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# MAPPING CREATIVE HUBS IN MALAYSIA

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# Mapping Creative Hubs in Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

- 4 • Defining Creative Hubs
- 7 • Adapting Research Terms
- 9 • Creative Hubs In Malaysia
- 11 • Mapping Spaces In Malaysia

## CREATIVE HUB OVERVIEWS

- 12 • Lostgens
- 13 • Zhongshan Building
- 14 • George Town Festival
- 15 • Malaysian Writers Society
- 16 • Projek Rabak
- 17 • Rimbun Dahan
- 18 • The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat
- 19 • Art For Grabs
- 20 • Kilang Bateri

## IMPACT

- 21 • Growing Roots
- 23 • Building A Culture
- 25 • Public Engagement
- 27 • Collaboration
- 30 • Catalysing Cities

## CHALLENGES

- 33 • Money
- 34 • Management
- 37 • Mindsets
- 38 • Sustainability

## SUPPORT

- 40 • Funding
- 40 • Training
- 41 • Connecting & Networking
- 41 • Making Space

## 42 • CONCLUSION

## 44 • INDEX

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## Defining Creative Hubs



When we began this research project, we started by compiling a list of places or groups that we felt could be considered “creative hubs”. It soon became clear that the term can contain multitudes. Here is the definition from the Creative HubKit (2015) commissioned by British Council:

*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.<sup>1</sup>*

Based on this definition, it would be possible to compile a list of hundreds of hubs in Malaysia. As we started to go through our list, however, we felt it was worth creating a more specific set of criteria to focus our research. Jon Dovey and Andy C. Pratt’s report, “Creative Hubs: Understanding the New Economy” (2016), presented further qualities to consider in this process:

*Three important themes emerge from our study. They are specific to the nature of creative enterprises and to the wider creative economy, which alerts us to the differences between creative hubs and hi-tech, maker, new media, etc. hubs. The first is that the creative hub is more than a building and more than a network. Success depends on collaboration and exchange between its members. Second, that creative hubs are embedded in their communities and regions, their economic, cultural and social activities. Every hub is different and dependent on its local context. Third, that multi criteria evaluation of creative hubs should be used to articulate their success or failure.<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis added).*

Based on the themes outlined above, we decided that we would focus on surveying and interviewing creative hubs which firstly, show “collaboration and exchange”; and secondly, demonstrate an impact on and from the “local context” through being embedded in their communities.

Thirdly, we decided to define creative hubs as those aligned with the arts, either as a producer or support system for literature, performance, visual art, crafts, film, design and other art forms.

This third and final criteria led us to exclude hubs that might, on paper, qualify as a “creative hub” based on the broader definition. For example, Malaysia has several commercial co-working spaces that are shared by technology start-ups. These certainly allow for networking and business development. But in this study, due to limited time and scope, we have decided to focus on hubs that lean more towards the creative sector than the tech sector.

By focusing our research on the arts, we hope to offer insights on a creative landscape that is often neglected as a pillar of society and economy. By contrast, Malaysia’s technology sector has been publicly proclaimed as a driver of the national economy since the 1990s, when the Multimedia Super Corridor was established by then Prime Minister Tun Dato’ Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

- 1 Crafts made from original silkscreen printed fabric by Malaysian company Bingka at Art For Grabs in March 2017
- 2 Rumah Attap Library & Collective at the Zhongshan Building.

Cyberjaya, a local “Silicon Valley” was purpose-built as a technology city and, as of 2014, has received RM17 billion worth of investments.<sup>3</sup> In the national budget for 2017, RM80 million was set aside for reinvigorating the arts, less than half the amount – RM200 million – to be invested in technology startups, while RM400 million was set aside for the tourism industry.<sup>4</sup>

As the old saying goes, “Necessity is the mother of invention”. Many creative hubs in Malaysia are grassroots, by virtue of receiving very little federal or state government support. Yet these same creative hubs are also the glue for various artistic communities. They create connections between individuals, individuals and groups, and groups and locales.

In the British Council paper “Working With and Through Creative Hubs”, Lynsey Smith and Ellen O’Hara write that “[Creative hubs] may differ in size and focus, but ultimately ‘a hub is a hub’ when it unites, inspires and promotes a community.”<sup>5</sup> It is this sense of community that we used as a starting point for researching creative hubs in Malaysia.



<sup>1</sup> Matheson, Janine and Gillian Easson, Creative HubKit, British Council, 2015, p.4

<sup>2</sup> Dovey, Jon and Andy C. Pratt, “Creative Hubs: Understanding The New Economy”, British Council, 2016, p.7

<sup>3</sup> Cyberview Sdn Bhd, “Strong Growth: A Tech City Scorecard”, Cyberjaya Malaysia.

**Available:** <http://www.cyberjayamalaysia.com.my/docs/default-source/publications/facts-and-figures/strong-growth.pdf?sfvrsn=4> [Accessed 14 April 2017]

<sup>4</sup> Government of Malaysia, “2017 Budget Speech”, Bajet Malaysia, 21 October 2016.

**Available:** <http://www.bajet.com.my/2017-budget-speech> [Accessed 14 April 2017]

<sup>5</sup> Smith, Lynsey and Ellen O’Hara, British Council, “Working With and Through Creative Hubs”, p.5

## Adapting Research Terms

It is worth remembering that the term “creative hubs” is fairly new. Many of the teams we interviewed would not necessarily use this term to describe themselves. At best, it can be used as an umbrella term to describe varied groups and spaces.

British Council provided a list of “hub types” to form part of our basic survey. We adapted and expanded on this list for more relevance to the Malaysian context and the scope of our research.

Original list of hub types:

- Studio
- Co-working space
- Makerspace
- Incubator
- Art Centre
- Network
- Other

Final list of hub types used for survey:

- Studio / art collective
- Co-working space
- Workshop
- Incubator / residency
- Event space / performance venue
- Gallery
- Network
- Event organiser
- Other

We added “event organiser” as a hub type because creative hubs in Malaysia are often tied to events such as festivals. Many festivals have been the means for connecting creatives for the purposes of collaboration, supporting the arts, as well as impacting their cities. Even though these events may only last a weekend or a month each year, it would be remiss to overlook their part in Malaysia’s arts scene.

“Art centre” was replaced with the options of “event space / performance venue” and “gallery”. There are very few – if any – places that define themselves as art centres in Malaysia. Places like theatres and galleries can be broadly called art centres, but not in the same way that this term is used in the UK, where “art centres” include varied elements such as a cinema, café and exhibition space all under one roof.



### MAKERSPACES

“Makerspace” was replaced with the broader term “workshop”, since “makerspace” is closely associated with digital and technological innovation. Makerspaces, also known as hackerspaces, are driven by a movement of hands-on learning and DIY creation through digital tools such as 3D printing, robotics and coding.

This movement has largely grown from the USA. MIT established the Fab Foundation in 2009 and created Fab Labs, a global blueprint and network for makerspaces. Various public institutions, such as libraries, started their own makerspaces.

The number of makerspaces around the world is growing. However, makerspaces in Malaysia are still fairly new and rare. In Malaysia, one

example of a makerspace is KakiDIY, which currently has two branches – the MCMC myMaker IOT Lab (located within the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission in Cyberjaya), and KakiDIY @ The Garage KL.

KakiDIY was founded by Johnson Lam in 2014. It hosted the SEA Makerthon in 2016, and regularly works with schools and universities on student maker contests. With a focus on recycling and upcycling, KakiDIY provides workshops and facilities for 3D printing, robotics and drone production, papercraft and more.

3 Laura Wills Studio at Rimbun Dahan (Feb 2017)



## CO-WORKING SPACES

In the past five years, several standalone co-working spaces have opened in Malaysia, particularly in the capital city. These co-working spaces attract freelance workers, as well as small businesses, particularly tech start-ups.

Some co-working spaces offer networking sessions, and also double up as venues for talks and workshops. However, the day to day experience of a co-working space is largely functional: people rent a desk or office space in order to use the facilities.

At their core, co-working spaces are flexible. They offer short-term tenancies and as a result, the community of a co-working space is always changing. This affects the interaction between members, and between the space and the public.

A creative hub, on the other hand, tends to encourage some kind of long-term investment and interaction between its members, even if the interaction occurs online. A creative hub

will also offer its members a platform to reach the wider public.

Creative hubs may contain co-working spaces, and some co-working spaces can be creative hubs. But the two terms are not always interchangeable.

Uppercase at APW, in Kuala Lumpur, is an example of a co-working space that is part of a creative hub. APW is a printing factory that, since 2014, has become repurposed as a venue for the arts and a hub for independent, small-scale restaurateurs and other creative businesses. Uppercase is a co-working space located in the factory loft, where desks and rooms are rented out by graphic designers, architects, tech start-ups and freelancers.

4 Left to right: Nazir Harith Fadzilah, co-founder of Rumah Khizanat, and Mohd. Jayzuan, founder of Projek Rabak.



4



5

## Creative Hubs In Malaysia

Creative hubs in Malaysia both flourish and struggle, at the same time. They flourish because there is a hunger for creativity and also for connections, which means that hubs can spring up quickly out of necessity or desire. However, whether those hubs continue beyond a few years is less certain.

The hubs we interviewed in-depth are either established, having been in continuous operation for several years, or they are emerging hubs, with a plan to be established and continuous. However, there are many more kinds of hubs that are in between.

For example, recent years have seen retail and café spaces take on a new angle that could fit with the idea of a “creative hub”. While these primarily focus on selling products or food, they also host events such as exhibitions and talks. Examples include AweGallery, a venue attached to the café Awesome Canteen in Petaling Jaya, Selangor; and DR.inc, a café that sells artisan goods by Malaysian designers and also hosts workshops in silkscreen printing and other crafts in Kuala Lumpur. China House in George Town, Penang, is a café, restaurant and bar that provides space for open mics and music performances, as well as exhibitions.

Another variation of this format are small groups who get together to organise events. For example POW Ideas, a rising star of the Malaysian architecture and design scene, has recently started

organising talks and film screenings about design. Although these talks may only be organised for the period of a year or so, they also become spaces for networking and future collaborations.

As mentioned above, festivals have also played a large role in the development of the arts, and so can also be seen as a kind of “creative hub”. In 2002, an independent media company in Kuala Lumpur decided to start a festival to bring together people from different art scenes. The result was Urbanscapes, a festival which is still being held 15 years later. The festival combines live music shows with visual art, craft bazaars, fashion and more.

In terms of location, our case studies have covered various cities in Peninsular Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Ipoh, George Town and Johor Bahru. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we did not include case studies from East Malaysia. However, two informal interviews were carried out with Tamu Tamu Collective from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, as well as HAUS KCH in Kuching, Sarawak.

