Hubs For Good
Malaysia

—

Evaluation report

Table of contents

Executive summary

In early 2017 the British Council commissioned a research project, *Mapping creative hubs in Malaysia*, which provided the British Council team with the evidence-based findings and clear and comprehensive understanding of:

a. The existing creative sector ecosystem in Malaysia

b. Creative hubs' organisational structure

c. Creative hubs' needs

d. Three major gaps that prevent growth and development of creative hubs in Malaysia

Based on these findings, the British Council in 2018 launched the implementation of the three-year **Hubs For Good programme** that aimed to address identified major gaps by:

1. Building capacity for existing and future hub managers in order to support the development of hubs

2. Connecting local hubs to each other and to international hubs for support, exchange and collaboration

3. Supporting long-term impact measurement and research to demonstrate the value and impact of hubs at policy level, while working with independent hubs for advocacy, network building, and co-creation

Over a period of three years, the Hubs For Good programme provided creative hubs in Malaysia with an opportunity to actively participate in three capacity building workshops, two UK Exchange programme trips, receive five seed fund grants, attend one regional Hubs For Good forum organised in KL, three international online forums, as well as have access to the Creative Hubs Malaysia digital platform.

The evaluation of the Hubs For Good programme was conducted between November 2020 and February 2021 with the primary aim to identify the programme's outcomes, strengths and weaknesses by assessing:

1. Values the programme contributed to or created – intrinsic, social and organisational values

2. Type of impact the programme achieved or has potential to create – content development, scaling up and institutional change

Data was collected through in-depth phone interviews with 24 respondents and consultations with relevant stakeholders such as policy and decision makers, stakeholders who enabled exchange and cooperation, Malaysian and UK organisations that provided and facilitated capacity building training to creative hubs, and 16 creative hubs from various states in Peninsula Malaysia and East Malaysia.

Key findings

Creative hubs in Malaysia are very different in their level of development, their resilience, outreach, capacities and needs. Bearing this in mind, the British Council made a wise decision to focus on capacity building topics that are relevant to the majority of creative hubs – sustainability, the role of the creative hub's ecosystem, management and funding.

The evaluation results show that 76% of participating creative hubs visibly improved their knowledge about the creative hub's ecosystem in Malaysia, as well as their roles and responsibilities, various management and funding issues and resources needed for continuous organisational development. This newly gained knowledge about needed resources was also reflected in the fact that interest and readiness to become part of the entrepreneurship sector increased among 60% of respondents.

All respondents of the evaluation are united in the opinion that improved networking and collaboration between creative hubs in Malaysia is the most important impact that the Hubs For Good programme achieved in the past three years. Linking hubs from Sabah and Sarawak with those from Peninsula Malaysia already

resulted not just in better understanding of different landscapes and better networking amongst them, but also in mutually beneficial collaboration.

During the implementation of the programme, creative hubs had an opportunity to get in touch with representatives from several governmental agencies/ministries, potential donors as well as creative hubs from the UK and other countries who participated in four forums organized by the British Council.

The evaluation results also show that rarely is any creative hub in Malaysia conducting a regular evaluation of their work or assessing the impact of their activities. The reasons are: 1) they do not have the required knowledge for evaluation and impact assessment, 2) there is no requirement from the funder's side for evaluation of their work. Most of them are aware that without solid data to show how their programmes contribute to positive change, they will not be able to secure more reliable and longer term funding and increase recognition of their work.

Key recommendations

Future programmes should consider grouping creative hubs based on their level of maturity, which would increase the relevance and efficiency of capacity building efforts.

Providing support just to creative hubs might not be sufficient for increasing and demonstrating the value and impact of their work. Knowledge sharing sessions should be provided to all ecosystem actors i.e. corporates, funders, government, media, academia, civil society organisations, investors.

Future programmes should put greater emphasis on opportunities for interactive connection with regional and international creative hubs.

Future programmes should focus on equipping creative hubs with knowledge and skills for

building clearly defined monitoring frameworks, assessment tools, data collection and presentation of evidence-based results. This knowledge will over time increase the visibility of creative hubs, and their contribution to both society and the economy.

All grant giving organisations should try to develop their application process in a way that will enable creative hubs to translate their beautiful and meaningful ideas into more user-friendly application forms. They should also clearly communicate the programme's expectations with all involved parties, train creative hubs in data collection and analysis, and set at least basic quantitative and qualitative indicators to be met by the end of programme.

1 About the British Council

Through its Creative Economy team, the British Council has been working with over 800 creative hubs globally since 2014. The British Council's work with creative hubs across Southeast Asia also began in 2014, with a project that aimed to assist the Vietnamese government to draft a new strategy for its creative economy. Since then it has expanded to Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

The British Council is strategically placed in Southeast Asia to develop more creative connections and exchanges between the dynamic hubs sector in Southeast Asia and the UK.

The Regional Hubs For Good programme aims to support creative hubs as key drivers and catalysts for good in cities in Southeast Asia. More specifically the programme aims to enhance the positive role of creative hubs in an urban context for socioeconomic, political and cultural change.

Five Arts Centre
The Hubs For Good programme helps creative hubs in Malaysia to learn and grow together

As Ms Katelijn Verstraete, Director of Arts and Creative Industries East Asia, British Council noted: "Hubs have a mobile mindset, they can be the drivers and catalysts for change in the context in which they operate. Hub managers are community leaders who open up connections between the public and private space, grassroots and policies, and are important in connecting dots in the creative ecology."

The British Council Hubs For Good Programme in Malaysia began in 2018, and has secured partnerships with Yayasan Sime Darby (YSD) as co-founder that supports the development of a vibrant arts community in Malaysia's multi-cultural society, and Universiti Malaya as an academic institution that provides research expertise and aims to embed the notion of creative hubs in arts education. During the three years of implementation of the Hubs For Good programme, this tripartite collaboration has combined national and international connections, knowledge and skills, and provided creative hubs in Malaysia with an opportunity to learn, network, grow and work together.

2 Introduction

> " A creative hub is 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.
>
> – **Creative HubKit** 2015, commissioned by the British Council

Creative hubs in Malaysia are numerous, spread across the country, and extremely diverse – by their very nature, by type of creative community, mission or business model. They have a wide-ranging variety of structures, sizes, focuses and goals. In practice, they fall under several different categories, including tourism, visual arts, business, retail, education and literature.

However, overall opinion within the sector is that there is a lack of recognition of creative hubs' role in contributing to the cultural, social and economic development of Malaysia.

Issues and challenges

The following are some of the issues and challenges that reinforce the lack of recognition:

1. Undermined role of creative hubs

- There is no clear official or legal definition of creative hubs, nor a legal framework that regulates creative hubs' work in accordance with their purpose

- The lack of legal clarity impairs the development of profiling i.e. real analysis of creative hubs by their scope of work (the sectors they cover); coverage of their activities (states/regions); number of their beneficiaries/audience; type of activities

- Consequently, the lack of profiling directly disables the identification of creative hubs' contribution to employment and job creation, as well as the tax contribution of the creative hubs' sector. Stakeholders remain largely unaware of their potential and positive impact on local communities

- Policy/decision makers and creative hubs managers/artists usually speak different languages and find it difficult to communicate – this leads to a lack of understanding of the relevance and importance of creative hubs, and a lack of information on how government and other stakeholders can assist their growth and development and therefore enable a bigger contribution to the cultural, social and economic development of the country

No legal framework for creative hubs → No proper analysis of creative hubs' profile → No recognition of hubs' contribution to economic/social development → Undermined role of creative hubs

Issues faced by creative hubs in Malaysia

2. Lack of visibility

Even though creative hubs have the ability to reflect and represent societal interests and tell truth to power, their ability to communicate and demonstrate the effect of their contributions to social development – especially to funders, decision makers and the wider public – is limited. This vital communication and visibility aspects are chronically overlooked by both creative hubs themselves and other stakeholders.

Research also shows that many creative hubs feel that the wider Malaysian public is apathetic to their work, indeed towards the arts. The general opinion among the creative sector is that Malaysia is still at the stage of development where the true value of art is yet to be widely appreciated.

3. Lack of capacities

Many creative hubs have grown out of organic beginnings, and so sometimes the founders (often doubling as hub managers) may not be trained in management skills or financial planning. Additionally, many of them do not have access to adequate funding, therefore preventing them from hiring more people. As a result, management of the hubs can be strained, with just a few people running things. This means that they cannot take on ambitious projects that might bring in more audience acknowledgment and positive impact.

4. Lack of resources

Malaysia's creative hubs are diverse in their approaches and in their needs, but many of them share the common thread of struggling for financing. Lack of knowledge to access funding (government, corporate or international grants) or financing (private investments) is common among creative hubs. They also often lack internal resources such as a basic business idea and plan, technical, leadership and marketing skills, and internationalization of know-how. Little support exists for those creative hubs that are not versed in business development.

5. Lack of relevant information

There was no off-line or on-line directory of creative hubs in Malaysia that offers a brief but informative description of their core activities, geographical coverage and contact details. Also, there were no guidelines or toolkits that cover issues that are relevant for creative hubs in Malaysia e.g. mapping of stakeholders and ecosystem, legal and registration procedures, tax issues, programming, funding, reporting, etc.

6. Lack of research/studies

There was no research or analysis about creative hubs in Malaysia done before 2017 by any stakeholder. The fact that scholars, research institutes or think thank organisations in Malaysia are not conducting research and analysis related to the work of creative hubs means that all relevant stakeholders lack core understanding about their real impact, about trends and changes that happen over time in the creative hubs ecosystem, as well as the types of strategic and technical support creative hubs need the most.

7. Lack of strategic support

Before 2018, there was no strategically developed and implemented programme by the government or any other stakeholder (national or international) that aimed to better understand and support the creative hubs' ecosystem and the overall role which creative hubs play in Malaysia.

**Hin Bus Depot in
George Town, Penang**

Addressing the needs

In early 2017 the British Council commissioned a research project, *Mapping creative hubs in Malaysia*, to better understand: the existing creative sector ecosystem in Malaysia; the definition of creative hubs in national/local context; their business models, organisational structure, needs and potential. This research conducted among creative hubs helped the British Council to identify three major gaps that prevent growth and development of creative hubs:

Skills
More often than not, hub owners and managers are not professionally trained, nor do they have the necessary skills to run and maintain a hub in an efficient or sustainable way.

Connecting and networking
Creative hubs managers work in silos and need a platform where connections, networking and exchanges can take place; in particular, connecting hubs in East Malaysia to West Malaysia and vice versa.

