
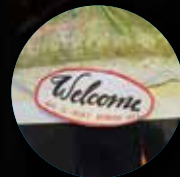


THE MAPPING OF CREATIVE HUBS IN VIETNAM

 Art shop



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INTRODUCTION

This research was implemented by journalist/ media consultant Truong Uyen Ly as requested by the British Council in Vietnam. The objective of the research was to carry out the mapping of creative hubs in Vietnam via desk research and interviews with creative entrepreneurs/practitioners in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

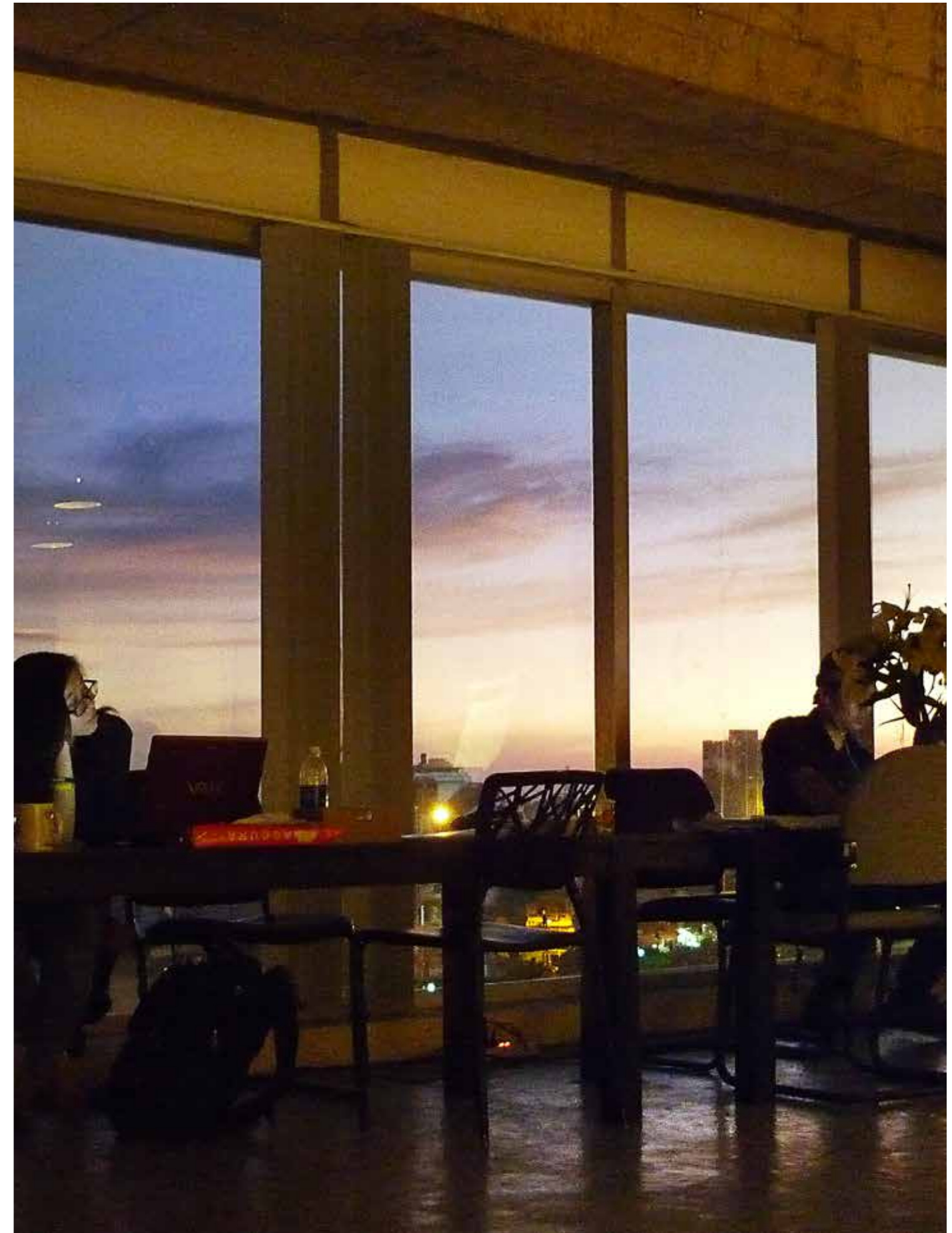
The researcher gave priority to names/contacts/ places that are most popular, accessible, and trendy in the local context. The researcher also gave priority to the sectors that are most relevant to her own knowledge and experience as a journalist in art and culture. Major sectors of this research are: visual arts, music, film, dance, design, and ICT (information

and communication technology) e.g. software and computer services and start-ups

The researcher also gave priority to new people, new events, or new activities, some of which are considered underground or experimental in the local context. The researcher believes change is made by people who try to do something different.