Malaysians speak a variety of languages. Two of our case study interviews were carried out in Bahasa Malaysia, one in Chinese and the rest in English.

5 Kilang Bateri exterior





Rimbun Dahan Gallery

## Mapping Spaces In Malaysia

We surveyed and interviewed creative hubs based in a range of physical spaces, both privately owned and rented. The locales include a small shophouse in downtown Kuala Lumpur, a space on repurposed industrial “brownfield” land, and a residence amid lush greenery on the outskirts of a village, to name a few. Then there are the hubs which exist mostly through online activities, with members meeting in cafés or other public spaces when they meet at all.

In Malaysia, the consideration of space is something that is inescapable. Those of us who live in the capital city are entrenched in a daily battle with the urban jungle: from traffic jams to flooded roads and intermittent bursts of haze in the air. The landscape shifts quickly, as new developments replace old and sometimes cherished buildings.

The shock of the new has been dulled to a kind of weary acceptance, as megatowers are planned even as Kuala Lumpur creaks with the effort of cranes. Both a historic school and prison have become commercial shopping centres. But a citizen movement of heritage preservation has become a vocal part of the backlash, gaining strength and visibility in recent years in cities across Malaysia. Deforestation and the logging of indigenous lands have also become high profile news items.

In this context, the politics of space must be considered in any mapping project. Who has a space? Why is it located in a particular place? For those who don't have spaces, why don't they have spaces?

Among the creative hubs we interviewed, there is a sense that several founders feel

somewhat at the fringes: tucked away, in obscure neighbourhoods or in upper shophouses. Sometimes this is a conscious choice, and sometimes it is circumstantial. Some of these hubs may succeed in becoming centres in years to come, but they know that these centres will have to be built from scratch, with blood, sweat and tears.

The commercial heart of Kuala Lumpur is a monopoly of luxury hotels and shopping malls. In this kind of setting, creative hubs are a much-needed counterpoint: providing services to communities, a sense of belonging, and personal development. At the same time, many of them struggle to survive.

Outside of Kuala Lumpur, the opportunities may be greater. Some creative hubs can be seen as catalysts for their surroundings. In George Town, Ipoh and Johor Bahru, creative hubs have brought economic benefits to places that were previously perceived as being “dead”, as young people left for the capital.

In East Malaysia, creative hubs look set to focus local talent, providing a platform that allows young creatives to thrive without needing to be based in West Malaysia. Yet in Kota Kinabalu and Kuching, hub managers know that they must develop their West Malaysian connections in order to grow the scene in their own hometowns.

Visibility is important. In our research, we found that many creative hubs feel that the wider Malaysian public is apathetic to their work, indeed towards the arts. If spaces for the arts were more visible and more central, how might that slowly shift the perception of the arts?



## LOSTGENS



### ABOUT

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



### WEBSITE

lostgenerationspace.blogspot.my



### FOUNDED

2004



### FINANCE STRUCTURE

Non-profit



### NO. OF MEMBERS

4 Members



### NO. OF EMPLOYEES

0 Full Time,  
1 Intern



### LOCATION

8C, Jalan Panggung,  
50000 Kuala Lumpur



### INTERVIEWEE

Yeoh Lian Heng,  
Co-Founder



### HUB TYPE

- Event Space / Performance Venue
- Gallery
- Network
- Workshop
- Studio / Art Collective
- Incubator / Residency
- Event Organiser

## ZHONGSHAN BUILDING AT KAMPUNG ATTAP



### ABOUT

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



### WEBSITE

facebook.com/thezhongshanbuilding



### FOUNDED

2016



### FINANCE STRUCTURE

Profit



### NO. OF MEMBERS

Approx. 40



### NO. OF EMPLOYEES

3 Full Time



### LOCATION

No. 80, 82 & 84  
Jalan Rotan, off  
Jalan Kampung  
Attap, 50460  
Kuala Lumpur



### INTERVIEWEE

Liza Ho,  
Co-Founder



### HUB TYPE

- Co-working Space
- Event Space / Performance Venue
- Gallery
- Workshop
- Studio / Art Collective



## GEORGE TOWN FESTIVAL



### ABOUT

- George Town Festival is an annual festival that runs for a month across various venues in George Town, Penang. The festival includes international and Malaysian theatre, dance, and music performances, exhibitions, talks, food bazaars and other cultural engagements. Funded primarily by the Penang state government, the festival also works with a range of other partners including NGOs and the private sector.



### WEBSITE

georgetownfestival.com



### FOUNDED

2010



### FINANCE STRUCTURE

Non-profit



### NO. OF MEMBERS

N/A



### NO. OF EMPLOYEES

15 Full Time



### LOCATION

86 Lebuhr  
Armenian,  
George Town,  
10200 Penang



### INTERVIEWEE

Joe Sidek,  
*Festival Director*



Lisa Case,  
*Festival  
Manager*



### HUB TYPE

- Workshop
- Event Organiser

## MALAYSIAN WRITERS SOCIETY



### ABOUT

- The Malaysian Writers Society is a society for the professional advancement of Malaysian writers, writing locally or abroad. It started as a Facebook group, the Malaysian Writers Community / Komuniti Penulis Malaysia, set up in 2014. The society was formalised with a committee and membership in 2016. It runs an annual festival and also holds talks by writers. The Facebook group has 5000 members to date, the society has over 100 members.



### WEBSITE

facebook.com/malaysianwriterssociety



### FOUNDED

2016



### FINANCE STRUCTURE

Non-profit



### NO. OF MEMBERS

100+



### NO. OF EMPLOYEES

5 Executive  
Council Members



### LOCATION

Online



### INTERVIEWEE

Tina Isaacs,  
*Founder &  
Secretary*



Gina Yap Lai Yoong,  
*President*



### HUB TYPE

- Other (A community of writers)



## PROJEK RABAK



### ABOUT

Projek Rabak is an art collective based in Ipoh, which also has a gallery space in Wisma Central, Kuala Lumpur. The collective includes musicians, writers, poets, painters, filmmakers, theatre activists, mime artists and few others. Activities include an indie publishing press, Rabak Lit, as well as the Ipoh Kreative festival. Projek Rabak's artspace Khizanat has a café and retail space, and there is also a guesthouse, Rumah Khizanat.



### WEBSITE

projekrabak.com



**FOUNDED**  
2011



**FINANCE STRUCTURE**  
Non-profit,  
Social Enterprise



**NO. OF MEMBERS**  
40-50



**NO. OF EMPLOYEES**  
8 Full Time



### LOCATION

No. 24, Jalan Lee Kwee Foh, Taman Canning, 31400 Ipoh, Perak



### INTERVIEWEE

Mohd. Jayzuan,  
*Founder*



### HUB TYPE

- Co-working Space
- Event Space / Performance Venue
- Gallery
- Network
- Workshop
- Studio / Art Collective
- Incubator / Residency
- Event Organiser

## RIMBUN DAHAN



### ABOUT

Rimbun Dahan is a residency centre for developing traditional and contemporary art forms, architecture, and creative arts nature conservation. Set on the grounds of a fruit orchard, the space spans 14 acres and features buildings designed by architect Hijjas Kasturi, who resides in the property with his wife Angela Kasturi, Rimbun Dahan Arts programme director. Rimbun Dahan offers residencies for artists and writers, dance workshops, and educational opportunities for students of architecture and ecology.



### WEBSITE

rimbundahan.org



**FOUNDED**  
1994



**FINANCE STRUCTURE**  
Non-profit



**NO. OF MEMBERS**  
N/A



**NO. OF EMPLOYEES**  
7 Full Time  
1 Part Time



### LOCATION

Kilometer 27, Jalan Kuang, 48050 Kuang, Selangor



### INTERVIEWEE

Syar S. Alia,  
*Arts Manager*



### HUB TYPE

- Event Space / Performance Venue
- Gallery
- Incubator / Residency



## THE ACTORS STUDIO SENI TEATER RAKYAT



### ABOUT

- The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat is part of The Actors Studio, based at Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (klpac). As a registered society, Seni Teater Rakyat focuses on supporting traditional art forms, developing emerging theatre talent and engaging the public through theatre. The Actors Studio is founded by Dato' Faridah Merican and Joe Hasham OAM.



### WEBSITE

theactorsstudio.com.my



**FOUNDED**  
2006



**FINANCE STRUCTURE**  
Non-profit,  
Social Enterprise



**NO. OF MEMBERS**  
N/A



**NO. OF EMPLOYEES**  
40 Full Time



**LOCATION**  
klpac, Sentul Park,  
Jalan Strachan off  
Jalan Sultan Azlan  
Shah, 51100  
Kuala Lumpur



**INTERVIEWEE**  
Dato' Faridah Merican,  
Co-Founder  
•  
Ian Chow,  
Group General Manager



### HUB TYPE

- Event Space / Performance Venue
- Network
- Workshop
- Studio / Art Collective
- Incubator / Residency
- Event Organiser

## ART FOR GRABS



### ABOUT

- Art For Grabs is a quarterly bazaar. First started at a regular event at the Annexe Gallery at Central Market in Kuala Lumpur, it has since found different venue partners, most recently in the shopping malls JayaOne and Publika. The bazaar mixes artists, craft, artisan and book stalls and often partners with NGOs for a social cause. Held over a weekend, there are often live music, poetry readings, film screenings and talks.



### WEBSITE

facebook.com/artforgrabs



**FOUNDED**  
2007



**FINANCE STRUCTURE**  
Profit



**NO. OF MEMBERS**  
90 Vendors



**NO. OF EMPLOYEES**  
5 Part Time



**LOCATION**  
Varies



**INTERVIEWEE**  
Pang Khee Teik,  
Founder &  
Director



### HUB TYPE

- Network
- Other (Bazaar)



## KILANG BATERI



### ABOUT

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



### WEBSITE

bateri.my



### FOUNDED

2015



### FINANCE STRUCTURE

Non-profit



### NO. OF MEMBERS

184 Vendors



### NO. OF EMPLOYEES

13 Full Time



### LOCATION

83, Jalan  
Tampoi, 81200  
Johor Bahru



### INTERVIEWEE

Johan Ropi,  
Co-Founder



### HUB TYPE

- Event Space / Performance Venue
- Incubator / Residency
- Event Organiser

## Growing Roots

Malaysian creative hubs – like many creative hubs around the world – are grassroots in nature. They are started by individuals who are passionate about creating a change, and these individuals use their own dedication, expertise, and money to fill a gap in the social infrastructure.

In mapping creative hubs, we must understand that the lens of the “creative industries” is often focused on quantitative impact: job creation and economic benefits, for example. Indeed the term “creative industries” itself already presumes some kind of economic motivation and outcome.