Advocacy to the public, policy makers and arts communities
Creative hubs are under-supported and under-developed. Hubs' managers also report that the talent pool, the audience and consumption of the arts and creative industries are limited and insufficient to achieve sustainability.

Based on these evidence-based findings, the British Council in Malaysia in 2018 launched implementation of the Hubs For Good Programme that aims to:

Build capacities for existing and future hub managers to support the development of hubs, which act as drivers for the local economy, as well as having a social and cultural impact.

Connect local hubs to each other and to international hubs for support, exchange and collaboration.

Support long-term impact measurement and research to demonstrate the value and impact of hubs at the policy level, while working with independent hubs for advocacy, network building, and co-creation.

In 2018, a tripartite partnership was established between the British Council, Yayasan Sime Darby and Universiti Malaya with the aim to increase and strengthen the capacities and networking of creative hubs and to increase their recognition by developing a digital platform and other tools that will improve their visibility and the results of their work.

Yayasan Sime Darby played a key role as co-founder of the three-year programme, enabling the project to double its scope and number of activities. Yayasan Sime Darby's support aided Universiti Malaya with one full scholarship and two partial scholarships of three research assistants working on the research and the development of the Hubs For Good toolkit and digital platform.

Universiti Malaya and their faculty of Arts provided educational and academic dimensions to the programme and embedded the notion of creative hubs in arts education. The university aimed at exposing their students to new knowledge and experience, and equipping them with the knowledge needed for meeting diverse challenges in the sector of the creative economy.

In September 2019, the British Council commissioned Madlab, a UK innovation organisation, to create a Situation Analysis of Creative hubs in Malaysia. The research aimed to produce an analysis of the sustainability and potential social and economic impact of creative hubs across the country. The research identified a list of recommendations that will enable creative hubs in Malaysia to create sustainable products and services responding better to the needs of their creative communities, generating income, and producing visible social impact at a local and national level.

3 Evaluation methodology

Method

The three streams of the Hubs For Good programme in Malaysia are:

- Capacity building
- Networking and collaboration
- Supporting demonstration of the value and impact of creative hubs

Therefore, key tasks in evaluating the results of the capacity building activities of the Hubs For Good programme were:

- To identify the usefulness of three capacity building workshops that focused on creative hubs eco-system, management and fundraising
- To identify to what extent those activities have contributed to building the professional capacity of hubs' managers
- To identify what kind of changes in capacity building approach and content should be introduced for future programmes

Key tasks in evaluating the results of the networking and collaboration of the Hubs For Good programme were:

- To identify to what extent the programme contributed to improvement of networking and information sharing between hubs, and among hubs and other stakeholders
- To identify improvements in recognition of creative hubs
- To identify lessons learned that could improve the quality of future programmes

Key tasks in evaluating the results of the supporting demonstration of the value and impact of activities related to creative hubs are:

- To identify to what extent the programme supported long-term impact measurement and research to demonstrate the value and impact of creative hubs at the policy level
- To identify what kind of follow up activities might strengthen recognition of the value and impact created by creative hubs

The primary aim of the evaluation of the Hubs For Good programme is to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the programme strands and its outcomes from two perspectives: 1) values that the programme contributed to or created, and 2) type of impact the programme achieved or has potential to create.

Bearing in mind the nature of the creative sector and the aims of the Hubs For Good programme, three types of values were taken into consideration during the evaluation:

Social values
Skills development, education, social inclusion, audience development

Intrinsic values
Experience, quality, enjoyment

Organisational values
Knowledge and skills on how to adequately address legal, financial, marketing, management, sustainability and other organisational issues that enable continuity of activities and creative hubs' presence in communities

Evaluation of the impact focused on the extent to which the programme achieved or has potential to:

Scale up
Improve the outreach from creative hubs to audiences and consumers, other communities or regions, various collaborators and partners

Develop/enrich content
The quality of creative hubs' programmes, ideas and messages that are translated into relevant activities

Effect institutional change
The capacity of creative hubs to advocate for more efficient regulatory frameworks which allow efficient implementation of laws and strategies that support development and growth of the creative sector

Data for evaluation of Hubs For Good programme was collected by using the following tools:

1. Desk research and analysis of all collected data since 2017. Data was collected from various sources:

   - The British Council - over 70 documents received from the British Council Malaysia were reviewed and analysed: research analysis, capacity building reports, events reports, evaluation forms from workshops, UK Exchange trips, forums, contracts, presentations, videos, press-clippings, seed fund reports

   - Creative hubs from Malaysia: several activity reports received from creative hubs were part of implementation of Hubs For Good programme and numerous web-sites of various creative hubs in Malaysia

   - Creative hubs from UK: research analysis and presentations used during capacity building workshops conducted/facilitated by UK hubs

   - International organisations: relevant creative sector/industry documents published by OECD, Unesco, etc.

2. Three open-ended questionnaires were used for phone interviews with representatives of creative hubs, donors and policy and decision-makers in Malaysia. Each structured questionnaire focused on specific roles of interviewed stakeholders during the implementation of Hubs For Good programme and had a set of standardised questions that allowed comparison between groups.

3. Consultation sessions with the British Council and MadLab, a UK innovation organisation that developed Situation analysis of creative hubs in Malaysia.

Target groups

1. **Demand side** – stakeholders that enable creative hubs to legally work and efficiently develop i.e. policy and decision makers. Interviews were conducted with two representatives from:

   - Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA), set up by the Malaysian government to build a vibrant, sustainable and ambitious cultural economy for Malaysia

   - National Department for Culture and Arts under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (JKKN)

2. **Supply side** – stakeholders that enable creative hubs to supply the market with their products and services by providing them with grants and other financial support, or focusing on knowledge and capacity building of people working in creative hubs. Interviews were conducted with:

   - CEO of the Sime Darby Foundation and her three team members

   - Four team members from the Universiti Malaya

   - Two representatives from UK creative hubs who conducted capacity-building workshops in Malaysia

   - One representative from MadLab

   - Two representatives from creative hubs in Malaysia who facilitated two capacity building workshops

3. **Creative hubs** – 13 out of 16 creative hubs from Peninsula Malaysia and East Malaysia who actively participated in the implementation of Hubs For Good programme.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation draws from a database of 25 respondents from the three target groups. Data was collected through in-depth phone interviews and consultations with relevant stakeholders.

Over the last three years the British Council interacted with almost 60 creative hubs by sharing updates and opportunities about relevant webinars, training courses, events, grant calls, etc. However, the main creative hubs cohort that was actively involved in the Hubs For Good programme activities consists of 16 creative hubs from various states in Peninsula Malaysia and East Malaysia.

In March 2020, five creative hubs (out of 16 actively involved) were awarded with seed funding grants to increase the capacity of creative hubs and advance professional development of hub managers in areas such as: social media, audience engagement, mass media and public relations, branding and legal.

Evaluation of the Hubs For Good programme therefore focuses on the impact of the programme on: 1) 16 creative hubs, 2) five seed funding grantees, and 3) four Universiti Malaya team members. Evaluation also looked at the indirect influence of the programme on UK hubs that were part of UK Exchange visits, as well as donor and policy/decision makers who took part in some of the Hubs For Good programme activities.

Constraints

For better understanding and interpretation of the results achieved during implementation of the Hubs For Good programme, a few factors should be taken into consideration:

- During implementation of the programme in 2018 and 2019, 16 creative hubs gained valuable and useful information, knowledge and skills. However, when the time came for them to start applying the newly gained knowledge and to cooperate on relevant initiatives, they had to adapt to COVID-19 related lockdowns, closures of their venues, cancellation of their activities, and to some extent swapping physical performance spaces for virtual ones.

- During 2020, creative hubs in Malaysia, like anywhere else in the world, were operating on survival mode. The venue-based sectors (such as museums, performing arts, live music, festivals, cinema, etc.) are the hardest hit by social distancing measures. The Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) reported that 93% of Malaysian artists and cultural workers have been negatively impacted by the pandemic, with 70% having lost all or most of their income.

4 Evaluation results

Capacity building

The Hubs For Good programme provided creative hubs in Malaysia with an opportunity to actively participate in the following capacity building activities:

- Three workshops that covered: 1) strengthening of creative hubs' knowledge about the ecosystem and their role in it, 2) management of creative hubs, 3) funding. All three workshops were attended by over 80% of representatives from creative hubs that actively took part in the implementation of Hubs For Good programme

- Five creative hubs received seed fund grants to support strengthening of their

organisational capacities (Borneo Lab, HAUS Kuching, New Naratif, Rimbun Dahan, The Zhongshan Building)

- Three creative hubs (Mereka, HAUS Kuching and Projek Rabak), as well as four University Malaya team members spent seven days in the UK visiting local and national creative hubs and learning from their experience

- A digital platform was developed and it contains a Resource Page and Creative Hubs Toolkit

The Zhongshan Building
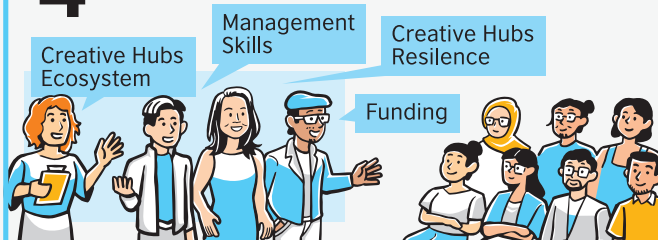One of five hubs to receive seed fund grants

Hubs For Good Malaysia programme impact

The beneficiaries

16 Creative Hubs in Malaysia and their communities

21 UK Creative Hubs

Connected with over **120** other hubs

ACTIVITIES

4 Capacity Building Workshops

- Creative Hubs Ecosystem
- Management Skills
- Creative Hubs Resilence
- Funding

2 UK Exchange Programme Visits
for selected hubs and Universiti Malaya

3 International Online Forums

- Inspiring Resilience
- Lessons on Digital Transformation
- Reimagining the Future

