# Highlights

> This study had two central aims: First, to understand the patterns of emergence and disappearance of creative spaces in Hanoi, Vietnam which are operated by or attract youth. Second, to investigate how such individuals either believe they are, or actually are, transgressing official and cultural norms with regards to their use of/actions in creative spaces and their surrounds.

> We approached these aims through a variety of methods. First, the two teams of researchers working on this study collectively investigated 11 creative hubs. In order to select a cross section of hubs we considered several criteria, namely: the length of time they have been active, their degree of foreignness, their business model (ex. financially independent, state-sponsored, funded by a corporation), their creative focus (ex. visual art, dance, performance art, film, fashion, marketing etc.), and the size of the hub. From the outset we found there to be two main sizes of hubs: large and small. The large hubs tended to be located in large buildings or complexes and had a diverse range of tenants. These hubs typically had several founders and were more commercially driven. For the most part the small hubs had only one or two founders and unlike the larger hubs did not have any permanent tenants. Instead they organized and hosted a variety of arts-related events and activities. We employed two different sampling strategies according to the size of the hub. For the larger hubs we conducted semi-structured interviews with 2-3 founders, 8-10 tenants, and 3-4 users/customers. For the smaller hubs we conducted semi-structured interviews with 1-3 founders and 4-5 users/customers. Here we took 'users' to be the individuals that show their art in the hubs, give talks or presentations, or collaborate with them in some other way.

> Our second strategy for investigating our aims consisted of interviewing members of international organizations that provide support for creative hubs in Hanoi and that are very familiar with their benefits, challenges, and goals. We identified UNESCO and the British Council as being the two most active international organizations in this sphere and interviewed representatives from both. >

> Finally, we attempted to interview government officials in order to gain firsthand information on government policies that might be implemented in order to support creative hubs in Hanoi. In the end we were only able to secure interviews with one government official and two members of VICAS (Vietnam National Institute of Culture and Arts Studies). In total Team 1 conducted 52 semi-structured interviews. Team 2 is expected to complete between 30 and 40 semi-structured interviews.
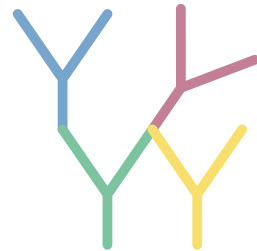
2019

TRYHANOI
biến chuyển
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YOUTH TRANSGRESSION IN THE VIETNAMESE CREATIVE CITY

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THIS CASE STUDY LOOKED AT 11 CREATIVE HUBS IN HANOI IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE PATTERNS OF EMERGENCE AND DISAPPEARANCE OF SUCH SPACES, THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR THE CITY'S YOUTH, AND WHETHER/HOW THEIR USERS AND FOUNDERS ENGAGE IN TRANSGRESSIVE ACTIVITIES.

What was done this year

> Survey of the literature and production of an extensive annotated bibliography on the question of creative hubs and creative city discourse/policy in East and Southeast Asia;

> Interviews with about 60 creative hubs founders, tenants, and users in Hanoi (summer 2019).

Photo credit: TRYHanoi

What is planned for the next year

> Coding of interview data (fall 2019);

> Finalizing of literature review on creative hubs and creative city discourse/policy in East and Southeast Asia;

> Preparation of a conference paper and journal article based on literature review.

Type of products envisaged in the coming year

> Multimedia Coproduction;

> Event;

> Scientific Publication;

> Presentation at a conference.

Preliminary results

REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF CREATIVE HUBS IN HANOI

1) **A need for (experimental) art spaces in Hanoi** – Many founders explained that they opened their hubs because there were not enough spaces in Hanoi that produced, displayed, or discussed experimental art.

2) **To provide a place for youth to interact** – For many founders, the objective of providing an environment that was attractive to youth was central to their reasoning for opening a hub. These individuals felt that it is very important for youth to have access to such spaces (reasons listed below).

3) **To provide a place for artists to create and collaborate** – Some founders suggested that when they initially opened their hubs they did so to provide themselves and their friends with an environment to create and collaborate with one another.