It is also difficult and challenging to research all creative sectors within a short period of time. The researcher hopes that her choice of the newest developments will represent creative hubs in Vietnam in their latest stage of development.

TRUONG UYÊN LY
Journalist / Media Consultant



CREATIVE HUBS - THE KEY WORDS



All creative hubs in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are different in scale and in the type of activities they are involved in. Each of them is a unique example of what is called a “creative hub”. It could be a co-working and networking space (The Start Centre, Work Saigon), a training institution (ADC Academy), an investment Fund and a co-working space (Saigon Co-Working), a place where broader creative ideas are welcomed (Saigon Outcast, Hanoi Rock City), an online information sharing forum (Hanoi Grapevine), or a talk-discussion base for all creative people and those interested in art (Ca phe thu 7).

Because of the uniqueness of each space/platform, it is a challenge to classify them. For clarity, I used the key words: ‘networking’, ‘creative’ and ‘business oriented’ to identify creative hubs. They should be a platform or meeting place for creative people such as artists, musicians, designers, film makers, apps makers, start-up entrepreneurs and the creative community in general.

With regards to ‘business’, there are various business models, including not for profit and for profit e.g. Saigon Co-Working, e.g. Work Saigon and ADC Academy, or not for profit e.g. Ca Phe Thu 7, it could bring no profit to the owner but it could run by itself e.g. Saigon Outcast.

Using those three key words, I have identified nearly 40 creative hubs in Vietnam.

“ networking

“ creative



“ business
oriented

THE CREATIVE SCENE IN VIETNAM

1. EVERY DAY SOMETHING NEW

Doi Moi, (the economic reform and poverty eradication program initiated by the Vietnamese government in 1986) and globalization are bringing exciting changes to Vietnamese society. Fast economic growth (GDP has increased by an average of 7-8% every year since 1990) ⁽¹⁾; the spread of the internet and the rapid development of social media in Vietnam (Vietnam has the fastest growth in terms of new Facebook users in the world – according to ICT news) are changing and bringing new elements and ideas to the creative scene in Vietnam every day.

During the first week of this research (early April 2014), the researcher witnessed the closure of Saigon Hub, a well-known creative hub in Ho Chi Minh City among the ICT and start-up community. Six days later, Station 3A, probably the most exciting creative space in Ho Chi Minh City opened and serves as an art based hub including Mai's gallery and Saigon Open City as well as an art fair and market space for graffiti artists, fashion boutiques and interior and decorative objects shops. In Hanoi, in early May, an art/music café called Hâm Hành (the Onion Cellar) opened on Doi Can Street and has become a home and meeting place for experimental film and music makers. In another part of town, there is a new co-working space called Wunder Lab which targets the media sector. The latest news is that the 'old' Zone 9 will be re-open in two months with a new name 'X-98', under the management of the original founder, architect Tran Vu Hai.

More and more creative hubs are opening. People are meeting, sharing ideas and doing something new. The creative scene is certainly developing and has gone far beyond the researcher's expectation. Before starting this research, I could only name about ten creative hubs in Vietnam. At the time of writing, there are over 40 creative hubs in Vietnam.



2. CREATIVE HUBS

Unlike the creative scenes of the 1990's to early 2000's when many creative and experimental arts spaces and events were funded by, and dependent on, foreign cultural institutions such as L'Espece, the Goethe-Institut, the British Council and the Ford Foundation; the scene is now changing and becoming more independent.

From partly independent to 100% independent

One example of partly independent hubs is Life Art/Black Box which opened in 2010 as a hub for theatre exploration, classes and workshops using art, music, theatre and dance techniques in self-understanding and improvement. Phan Y Ly, the founder of Life Art sets clear goals for Life Art, it will operate as a social enterprise and not be completely dependent on external funding. Life Art has had a number of theatre projects which received funding from the British Council and CDEF



(The Cultural Development and Exchange Fund from Denmark) but most of its workshops were organized using their own resources with contributions (class fees and time) from participants and young volunteers. Another example is Manzi – an art gallery-café-art shop which is 100% funded by its Vietnamese owners. The place is partly supported by CDEF which supports the production costs of its cultural events but is otherwise self-funded.