Development of

creativehubs.my
Creative Hubs Malaysia Digital Platform

1001101
1011011
0101
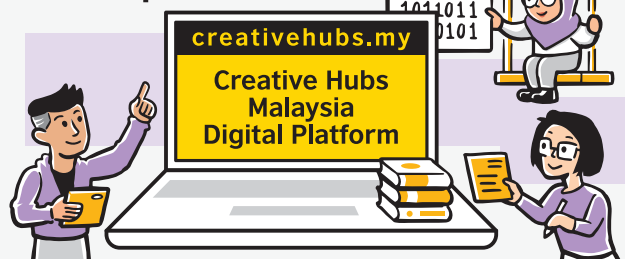
KEY FINDINGS

CAPACITY BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS

Category	Value
Knowledge about creative eco-system in Malaysia	76%
Importance of business model and presentation for fundraising	77%
Improved Marketing Activities	62%
Knowledge about needed resources for org. development	100%

5 Seed Funding Grants
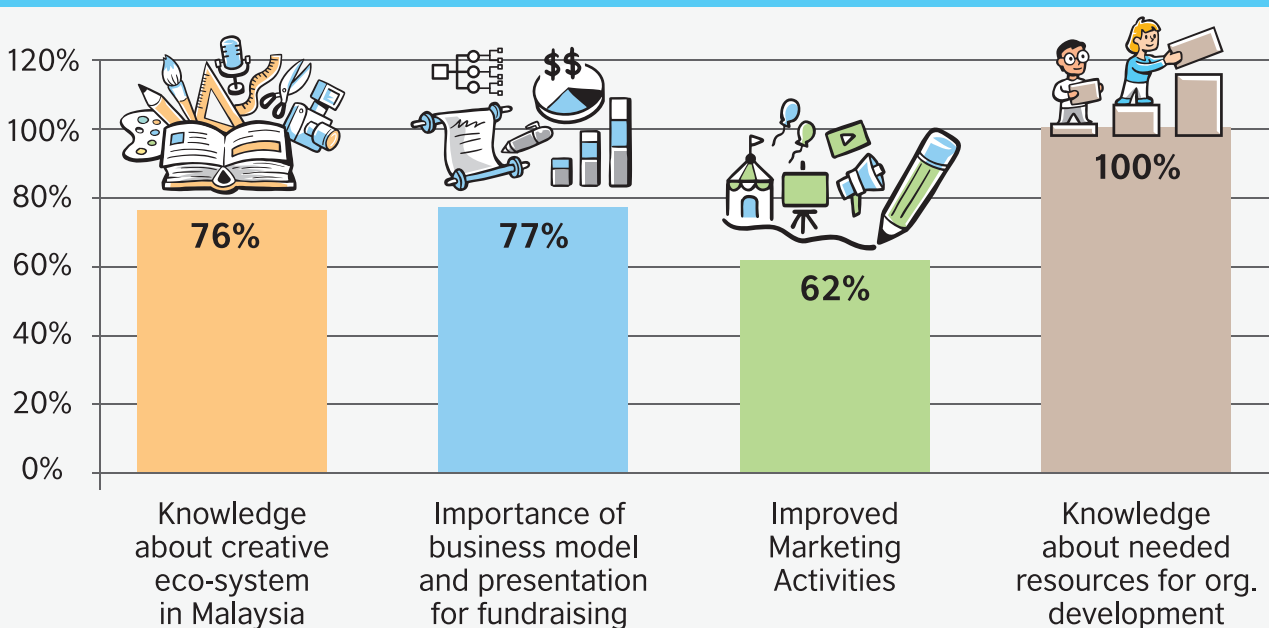
New Naratif · Rimbun Dahan · THE ZHONGSHAN BUILDING · Borneo Laboratory · HAUS

1 Regional Hubs For Good Forum

Toolkit · **Research Report** · **2 Situational Analysis**

Creative Communities Learning Lab

NETWORKING IMPROVEMENTS
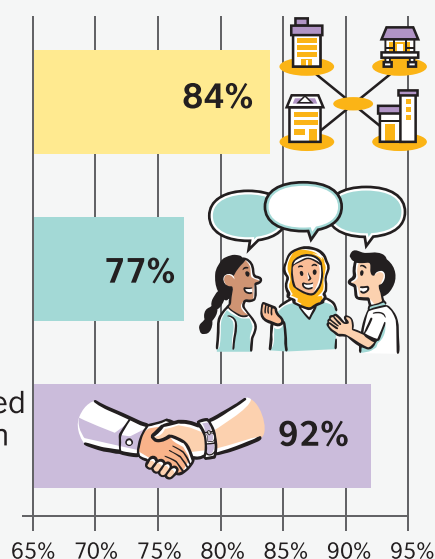
Potential influence of directory on future improvement of cross-sectoral networking — **84%**

Increased motivation to engage with local communities — **77%**

Probability of increased collaboration between hubs in the future — **92%**

65% 70% 75% 80% 85% 90% 95%

VALUE AND IMPACT OF HUBS

Two studies played great role in informing relevant stakeholders about creative hubs activities, results and needs

Tool kit for hubs will enable knowledge sharing among all stakeholders

Hubs For Good has benefitted over 1,000 stakeholders, hubs and art practitioners
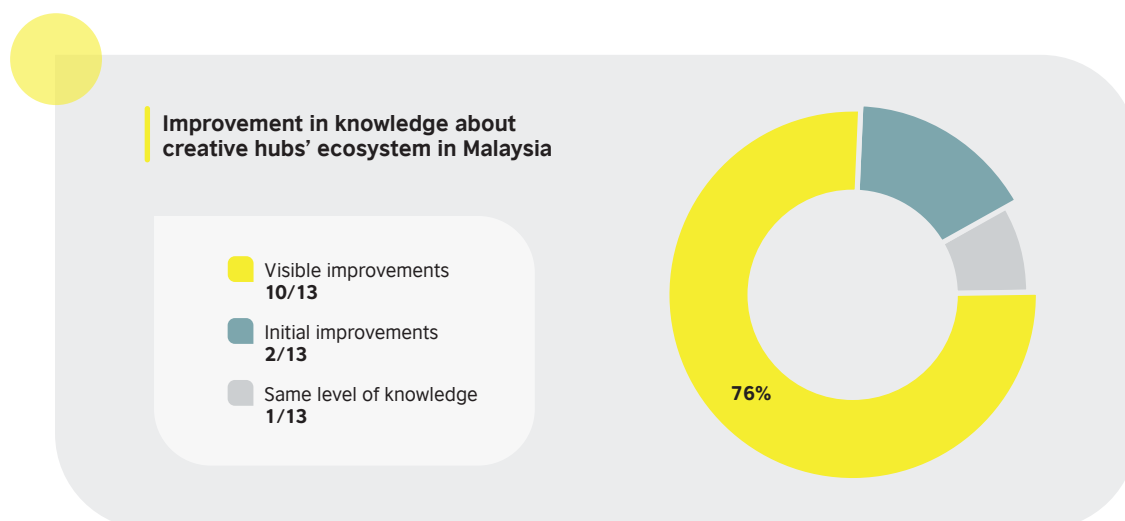
Contribution to development of social values

Evaluation shows that during the past three years of the programme implementation, **76% of creative hubs visibly improved their knowledge about the creative hubs' ecosystem in Malaysia** compared with the beginning of implementation of the Hubs For Good programme.

77% of respondents reported that their motivation to engage with local communities improved (54% reported visible improvements and 23% initial improvements). With the introduction of lockdown and movement control order, many public and private providers moved their content online for free to keep their local communities and audiences engaged, and satisfy the sharply increased demand for cultural content. While the provision of free and digitally mediated cultural content is not sustainable over

time, it motivated creative hubs to open the door to many future innovations and changes in the way they are conducting their activities and delivering content to their communities and the wider audience.

However, when it comes to **creative hubs' interest in fostering dialogue about issues that are relevant for improvement of overall societal wellbeing, the majority of them (i.e. 61%) are at the same or initial levels of improvements.** During the whole of 2020, when creative hubs were better equipped and ready to engage more on issues that go beyond their core activities, due to COVID-19 imposed measures they were struggling to survive. In those limiting circumstances they mostly focused on the existing artist community and their immediate needs.

Improvement in knowledge about creative hubs' ecosystem in Malaysia

- Visible improvements
  10/13
- Initial improvements
  2/13
- Same level of knowledge
  1/13

76%

Knowledge and skills related to the role of creative hubs

In March 2019, the workshop conducted by Gillian Easson of Creative Dundee (a UK-based creative hub) aimed at strengthening connections amongst different creative hubs in the country and helping participants further develop relevant areas of expertise related to the overall management and sustainability of their creative hubs. The workshop was set up to present an example i.e. hands on

experience that provided the context for the creative hub sector in Malaysia.

Almost two years later, **61% of creative hubs that participated at the workshop noticed visible improvements in knowledge about their hub's role in growing their creative community of artists and collaborators.**

Evaluation results
Capacity building

The remaining 31% of creative hubs reported that their perception about their hub's role in growing their creative community has changed – however the lack of internal resources has prevented them from being more proactive and initiating any projects outside of their basic activities.

During COVID-19 lockdowns and movement restriction orders, the British Council provided creative hubs and their creative communities with an opportunity to attend three online forums that gathered 368 representatives from 17 countries to learn how to connect with their audiences and communities digitally. However, in practice, visible improvements were mostly noticed amongst: 1) seed fund grant recipients who used funds to strengthen their own capacities in various fields, as well as knowledge and capacities of their creative communities, and 2) creative hubs that participated in the UK Exchange programme.

For example, Borneo Lab and Penang Art District accepted invitations to speak at hubs-related forums across the region, and also in roundtables that contributed to the wider hubs' discussions. Also, in addressing the issue on 'how to work in the new normal', Borneo Lab tested various approaches that will enable future art showcases and performances in compliance with the social distancing policy.

Through the British Council seed fund grants, Rimbun Dahan and HAUS Kuching reached out to the community of practitioners and offered them participation in their workshops. HAUS Kuching conducted two public sessions for artists to help them better understand their legal rights and address any concerns that may arise regarding intellectual property. They also produced a digital legal handbook for artists and hub managers that can be shared within the Hubs For Good network and made it available as a resource on the Creative Hubs Malaysia Website.

Rimbun Dahan coordinated two types of workshops: 'Mass Media Training for Art Makers' and 'Improving Online Visibility for Cultural Practitioners'. The aim of these workshops was to assist visual artists and dance artists to promote and present their work to a more general audience, by creating efficient digital media marketing material and improving visual artists' and dance artists' capacity to craft and deliver narratives more clearly and accessibly in interviews.