So it’s important to note that many creative hubs in Malaysia do not prioritise quantitative outcomes. Very few of them set their own KPIs. Their concerns are often on more intangible results.

To these hub managers, the “long game” is not making money, but in fact building up a culture: offering career advice, education and mentoring, building relationships with the local community, and promoting understanding of the arts in Malaysia, to name just a few.

“We were among the first to start a serious collective [...] Before this, Ipoh was very famous with just underground music. When Projek Rabak came out, we started to offer more than just music. And we offer not just entertainment, but education as well,” says Jayzuan, co-founder of Projek Rabak.

Projek Rabak was set up in 2011, and is now a self-sustaining collective whose members are involved in literature, visual art, music and more. As Jayzuan explains, the hub is one of the first of its kind in Ipoh, and it has grown to become a place where young people can come for advice and mentorship in their creative careers: as he describes it, Projek Rabak is like a “shortcut” for them.

Like Projek Rabak, several creative hubs we interviewed were started by individuals who wanted to help their community. Many have gone as far as using their own money to fund their creative hubs.

The Malaysian Writers Society, for example, started out as a Facebook group. The founders, Tina Isaacs and Gina Yap Lai Yoong, decided that there needed to be a platform to bring together writers of all languages, since the national writers associations GAPENA and PENA only represent Bahasa Malaysia language writers.

1 Tamu Tamu Collective at Art For Grabs in March 2017





“It’s really out of what we thought, as writers, was lacking in the industry, so we created what we wanted. What we needed,” says Gina, president of the society.

Today, the Facebook group has 5000 members, while the society has over 100 registered, fee-paying members. The group organises a regular festival to help authors sell their books, run public workshops. They also have localised chapters in different Malaysian states. But Gina and Tina are still responsible for covering any additional operation costs. “Can you count that as a 100 percent loss?” asks Gina. “No... it’s not a loss because we think it’s intangible. Intangible profit.”

Some creative hubs have formal support from local or national government bodies. Yet even in these cases, it’s clear that the personality of those leading the hubs is crucial. Often, the funding does not allow the creative hubs to be commercially profitable, so it takes someone with a vision and a personal sense of purpose to stay in the job.

Those who run creative hubs need to be not only managers but also advocates. During our interviews, we met a series of individuals who have devoted an astounding amount of time, energy and money to their creative hubs.



Yeoh Lian Heng is one of the co-founders of Lostgens, a contemporary art and community space in Chinatown, Kuala Lumpur. Yeoh is one of two members who have continued running the collective since 2004. He rarely breaks even with the operating costs and has often reflected on the struggle of running a space such as Lostgens.

“Change is slow and comes from the bottom up,” says Yeoh. “There’s a philosopher I like a lot, Deleuze. He said, ‘People shouldn’t be trees, people should be roots.’ Roots can go very far, whereas a tree can be cut down. Growing in the soil, underground -- that kind of change, I feel Lostgens is taking that approach. Grassroots.”

Yeoh’s words on roots are a good starting point for considering the impact of creative hubs in Malaysia. Roots may not be visible from the surface, but they can have a wide ranging impact, extending their tendrils in unseen ways.

In these next sections, we will discuss the intangible and invaluable impact of creative hubs, as well as their more measurable impact on local economies and contexts.

## Building A Culture

At The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat, the current motto is “Nurture, Educate and Entertain.” Seni Teater Rakyat is an arm of The Actors Studio, a theatre company based at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (klpac). As a registered society, Seni Teater Rakyat’s mission is to “break the barrier between the arts and the people.”<sup>6</sup>

The society supports traditional art forms such as Mak Yong and Cantonese Opera. It also sets out to nurture and support emerging artists.

“When we talk about ‘nurture’, if you notice, a lot of our productions do not use the star list; it’s a lot of newcomers, newbies whom you do not know. And that is a conscious decision that we have made,” says Ian Chow, group general manager.

Ian cites another example: “We actually provided Yuna with the venue for her first album launch,” he says, referring to the Malaysian musician who has since found success on a major music label in the USA. “Back then she was not as big as now, so you see for us, we never know where the people that we support may reach. For example, a case like Yuna. I’m not saying we made her famous, no, but at least she got the platform from us.”

In previous incarnations, The Actors Studio also provided early career opportunities for Harith Iskander – now Malaysia’s best known stand-up comedian – and Huzir Sulaiman, a feted playwright based in Singapore. Yet Dato’ Faridah Merican, co-founder of The Actors Studio, feels that such contributions have often been overlooked.



“Many a time I have attended government sessions or meetings on culture, etcetera, etcetera... klpac is never ever mentioned in the same breath as Istana Budaya and other places that the government owns – which I find very wrong because this is very important for the arts of Kuala Lumpur,” she says.

The contribution of creative hubs to education can be hard to quantify. After all, the kind of knowledge, confidence and experience gained by members through hubs is cumulative. It’s a stepping stone in a much longer career. But it is that stepping stone that can make all the difference.

- 2 Rumah Khizanat- No. 24, Jalan Lee Kwee Foh, Taman Canning Ipoh, Perak
- 3 The Actors Studio founders Dato’ Faridah Merican and Joe Hasham

<sup>6</sup> “The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat”, The Actors Studio.

Available: [http://www.theactorsstudio.com.my/?page\\_id=17](http://www.theactorsstudio.com.my/?page_id=17) [Accessed 16 April 2017]



Jack Malik, a member of Projek Rabak, credits the collective and particularly Jayzuan with his development as a poet. In 2016, Jack was one of the Malaysian poets who participated in and won the Causeway Exchange Poetry Slam in Singapore.

“I’ve met so many wonderful people, I’ve gone places. If it weren’t for Projek Rabak, I think I wouldn’t expand that much as a poet, as an artist,” says Jack.

The art collective Lostgens looks for emerging contemporary artists, and then offers them the span of a year to develop an exhibition. During this time, Yeoh and other members will meet with the artist for discussions and development. “We give the space, advice, direction, curation,” says Yeoh.

Rimbun Dahan offers free residencies where Southeast Asian artists can come and stay for a period of a few months and receive a stipend, while Malaysian artists can stay up to a year. During the longer residencies, the artist will usually

complete a set of artworks that will culminate in an exhibition, with guidance from Rimbun Dahan. These costs are then offset by artists from outside the region, who pay a fee to access the residency.

These are just a few examples of how Malaysia’s creative hubs help to develop talent and career opportunities. Other hubs, meanwhile, encourage members to share advice amongst each other.

The Malaysian Writers Society often posts information about writing rates and publishing opportunities to their Facebook group. They also invite people in the group to share their own knowledge. “We’re trying to show [writers] that if you succeed, then you bring others up with you,” says Tina.

**4** Interior of Lostgens

**5** A performance at Butterworth Fringe Festival 2016 for George Town Festival



## Public Engagement



Beyond offering training and development to their own members and partners, creative hubs in Malaysia are also leading the way when it comes to public engagement with the arts.

Some of them have been able to obtain sponsorship from partners who recognise this value. But it is the hubs that create and sustain this engagement in the long term, regardless of whether it is profitable or not.

While most of these creative hubs do not call themselves “social enterprises”, many of them share some aspects of a social enterprise. For example, they use their revenue to reinvest back into the hub, in order to sustain its activities and offer more services at a cheap rate, if not for free, to both members and to the public.

Kilang Bateri, for example, is a creative and commercial hub in Johor Bahru, which earns revenue through renting space to almost 200 independent retail and food vendors. However, the opportunity is provided to the vendors at a lower cost than a commercial space, so that the threshold for starting a business is lower. The rest

of the space is also used to host events, but “if it’s anything to do with the arts, we give for free,” says Johan Ropi, co-founder. For example, busking musicians can use the space for free, as can university related events.

The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat strives to keep their shows affordable, because they see this as a way of nurturing both the audience and performers: “If you look back 10 or 15 years ago, the ticket price that we had was in the range of RM20 to RM35,” says Ian Chow, adding that today’s prices are only about RM5 more.

George Town Festival aims to keep their shows accessible as well, sometimes at the cost of incurring huge losses when they bring in world renowned theatre and dance performances. Of 2016’s programme, 118 of the total 141 events were free.<sup>7</sup> They also partner with Teach For Malaysia, an NGO which aims to raise the educational quality of schools.

“We’ve adopted schools from Teach for Malaysia to expose them to see shows,” says Joe Sidek, festival director. “Because young kids at 12

<sup>7</sup> George Town Festival, “GTF Executive Summary 2016”, 2016, p.2



to 14, cannot afford to see culture.” He recalls meeting one child who had been “the worst kid” in his class, but who had later become a top student and thanked Joe personally for the experience of seeing the shows. “It changed my life, it’s given meaning to me and how we can educate people,” says Joe.

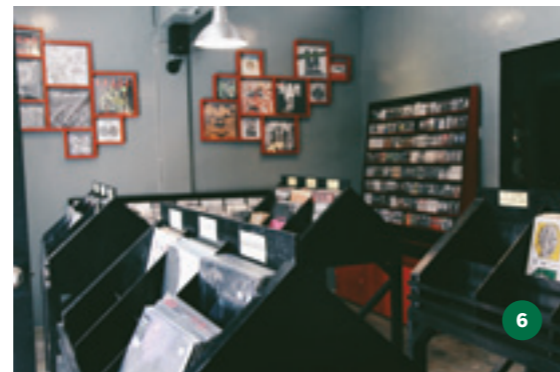
Art For Grabs is a bazaar which combines independent retail stalls with live music and panel discussions. It includes vendors who range from social-political and environmental activists to craft makers and artisans, experimental artists, booksellers and zine distributors.

Often, Art For Grabs partners with NGOs to theme its content around social causes. In March 2017, the “Fifty Shades of Green” theme (sponsored by the Selangor Tourism, Environment, Green Technology and Consumer Affairs Committee), included a panel discussion from indigenous people who spoke about the threats to their native forest land.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, these examples only serve as the most visible and memorable of a wider impact. Creative hubs can contribute to a long-term relationship that people have with the arts, with each other and with themselves.

“My interest is in people reinvesting and redefining their acts of citizenship,” says Pang Khee Teik, founder of Art For Grabs. “Like speaking in public, demonstrating, expressing themselves. Things that people entitled to rights in a space would do. By the act of doing that, that then assumes an act of citizenship. So I see the process as a creative act.”

Lostgens, which started with a focus on contemporary art, has evolved to be actively



involved in community projects such as cultural mapping and oral histories in various places around Malaysia, including Pudu<sup>9</sup>, Kuala Lumpur, as well as Melaka and Ulu Langat.