The most prominent examples of 100% independent i.e. self-funded hubs are: Heritage Space and Zone 9/ X-98) in Hanoi and Station 3A in Ho Chi Minh City.

Heritage Space was unofficially launched in February 2014. It is a large area on the ground floor of Dolphin Plaza – a residential building in

(1) Vietnamese Art after 1990 - Post Đổi Mới, Joyce Fan, Singapore Art museum curatorial report, 2008



the My Dinh area of Hanoi. Ms Nguyen Hong Minh, general director of the owner of Dolphin Plaza (TID joint-stock company) and an art collector, said "I'd like to have a centre – a playground – a destination for intellectuals and artistic people to meet and exchange ideas, a place where one can express ideas and opinions freely. It is ok and healthy if the ideas are different and controversial". Heritage Space has 3 large rooms; a gallery for art exhibitions, a book shop/café/library for art talks/presentations, music events and book launches and a business centre with free Wi-Fi and books on the shelves. The third room is a conference hall, which is flexible and can be used as a large open space for a variety of events and activities. At the moment, Heritage Space sometimes provides space free of charge for exhibition or events. Most of the events are free to the public except for some music events.

Station 3A is a large space (2,000 m2) between two tall buildings on Ton Duc Thang Street, Ho Chi Minh City and is another exciting example of a 100% independent hub. Ms Do Thi Tuyet Mai from Man Nghi Company Ltd (the owner of Mai's Gallery) invested in constructing the space and sub-let it to creative people such as painters, fashion designers, photographers and artists. For a number of years, the space was a restaurant and partly empty. Station 3A (3A means ALTERNATIVE ART AREA) opened on 6 April 2014 as a venue for artists to introduce their work to the public. Ms Mai's goal was to build a physical connection and meeting place for creative people, the local community and tourists. She wants Station 3A to be similar to SoHo in New York or Zone 798 in Beijing.

ZONE 9 (now closed but due to be re-launched in another location in two months) was a cultural hotspot in Hanoi. The original location was an 80's style building, originally a government owned pharmaceutical company which was discovered

by Tran Vu Hai a young and active architect who already impressed many art people with his vintage decor style, shown to good effect in BarBetta a popular and stylish bar. With a few friends, Hai hired a big space and set up BarBetta 2 a bar/nightclub with an industrial atmosphere and eclectic décor and furnished with redundant machinery, old windows, bottles and metal bars. The bar became a new entertainment place for thousands of young locals and expats in Hanoi.

The old communist style and the melancholy atmosphere of the Zone 9 buildings was also very attractive to many other creative people such as painters, bar owners, architects, dancers, photographers and wedding planners. It soon became a popular 'hang out' place for young Hanoians. It seemed to become a concern for the local authorities and after a fire which killed 6 people, it was forced to close down.

Tran Vu Hai, who is now developing another redundant industrial property, X-98 and explained "The area is not as big as Zone 9 and will be much more organized. I want to avoid what happened to Zone 9 where everything happened all of a sudden without any plan, I want to turn it into a creative zone and there will be no clubs or bars which might be 'sensitive' from the authorities' point of view. There will be a café, a restaurant, fashion boutiques,



a game studio of Dong – the Flappy Bird creator, a décor art shop, an architect's office, and an animation studio.

There are more examples of 100% independent hubs, like CAMA a music company owned by expats who love music and Hanoi Rock City a space for all kinds of creative events. Since 2008 CAMA has brought famous international (mostly rock) bands to Vietnam. In early 2012 they opened a music bar CAMA ATK. The bar became a hub for experimental music events and people such as Vu Nhat Tan, Luong Hue Trinh, the Ca Tru and Dan Tranh group, the Onion Cellar founders as well as a number of foreign musicians who live in Hanoi to meet, exchange ideas, cooperate on projects and perform together. The bar has helped attract new audiences for experimental music. Hanoi Rock City opened in late 2010, it is owned by a group of Vietnamese and English friends who loves art and music. The venue hosts all kinds of creative events but mostly music events. It also welcomes graffiti and hip hop artists, flea market organizers and performance artists, etc. and offers free space for artist, musicians and dancers to practice in the day time. The Onion Cellar Hâm Hành, an art group, now has a physical meeting place the bar/café Hâm Hành which was founded by Vietnamese and French friends who love experimental film and music.