Improvement in knowledge about hub's role in growing creative community

61%

Visible improvements
8/13

Initial improvements
1/13

Same level of knowledge
4/13
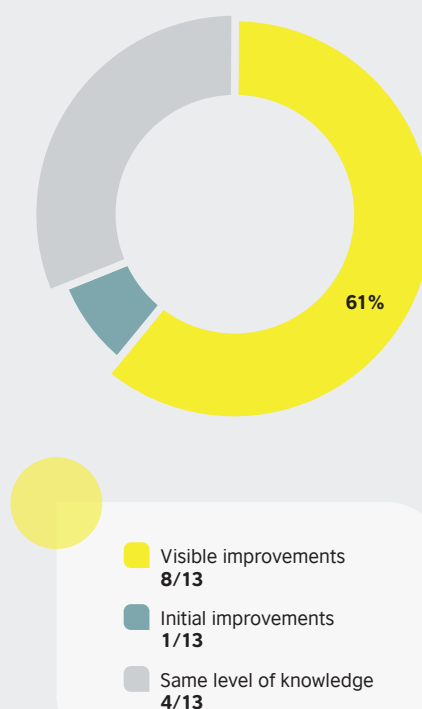
New Naratif strengthened their internal social media skills, which resulted not just in an increase of the followers' count, but also in creating a social media toolkit that was shared with the Hubs For Good network.

The Zhongshan Building conducted a branding exercise and social media engagement workshop to create wider visibility for its creative community.

As mentioned before, in May 2018 representatives of three creative hubs (Mereka, HAUS Kuching, Projek Rabak) spent 7 days in the United Kingdom visiting more than fifteen UK creative hubs and learning from their experience. During this trip and numerous discussions organised in various UK creative hubs, HAUS Kuching improved their knowledge about outreach to under-privileged communities and the importance of building more than just one internal creative community.

Mereka learned how to organise events outside the creative hubs and offer them to a more diverse group of people – especially to lower

income families, people with different ethnic backgrounds, and many of those who wouldn't usually come to their space.

The Hubs For Good programme didn't focus on any specific models of influence, advocacy tools or mechanisms that hubs can use for influencing stakeholders. Some of the examples provided

during workshops were intended to increase a general understanding of creative hubs' role in influencing relevant stakeholders – however it is encouraging to see that **54% of hubs noticed initial improvements in their knowledge about creative hubs' role in influencing funders and policy and decision makers.**

Knowledge about role in influencing funders and policy and decision makers

Visible improvements **2/13**	Initial improvements **7/13** 54%	Same level of knowledge **4/13**
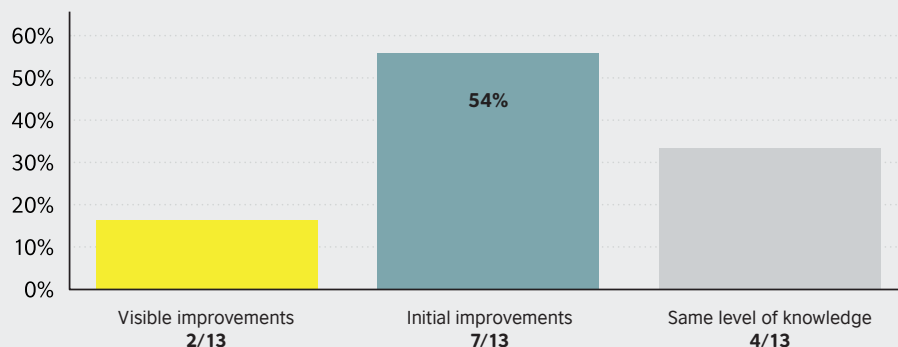
Knowledge and skills in addressing management issues

The Management Skills workshop was delivered in three different cities: Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Kuching, during November 2019. Workshops provided space for discussion about different management models, the important values and skillsets for good managers, approaches in mapping challenges, and brainstorming about possible solutions and responses.

According to the majority of creative hubs, these were the most practically useful workshop of all organised during the Hubs For Good programme. Its content was especially important for young hubs' managers, because it presented the framework and the scope of work i.e. relevant areas that have to be efficiently managed by hubs' managers.

Whilst it was expected that the seed fund grantees would, during the months of implementation of their grants, improve internal knowledge and skills in marketing and community engagement, it was interesting to see how a one-day Management skills workshop succeeded in building knowledge and awareness of all participating creative hubs in those same respective areas of interest.

In total, **62% of respondents reported visible (46%) and initial (16%) improvements in the way they conducted their marketing activities and in the way they cooperated with their existing creative communities of artists.**

However, when it came to addressing other management issues such as planning, human resources or audience building, the issues that were lightly touched upon during the workshop, 78% of respondent's replied that they are at the same (46%) or initial improvements (31%) level.

Improvements in creative hub's marketing activities

62%

Visible improvements	Initial improvements	Same level of knowledge
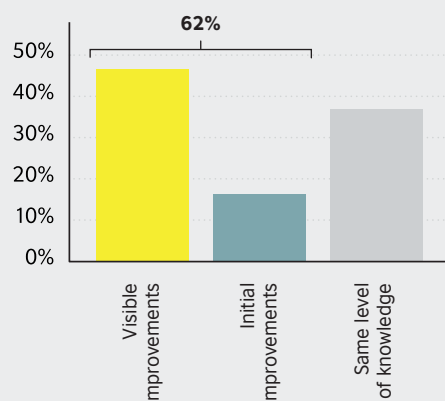
Knowledge and skills in addressing funding issues

A two-day Funding workshop organised in November 2019 aimed to provide better knowledge of the corporate funding landscape in Malaysia, combined with examples from the Philippines – understanding the funding needs of hubs, but also what kind of support can be secured from funders and how. This workshop was well received by the participants, who, as a majority of the creative sector, are largely composed of micro-firms, non-profit organisations, and creative professionals – often operating on the margins of financial sustainability.
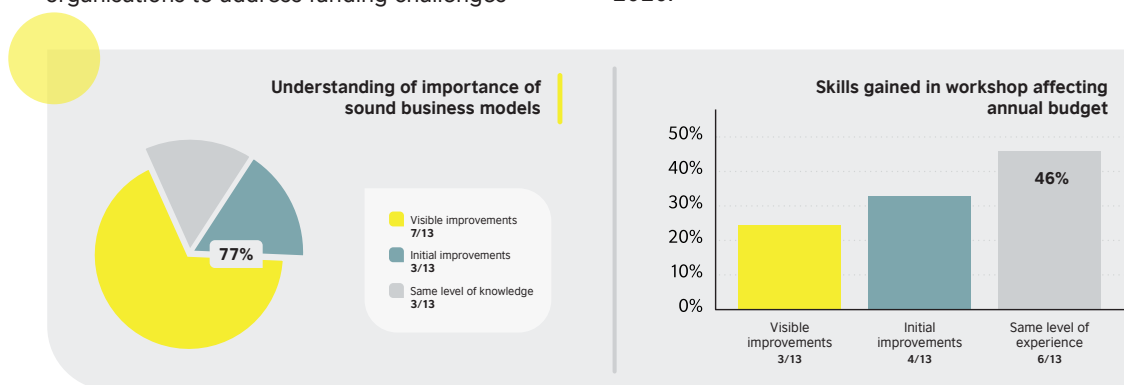
In total, **77% of hubs reported visible (54%) and initial (23%) improvements in understanding the importance of sound business models and improving their presentation skills for fundraising** and funding applications.

Various hubs have reached out to different donor organisations to address funding challenges during 2020. APW and HAUS Kuching pitched their projects to investors during an AVPN event in Singapore.

In addition to the Funding workshop, seed fund grantees New Narratif, Borneo Lab, The Zhongshan, HAUS Kuching and Rimbun Dahan used grants to develop or strengthen various capacities (marketing, legal, communication) that support implementation of their own business models.

However, **77% of respondents reported that knowledge and skills gained during the workshop didn't affect their annual budget (46%) or that they noticed some initial improvements (31%)**. Most of them associate this with funding restrictions i.e. lean budgets of their corporate funders who were facing many operational and financial challenges during 2020.

Understanding of importance of sound business models

77%

Visible improvements
7/13

Initial improvements
3/13

Same level of knowledge
3/13

Skills gained in workshop affecting annual budget

46%

Visible improvements
3/13

Initial improvements
4/13

Same level of experience
6/13

Usefulness of the Hubs For Good digital platform

On 27 August 2020, the British Council in Malaysia, Yayasan Sime Darby and Universiti Malaya launched a digital platform that aims to connect Malaysian creative hubs to each other, as well as to raise awareness to decision-maker stakeholders and the public. Yayasan Sime Darby's support aided one full scholarship and two partial scholarships of three research assistants, currently undergoing postgraduate studies in Master of Arts at Universiti Malaya, who were working on the research and development of a digital platform and its content – a directory of creative hubs, resource page, toolkit, and research.

Bearing in mind that the website has only been operational for five months and that, at the time of evaluation of the Hubs For Good programme, some of its content/components such as the creative hubs toolkit and research papers are still in the process of development, it was not possible to evaluate the evidence-based usefulness of a digital platform. However, evaluation focused on capacity building of team members from Universiti Malaya i.e. three research assistants and their supervisor, who were working on the development of the website and its content.

Four Universiti Malaya team members identified two sets of knowledge and skills benefits which their university and they as individuals received during implementation of the Hubs For Good programme.

Universiti Malaya benefits	Universiti Malaya team members benefits
• Expanded network of potential collaborators to art/creative groups and space • Profiling of Universiti Malaya among relevant stakeholders • Better practical understanding of creative hubs and their ecosystem challenges • Sufficient funds to conduct proper research in new research areas • Three scholarships that enabled students to learn about diversity of relevant topics related to creative sector • Internal discussions about potential establishment of University Malaya hubs programme	• Potential job in future in creative sector in Malaysia; • Direct insight, connection and networking with local creative hubs • Knowledge about various UK and Malaysian hubs and their models of operation • Opportunity to work outside academia • Steep learning curve about management issues, governance, admin, communication with stakeholders • Knowledge on how to develop evidence-based arguments • Understanding of strong relevance of creative hubs and how much society needs them and their work

After gaining better understanding of the challenges faced by creative hubs in Malaysia, and various tools and mechanisms used by other countries in overcoming similar issues, the Universiti Malaya team members think that academia i.e. especially universities that, like Universiti Malaya, have culture/arts studies, could in future better address the needs of creative hubs by conducting the following activities:

- Improve knowledge sharing by making some of the basic culture, arts and/or management courses available for hubs' managers

- Create makerspace for students – future hubs' managers and artists

- Conduct research that focuses on the cultural impact of creative hubs

- Support the creative side of hubs' work and not just their business/management side

Contribution to development of intrinsic values

Intrinsic values are related to individual emotions and responses to arts and culture. These values are usually difficult to measure and cannot be tracked directly in the market – however, if recorded and presented, they add value to the results of any particular programme.