Yeoh of Lostgens also spearheaded the Petaling Street Community Art project. This was a movement to raise awareness of the proposed MRT construction in Chinatown, which at one point threatened to demolish several historic buildings before a compromise was reached. The art project included protest posters, talks and performances in Chinatown.<sup>10</sup>

“There’s no rules on what we ought to be doing, but we’ll care about our surroundings and current events,” Yeoh says, when asked about the mission of Lostgens. “What we’ve done is create some examples of community projects, how to go about these activities such as oral histories, collecting old photos. Letting people see the possibility of using art as a medium for these concepts.”

**6** Tandang Records Store in the Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap

**7** Rumah Attap Library in the Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap

<sup>8</sup> Selva, Melizarani T., “Art bazaar pushes green theme”, The Star, 24 March 2017.

**Available:** <http://www.thestar.com.my/metro/community/2017/03/24/art-bazaar-pushes-green-theme-10th-edition-of-event-to-also-feature-series-of-forums-on-environmenta> [Accessed 16 April 2017]

<sup>9</sup> Mendolicchio, Herman Bashiron and Susanne Bosch, eds. “Adding Letters to our Transactions: Yeoh Lian Heng in conversation with Alicia Neo”, in *Art in Context: Learning From the Field*, Goethe-Institut, 2017, pp.75-76

<sup>10</sup> Tariq, Qishin, “Artist wonders if ‘New Kuala Lumpur’ must be built on the ruins of heritage”, The Star, 7 December 2014.

**Available:** <http://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/entertainment/arts/frame-up/2014/12/07/artist-wonders-if-new-kuala-lumpur-must-be-built-on-the-ruins-of-heritage> [Accessed 16 April 2017]

## Collaborations

Collaboration is key to our definition of “creative hubs”. The hubs we interviewed demonstrate several kinds of collaboration: between individuals and organisations, between different members, and between members and the public.

If hubs can change the way people see themselves, then they can also change how people interact with each other. In many instances, the collaboration in these creative hubs takes place organically, as a result of the hubs being “convenors” of different kinds of creative people. It can also often be multi-disciplinary.

The Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap is a privately-owned building that has become an arts hub: different units are rented out to creative tenants. These groups and small businesses span risograph printing, graphic design, music,

visual art, fashion and more. The building is run by Liza Ho, her husband and Snow Ng.

In 2013, Liza and Snow started an art gallery and consultancy, OUR ArtProjects. They operated without a space for four years. Last year, they inherited a building from within the family, and they have now invited other creative groups to take residency.

“We’re hoping to create more awareness. Most of these people here have been operating for some time but they are not visible. For example, the people in the [fashion] atelier are a bit more commercial, so they’d be able to bring people to the punk rock scene. The people in the punk rock scene can bring people to the designers,” says Liza.

Liza cites another example: one of the tenants is a DJ collective, Public School. In the future, they plan to design their own T-shirts, and so they can go directly to another tenant – Bogus Merchandise – to produce these.

Indeed, the way Kampung Attap is structured also allows for hubs within hubs: some units are rented to certain groups, who might invite others to co-share the space. One of







the units is a community library, Rumah Attap, which is shared by three different tenants who help to keep the library going among themselves but also have distinct projects of their own.

“With more people, things happen faster. There are more ideas. And people from different fields can offer new perspectives,” says Penny Wong, who runs Cultura, one of the co-tenants of the Rumah Attap library.

Kilang Bateri’s space includes a skate park and a black box for performances, as well as retail and F&B units. Projek Rabak has two separate spaces, Rumah Khizanat and Khizanat, which between them host a library, bookshop, hangout space, exhibitions, live music and film screenings.

Lostgens, as well as being a gallery, residency and community art hub, also hosts a regular Philosophy class. “At Lostgens I feel we should not just do visual arts. It’s hard for art to stand alone. It needs to have support from music, philosophy, film,” explains Yeoh.

Meanwhile, George Town Festival spans the full range of arts, from exhibitions to performance and site-specific installations. Like Art For Grabs, the festival can include all kinds of people who might not be traditional artists and performers.

While collaboration takes place within hubs, it’s also worth noting that many Malaysian hubs are strongly

supportive of one another. Recognising that the ecosystem of independent arts is fragile, individual members often help to connect various hubs through personal friendships. Imagined as a map, these creative hubs overlap and ripple out, like concentric circles in water.

For example, Tamu Tamu Collective is a Sabahan creative hub which brings together different craft groups. Tamu Tamu formed after one of the core members, Jesse Joy, was invited to take part in Art For Grabs in 2015. Jesse invited other friends to join him, and Tamu Tamu started from there. The collective then went on to collaborate with other Sabahan groups such as Cracko Art Group and Pangrok Sulap.

Meanwhile, Tandang Records is a local music shop that was previously located in the punk rock collective space Rumah Api. When the Rumah Api space was threatened with demolition due to new developments<sup>11</sup>, Tandang Records moved to The Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap, and will therefore connect the punk rock scene to the new space and its other tenants.

Beyond Malaysia, creative hubs have created connections and collaborations between artists across the region and world. Often, international organisations play a key role in fostering these partnerships: British Council, Japan Foundation and Goethe-Institut are

<sup>11</sup> Kow, Gah Chie, “Saving Pekan Ampang, the small town in a big city”, Malaysiakini, 16 October 2015. Available: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/315932> [Accessed 16 April 2017].



particularly active in their support. In 2015, Lostgens hosted an arts project called TransActions in the Field, in partnership with Goethe-Institut, which brought together artists from around the region and resulted in the publication of a book of their conversations.<sup>12</sup>

Art For Grabs partnered with Singapore’s Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth as part of a cross-causeway arts exchange in 2015. The exchange, titled Titian Budaya, brought Singaporean artists, musicians and artisans to Malaysia and vice versa.

George Town Festival is part of the Southeast Asian Creative Cities Network (SEACCN), which was formed in 2014 and includes Cebu in Philippines, Bandung, Chiang Mai, Hanoi and George Town.

Rimbun Dahan set up a regional meeting for Southeast Asian Arts Residencies with Res

Artis in 2016, which was also supported by Goethe-Institut. Rimbun Dahan also works with Asialink in Australia and the Asia New Zealand Foundation for artist exchanges. “I do think the artists that come in, always leave with connections they didn’t have before,” says Syar S. Alia, arts manager of Rimbun Dahan. “That extends beyond Malaysia. So because of the variety of nationalities that we usually have at any one time, local artists come here then make a friend or colleague that will then go back to say, Germany, or Austria, or the Philippines, or Australia. And that then leads them to further opportunities.”

**8** Retail unit, Kilang Bateri

**9** Syar S Alia and Liyana Dizzy from the zine distributors Biawak Gemok at Art For Grabs in March 2017. Syar is also Arts Manager at Rimbun Dahan.

<sup>12</sup> Mendolicchio, Herman Bashiron and Susanne Bosch, eds. Art in Context: Learning From the Field, Goethe-Institut, 2017.



## Catalysing Cities

The impact of creative hubs on city regeneration has been documented across the world. In the report “Creative Hubs: Understanding the New Economy”, Dovey and Pratt describe how the project of “Creative Industries” was closely tied to urban regeneration of abandoned buildings and neighbourhoods in decline in the UK:

*In the 2000s, New Labour’s Creative Industries initiatives led to the growth of workspaces for culture and creative industries business. With public support, many old vacant factory buildings were redeveloped as studio spaces for creative professionals and businesses. In the last decade there has been continual flowering of ‘art factories’ and ‘cultural factories’. These are, in part, driven by public authorities’ desire to resume derelict industrial space, to regenerate and repopulate the inner city, to draw the population back, and renew tax revenues.<sup>13</sup>*

Among the creative hubs we interviewed, there are several which have been self-consciously involved in a similar kind of urban transformation:

in particular, Projek Rabak (Ipoh), Kilang Bateri (Johor Bahru) and George Town Festival (George Town).

Prior to starting Kilang Bateri, Johan Ropi had worked closely with the state government in Johor: “I was responsible for a project called Johor Bahru Transformation, to turn around the Johor Bahru old city,” he says. “When I was in Iskandar Malaysia, I had to come up with the initiative, of course, then I get a buy-in from all my friends. We started to turn around the old Johor Bahru city as a hub. Then in 2015 we decided to come up with [Kilang Bateri].”

With his close ties to local government and his experience of speaking to stakeholders, Johan managed to get an injection of funding for Kilang Bateri. He also negotiated other kinds of support: for example, the industrial land where Kilang Bateri is located was legally prohibited from being used for commercial activity. However, the local council granted an exemption, so that independent brands could set up as vendors under Kilang Bateri.

**10** Johan Ropi, Co-Founder of Kilang Bateri



“Basically, we use ‘recharge’ as a term. We didn’t want to use ‘rehabilitation’ or ‘rejuvenation’, so we used ‘recharge’. And we keep on taking brownfield areas and turning it around. So we got that ‘recharge’ after the Bateri thing. Now we are using the term ‘recharging the city’ for our initiative, and how do we describe ourselves? We always tell people that we are the ‘soul planters’. We find a place, plant in soul, bring in economy, bring activities.”

– Johan Ropi

Kilang Bateri has arrived at the right time: Johor Bahru is in the midst of a government-led urban transformation project as part of Iskandar, a development corridor that aims to bring investment and human capital to the state. Since its formation in 2006, Iskandar has amassed over RM200 billion in investments.<sup>14</sup> The contribution of the arts has been recognised as part of this transformation: Iskarnival, an arts festival, was launched in 2013 as part of this catalyst project.<sup>15</sup>

Johan sees Kilang Bateri as a way to brand Johor for visitors. Whereas Johor Premium Outlets and Legoland were developed in order to bring in tourists with the lure of luxury fashion brands and a global toy brand, Kilang Bateri “addresses the gap” and “completes the ecosystem”, to use his words. It’s a one-stop centre for people

to experience Johor, while also bringing more recognition for small, local businesses.

“The best thing about social impact is that some people argue that it’s about economic impact. But I would put it as a social impact. Because of jobs. We offer 350 job opportunities directly, and to kids from around the area,” says Johan. “So our statement to the government is: ‘You see? When you get together and come in with a positive vibe, together with an arts component, it creates great economic value.’”

George Town Festival started as a festival to celebrate the city’s UNESCO Heritage status in 2010, an event proposed and funded by the Penang state government. It has since evolved, but continues to be a showcase for the city itself – using a range of venues, from cafés to boutique hotels and even old temples. The festival pays performers and production staff, as well as bringing in tourists that give their business to local restaurants and hotels.