(See the list of creative hubs attached for more info)

3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CREATIVE HUBS (2)

Some of the oldest the creative hubs in Vietnam were built within the last two decades. Salon Natasha is probably the oldest (established in 1990) (3). L'Espece, Goethe Institute and the British Council have been meeting places for many creative people in Vietnam since the early 2,000's. Other local hubs were set up in the 1990s (Gallery Không gian Xanh opened by Ms. Nga in 1997) (4) Nhà Sàn studio (1998), studio Anh Khánh (opened to the public in 1999), Centre for Contemporary Art (by Trần Lương opened in 2002, closed in 2003), Art Vietnam Gallery (opened in 2002, now open by appointment only), TPD (Centre for Assistance and Development of Movie Talents) was founded in 2002, Quỳnh gallery (late 2003), Ryllega gallery (2004), Then San Art, Ho Chi Minh City opened(2007), New Space Arts Foundation, Hue (2008), Tadioto art bar (2008), Gallery Bui (opened in 2008, closed in late 2011), added to the scene. Between the end of 1990s, and the first decade of the 21st century, there were fewer creative hubs being established than now.

The scene has changed significantly in the last few years, particularly since 2009 and the opening of Doclab, 7 Ca Phe Thu a café with free weekly art talks for the public followed by YxineFF (2010), Zero Station (Ga 0, in 2010), Hanoi Rock City (2010), Manzi (late 2012), Cama ATK (2012), Saigon Outcast (2012), DOM DOM (early 2013), then Zone 9 (early 2013, closed in early 2014), Heritage Space (early 2014), ADC Academy (March 2014), Work Room Four (2013, re-opened at a new space in May 2014), Station 3A (April 2014), which help increased the number of creative hubs in Vietnam massively and diversify the creative scene much more than before, especially in terms of experimental music, film making, design and public access to art and culture.

With Dom Dom and CAMA ATK, experimental music has a physical space for musicians to perform regularly for the first time. Doclab was opened as a meeting place for young film makers to learn film making techniques and use the equipment and facilities at a very reasonable cost. Together with TPD, a training centre for young film makers, Doclab has encouraged a number of young film makers in Vietnam, which has helped to build a bigger community and audience base for the creative scene in Hanoi.

Yxine FF is another exciting example of this kind of creative hub, It started in 2010 with the ambitious goal of running an annual online festival of short films and has grown every year, nationally and

internationally. Also In the film sector, YxineFF, Doclab and TPD have increased opportunities for anyone interested in making films; proving it is possible and realistic to make a low cost yet very interesting and artistic film which is not only personal and touching but also portrays the 'hot topics' of society.

The last few years have also seen remarkable growth in the ICT sector. In Ho Chi Minh City, the Start Centre a co-working space for IT people opened in 2012, located in a 3-storey building with a roof top which can accommodate 40-50 people and has proved popular with 'IT nomads' from outside Vietnam. The Start Centre became so successful that the founders were confident enough to open a second co-working space, Saigon Hub in June 2013 in a commercial area in the heart of the city. It soon became popular among the ICT community in Vietnam and abroad. TechinAsia, a very fast moving and up to date online magazine covering the Tech industry kept posting about this space until it closed on 1st April 2014 due to the unsustainable high rent. Saigon co-working (opened in July 2013) a young company which focuses on start-ups incubation and consultancy services is rather less high profile than Saigon Hub yet innovative in their business model. The company shares the rent with other companies and earns extra income by providing accounting and administration services as well as marketing, branding and investment advice. After more than a year, the company is doing fine with no worries about running costs. In Hanoi, HATCH! a start-up focused on helping other start-ups, was established in 2013). The company has a very dynamic programme of activities and provides consultancy and training services and event-organizing for start-ups. 5desire another company in the ICT sector was founded in 2011 and restructured itself in 2013 has a clear interest in investing and funding start-ups. Both of the companies reach a large community of people who are interested in creating a start-up or have already established a start-up. According to Le Viet Dat -co-founder of Hatch! and 5desire, this community could be as large as 8 - 10,000. HUB IT a significant brand in the ICT sector is located on a large floor of a modern office/residential building in Hanoi was opened in late 2013. It was initially established as a co-working space, but identified potential in the start-up sector has since become an incubator for start-ups, from constructing and nurturing business ideas to looking for funding/investment (5).