When asked about the degree to which participants in the workshop were stimulated to debate about their norms and values, **67% of respondents reported a high level, while 33% reported a medium level of space and stimulation for sharing of their norms and values.**

Also, **75% of participants reported a high level of opportunities for expression of their attitudes and perceptions, and for hearing opinions from other participants.**

This feedback indicates that the workshops created an environment conducive to sharing and

openness, which is possible only when, despite their differences, a sufficient level of trust is shared amongst participants.

The majority of respondents reported that, over time, the British Council earned authority as a valued stakeholder and trust from the creative hubs, which led to increased willingness for the sharing of attitudes, perceptions, norms and values.

When deciding on the trainers and facilitators of workshops and various other project activities, the British Council engaged moderators who are experienced in moderating and balancing opinions and viewpoints. This was reflected in a remark of one of the respondents: 'I appreciate generous sharing among participants and quality time we had to do so.'

Contribution to development of organisational values

The general level of knowledge about resources needed for continuous organisational development and growth of creative hubs was by all respondents marked as improved. Hubs For Good programme helped hubs' managers to understand the need to: 1) identify some of their capacity and organisational gaps, and 2) start building needed-knowledge, capacities and other resources that will help them run a sustainable creative hubs business.

This newly gained knowledge about needed resources was also reflected in the fact that **interest and readiness to become part of the entrepreneurship sector increased among 60% of respondents.**

In contributing to the organisational values, the Hubs For Good programme achieved the best results with five seed fund grantees and three hubs that were part of the UK Exchange trip. This was best shown by the proactivity of these creative hubs in the implementation of activities that focused on improving their legal, financial, marketing and sustainability practices but also in providing relevant support to their communities that wished to improve organisational practices.

During the UK Exchange visit three creative hubs from Malaysia significantly improved their understanding of various management issues, and used the opportunity to brainstorm and test some of their ideas with experienced UK hubs.

Mereka learned about the importance of data collection and evidence-based storytelling about the work of creative hubs and the impact that they have on people's lives. The notion that the development of creative hubs comes in phases (instead of all at once, which has been one of the management flaws of various creative hubs) helped them to do better prioritising, planning, fundraising, and overall implementation of activities.

HAUS Kuching used the opportunity to discuss their own and various other management frameworks and business development models, as well as to get recommendations on how to manage creatives without being overbearing.

After the UK trip, the Projek Rabak hub manager and team became more professional in addressing issues that are related to the hub and its cooperation with others. They gathered hubs from Ipoh to jointly discuss management issues based on the approach applied by UK creative hubs.
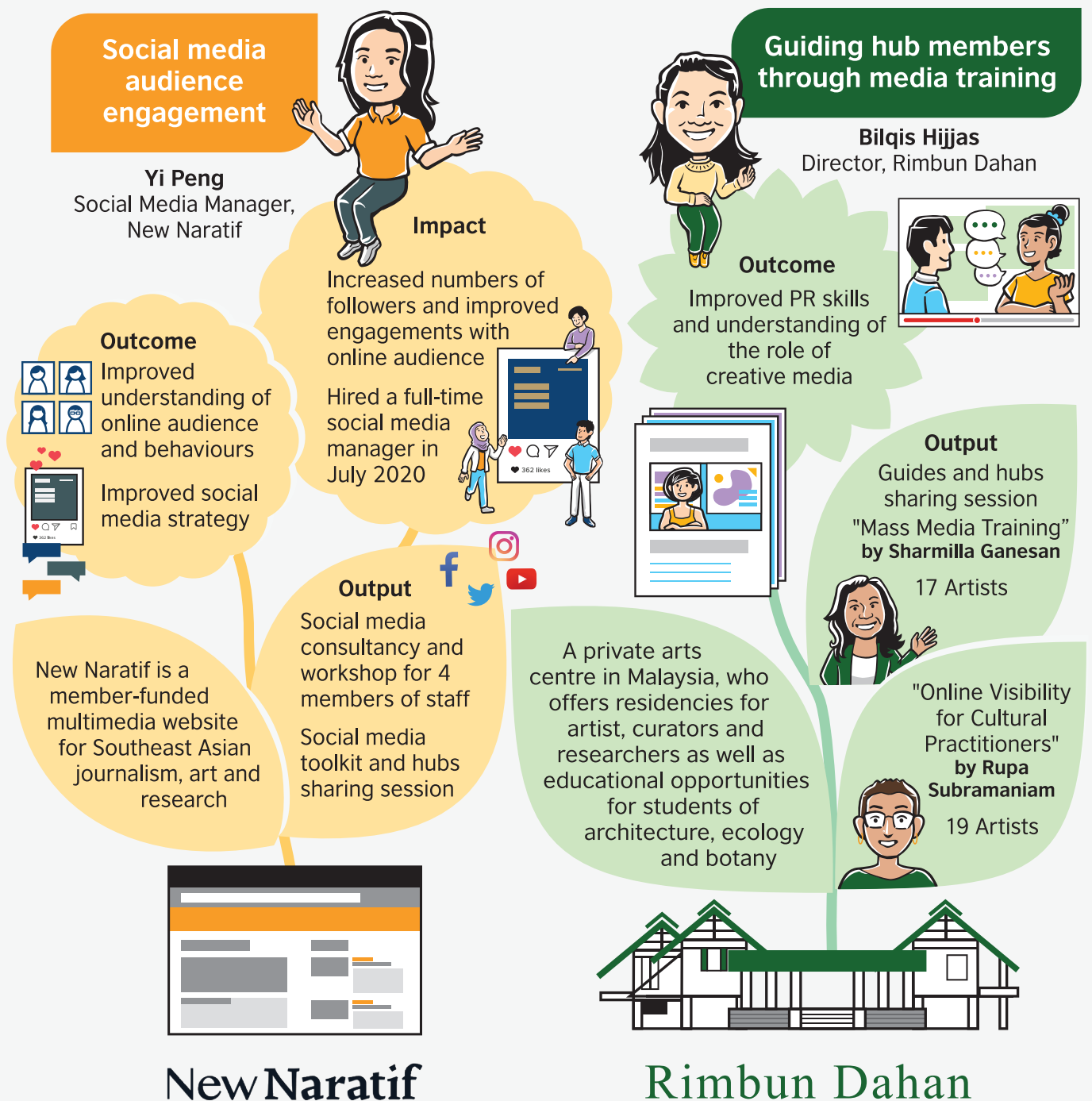
Mereka, a makerspace and alternative education space

Hubs For Good Malaysia seed funding grant projects

Building capacity for five hubs

Social media audience engagement

Yi Peng
Social Media Manager, New Naratif

Impact

Increased numbers of followers and improved engagements with online audience

Hired a full-time social media manager in July 2020

Outcome

Improved understanding of online audience and behaviours

Improved social media strategy

Output

Social media consultancy and workshop for 4 members of staff

Social media toolkit and hubs sharing session

New Naratif is a member-funded multimedia website for Southeast Asian journalism, art and research

New Naratif

Guiding hub members through media training

Bilqis Hijjas
Director, Rimbun Dahan

Outcome

Improved PR skills and understanding of the role of creative media

Output

Guides and hubs sharing session
"Mass Media Training"
by Sharmilla Ganesan

17 Artists

"Online Visibility for Cultural Practitioners"
by Rupa Subramaniam

19 Artists

A private arts centre in Malaysia, who offers residencies for artist, curators and researchers as well as educational opportunities for students of architecture, ecology and botany

Rimbun Dahan

Legal guidelines for hub leaders

John-Paul Davis
Co-founder and Director,
HAUS KCH

Outcome
Improved understanding and knowledge of the legal and organisational management skills to run a hub

Output
A consultancy clinic and 2 public sharing sessions on legal matters to over 80 artists and 1 hubs sharing session

HAUS KCH is a community-led and community-powered project that revitalises abandoned buildings into creative and community launchpads

HAUS

Branding Exercise

Liza Ho
Co-founder and Manager,
The Zhongshan Building

Rethink Public Spaces and Interactions

Wendy Teo
Founder,
Borneo Laboratory Malaysia

Outcome
Increased visibility of the hub to creative community

Improved the navigation of the audience within the hub

Improved social media presence

Outcome
They ran 4 physical art events in Kuching after Covid-19 in 2020 over 1 month to 200 audiences, to curate their new space 'Think & Tink' and to test audiences' reactions

A SIGN of HOPE

A dynamic artist collective nested in a newly restored 1950's building in the centre of Kuala Lumpur
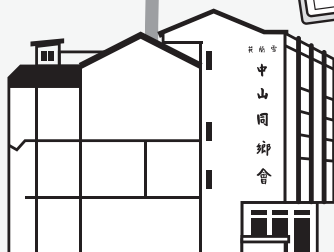
Output
A branding clinic, a social media engagement workshop, hub promotional collaterals and hubs sharing session

The Borneo Art Collective is a sharing platform with a vision to reconnect the missing narrative of Borneo with the world

Output
Developed solutions for Spatial optimisation and sustainability – through various activities such as a consultation, an exhibition, an article, an installation and 1 hubs sharing session

THE ZHONGSHAN BUILDING
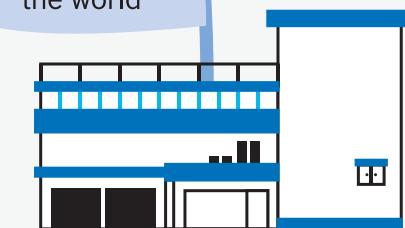
Borneo Laboratory

The real impact of the workshops and other seed fund related activities conducted with five creative hubs – and in some cases their creative communities – will be visible only over time. However, the following are issues that were addressed within their organisations and reported as very useful for the future sustainability of their organisations and practices:

1. Legal

HAUS Kuching conducted a legal consulting workshop that addressed directors, mergers and acquisitions, staff contracts, sub-lease tenancy agreements, and various legal permits. They hosted two public sessions for artists, to provide them with better understanding of their legal rights and obligations, and to address concerns that may arise regarding intellectual property. They also produced a digital legal handbook for artists and hub managers, that will be shared within the Hubs For Good network and made available as a resource on the Creative Hubs Malaysia Website.