“If you look at the dollar signs of the festival, the economic spin-offs of what the festival does, that means when we bring contractors, performers... really it’s a support system that brings money to [the economy],” says Joe Sidek. He estimates that “two thirds of the funding that we get, goes back into the local economy.”

The festival attracts as many as 200,000 people during its annual run. Without a doubt, it has played a key role of developing the city’s reputation as a hub for the arts and top travel destination, with coverage in the New York Times and other international media. During its 2016 edition, the PR value of the festival was estimated to be over RM20 million, versus its budget of approximately RM6 million.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Dovey and Pratt, “Creative Hubs”, p.12

<sup>14</sup> UEM Sunrise, “ISKARNIVAL IS BACK! Over 100,000 visitors expected at ISKARNIVAL 2016”, 5 September 2016.

Available: <http://www.uemsunrise.com/iskarnival-2016> [Accessed 16 April 2017]

<sup>15</sup> Forbes Asia, “To Drum Up Business In Iskandar, Malaysian Home Builder Tries Novel Approach”, 1 March 2017.

Available: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesasia/2017/03/01/four-of-malaysias-richest-take-part-in-iskarnival/#fb1847473de9> [Accessed 16 April 2017]

<sup>16</sup> George Town Festival, “GTF Executive Summary 2016”, 2016, p.5



In 2015, George Town Festival started an offshoot, Butterworth Fringe Festival (BFF), to spread some interest to Butterworth. With George Town now firmly on the map as a travel destination, BFF aims to bring spillover benefits to the inland part of Penang which is often overlooked.

Ipoh is seeing its own regeneration, and is now frequently compared to Penang in the same breath. Like George Town, it boasts good local food, heritage buildings and even street art painted by Ernest Zacharevic, the same street artist who caused a frenzy in Penang with his murals. But as Jayzuan of Projek Rabak argues, what's even better than an annual festival is regular arts events:

“Once a week, we still have events, and in between weekends, we have forums, workshops. So it's very healthy and very happening. That's what we see most clearly, the most visible change in Ipoh. A few of the people that we know have come to Ipoh just for the art scene. That is one of the impacts that we can observe. They moved to Ipoh because they know Ipoh has forums, has workshops, has collectives like Projek Rabak that push people to make art.”  
– Mohd. Jayzuan

As local governments look for ways to transform urban spaces – especially those that are experiencing a commercial



and social decline – creative hubs have proven to be valuable partners. In 2009, the government's investment fund Khazanah Nasional started an initiative called Think City, to focus on urban regeneration. Initially based in George Town, it has since expanded to projects in Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur and Johor. In 2014, Think City launched a grants programme with a total budget of RM30 million to support grassroots-led projects that contribute to a city's liveability.<sup>17</sup>

Creative hubs are a strategic investment for such funding, since partnering with one hub can create connections with a wide range of groups and individuals. Among Think City's grant recipients is the Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap, which received RM200,000 of funding in 2016 to restore the building for its new usage as an arts hub.

11 Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap

<sup>17</sup> Lim, Ida, “Think City launches RM30 million grant for nationwide urban renewal programmes”, The Malay Mail Online, 18 December 2014. Available: <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/thinkcity-launches-rm30m-grant-in-bid-to-boost-city-living-for-kl-penang-re> [Accessed 16 April 2017]

## Money

Among Malaysian creative hubs, the most common challenge is money. Even creative hubs which have been running for over a decade feel uncertain of their future.

Malaysian Writers Society, Lostgens, Rimbun Dahan and The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat are all being sustained – in whole or in part – by the personal funds of the founders, or with profits from another part of the founders' business.

“It's very painful because we need to be looking for the money. Sometimes I don't really know how to do it anymore. How to go out there and get some people to open their doors for us,” says Dato' Faridah Merican of The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat.

She mentions that many arts organisations are competing for the same sponsors: “Everybody goes to Sime Darby, Khazanah – everybody goes to Khazanah, you know? I mean they also cannot survive by helping everybody so we have to find other resources.”

At the end of the day, “Joe [Hasham, co-founder of The Actors Studio] and I will dig deep into our pockets and assist if the company needed funding, that's how it has to be, because if we don't do that, then the company could collapse.”

Rimbun Dahan is supported through the other businesses owned by the same founders, Hijjas and Angela Kasturi. It has also received some project-based funding from partners such as Goethe-Institut. However, in recent years, Rimbun Dahan has started seeking its own revenue through venue rental for events such as weddings and film locations. It also charges an accommodation fee for resident artists from outside Southeast Asia.

Malaysian Writers Society runs mostly on social media, in order to keep its costs low. Many of the ad hoc expenses are covered by Gina and Tina. This means that they lose out on certain opportunities, as Tina explains:

“For example, we were invited to take part in the London Book Fair in the [Malaysian] booth. The idea was to collaborate and rent the booth together at £12,000, we were gonna be one of six [independent Malaysian bookselling groups], so £2,000. We were hoping to go, couldn't come up with the money, so we just had to let it go.”

1 Yeoh Lian Heng, Co-Founder of Lostgens







George Town Festival has run for seven years. Most of those years, it has broken even, but its managers note that each year presents a different scenario. As a state government funded festival, it can depend on a measure of financial security for the majority of its budget. But it still needs to look for additional private sponsors.

Last year's George Town Festival made a loss, due to the implementation of the federal government's Goods and Services Tax (GST), which led them to restructure some of their finances.

"We also realised that it is very hard," says Joe Sidek. "Nobody owes the arts any money, why should anyone give you money? Why should anyone want to sponsor? So the last two years we've been working on an idea of partnerships. What we can give you if you partner us, because we have mileage, we have eyeballs, we have footfalls."

Among those we interviewed, the creative hubs that are the most confident of their financial future are Projek Rabak, Kilang Bateri and the Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap. One commonality of these hubs is that they benefit from holding a physical space.

Projek Rabak has bed and breakfast accommodation, as well as venue space, a streetwear label and a publishing imprint. They also earn money by organising events. The Zhongshan Building at Kampung Attap's business model is based on renting out its units.

Kilang Bateri, which started with some private investment, broke even after a year. Having been started by five individuals with entrepreneurial backgrounds, it was in a strong position to plan its business model, while also starting with low overheads. It's also notable that Kilang Bateri had done several case studies before its launch, in order to develop its business models.

After two months, the team pitched for a Bumiputera competition (open only to Malay and indigenous entrepreneurs), Skim Usahawan Permulaan Bumiputera (Superb) by Unit Peneraju Agenda Bumiputera (Teraju). This won them RM500,000, used for upgrading the space.

Johan Ropi emphasises that Kilang Bateri operates like a business. When vendors are not up to scratch, their contract is not renewed. There are 184 vendors operating as part of Kilang Bateri, with various personalities: "That is a major challenge. I would add that this business does not bring in crazy profits, and it is actually very fragile. Because we rely on rent, and we have to work hard to make sure people come to our place."

Whether run as profit or non-profit, money is often a challenge for creative hubs. For many, the search for sponsors is continuous and can only be relied upon in the short term.

**2** Accommodations at Projek Rabak

**3** Lostgens details

## Human Resources

Money problems are part of a vicious cycle within creative hubs. Because many of them do not have a lot of money, they cannot hire more people. As a result, management of the hubs can be strained, with just a few people running things. This means that they then cannot take on ambitious projects that might bring in more money.

"Maybe people don't dare to join us as members, seeing us struggle," comments Yeoh from Lostgens. He's partly joking, but the struggle is real.

When creative hubs become dependent on just a few individuals, it also means the sustainability of operations will be at risk. "At any time we are aware that if something happens to Tina, if something happens to Gina, then it just dies off," says Gina of the Malaysian Writers Society. That is why they decided to set up a more formal society, with paying members and a committee.

Similar feelings were expressed by Dato' Faridah of The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat. "We're very confident that we'll be there in a year. Our worry for Joe [Hasham] and me is what happens when we're gone? That's what we worry about. Because it has to be taken over and it has to be run better than the fate that we are facing now."

With core managers spreading themselves thin, it makes it harder for creative hubs to plan for the future. Another related issue is that sometimes the founders themselves are not well equipped to manage the administration of hubs.

Yeoh from Lostgens cites this as one of his problems. The collective started out quite organically, and so he has spent

several years realising that he needs to plan ahead more. He doesn't really like or enjoy engaging with the business side of things, or with administration. He says that he would ideally like to hire a full-time employee.

Syar from Rimbun Dahan tells us that the residency and exhibitions have increased in recent years, which means they are now faced with questions of how they can operate in the future: "Because if you're running from a model that's small-scale, and you expand it even just a little bit, and from that expansion it keeps expanding, you're running something that much bigger on the same amount of fuel."

The creative hubs that are thriving in their operations (and more confident of their future) have multiple people in different roles. At Projek Rabak, for example, Jayzuan is no longer running day to day operations:

"We are a collective, but we are still run like a professional company. Maybe in certain ways, in terms of profit, we don't really follow the corporate or capitalist style. But in terms of discipline, we still work like a corporate company. We still have meetings, we have minutes. All that usual office stuff."





Meanwhile, Kilang Bateri leveraged on the various skills of its five founders. For Johan, his experience with government from his previous job on the local council has helped enormously: “So with regard to any policy, licensing, and so on, I’m dealing with it, because I can speak their language.”

When creative hubs have smooth, organised operations, it allows them to reap further benefits: strengthening their marketing for example, and capturing data on their impact. These steps will lead to further opportunities, growing their audience base and finding new kinds of support.

But when creative hubs need to keep costs down and are run by teams who need to also find their main income elsewhere, some of

these details become lost. Many of the hubs that we spoke to have not kept detailed data records, although most of them have general numbers on their growth of participants.

In turn, this means that many creative hubs cannot compete for public attention, and cannot advocate effectively, which once again feeds into a cycle. Instead, they must rely on low-cost marketing.

Joe Sidek of George Town Festival points out that arts management training is lacking in Malaysia: “Most of the schools give you event management and they think an idea of an event is weddings or concerts. So arts management per se has never been an easy task, to get people with the right sort of background.”

#### 4 Interior of Lostgens



## Mindsets

A more deep-seated challenge mentioned by some of the creative hubs is that the Malaysian public at large does not care about their work.

“I think we’re still a long way from building an audience for the arts in Malaysia. I don’t think anyone in Malaysia can say hey, we’ve got a brilliant, ripe fruit audience,” says Joe Sidek. “It is shocking. Students who study arts don’t go and see exhibitions. Dance students don’t go and see dance programmes. Isn’t that shocking? That is Malaysia.”

Although several creative hubs are working to make the arts more accessible, they sometimes feel as though they are shouting into empty rooms. This then compounds their issues of sponsorship and sustainability.