(2) Vietnamese Contemporary Arts 1990 - 2010, Bui Nhu Huong & Pham Trung, Knowledge Publishing House, 2012

(3) <http://thethaovanhoa.vn/van-hoa-giai-tri/nghe-thuat-duong-dai-viet-nam-ke-noi-cong-thong-tin-chau-a-n20130627150841141.htm>

(4) <http://thethaovanhoa.vn/van-hoa-giai-tri/nghe-thuat-duong-dai-viet-nam-ke-noi-cong-thong-tin-chau-a-n20130627150841141.htm>

(5) See this article for more information about start-up scene in Vietnam: <http://www.techinasia.com/nhip-cau-dau-tu-startup-vietnam/>

4. THE IMPACT CREATIVE HUBS ARE HAVING IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT

MORE ACCESS TO ART AND CULTURE, MEANS BETTER PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Creative hubs create a welcoming and safe environment where people meet, exchange ideas and challenge their own boundaries. The more open and creative the environment is, the healthier it is for each individual to express themselves and to be themselves. “Life Art has changed my life. I am happier and more confident about who I am now”, said Yoon Chi, a class member of several Life Art’ personal development courses. Life Art is a social enterprise focusing on using the arts as a medium of self-understanding and development.

Galleries, studios, and all other types of creativity related spaces and platforms can be categorized as a creative environment. If there are more of these facilities, more people will have the opportunity to explore themselves and to improve their lives.

In terms of public access to art and culture, the most obvious and recent example is how Zone 9, the biggest creative hub which could accommodate thousands of people become a meeting point for the youth of Hanoi. Before zone 9, there was no other focal point of its kind. Zone 9 was an interesting complex with 60 business employing about a 1,000 people, including shops, restaurants, ‘bia hoi’ (cold draught beer restaurants), music cafés, a late night bar, and even a car wash, some dance and yoga studios, photography studios, architect’s offices, art galleries and “cool” creative well known people’s houses. Since its opening in early 2013, it became a meeting point for thousands of young people and expats in Hanoi. The opening night of BarBetta 2 – a big communist/industrial style night club in Zone 9 attracted over a thousand people.

Many young people adopted zone 9 as their entertainment space and a home for creativity.

CHANGING THE CITY’S IDENTITY

Station 3A is another significant example of how art can contribute to the development of a city. 3A is located right in District 1 Ho Chi Minh City, the commercial and administrative centre of the city where a large number of international visitors come and stay. Before 3A, the area was occupied by some ‘fish and sushi’ restaurants and remained insignificant until it was turned into an art zone. Now it has become an interesting destination for artists,

shoppers who want to buy 100% local high quality authentic handmade designs and for tourists who want to experience the authentic emerging local art & culture scene.

CREATING MORE JOBS

Each creative hub (big or small) provides jobs. With about 60 businesses and more than 1000 staff, Zone 9 was probably the biggest creative collective so far in Vietnam.

INSPIRING CREATIVITY AND NETWORKING

Even though Zone 9 closed, inspiration for creativity spread and became stronger than before. The former founders of Zone 9, Tran Vu Hai and Doan Ky Thanh have founded another ‘After Zone 9 X98, (with a similar business model) was set-up and their dreams continue to grow. Doan Ky Thanh is very excited with the new location which is close to the old Zone 9. He and his friends have named the location “Creative City”. Their wish is to turn the tall building (about 10,000 m2) into a hub of creative related offices and businesses e.g. architectural offices and interior and fashion design studios. The project has attracted a growing number of collaborators. Tran Vu Hai said there are already more new businesses involved in this project than the old one, which means the idea of a creative space has become more popular and inspiring for people. That also means the network of creative people and businesses is becoming larger, which contributes significantly to the development of society.



5. CREATIVE PEOPLE - WHO ARE THEY?

A growing number of young people who absorbed and benefitted from the change are now creating change themselves. They contribute significantly to the creative scene in Vietnam which is now becoming more and more diverse and exciting.

There are common characteristics of these creative people i.e. exposure to western culture and the ability to keep up with the modern technology.

The majority of creative hub founders are between 20 to 50 years old which means they were born in the 1960s – 1990s. This generation has benefited from the open market economy which imported and exported cultures into and from Vietnam. This is a great opportunity for the new generation to learn about other cultures and to communicate through arts.