2. Marketing

Seed grant funds enabled Rimbun Dahan and their community of visual and dance artists to promote and present their work to a more general audience, by creating efficient digital media marketing material that will: 1) support new audiences' engagement approaches, 2) craft and deliver narratives more clearly and accessibly in interviews.

3. Branding and public relations

- New Naratif hired a social media consultant to run a social media skills workshop for its team. At the time, New Naratif had a high follower count on its social media platforms, but experienced low engagement with its content. The consultant ran a two-week audit of New Naratif's social media accounts and then prepared one day training for key members of the team. Their follower count has increased steadily since the workshop in May 2019, and even though they cannot maintain a high level of engagement on a daily basis, their average number of follows

and engagement has increased. Also, a social media toolkit was developed by the consultant and shared among the wider Hubs For Good network

- The Zhongshan Building conducted a branding exercise and social media engagement workshop to create wider visibility for its creative community. They focused on their logo, location map, wayfinding system, booklet, photography, printing, templates for event listings and greetings, as well as on developing guidelines for social media engagement

4. Spatial optimisation and sustainability

Through various activities such as consultation, an exhibition, an article and an installation, Borneo Lab developed: 1) a guide for performance spaces i.e. for future art showcases and performances in physical space that are in compliance with the social distancing policy, and 2) an innovative public relations model carried out in an omnichannel manner to encourage public awareness in the ways in which they will conduct their programmes, design the content, and reach the audience.
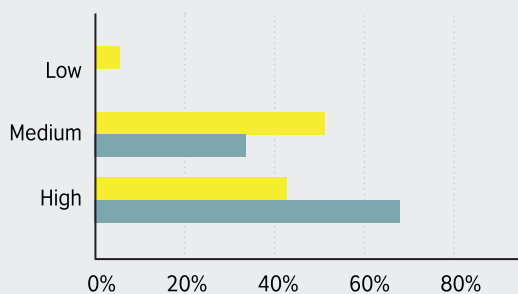
The UK creative hubs that hosted the Malaysian hubs and the Universiti Malaya team members during the two UK Exchange visits also reported benefits from the programme. They emphasised the opportunity to reflect on what work they are doing in the sector, to conceptualise and present it, and to get valuable feedback from their Malaysian peers. Knowledge exchange and learning from examples from the other side of the world resulted in: 1) an increased notion of collective value and the impact of creative hubs, and 2) an opportunity to view their programmes from a non-UK perspective and see what they can and should learn from a part of the world that is geographically very far away from them – their problems, challenges and ideas.

Scaling up

When asked about the potential for scaling up of their various activities in the future, **92% of respondents reported a high probability of increased collaboration with other creative hubs in the future.**

However, when it comes to scaling up of their activities to new regions or states within Malaysia or abroad, 50% of respondents think there is a medium possibility, 42% high, and 8% a low possibility for expansion in years to come. Changes in the creative sector depend on various internal (building creative hubs capacity and readiness to scale up) and external factors (provided support in developing relevant policies, building mechanisms and securing funds) which pace is rather hard to predict.

Priority for scaling among creative hubs

Scaling up to new territories – regions, states

Reaching out to new partners, funders and audience

At the same time, 67% of respondents think that – based on their wishes and, one hopes, strengthened internal capacities – there is a high probability for reaching out to new partners, potential partners and audiences.

There have been many developments and changes within the creative hubs and the creative sector ecosystem in Malaysia during the past three years of implementation of the Hubs For Good programme. Therefore, it is rather hard to assess a level of attribution i.e. changes that happened primarily due to the programme and that influenced some form of their scaling up. However, the following are a few examples of attribution which the Hubs For Good activities that focused on networking and capacity achieved:

- Borneo Lab and sustainable fashion and material designer Lisa Collin cooperated on the 'Connections Through culture' grant, which enabled them to expend their areas of work by jointly conducting a

workshop around the new topic of soil, as well as organising an exhibition that will be presented at Borneo Lab's new space, Think and Tink, in Kuching

- Borneo Lab and Suryani Senja Alias – Managing Director of the CULT organisation which provides advisory work on art and the development of creative strategies, policy and spaces – got in touch via the British Council's Crafting Futures Southeast Asia Craft Forum. They established collaboration and jointly worked on Langkasuka research projects, which provided Borneo Lab with an opportunity to expand their pool of collaborators and to directly cooperate with a new stakeholder

- Penang Art District co-designed a training program with Thames International, the Philippine's first international college, which participated at the Hubs For Good funding workshop organised in Kuala Lumpur in November 2019. This new training programme enabled Penang Art District to provide creative entrepreneurs with a learning environment that: 1) combines national and international academic theory with practical and real-world application, 2) enables peer-learning and mentorship, and 3) develops an interconnected ecosystem and network of the creative community in Penang

- HAUS Kuching and Mereka got in touch through the UK Exchange programme in 2018, after which their cooperation was mirrored in cross-collaboration and the exchange of new knowledge and skills between employees of these two creative hubs. HAUS Kuching staff came to Kuala Lumpur to deliver creative workshops for Mereka staff and their creative community, while Mereka makers went to Kuching to install tech related programmes which improved the quality of work and outreach of HAUS Kuching. This cooperation continued throughout three years of implementation of the Hubs For Good programme. Currently, HAUS Kuching is in the first cohort of organisations that will run beta testing of creative hubs management software, a new online tool that helps manage creative hubs' space and connects them with all hubs around Malaysia.

Conclusion and lessons learned

Both nationally and internationally, specialisations in the cultural and creative sectors are evolving. This process requires resilience, new sets of skills, diverse audiences and better communication that leads to pro-social behavioural changes and advocating for policies that support creative hubs' growth and development.

Creative hubs in Malaysia are very different in their level of development, their resilience, outreach, capacities and needs. Bearing this in mind, it is rather challenging for any donor to find a common topic which would be useful and equally relevant for all of them. The British Council made a wise decision to focus on topics such as sustainability, the role of the creative hubs ecosystem, management and funding – these are relevant to the majority of creative hubs, regardless of their differences.

The evaluation results show that creative hubs' knowledge about relevant ecosystem actors, roles and responsibilities, as well as various management and funding issues, significantly improved during implementation of the programme. Some of the creative hubs had an opportunity to apply newly gained knowledge and skills in their internal practices and in work with their creative communities, while some did not. However, regardless of the fact that during 2020, the year of a global pandemic and significant disruption, the majority of creative hubs did not have that opportunity, their knowledge remains intact and it will, in one way or another, be applied when circumstances allow.

There is a high probability that a digital platform, shared information about relevant resources (studies, articles, research) and various tool kits and guidelines (social media, legal issues, registration, etc) – that have been developed or are still in the process of being developed – will be highly valued tangible deliverables that will have a positive impact not just on the sixteen creative hubs that were part of the programme, but also on a much wider ecosystem – hubs' managers, staff, creative communities, interested funders and other stakeholders.

Thanks to all these efforts, respondents reported a very high probability of increased collaboration with other creative hubs in the future.

The Hubs For Good programme also built new, and strengthened the existing capacities of, Universiti Malaya – which hopefully will set the path for future in-depth research of relevant creative sector issues and cross-sectoral cooperation with various non-academia partners.

However, this programme brought to light several lessons learned that all stakeholders, who are interested in supporting future capacity building of creative hubs in Malaysia, should take into consideration:

- Grouping of creative hubs based on their level of maturity or common issues would increase the relevance and efficiency of capacity building efforts. In this case, content provided will be adjusted to the organisational life cycle phase and to their very specific needs (as in the case of seed fund grantees)

- Mentoring and pairing programmes can be very successful in matching hubs with one another based on their expertise, roles, users, focus areas, etc. These programmes could be a great opportunity for both networking and capacity building at national and international level

- Inviting more than one person from a creative hub to participate in workshops would enable better knowledge and skills building. It is hard to share with non-participating colleagues insights that one gets during brainstorming sessions, case study presentations and face-to-face networking – moments when really inspiring and motivating information can be shared and properly understood

- Higher reach out for knowledge sharing could be achieved through online publications, articles, toolkits and guides. They are adjusted to the different levels of hubs' development and can also be used by those who did not attend workshops. They cannot replace the value of face-to-face discussion in addressing relevant issues as well as networking among participating creative hubs – but on the other hand, they are a component of knowledge building that is available to everyone

- Participants at the workshops should be presented with clearly defined KPIs which

explain what hubs must achieve after the workshops. If there is no proactive follow-up and topic-related facilitation, then conversations and consultation might die soon after the workshop. This lesson is less important for individual hubs because their internal communication about relevant issues is on-going process. However, for achievement of stronger collective impact within the creative hub ecosystem, regular follow up is necessary

Networking and collaboration

The Hubs For Good programme provided creative hubs in Malaysia with an opportunity to actively participate in networking and collaboration related activities:

- Three capacity building workshops were organised in Kuala Lumpur, Kuching and Penang. They gathered not just creative hubs, but also representatives from: My Performing Arts Agency, CENDANA, Goethe-Institut Malaysia, Yayasan Hasanah, Yayasan Sime Darby from Malaysa; Thames International from the Philippines; and Creative Dundee from the UK

- Two UK Exchange programme trips (for creative hubs and for a Universiti Malaya team) during which more than 15 UK creative hubs shared their knowledge, experience and lessons learned with Malaysian participants

- A regional Hubs For Good forum organised in Kuala Lumpur. The forum brought together over 70 representatives of creative hubs from Malaysia, UK, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar, as well as representatives from: the National Department of Culture and Arts of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Arts in Malaysia; Department of Trade and Industry in the Philippines; and project partners Yayasan Sime Darby and University of Malaya

- Three online forums that gathered 368 participants from 17 countries

- Development of an online directory of creative hubs in Malaysia

Contribution to development of social values

All respondents of the evaluation are united in the opinion that improved networking and collaboration between creative hubs in Malaysia is the most important impact the Hubs For Good programme achieved in the past three years.

Besides their capacity building component, three workshops organised during implementation of the Hubs For Good programme were, by all respondents, evaluated as a great networking platform that enabled them to: 1) improve internal organisational knowledge and understanding of the potential for the sector, 2) improve access to creative hubs in Malaysia and their willingness to share their knowledge and experience.

For example, Mereka established cooperation with the Institut Kraft Negara (IKN) and so far they organised skills exchange session during which Mereka learned about different programmes, models and tools that make craft center operates efficiently and IKN staff learned about running of the makers space. At the moment they are considering long term partnership that will be based on modules development and resource sharing.