“It’s not a simple thing that can be solved overnight, because it requires the participation of all different levels of people and agencies” says Ian Chow of The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat, who adds that the education system in Malaysia is “very geared toward the science stream”. In Malaysian schools, students must select either the science stream or arts stream at age 15. Those with the better grades are often encouraged to go to the science stream.<sup>18</sup>

This mindset is not just apparent in audiences, but also in the higher echelons. While there are forms of federal and local government support for some creative hubs, these tend to be selective and sporadic. Creative hubs are rarely assured of receiving funding to cover a block of a few years.

Returning to the example of the London Book Fair mentioned earlier by the Malaysian Writers Society, it’s apparent that many creative hubs are taking steps where the government has not ventured. Malaysian publishers and booksellers resorted to bundling together their own money

in order to attend the London Book Fair, in contrast to other nations which are supported by government funds to attend.

In recent years, there have been some new opportunities for funding from the federal government. MyCreativeVentures, for example, gives low-interest loans to businesses with a creative element, but these loans still need to be repaid. Creative hubs with an urban transformation angle have also been supported by Think City, as shown earlier, because of the incentives brought to cities.

Yet, government initiatives often move much slower than grassroots organisations. Johan Ropi of Kilang Bateri gives an example:

“Now Iskandar Malaysia is working on something called Youth Hub, which we were involved in in the early days, to come up with a concept paper. The thing about government initiatives is that it takes some time. So because we as a movement we have the buy-in from our stakeholders, so they keep on pressuring us, ‘So where’s the project?’ So we couldn’t tahan [stand it] already, so we come up with our own thing. That hub is still under development, and is expected to be up by next year, if I’m not mistaken.”

At the same time, some creative hubs will always be deemed high risk and so will not receive funds. These are the hubs that include activism and socio-political engagement in their work. Censorship in Malaysia is an issue across the arts and media, and it has a direct impact on creative hubs.

<sup>18</sup> Lim, May Lee, “Science vs Arts: Career Guide”, My Star Job, 3 November 2012.

**Available:** [http://mystarjob.com/articles/story.aspx?file=/2012/11/3/mystarjob\\_careerguide/12216039&sec=mystarjob\\_careerguide](http://mystarjob.com/articles/story.aspx?file=/2012/11/3/mystarjob_careerguide/12216039&sec=mystarjob_careerguide) [Accessed 16 April 2017]



## Sustainability

Issues of money, management and mindsets have a cumulative impact that threatens the sustainability of creative hubs. Lisa Case, festival manager of George Town Festival describes the scenario that faces the team:

“In Singapore they definitely plan two years ahead because they have the money, they know the money is coming or the money is already there. Whereas we have to work one step at a time, and that has actually been a bit of a problem for us. We want to confirm, we want to go to sponsors with programmes but we cannot yet because we don't have the money or the permit so we're working from year to year to year.”

– Lisa Case

Many creative hubs are in a position where they must simply try to survive. Without a regular patron or the assurance of long-term funding, they simply cannot see far enough in the future to make plans. Without these plans, they cannot seek further support, and without this support, they cannot continue to do their work effectively.

While most of the creative hubs we spoke to were confident that they would still be here in one year's time, they were less certain about being here in five years' time. “We honestly don't know how long we can carry on,” say Gina and Tina of Malaysian Writers Society.

Even Johan, who rated Kilang Bateri's financial health as very good, spoke about the hub's lifespan with pragmatism:

“As an architect and as someone who is involved in retail, a normal mall's lifespan is about eight years. I'm not sure where we will be after eight years, but we have exit strategies. Looking at the growth rate that is three times faster, our lifespan may be three times shorter.”

Of course, even if hubs are not sustained, their contribution still makes an impact in the long term. To use an example of a past creative hub, many

in the Kuala Lumpur arts scene still talk about the Annexe Gallery fondly. Part of Central Market, the Annexe Gallery was a place for creative people to meet, hang out and exchange ideas at talks, music events and more. In talking about her mission with Kampung Attap, Liza Ho explicitly mentioned Annexe Gallery as a point of reference.

According to Pang Khee Teik, formerly Programme Director of the Annexe Gallery, the Annexe could not be sustained because the developer of the property expected the space to be able to generate profit. Given that the space could be rented out at a higher value by sacrificing the arts community, something had to give.

“Some things are better not sustained. You do as much as you can. Then it evolves into ideas for other people to create other things,” says Pang.

Pang's insight touches on one aspect of the creative scene in Malaysia: even as some spaces and hubs have died out, others have sprung up. Because so many individuals have connected through their artistic interests, they are also able to take forward new challenges, crossing over to other hubs or starting something new. In other words, those underground roots continue to spread, and may pop up with shoots elsewhere.

However, this resilience does not mean that the uncertain situation facing many creative hubs should be accepted. Indeed, given that so many individuals have invested their time, energy and money into these hubs – often providing public services for free – we need to ask how they can be supported to continue.

In every creative discipline, people's talents develop over time. When hubs can sustain themselves not just for years but for decades, they can support and push these talents more fully. They will not only give young creatives a launch platform, but continue to work with them throughout an entire career.

Creative hubs also accrue more credibility over time, allowing them to raise their national and international profile. Their cumulative experience enables them to play a bigger cultural role and even advise on policy. Since many of them are embedded in communities, they also have a wealth of local knowledge of and for different groups in society.

We can look to the experimental theatre group Five Arts Centre as an example of a creative hub which has managed to survive and thrive. Five Arts Centre celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2015. Although its work would not be considered mainstream, it now holds an important role in the arts scene.

For 11 years, Five Arts Centre has been awarding grants to artists from different fields through a sponsorship partnership with the broadcaster ASTRO. It has also been invited to festivals around the world to tour with its performances. The Japan Art Association awarded Five Arts Centre the prestigious Praemium Imperiale Grant for Young Artists in 2016.<sup>19</sup> But more importantly still, Five Arts Centre has helped to sustain the work of a group of writers, directors, producers and performers for over three decades.

Yeoh of Lostgens puts it like this: “It's important to continue. In Malaysia, you have to continue. If you can continue to do it for several years, you'll have something to show for it. We [Malaysians] have a problem with stopping and starting.”

<sup>5</sup> Malaysian writer Lokman Hakim, Vice President of the Malaysian Writers Society



<sup>19</sup> Praemium Imperiale, “Grant for Young Artists”.

Available: <http://www.praemiumimperiale.org/en/grantforyoungartist-en/allrecipients-en> [Accessed 16 April 2017]



Based on the challenges outlined in the previous section, here are some suggestions for how creative hubs can be supported:

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## Funding

While many hubs have benefited from short term funding or project-based funding, more long-term sponsorship from both government bodies and private companies would allow creative hubs to plan ahead. Currently, many creative hubs have a “survival” mentality which means they are only able to plan for the short-term.

Long-term funding would also allow creative hubs to hire full-time employees. This would lessen the burden on a small group of people to manage the hub in their spare time, which in turn would make the creative hubs less dependent on a few individuals. As a result, creative hubs would be more sustainable.

However, funding also needs to be given with consideration. Many creative hubs want to maintain independence in their programming and curation, and their managers are wary of funding that comes with conditions or restrictions.

At the same time, some sponsors have been fearful of the creative output of hubs they support. A long-term partnership would help both parties to understand each other’s needs, hopefully increasing trust between the two parties over the years.

## Training

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. As we’ve seen, the creative hubs that have a clear business model are more confident about their future.

Providing workshops on arts management would help be an intermediary step to help hub managers manage finances and future plans, although ideally the role of running the hub could be divided between full-time employees.

## Connecting & Networking

While many creative hubs are clustered in Kuala Lumpur, those outside the capital are also having a huge impact in their communities – sometimes even more so, as a result of being the first of their kind.

While some of these hubs are already connected through informal friendships and partnerships, it could be worth having a networking platform that allows for the exchange of skills and approaches: in particular, connecting hubs in East Malaysia to West Malaysia and vice versa.

Similarly, if hub managers can be supported to make contacts and network on a regional and international level, the exchange of knowledge and skills will offer new ideas and approaches to running a hub.

Creative hubs need advocates beyond their own members. A more formalised network of creative hubs might help to give a collective voice in situations where one creative hub needs legal or public support.

On an international level, several established creative hub managers are already being invited to speak at international conferences. Often, this is sponsored by an international partner. It would be useful if emerging hub managers are also given an opportunity to participate as audience members, perhaps sponsored by a Malaysian travel grant.

## Making Space

As mentioned earlier in this report, space is a huge factor for creative hubs. Space affects revenue, allowing creative hubs to earn money from rental or retail. Space also affects visibility. When a creative hub holds a physical and visible space, it grows its own public profile. Over time, this may affect public perception of not only one creative hub, but also of the arts scene at large.

Many creative hubs provide a public service for free or for cheap. One way to help them continue to do so would be to foster partnerships that give creative hubs a more fixed space where members can come together.

Currently, commercial rental rates are not affordable for many creative hubs, especially those which are not profit oriented. Another issue is that private landlords may not be able to guarantee stability.

One solution can be seen in the example of HAUS KCH, a new creative hub in Kuching. The developer of a vacant, unused building (a former police headquarters) has leased the space to the creative hub for a token fee to help various creative groups come together. In turn, HAUS KCH only charges a very small fee to its members for usage of the space.



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, as grassroots groups which were started by individuals.

While creative hubs often run independently through the passion and dedication of their founders, they have an impact that is far beyond their membership: they create new economic opportunities, they nurture and educate emerging creatives, and they engage the public through placemaking, public art and free resources. However, all these services (and more) are often threatened by the risk of a creative hub shutting down when the money runs dry or the founders move on.

While the government is starting to recognise the value of creative hubs in the context of the creative industries, this focus on economic value neglects their many other contributions.

Malaysia's creative hubs need long-term support as well as recognition for their efforts. Their impact may often be intangible, but it is invaluable. International partners have provided both funding and platforms for creative hubs for years. The next question is whether more Malaysian partners in the government, non-government and private spheres can do the same.



Rimbun Dahan Gallery



## Selected Index of Creative Hubs in Malaysia

This index includes a selection of groups and spaces that can be defined as creative hubs, but it is by no means a full list.

### KLANG VALLEY

#### 📍 KUALA LUMPUR

##### APW

Hub for small-scale creative entrepreneurs.  
*Events, co-working space, café, restaurants.*

🌐 apw.my  
📧 hello@apw.my  
📍 29, Jalan Riong, Bangsar,  
59100 Kuala Lumpur

##### ART FOR GRABS

Bazaar featuring literature, art, crafts, music, films, activism.