Nha San studio was founded by Mr Nguyen Manh Duc and curator Tran Luong in 1998 ⁽⁶⁾. Tran Luong (b.1960) is one of the first young artists of Vietnam who gained his reputation internationally for making contemporary art, rather than war/propaganda art after Doi moi. It is possible to say he belongs to the first generation of contemporary artists who laid the foundation for the contemporary art scene in Vietnam. Nha San was the only exciting hub for Vietnamese contemporary artists for several years until the art scene became more diversified with more hubs opening in the 2000's. Thanks to Nha San, a number of artists were inspired and became successful not only inside Vietnam like Nguyen Minh Thanh, Truong Tan, Nguyen Manh Hung but internationally. In 2010 Nha San was under pressure to stop all its activities by the local authorities. After a few years in silence, in 2013 the latest generation of Nha San studio took over the 'mission' to continue Nha San under a new format called "Nha San Collective" which gathers a younger group of artists who contribute greatly to the art scene with regular exhibitions and art talks.

In the ICT sector and especially among the start-up community, there is a generation of young ambitious entrepreneurs who started their careers very early. Jason Khai Hoang – the co-founder of Saigon Hub is in his early 20s. Three of the four founders of HATCH! programme are under 25 years old. One of the co-founders of Saigon Co-working was also under 25. They all act and speak very passionately about their businesses.

The ICT sector provides vast opportunities for those who want to work hard and be independent and



young people working in the sector are changing the common perception of Vietnamese society about businesspeople. The new entrepreneurs are no longer described as 'a middle aged man in his 40s or 50s wearing a suit and carrying a black briefcase'. In fact, ICT entrepreneurs are quite relaxed. Most of them wear glasses, shorts and T-shirts while talking business firmly and confidently using all the 'current business terms' which affirms that they are really into their profession. Their confidence and passion are becoming a source of inspiration that encourage many other young people to pursue their dreams and try to implement their business ideas with more confidence and less dependency on their parents or any other source of help.

With new technology and social media like Facebook and Twitter, it is easier and faster than ever to get connected and share ideas and be open about everything in life. Social media has been changing people's way of life all over the world and Vietnam it is no exception. The new possibilities and the vast access to information and communication have brought a whole new world of choice for

people who want to reach big goals from modest beginnings. ICT has become the launch pad for start-ups, both for people with an idea for a start-ups and those already in business but with ambitions to develop it further. This is the kind of business where the medium to success is not about how much money you have to invest in the business, but more about how smart and unique the business idea is. One example of a success story in the sector is 'Flappy Bird' a simple mobile game developed by 29 year old game developer Nguyen Ha Dong, which without any marketing, was a global sensation becoming the No. 1 free Apple Inc. (AAPL) iOS app download in 137 countries, according to App Annie Ltd., an analytics and marketing service ⁽⁷⁾. It was also the top free Google Inc. Play download in 33 countries." (According to Bloomberg) ⁽⁸⁾. It was the first time in history that a mobile game created by a Vietnamese became such a success and that is why Flappy Bird and its creator became a source of inspiration and encouragement for IT people in Vietnam. "I deeply admire Nguyen Ha Dong", the former CEO of FPT a leading company in the IT sector in Vietnam said during a press interview ⁽⁹⁾.



(6) <http://nhasanstudio.org/web/index.php?id=203>

(7) www.thanhvien.com.vn/pages/20140206/chang-trai-viet-game-flappy-bird-gay-sot-toan-cau.aspx

(8) <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-08-22/flappy-bird-creator-dong-nguyen-offers-swing-copters-game.html>

(9) <http://cafebiz.vn/nhan-vat/cuu-ceo-fpt-nguyen-thanh-nam-toi-cuc-ky-nguong-mo-nguyen-ha-dong-20141015111723469ca48.chn>

THE FOREIGN FACTOR

Many founders of creative hubs have connections with western culture through studying abroad, working for foreign companies, or taking part in cultural exchange programs. There is no-doubt that their creativity has been inspired by western culture either through their studies or connections with foreign partners.