The regional Hubs For Good forum, held on 11 March 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, created space for international discussion about the opportunities and challenges in the development of creative hubs, and ways in which they can work with each other. The event also created opportunities for cross-sectoral networking and potential collaboration – by bringing together leading policy makers, researchers, managers and practitioners from the arts and culture sector from different countries – to examine how governments, cultural organisations, creative practitioners, and citizens can work together, and how creative hubs can demonstrate their impact.

For representatives of creative hubs which participated in the forum, this was the great opportunity for exposure, sharing experiences, understanding industry specific issues and being inspired. However, the evaluation identified **lack of knowledge and information transfer**, both internal (transfer from those who participated at the forum to their colleagues) and external (to representatives of other creative hubs). Knowledge management (writing a brief report about each event with links to relevant reports, stakeholders and contact details and saving it in internal folders) and knowledge transfer (sharing knowledge with colleagues and partners) have not been achieved – neither after the UK Exchange visit, nor after the three regional online forums.

A series of creative hub conversations took place as a three-part gathering of creative hub managers and community leaders that was conducted from 28 May – 23 July 2020. Three forums were organised: 1) Inspiring Resilience, 2) Lessons on Digital Transformation, 3) Reimagining the Future of Creative Hubs.

While great effort, significant international coordination, and a lot of adjustment to online events were needed for the organisation of these three online forums, Hubs For Good respondents reported that – besides rather limited exposure and opportunity to network with other stakeholders – the majority of them didn't really benefit from these events. This is mostly because:

- The talk show format was not very effective in allowing sufficient interaction between participants
- There were a lot of conversations, but no real takeaway

For the few creative hubs which had presenters at the forum, this was a very good personal opportunity to reconceptualise the work which they are doing and to place their story in a different context, and in front of a diverse audience.

On the other hand, **seed fund grants achieved really good results in fostering networking and sharing knowledge with the creative hubs ecosystem.** They all worked with an expert who focused on specific areas of work (social media, legal, marketing, use of physical space) and helped them build their internal capacities. Each hub invited their wider group of members and/or broader communities of artists and practitioners to benefit from and participate in the activities and events. They also delivered sharing sessions with other hubs from the Hubs For Good cohort to share the knowledge and skills they have gained. Their guidelines and toolkits produced during the grant period will be available at the Hubs For Good website for the use of the creative hubs ecosystem.

A directory of creative hubs in Malaysia (**www.creativehubs.my**) has been operational since 27 August 2020, and as with any offline or online directory, it is constantly a work-in-progress. New creative hubs are regularly identified and their data is incorporated into the directory.

Influence of directory of creative hubs on improving networking

69%

High
9/13

Medium
2/13

Low
2/13
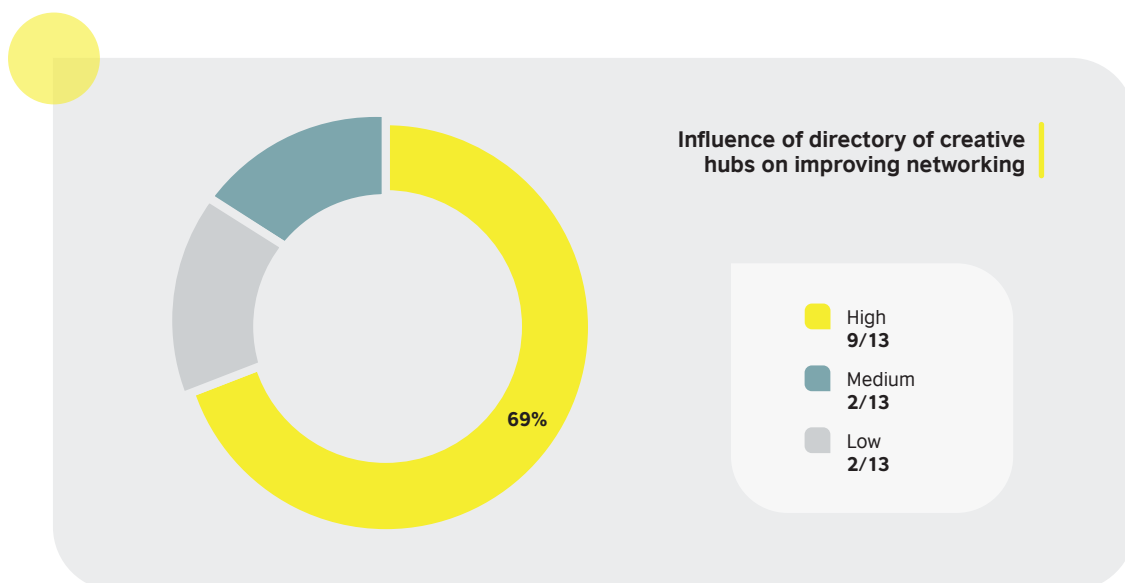
A total of **69% of respondents think that the directory could have a high influence, and 15% that it could have medium or low influence, on improving networking among hubs.**

The directory will best serve for mapping of relevant stakeholders and getting a better understanding of where they work and what types of activities/sectors they are involved in.

This mapping will in the medium term, one hopes, lead to personal contact between representatives from different hubs or between creative hubs and other stakeholders – which is the step towards potential collaboration that requires personal interaction.

Besides improving networking among hubs, 42% of respondents think that the directory will have high influence, and an additional 42% predict medium influence of the directory, on increasing actual collaboration between hubs.

Content development

Even though the Hubs For Good programme did not focus on the artistic quality of creative hubs programmes, respondents were able to reflect on their practices during the past three years and to identify issues that benefited from the programme:

- Created events were facilitated by different people, which added to the plurality of opinions and ideas, and inspired them to think of the content they produce within creative hubs and in cooperation with their creative communities, from different points of view

- Sharing about digital tools and various methodologies is helpful in creating engaging content

- Exposing artists and members of their creative communities to new knowledge and information was a good method for dissemination of information, which consequently created a wider pool of creative ideas

The Hubs For Good programme provided Mereka with an opportunity to meet representatives from the Falmouth University (UK) which triggered collaboration on issues related to design, graphics and marketing.

First year students at the Falmouth University are providing Mereka with support in 3D designs and moulding designs while Mereka will share creative content they develop with Malaysian creative communities. This cooperation has just

started but there is on-going discussion about long term partnerships and applying for joint funding.

During implementation of the programme, creative hubs had an opportunity to get in touch with representatives from several governmental agencies/ministries, as well as potential donors. The creative hubs' overall perception, and in a few cases lived-experience, is that government is interested in engagement, but not in real action. Even when content is the main theme of the meeting, talking versus acting over time created some kind of fatigue – and a steady decline in interest in continuing to be part of those conversations – among the more mature hubs that were often invited to various consultative meetings and presentations.

When it comes to funders, the overall impression is that there is no coordination of activities between several funders who are supporting creative hubs – neither when it comes to content development, nor support provided to the creative hubs ecosystem.

Conclusion and lessons learned

High profile and mature creative hubs had been well connected nationally – both within the creative sector, and within the public and corporate sector – as well as internationally, even before implementation of the Hubs For Good programme. However, they are a small minority in comparison to the majority of creative hubs in Malaysia which, due to various resource related constraints, have not had the opportunity for proper networking. The challenging reality is that the majority of hub owners must have a second job which enables them to sustain the work of their hubs. Lack of time and internal resources has been preventing them from initiating engagement with other creative hubs or various stakeholders.

The Hubs For Good programme created a platform with different types of mechanisms and activities which enabled easier and more efficient networking amongst all creative hubs in Malaysia. Linking hubs from Sabah and Sarawak with those from Peninsula Malaysia already resulted – not just in better understanding of different landscapes and better networking amongst them – but also in mutually beneficial collaboration.

The programme enabled establishment of connections between the lesser and more developed hubs, between grass roots activists and commercial creative hubs. That structural connection – supported by various online tools which are available to the whole creative sector and all interested stakeholders – provided higher exposure to new ideas, solutions, content and possibilities. Sharing of actual stories from behind the scenes – related to the organisation of big events such as festivals, audience reach-out, pricing structures, or support to artists – provide very valuable insights that are only possible to obtain through well-organised networking.

Evaluation also revealed that creation of connections through networking is seen as much easier and faster than actual collaboration between creative hubs, which is well-mirrored in the fact that so far collaboration between creative hubs has been only on a one-off basis, mostly in organising joint events (seminars, exhibitions). Strategic partnerships have been very rare for various reasons: different levels of maturity among hubs; lack of capacities to focus on activities; different audiences that are not part of their core work.

However, positive correlation was established between increased practical knowledge and specific skills gained through seed fund grants and the UK Exchange programme, and readiness and proactivity in establishing collaboration by those creative hubs. This is a rather small sample to assess and conclude that this correlation would lead to causality, but in the case of those creative hubs which benefited from seed grants and the UK visit, that causality is visible.

Evaluation results
Networking and collaboration

The following are lessons learned from the Hubs For Good programme which could in future strengthen networking and collaboration among creative hubs in Malaysia, and between hubs and other stakeholders:

- Creative hubs should increase awareness of different issues addressed overall by the creative sector, as well as of their different expertise. Based on that knowledge and information they could potentially establish contact and join forces in achieving collective positive impact

- Introduction of collaborative digital tools like Slack will facilitate and improve discussions, and potentially collaboration, among smaller cluster groups of creative hubs which share common issues, audiences and/or goals

- Knowledge provided during workshops and forums has to be recorded in a written form to achieve efficient knowledge transfer both internally and externally

- Networking and collaboration can be born from conducting capacity building sessions. The corporate sector, as one of the potential funders, can provide to creative hubs coaching and mentoring workshops on topics that focus on business model development, business planning and growth, and various business related tools used by corporations in

supporting their operations and tracking their success. This collaboration doesn't require actual funding – but it requires time, which corporate analysts and experts spend with creative hubs that are in need of this kind of expertise

- Increased opportunities for interactive connection with regional and international creative hubs – and sharing of relevant experiences, research analysis, case studies and international calls for funding – would create opportunities for higher levels of collaboration

- Social media is very influential in raising awareness and getting recognition of work done by creative hubs. More thought and emphasis should be put on how to use social media for networking and collaboration amongst creative hubs and other stakeholders

- Encouraging collaboration between creative hubs could be achieved through Calls for grant applications (announced by different funders) which set collaboration between creative hubs as one of their selection criteria

Support long-term impact measurement and research

The Hubs For Good programme supported long-term impact measurement and research to demonstrate the value and impact of hubs at the policy level through the following activities:

- Early in 2017, the British Council commissioned a research study *Mapping of creative hubs in Malaysia* to provide better understanding of the contextual definition of hubs, their histories, business models, organisational structures and more

- In September 2019, the British Council commissioned development of the *Situation analysis of creative hubs in Malaysia*, which aimed to produce an analysis of the sustainability and potential social and economic impact of creative hubs across the country

- Three research assistants at Universiti Malaya were working on research and the development of a digital platform and its content – directory of creative hubs, resource page, toolkit, and research

- Workshops, a regional forum and three online forums provided exposure for creative hubs to national and international stakeholders and enabled exchange of experiences, a better understanding of the value, as well as social and economic impacts, that creative hubs are achieving in their communities, cities and countries

Two studies commissioned by the British Council are the first studies that investigated and analysed the types of creative hubs in Malaysia, their activities, audiences, values, business models and challenges. These studies played a great role, from an evidence-based point of view, in informing relevant stakeholders about this segment of the creative sector that was, apart from a very few high profile creative hubs, almost invisible in Malaysia. Studies provided potential funders with information that

could assist them in making sound decisions about the ways in which the needs of creative hubs and their creative communities can be most appropriately addressed.