*Performances, talks, film screenings, retail.*  
🌐 facebook.com/artforgrabs  
📧 artforgrabs@gmail.com  
📍 Various locations

##### BIJI-BIJI

Upcycling & environmental crafts collective.  
*Crafts, retail, workshops.*

🌐 biji-biji.com  
📧 share@biji-biji.com  
📍 9, Jalan Nangka, Sentul,  
51100 Kuala Lumpur

##### FINDARS

Experimental art & music venue.  
*Exhibitions, performances, talks.*

🌐 facebook.com/FINDARS  
📧 findars@outlook.com  
📍 4th Floor, 8, Jalan Panggong,  
50150 Kuala Lumpur

##### FIVE ARTS CENTRE

Interdisciplinary theatre, dance & music collective.  
*Performances, exhibitions, development grants.*

🌐 fiveartscentre.org  
📧 fiveartscentre@gmail.com  
📍 27, Lorong Datuk Sulaiman 7,  
Taman Tun Dr Ismail, 60000 Kuala Lumpur

##### FRINJAN

Arts & culture collective.  
*Talks, events, workshops.*

🌐 facebook.com/Frinjan  
📧 frinjan@gmail.com  
📍 5, Persiaran Titiwangsa 1,  
Titiwangsa, 53200 Kuala Lumpur

##### GASLIGHT CAFE

Music & spoken word poetry venue.  
*Performances, retail, café-bar.*

🌐 facebook.com/gaslightcafe  
📧 sydjohann@gmail.com  
📍 15, Plaza Damansara, Jalan Medan Setia 1,  
Bukit Damansara, 50490 Kuala Lumpur

##### HOM ART TRANS

Art space for local & regional visual artists.  
*Gallery, exhibitions, art talks, residencies, awards.*

🌐 homarttrans.com  
📧 homarttrans@gmail.com  
📍 6A, Jalan Cempaka 16,  
Ampang Jaya, 68000 Kuala Lumpur

##### IMPACT HUB

Business incubator with a global network of members.  
*Co-working space, event space, networking, talks.*

🌐 kualalumpur.impacthub.net  
📧 kl.hello@impacthub.net  
📍 D7 Sentul East Design Centre,  
Jalan Sentul, 51000 Kuala Lumpur

##### INSTANT CAFÉ THEATRE COMPANY

Theatre company.  
*Performances, workshops.*

🌐 instantcafetheatre.com  
📧 ictreunion@gmail.com  
📍 7, Jalan Kia Peng, 50450 Kuala Lumpur

##### KAKISENI

Performing arts platform.

*Publishing, arts development, performances, events, network.*

🌐 kakiseni.com  
📧 contact@kakiseni.com  
📍 Unit 1-1 & 1-2, Pusat Kreatif Kanak-Kanak Tuanku  
Bainun, 48, Jalan Tun Mohd Fuad, Taman Tun Dr.  
Ismail, 60000 Kuala Lumpur

##### LOSTGENS

Contemporary art collective.

*Exhibitions, talks, performances, workshops, screenings.*

🌐 facebook.com/lostgens  
📧 lostgens@gmail.com  
📍 8C, Jalan Panggong, 50000 Kuala Lumpur

##### MAP AT PUBLIKA

Visual arts platform & venue.

*Events, exhibitions, performances, bazaars, retail.*

🌐 facebook.com/mapkl  
📧 (60) 03 6207 9732 or Facebook message  
📍 1, Jalan Dutamas 1, Solaris Dutamas,  
50480 Kuala Lumpur

##### PROTOTYPE GALLERY BY CITYLAB STUDIO

Architecture studio & artist convenor.

*Events, exhibitions, retail.*

🌐 www2.citylabstudio.com  
📧 write@citylabstudio.com  
📍 Lot 2.144, 1st floor, Wisma Central,  
Jalan Ampang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur

##### PUSAKA

Traditional arts platform.

*Talks, performances, research.*

🌐 senipusaka.com  
📧 info@senipusaka.com  
📍 16B, Jalan Wan Kadir 1, Taman Tun Dr Ismail,  
60000 Kuala Lumpur

##### RAKSASA PRINT STUDIO

Silkscreen printing & art studio.

*Workshops, exhibitions, retail.*

🌐 raksasaprint.com  
📧 raksasa@raksasaprint.com  
📍 4th Floor, 8, Jalan Panggong,  
50150 Kuala Lumpur

##### RUANG BY THINK CITY

Community & arts venue.

*Events, exhibitions, workshops, talks, bazaars.*

🌐 thinkcity.com.my  
📧 (60) 03 2260 1095  
📍 2, Jalan Hang Kasturi, 50050 Kuala Lumpur

##### SNACKFOOD

Retail space featuring Malaysian artisan & independent brands.

*Retail, workshops.*

🌐 ilovesnackfood.com  
📧 ilovesnackfood@gmail.com  
📍 1st Floor, 17, Jalan Telawi 3, Bangsar Baru,  
59100 Kuala Lumpur

##### THE ACTORS STUDIO SENI TEATER RAKYAT

Platform for traditional performing art forms & emerging theatre talent.

*Workshops, performances, venue.*

🌐 theactorsstudio.com.my  
📧 ian@theactorsstudio.com.my  
📍 Klpac, Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah,  
Sentul West, 51100 Kuala Lumpur

##### THE WKND

Southeast Asian platform for independent music.

*Performances, events, publishing, multimedia, retail.*

🌐 the-wknd.com  
📧 editor@the-wknd.com  
📍 19, Lorong Rahim Kajai 4, Taman Tun Dr Ismail,  
60000 Kuala Lumpur

##### VERY BAD FILM SCHOOL

Training for independent filmmakers.

*Screenings, workshops.*

🌐 facebook.com/groups/VeryBadFilmSchool  
📧 Facebook message  
📍 Da Huang Pictures, 33-3, Plaza Danau Desa 2,  
Jalan 1/109F, 58100 Kuala Lumpur

##### ZHONGSHAN BUILDING AT KAMPUNG ATTAP

Studio & retail spaces for artists & creative businesses.

*Exhibitions, events, workshops, studios, library, talks, retail.*

🌐 ourartprojects.com  
📧 contact@ourartprojects.com  
📍 80 - 84, Jalan Rotan, Off Jalan Kampung Attap,  
50460 Kuala Lumpur



## 📍 SELANGOR

### AWEGALLERY

Venue space for art & small-scale creative entrepreneurs.

*Exhibitions, performances, talks, bazaars, events.*

🔗 facebook.com/awegallery

✉ enquiry.awegallery@gmail.com

📍 21, Jalan 20/13, Taman Paramount,  
46300 Petaling Jaya

### KAKIDIY

Creative technology lab.

*Workshops, makerspace, talks.*

🔗 kakidiy.com

✉ admin@kakidiy.com

📍 The Garage KL, Jalan Hillview,  
Taman Sri Ukay, 68000 Ampang

### MARKAS KOTA DAMANSARA

Blackbox event space.

*Events, performances, talks.*

🔗 facebook.com/MarkasKotaDamansara

✉ markaskotadam@gmail.com

📍 68-1, Jalan PJU 5/21,  
Kota Damansara, 47810 Petaling Jaya

### MINUT INIT

Art & music venue.

*Events, exhibitions, performances, art jams.*

🔗 minutinit.com

✉ minut.init@gmail.com

📍 29A & 29B, Jalan SS 21/37,  
Uptown Damansara Utama, 47400 Petaling Jaya

### RIMBUN DAHAN

Visual art, literature & dance residency.

*Residencies, workshops, exhibitions, events.*

🔗 rimbundahan.org

✉ angelahijjas@gmail.com

📍 Km. 27 Jalan Kuang,  
48050 Kuang

### RUMAH API

Punk rock music collective.

*Performances, events.*

🔗 rumahapi.weebly.com

✉ rumah\_api@riseup.net

📍 178, Jalan Ampang, Kg. Baru Ampang,  
Pekan Ampang, 68000 Ampang

### THE GARAGE KL

Hub for small-scale creative entrepreneurs.

*Events, makerspace, café, retail, performances.*

🔗 thegaragekl.com

✉ shaz@thegaragekl.com

📍 Jalan Hillview, Taman Sri Ukay,  
68000 Ampang

### TOCCATA STUDIO

Music studio & residency.

*Workshops, residencies, performances.*

🔗 toccatastudio.com

✉ etoccata@gmail.com

📍 39B, Jalan SS2/55, 47300 Petaling Jaya

### URBANSCAPES

Creative arts festival.

*Performances, events, talks, exhibitions.*

🔗 urbanscapes.com.my

✉ hello@urbanscapes.com.my

📍 85-1.1, Block F, the Square, JayaOne, 72A,  
Jalan Universiti, 46200 Petaling Jaya

## BEYOND THE KLANG VALLEY

## 📍 JOHOR

### KILANG BATERI

Hub for small-scale creative entrepreneurs.

*Retail, events, performances, F&B.*

🔗 bateri.my

✉ recharge@bateri.my

📍 83, Jalan Tampoi, Bandar Baru Uda,  
81200 Johor Bahru, Johor

## 📍 NEGERI SEMBILAN

### SEMBILAN ART RESIDENCY

Visual art residency.

*Residency, exhibitions.*

🔗 sembilan.com.my

✉ art@sembilan.com.my

📍 Hotel Sun Lun Yik, 19 Jalan Tun Dr Ismail,  
70200 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan

## 📍 PAHANG

### 90 DEGREES CAFÉ & ART

Café & art space.

*Exhibitions, screenings, performances, workshops, retail.*

🔗 facebook.com/90.cafe.art

✉ 90.cafe.art@gmail.com

📍 882, Jalan Air Putih, Taman Imbi, 25300 Kuantan,  
Pahang

## 📍 PERAK

### BODYSURF

Music label & collective.

*Talent development, retail, performances.*

🔗 facebook.com/bodysurfmusic

✉ (60) 012 550 6592 or Facebook message

📍 1B, Jalan Lim Bo Seng, Kampung Jawa,  
30670 Ipoh, Perak

### PROJEK RABAK

Arts collective.

*Exhibitions, publishing, café, performances, retail.*

🔗 projekrabak.com

✉ projekrabak@gmail.com

📍 57A, Jalan Dato Onn Jaafar, 30300 Ipoh, Perak

## 📍 PENANG

### BAD WOLVES

Performing arts platform.

*Workshops, performances, events, talent development.*

🔗 sayitmeanitpenang.com

✉ silymi.penang@gmail.com

📍 N/A

### CHINA HOUSE

Café & venue for the arts.

*Exhibitions, events, performances, café, bar, retail.*

🔗 facebook.com/ChinaHousePenang

✉ info@chinahouse.com.my

📍 153 & 155 Beach Street & 183B Victoria Street,  
10300 George Town, Penang

### GEORGE TOWN FESTIVAL

Citywide arts festival.