For Phan Y Ly, the founder of Life Art, a social enterprise using art for community development had an encounter with a foreign cultural experience which changed her life forever. She was working for an NGO when she discovered a workshop about Arts for Development, a new educational theory and practice using arts as a medium to help learners develop themselves from within. The workshop was arranged by the British Council in Vietnam in 2003 and inspired her to apply in 2004 for a master degree in Arts for Development in the UK. In 2010, she founded Life Art to apply her knowledge and pursue her dreams of community development.

Tuan, co-founder of Work Saigon said “I wanted to create a co-working space because I had been to a co-working space in Dubai, and I wanted to do something similar”. Work Saigon is now a beautiful co-working and creative space with a swimming

pool, an organic garden, stylish work spaces and studios, and a charming café and restaurant. Tuan set up a partnership with a French colleague, Laure Chevallier who he had worked with for an advertising company in Dubai and where Tuan got the inspiration for Work Saigon.

Saigon Hub was inspired by ‘THE HUB’ a famous chain of co-working spaces in many cities across the world. Jason Khai Hoang, one of the co-founders and his friends visited THE HUB in Singapore and they wanted to open a similar space in Ho Chi Minh City. The other co-founder, Christopher Quang Zobrist, is a young Vietnamese-American businessman. ADC Academy was founded by Ta Minh Trai and four other friends, almost all of them had studied abroad. The three co-founders of Manzi : Vu Tram, Giang Dang (who resigned from Manzi in May 2013) and Bill Nguyen have close experience with foreign cultures. Ms Vu Tram had worked as a cultural officer for the British Council, Mr. Giang Dang is a researcher who lived abroad for many years. Bill Nguyen studied visual arts in the UK.

And there are many more examples of ‘the foreign factor’, there is no doubt that western influences are very important, or put another way, it is the cross-cultural exchange experiences that inspired many creative hub founders.

SUPPORT FOR CREATIVE HUBS

WHAT THEY NEED?

Sustainability is the goal of all creative hubs. Young creative hubs founders are very keen to learn how to keep their “dream” sustainable. At the moment it is hard to say which creative model will survive better in Vietnam because all the hubs are very new. Some non-profit hubs rely on funding resources or voluntary donations (Doclab, TPD, Together Higher, Nha San Studio, Ga O, Dom Dom, CUCA). Some other hubs are partly business oriented (Hanoi Rock City, CAMA ATK, The Onion Cellar, Life Art, Heritage Space, Station 3A), and many hubs are structured as self-funding (Hanoi Design Centre, Work Room Four, HubIT, HATCH!, 5Desire).

Self-funding is becoming the only practical choice for many creative hubs. Unlike the 1990’s or the 2000’s when the new creative hubs and art projects benefited from foreign aid and support, far fewer creative hubs have the opportunity to receive funding from foreign cultural institutions due to the fact that many funding sources had been withdrawn as a consequence of the global economic crisis. At the same time the economic growth of Vietnam provides more room for creativity to bloom and foreign donors decided it was the right time to stop sending grants to Vietnam. This change means that creative hubs need to look for new ways to survive.

Ms. Vu Tram, the co-owner of Manzi said her wish was to make Manzi completely independent from external funding sources. Tram wants Manzi to be

successful enough to make a profit so that she and fellow co-owner Bill Nguyen can re-invest the profit into organizing cultural events. The owners have not been able to pay themselves a salary since the opening in late 2012, so there is still a long way to go for Manzi’s owners to make their dream come true.

Station 3A owner, Ms. Do Thi Tuyet Mai said she wanted Station 3A to be self-sustaining because; “In fact, among the art community, there was kind of laziness and dependency on funding and offerings. In the past, there was good funding, for example Saigon Open City was a funded project, but now there is no such opportunity. Additionally, it will be difficult to rely solely on funding from foreign cultural agencies like the British Council or the Goethe Institute because their resources are quite limited. I know it is not easy to look for investment either, because all investors have their own agenda and what they want is to promote their own culture”.

Creative hubs set up since the 2010s are most likely to fund themselves but the questions regarding sustainability remain the same; How long they can they carry on? What are the skills and business models they need to remain self-sustaining?

It is important for young creative hub founders to learn from more advanced creative industries about successes and also failures and to decide what models and business structures can be applicable to the Vietnamese context.

The major challenges and requirements suggested by creative hub founders are listed below:



1. STABLE AND SUPPORTIVE LANDLORDS/ AUTHORITIES

THE “CLASSICAL” OR “DEFAULT” CHALLENGE FOR MANY CREATIVE HUB FOUNDERS IS UNSTABLE LANDLORDS/ UNSUPPORTIVE AUTHORITY.