Both studies were also used by academia i.e. Universiti Malaya research assistants, as a reference point in developing:

- New research that aims to unravel the complex ecosystem of the creative hub and, by focusing on case studies from specific communities in Malaysia, examine factors impacting creative hubs on a federal level

- Toolkit that explains what kind of work creative hubs have to do to develop programmes and sustain their activities – starting from the hubs' vision, registration, design of the hubs' programming, building partnerships, communication, fundraising, impact, etc

These methodological guidelines, coupled with exposure to relevant national and international stakeholders (through workshops, forums, conferences, panels), will enable creative hubs to become more aware of various issues that influence their work. With continuously provided support by different donors this will gradually lead to better prioritisations of their activities, more focused knowledge and skills building (as in the case of seed fund grantees), and improved ability to adequately measure and present the value and the impact of their work. One hopes this will result in the development of a more robust narrative in funding applications and meetings with policy and decision makers.

Conclusion and lessons learned

As indicated in the *Situation analysis of creative hubs in Malaysia*, some of the creative hubs are already working with regional government to create new cultural (hub) opportunities – such as Penang Art District in Kuala Lumpur, an initiative mooted by the state government to catalyse the economic growth of the creative industry in Penang, and Projek Rabak in Ipoh, which has been commissioned to develop and manage a new Artists Village, '30300 IPOH: ARTIST VILLAGE'. These collaborations are based on a well-proven track record of results achieved by those two creative hubs and they are a good sign of recognition of their roles in contributing to social and economic development of cities and of society as a whole.

However, at the moment, rarely is any creative hub in Malaysia conducting regular evaluation of their work or assessing the impact of their activities. The reasons are: 1) they do not have the required knowledge for evaluation and impact assessment, 2) there is no requirement from the funder's side for evaluation of their work.

This lack of requirements for evaluation and impact assessment is, in the short run, definitely making it easier for both sides – but at the same time it represents a double-edged sword. International practice demonstrates, and the Malaysian donor landscape mostly confirms, that those donors who do not require reporting based on at least basic KPIs are more likely to easily pull out from funding and shift to some other area of work. Without solid data that shows how their programmes contribute to change (either in terms of basic number of beneficiaries or some qualitative change in the lives of people and communities), and evidence of change which they can share with their decision makers (Board of Directors, EXCO members), there is nothing that will persuade donors that the programme is worth investing in for more than one funding cycle.

On the flipside, even though collecting data takes time, organisations which track meaningful data about their results and impact – and are able to soundly present/communicate them to donors,

decision and policy makers, as well as to the public – tend to secure more funding for their programmes.

Improved presentation of evidence-based results of the work of creative hubs will not only result in better funding, but it will also over time increase the visibility of creative hubs, as well as recognition of the contribution they make to both society and the economy.

Lessons learned during implementation of the Hubs For Good programme mostly focus on potential future activities which aim to demonstrate the value and impact of hubs:

- Create programmes that 'break' the creative hubs' habit of working in silos and enable their 'mind shift' towards working in partnerships. Practice shows that higher and more visible influence is in most cases achieved by the work of several creative hubs which joined forces to give birth to an artistic or creative programme. This also requires stronger leadership and proactivity amongst creative hubs – which is the topic/skill that so far has not been adequately covered by various training sessions

- Capacity building training that specifically focuses on development of relevant indicators, assessment tools and adequate reporting forms should also be provided to creative hubs

- Funders should: clearly define a programme's expectations; communicate them at the beginning of implementation; train creative hubs in data collection and analysis; set at least basic quantitative and qualitative indicators to be met by the end of programme. This approach will at the same time serve as a practical exercise for creative hubs and be a great source of relevant data that emphasises the value of the creative sector

Evaluation results
Long-term impact measurement

- Focusing primarily on the ways that the work of creative hubs affects their bottom line and defining financial results as their matrix of success will hardly lead to improved recognition of creative hubs in Malaysia. This matrix is highly regarded in the creative economy sector, but the majority of hubs do not operate on a profitable basis. Collecting qualitative and quantitative data on how they influence the development of social and cultural capital in their communities and cities is more realistic and a more genuine way of enhancing their recognition

- Providing support just to creative hubs might not be sufficient for increasing and demonstrating the value and impact of their work. Awareness-raising and knowledge sharing sessions should be provided to all ecosystem actors i.e. corporates, funders, government, media, academia, civil society organisations, investors. Enhancing their overall knowledge about various operating modalities of creative hubs, as well as challenges that prevent them from doing more, will, one hopes, gradually improve their practices, models of cooperation, and notion of the value that creative hubs create

- Programme provided great learning opportunity to donors and other stakeholders in Malaysia that do not have experience on the ground and lack important information about the sector. Hubs For Good programme has the capacity to gather relevant stakeholders, share their multi-year experience and lessons learned and by enabling vibrant cross-sectoral cooperation, encourage the development of new national policies which can bring additional value for the whole creative sector

5

The way forward

The everlasting question, 'What next?' comes onboard with the end of every programme. The question is asked, not just by programme beneficiaries, but by funders themselves as well as other stakeholders who are deciding about distribution of their future funding, creation of new grant programmes, or establishment of new partnerships.

Another equally intriguing question that demands an answer is: 'Whose responsibility is it to initiate 'the next'?'

After providing a set of capacity-building workshops which improved knowledge and skills; developing a platform for networking; creating opportunities for exposure; development of documents that assist the creative hubs' journey towards more sustainable practices; after raising awareness among hubs that they are important stakeholders of the sector; and in a way shaping an "identity" for the sector that once was perceived just as arts venues and collectives… the question is: 'Who should take over from here and be the one to take a lead in the next phase of the development of creative hubs in Malaysia?'

The answer is: all relevant stakeholders in their own way and with their own capacities.

Creative hubs should take a leading role in facilitating networking and initiating partnership amongst hubs and between creative hubs and other stakeholders. Acquiring new knowledge and skills, which support their development and sustainability, is an imperative for any creative hub that plans to continue with creative activities in the rather uncertain time ahead of all of us. They should also over time be able to develop their reports in a way that shows what they do – and also what they achieved.

Academia should play a key role in grooming future creative sector leaders and developing minds that don't stop questioning, answering and researching. Equipping them with relevant multi-sectoral knowledge will create benefits in all sectors of our society. There is a fear – among the sciences in various disciplines all over the world – that, in the years and decades ahead of us, we will face a situation in which we will be able to develop excellent tools for gaining answers, but there will be a serious shortage of interesting questions. One of the goals of academia should be to prevent that scenario.

Donors should improve their knowledge and understanding of the creative sector, and grow bigger ears to hear the real needs that need to be addressed. To avoid overlapping, they should connect and network amongst themselves – and by doing so support collective cross-sectoral impact. However, achievement of impact will not happen with short term and unreliable funding, and lack of continuity in support. Practice in various sectors shows that a high amount of funds over a shorter period of time will achieve far less tangible results then a moderate or even low amount of funds continuously and reliably provided over a long period of time. A long period of cooperation indicates real partnership, and builds integrity and a legacy of truly committed funders.

The way forward

Yayasan Sime Darby is an example of a committed and reliable donor. In their opinion, the Hubs For Good programme enhanced capacities of artists and hubs managers who might become future beneficiaries of their Arts&Culture programme, which will contribute to the creation of sustainable impact of the creative sector. Being satisfied with results achieved during the implementation of the Hubs For Good programme, Yayasan Sime Darby is interested to support the continuation of work with creative hubs in Malaysia.

Relevant government agencies and policy and decision making bodies should continue their efforts to better understanding the profile, needs and impact of creative hubs and committing their support to creative hubs ecosystem's development. Ministry of Communication and Multimedia Communication and Ministry of Arts and Culture Development are joining forces through the joint creative committee which aims to safeguard and sustain the growth of creative sector in Malaysia. CENDANA and JKKN confirmed they are already implementing some of these programmes as well as planning various new funding programmes and purpose grants that for example focus on digital creation, TEVET in arts and culture, business plan development for arts organisations, heritage, performance arts, etc.

However, all grant giving organisations – whether corporate funders, international donors, academia or government agencies – should try to develop their application process in a way that will enable creative hubs to translate their beautiful and meaningful ideas into more user-friendly application forms. This will be a win-win situation and it will trigger the growth and development of creative hubs programmes in Malaysia that we are yet to see, experience and appreciate.

W!SE

**By Dr. Jasmina Kuka
CEO, W!SE**

WISE is a consulting company that works on impact assessment projects and social sustainability initiatives within all three sectors: profit, non-profit and government. This includes the development of monitoring and evaluation strategies, social impact reports, and conducting relevant training.

BRITISH COUNCIL

**Commissioned by
British Council Malaysia**

The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.

We work in two ways – directly with individuals to transform their lives, and with governments and partners to make a bigger difference for the longer term, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

We help young people to gain the skills, confidence and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise.

We connect the best of the UK with the world and the best of the world with the UK. These connections lead to an understanding of each other's strengths and of the challenges and values that we share. This builds trust between people in the UK and other nations which endures even when official relations may be strained.

We work on the ground in more than 100 countries.

In 2019-20 we connected with 80 million people directly and with 791 million overall, including online and through our broadcasts and publications.