*Exhibitions, talks, performances, bazaars, retail, film screenings.*

🔗 georgetownfestival.com

✉ info@georgetownfestival.com

📍 Joe Sidek Productions Sdn. Bhd. 1st Floor,  
86 Armenian Street, 10200 George Town, Penang

### HIN BUS DEPOT

Visual art space & venue.

*Exhibitions, events.*

🔗 hinbusdepot.com

✉ team@hinbusdepot.com

📍 31A, Jalan Gurdwara, 10300 George Town, Penang

### POKOTHINGS

Social community wood workshop.

*Workshops, makerspace, screenings.*

🔗 facebook.com/pg/pokothings

✉ pokothings@gmail.com

📍 31A, Jalan Gurdwara, 10300 George Town, Penang

## 📍 TERENGGANU

### PAKSI

Hub for creative entrepreneurs.

*Networking, exhibition, crowdfunding, events.*

🔗 berpaksi.com

✉ berpaksi@gmail.com

📍 N/A



## 📍 SABAH

### ASYLUM KK

Art community & venue.

*Workshops, events, talks, gallery.*

🔗 [asylumkk.wordpress.com](http://asylumkk.wordpress.com)

✉ [theasylumkk@gmail.com](mailto:theasylumkk@gmail.com)

📍 86A, 3rd floor, Block G, Gaya Street,  
88300 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

### PANGROK SULAP

Art & punk rock collective.

*Exhibitions, workshops.*

🔗 [facebook.com/PangrokSulap](https://facebook.com/PangrokSulap)

✉ Facebook message

📍 N/A

### TAMPARULI LIVING ARTS CENTRE

Arts & culture resource centre.

*Exhibitions, workshops, makerspace.*

🔗 [facebook.com/TamparuliLivingArtsCentre](https://facebook.com/TamparuliLivingArtsCentre)

✉ Facebook message

📍 Tamparuli, 89250 Tamparuli, Sabah

### TAMU TAMU COLLECTIVE

Crafts collective.

*Bazaars, retail, workshops.*

🔗 [facebook.com/tamutamucollective](https://facebook.com/tamutamucollective)

✉ [tamutamusabah@gmail.com](mailto:tamutamusabah@gmail.com)

📍 N/A

## ONLINE

### BORNEO ART COLLECTIVE

Collaborative art & culture platform.

*Publishing, events, workshops.*

🔗 [borneoartcollective.org](http://borneoartcollective.org)

✉ [borneoartcollective@gmail.com](mailto:borneoartcollective@gmail.com)

### MALAYSIAN WRITERS SOCIETY

Writers' community.

*Workshops, talks, events.*

🔗 [facebook.com/malaysianwriterssociety](https://facebook.com/malaysianwriterssociety)

✉ [malaysianwritersgroup@gmail.com](mailto:malaysianwritersgroup@gmail.com)

## 📍 SARAWAK

### HAUS KCH

Hub for creative entrepreneurs & artists.

*Workshops, studio space, events, venue.*

🔗 [hauskch.com](http://hauskch.com)

✉ [haus.kch@gmail.com](mailto:haus.kch@gmail.com)

📍 216, Jalan Capital Garden, Taman Berjaya,  
93250 Kuching, Sarawak

### SMALL TOWN ART MARKET

Art, craft, fashion & design market.

*Retail, workshops, events.*

🔗 [instagram.com/smalltownartmarket](https://instagram.com/smalltownartmarket)

✉ [hello.smalltownartmarket@gmail.com](mailto:hello.smalltownartmarket@gmail.com)

📍 N/A

### SOCIETY ATELIER SARAWAK

Traditional Sarawakian arts & crafts organisation.

*Exhibitions, publications, workshops.*

🔗 [www1.sarawak.com.my/org/atelier](http://www1.sarawak.com.my/org/atelier)

✉ [eoarchi@tm.net.my](mailto:eoarchi@tm.net.my)

📍 Rumah Masra, Jalan Taman Budaya,  
93300 Kuching, Sarawak

📍 N/A

### MYDANCE ALLIANCE

Network organisation supporting & promoting dance.

*Workshops, performances, conferences, exchange programmes.*

🔗 [mydancealliance.org](http://mydancealliance.org)

✉ [contact@mydancealliance.org](mailto:contact@mydancealliance.org)

### WORKING TITLE FILM DRINKS

Community of filmmaking enthusiasts & professionals.

*Workshops, talks & screenings.*

🔗 [facebook.com/groups/350801781688282](https://facebook.com/groups/350801781688282)

✉ Facebook message

## Sources of Funding for Creative Hubs

This index includes selected national and international bodies that have previously supported Malaysian creative hubs. The list excludes state and local council level funding.

### 🏛️ GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

#### JABATAN KEBUDAYAAN DAN KESENIAN NEGARA (JKKN)

🔗 [jkkn.gov.my](http://jkkn.gov.my)

✉ [info@jkkn.gov.my](mailto:info@jkkn.gov.my)

📍 Kementerian Pelancongan dan Kebudayaan, Aras 16, 18, 19, 26, 27, 30 & 34, Lot 1001, Menara TH Perdana,  
Jalan Sultan Ismail, 50250 Kuala Lumpur

#### TOURISM MALAYSIA

🔗 [tourism.gov.my](http://tourism.gov.my)

✉ [enquiries@tourism.gov.my](mailto:enquiries@tourism.gov.my)

📍 9th Floor, Tower 1, 2, Jalan P5/6,  
Presint 5, 62200 Putrajaya

### 🏛️ GOVERNMENT LINKED AGENCY

#### THINK CITY

🔗 [thinkcity.com.my](http://thinkcity.com.my)

✉ [tcgrants@thinkcity.com.my](mailto:tcgrants@thinkcity.com.my)

📍 Level 27, Mercu UEM, Jalan Stesen Sentral 5,  
Kuala Lumpur Sentral, 50470 Kuala Lumpur

#### MALAYSIA MAJOR EVENTS (MALAYSIA EXHIBITION AND CONVENTION BUREAU)

🔗 [mymajorevents.com.my](http://mymajorevents.com.my)

✉ [info@mymajorevents.com.my](mailto:info@mymajorevents.com.my)

📍 Level 33, Tower 2, Petronas Twin Towers,  
50088 Kuala Lumpur

#### MALAYSIAN GLOBAL INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY CENTRE (MAGIC)

🔗 [mymagic.my/en](http://mymagic.my/en)

✉ [enquiries@mymagic.my](mailto:enquiries@mymagic.my)

📍 Block 3730, Persiaran Apec, 63000 Cyberjaya

#### MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS, MALAYSIA

🔗 [kbs.gov.my](http://kbs.gov.my)

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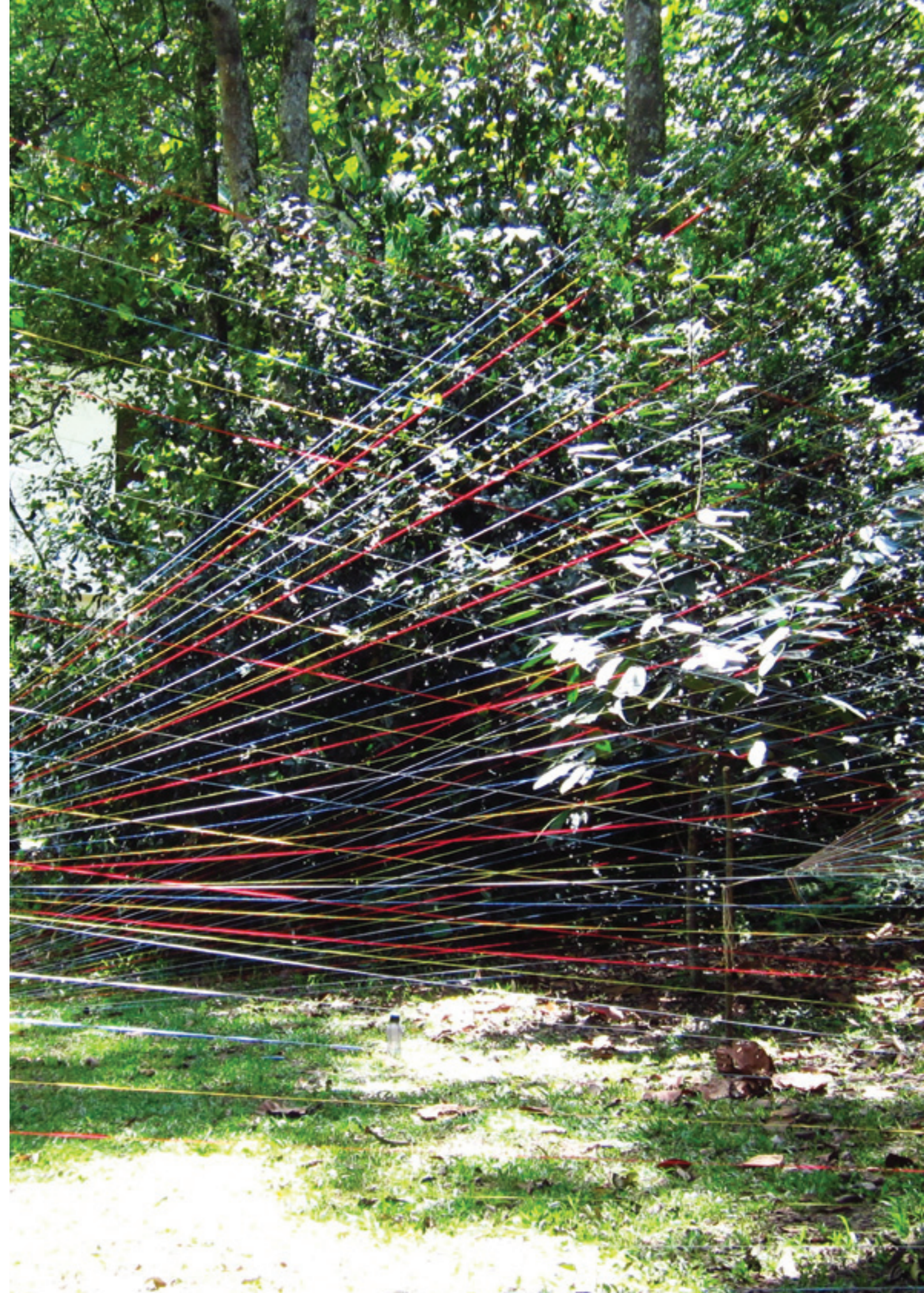
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# Mapping Creative Hubs in Malaysia

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