4) To help young and emerging artists gain exposure and experience – Many explained that in order for the Vietnamese art scene to grow, young and emerging artists must be given platforms to display their work and the opportunity to receive professional critiques.

CHALLENGES/ REASONS FOR CLOSING

1) **A lack of funding** – A large number of hubs in Hanoi do not generate profit or only generate a small profit. These hubs are therefore heavily dependent on external funding from international organizations in order to remain in operation. There is no government funding for creative hubs in Vietnam. On a related note, there is no special status for creative hubs in Hanoi. This means that they pay the same taxes as commercial enterprises.

2) **Location of hub** – Participants suggested that the location and configuration of the building in which a hub is located is key to its success. However, appropriate spaces located near the Old Quarter are few and far between. Similarly, it has happened in the past that hubs have had to close down when the property owner decided to redevelop or sell the land on which the hub was located.

3) **Censorship** – Although some suggest the censorship laws have relaxed in recent years, censorship is still very much a challenge that small hubs face. The fees that hubs must pay in order to have their content censored are high and the censorship process often greatly inhibits their freedom of expression. Many participants have had negative experiences with the cultural police including having their events and shows shut down.

4) Lack of audience/ insufficient customers – A less common factor is that some hubs have not been able to tap into a large enough audience. This is closely related to the factor of the hub's location as a less convenient location often means fewer customers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVE HUBS FOR YOUTH

1) **Insufficient arts education in Vietnam** – Vietnam's current education system does not include education about the arts. Creative hubs provide an alternative source of education for youth.

2) **Fine arts universities are quite traditional and conservative** – Even the top arts universities in Vietnam are falling behind those in other countries. The curriculum has not changed for years and students do not learn about contemporary or experimental art.

3) **Youth need places to hang out other than shopping malls and movie theaters** – Hanoi has a lack of public space. Youth have very few options for non-commercial places to spend their time outside of home and school.

4) **Youth need to learn to think critically** – Vietnamese students are not taught to think critically. Creative hubs provide them the opportunity to practice formulating their own opinions in a way that is not encouraged in most schools.

TRANSGRESSIVE ACTIVITIES

1) **Experimental Art** – The majority of the artists associated with the hubs that we investigated produced experimental art. This art can be seen as transgressive because it defies Vietnamese traditional styles and norms and integrates Western approaches. It is common for artists to hide subversive comments about social issues in their pieces.

2) **Talks on social and political issues** – Many participants suggested that they had either participated in or listened to talks on social and political issues at the hubs we were investigating.

3) **Substance use** – It seems to be the case that the use of marijuana is very common in some of the larger hubs. Others discourage its use since they do not want to run into issues with the local police.

4) **Hours of operation** – Although some hubs operate within normal hours, others discussed paying off the local police in order to stay open nearly all night.

5) **No special permissions** – In order to avoid the limitations imposed by censorship some founders have decided to risk the consequences by not submitting their artworks for censorship.

6) **Graffiti** – It is common to see graffiti around the hubs but it is not usually viewed as transgressive in these contexts.

Photo credit: Célia Zuberec

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN CREATIVE HUBS

From speaking to international organizations, a government official, and members of VICAS it appears that the government is slowly warming up to the concept of the creative economy. Most notably, in 2016 the government rectified the national strategy that stated that the country would develop its creative industries. The ministry has since entered into dialogue with some creative hubs and international organizations to better understand the value of creative hubs and the challenges that they face. They have not yet implemented any policies that would directly benefit the hubs.

ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

From our research it appears that the British Council is the most involved in activities related to the creative economy and creative hubs in Hanoi followed by UNESCO. The Goethe Institute, the Dutch Embassy, the Japan Foundation and some other embassies are also involved in arts activities and programs in Hanoi. The main organizations provide small grants to hubs, are involved in policy advocacy and creative hubs research, and collaborate with hubs on some events and projects. Others provide infrastructure and equipment to hubs. Most recently the British Council has begun a large-scale training program for the founders of hubs in Hanoi.