety of creative businesses and artists, forming neighbouring units such as artist studios, a record store, a library, and more.

Other kinds of creative hubs can also benefit from space rental. For example, some art residencies charge visiting artists for the usage and experience of their space. Others, such as Project Rabak in Malaysia and Casa San Miguel in the Philippines, use some of their space as guesthouse accommodation.

Beyond simply renting out the space as a venue, creative hubs can also generate income from organising events, or setting up retail ventures such as a shop or café.

PARTNERING WITH COMPANIES & INSTITUTIONS

Creative hubs are well-connected with their communities, both in terms of geography and shared interests. For companies and institutions, partnering with a creative hub is an efficient and valuable way to reach these communities. Such partnerships, in turn, give creative hubs financial support, as well as a different kind of platform.

In the Philippines, many art and community hubs have ongoing collaborative partnerships with institutions.³⁹ Such institutions include the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), British Council, Japan Foundation, Goethe Institute, Asialink, Andy Warhol Foundation, Asia Art Archive and Prince Claus Fund. Green Papaya Projects has been invited to take part in exhibitions at Tate Modern, London, and Singapore Art Museum.

For the sponsoring institution, "these artist-run spaces provide [...]"

the audiences, innovative ideas and practices, as well as content that may not be offered by mainstream establishments."⁴⁰

Malaysian and Indonesian art collectives have also benefited from such collaborations. ruangrupa in Jakarta has worked with Hivos, Ford Foundation, Stichting Doen, Art Collaboratory and British Council. In 2015, ruangrupa collaborated with Sarinah mall to take up unused warehouse space. Working with other art forums, ruangrupa turned the warehouse into an exhibition and events space, Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem.

Co-working spaces and makerspaces also benefit from partnerships. Code Margonda, a co-working space in Depok, has recently gained an injection of funding from the banking service BCA, which enabled it to move to bigger premises. Makedonia uses sponsorships to sustain itself and keep its space free for members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Many creative hubs are started by individuals or groups with a shared dream, so their operations can be fluid and unpredictable. Training in matters such as online marketing, data tracking, tax returns, registration of their entities and financial planning would help hub managers to improve operations and future sustainability.

FUNDING & FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Currently, most creative hubs – especially in the arts sector – rely on short-term funding and grants, which are often tied to a specific project. While these help their overall revenue stream, long-term funding would help them to prepare for the future and plan ahead. While not all creative hubs operate for-profit, financial planning will lessen the strain on founders.

ADVOCACY

Creative hubs are often led by passionate people who are also the best advocates for their hubs. However, it is also helpful to have a wider support base. In some cases, arts and community hubs are marginalised from the mainstream because of their political activism. Partners can help to speak up in support of such hubs and their contributions to society.

NETWORKS

Creative hubs are already adept at forming local, regional and international networks. But it's worth noting that networks are particularly useful for creative hubs that are not located in major cities. For these hubs, such connections are even more vital for future collaborations and shared knowledge.

SPACE

When creative hubs don't benefit from renting or owning their own space, partnerships can help to step in. Commercial or institutional partners can make a big impact on a hub's possibilities by leasing out spaces at a discounted rate, or even working together to reinvent an unused space.

CONNECTIONS

With only a few exceptions, creative hubs in the tech and arts sectors don't tend to cross over. Without creating forced partnerships, it may be worth exploring how hubs from the two spheres could connect and collaborate, using case studies from hubs that bridge arts, community engagement and technology.

P



PASIG CITY, THE PHILIPPINES
co.lab



FOUNDED
2011
NO. OF MEMBERS
60
TEAM / EMPLOYEES
3
FINANCE STRUCTURE
Profit

First located in Makati business district, co.lab is a pioneering co-working space of Metro Manila. In 2012, it relocated to Pasig City, in partnership with xchange, an incubator for social enterprises. The co-working space is designed for freelancers and startups, and organises a range of workshops and talks for members. co.lab also initiated the Better Brixton project to consider how they impact their neighbourhood.

[colab.ph](https://www.colab.ph)

Unit 301, No. 3 Brixton Building, Brixton Street, Kapitolyo, Pasig City

I

DEPOK, INDONESIA
Code Margonda



FOUNDED
2013

NO. OF MEMBERS
420

TEAM / EMPLOYEES
6

FINANCE STRUCTURE
Non-Profit

First founded in a modest office building in Depok, the city that neighbours Jakarta, Code Margonda is open to a range of communities. Although Code Margonda is broadly speaking a co-working space, it is not focused on the digital sector, with activities ranging from maker workshops to coding, art sessions, entrepreneurship talks and film screenings. Recently, Code Margonda relocated to a bigger area in Depok Town Square.

codemargonda.com

2nd Floor, Mezzanine Level,
Jalan Margonda Raya No. 1,
Depok Town Square, Depok

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CONNECTING CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

CREATIVE HUBS IN MALAYSIA,
THAILAND, INDONESIA &
THE PHILIPPINES

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