Saigon Hub failed to earn enough income to cover its expenses. The major challenge was the high rent and after nearly a year in operation, it was closed on 1st April 2014. Zone 9 was forced to close down because of its uncertain legal status. Tran Vu Hai owner of BarBetta one of the first businessmen to move into Zone 9 said it was complicated to rent a space because it was unclear who owned or had rights to use the space). Tadioto the art bar and meeting places for writers, journalists and musicians in Hanoi had to move 3 times (from Trieu Viet Vuong to Truong Han Sieu, then to Zone 9, and now to another location on Tong Dan street), all because of the classic landlord issues. Station 3A, an exciting new cultural space in Ho Chi Minh City is under a 2-year lease which might be too short for a space to develop its reputation and become a popular destination for cultural visitors from Vietnam and overseas, especially as it's likely to take quite a long time for Vietnam to become a developed market for local artists. Why might the lease be too short? Heritage Space owner, an experienced entrepreneur, gives herself 5 years to invest in the project and hopes then the space will be able to sustain itself and become a popular destination for artists and cultural people.

Saigon Outcast founder, Ms. Doan Phuong Ha is of the opinion that it is very time consuming and expensive to apply for the necessary permits for cultural events. She finds the application process tricky because it is always unclear how to do it properly and she often receives inconsistent advice from the authorities. For a single event, she is usually required to apply for different types of permit and to get things done, she has to pay the authorities 'to ease the process' (tiền bôi trơn).

Researcher's comment

- * It might be helpful to change the mind-set of art authority from “xin-cho” (begging - offering) to a service for which a fee is paid.
- * Short term solutions: A free training program for landlords and local authorities including the police of the cities/districts/towns about the value of cultural activities and outlining the reasons why they should be supportive. Some encouragement for landlords and local authorities may help, for example: Certificates or Medal of Honour for supportive landlords.
- * Long term solutions: Policy advocacy; Reducing the tax liability for landlords who rent out space for cultural hubs.



2. SKILLS TRAINING

MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS SKILLS

Many creative hubs started from an individual's or small group's dream e.g. Manzi, Hanoi Rock City, Saigon Outcast. Most founders have learnt from practical experiences, which is very helpful but also potentially expensive as the chance of wasting time and resources is higher than those who are professionally trained with efficient management and business skills.

Manzi is struggling to survive and has not made any profit even though it seems that the founders have tried their best to raise income and funds from a café, an art gallery and souvenir shops, all in an elegant white building located in a pleasant area of Hanoi.

While Saigon Outcast makes enough money from selling drinks to support its staff costs and the income is insufficient to pay the founders a salary. Saigon Outcast founder, Ms Hà would rather not have to divide her time between Saigon Outcast and her other job as a freelance video game and event producer. Ha invested all her savings in Saigon Outcast and her dream is to be able to focus 100% on Saigon Outcast and for it to make enough money for her to live on.

ADC Academy founder Ta Minh Trai said they need to develop groups of trainers with a business mindset, this will help fill the educational gap in design schools in Vietnam where the curriculum has almost no connection with the real market ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Skills can be very basic. As Truong Minh Quy, co-artistic director of Zero Station (Ga 0) said he needs training in Administration, Human resources (HR) and Finance (accounting) to be able to manage the space effectively.

ART BUSINESS SKILLS (FOR CREATIVE HUBS ABOUT VISUAL ARTS)

(Art administration, art critic, curating, art marketing)

Ms. Do Thi Tuyet Mai, owner of 3A Station insisted that it is essential to educate more creative hub owners in art business/art management in order to make the relationship between the artists and the market more professional. "In Vietnam, there are too few people with art management skills, and without these skills, simple jobs can become very complicated".

Ms Mai said the only thing artists should focus on is to making art, the rest should be taken care of by art business professionals. "Everything is marketable", Ms. Mai stated, "The only thing that matters is the story you have to tell about it", she added.

"It is necessary to build a generation of art managers who are experienced in selling art, administration including applying for permits and working with the art authorities, working with different personalities, reviewing artwork, curating exhibitions, as well as describing and explaining works of art. The art manager must have many different skills to be able to change the art environment in Vietnam and keep the art scene on track".

Ms Mai is worried that if there are too few people with professional art business skills, the Vietnamese art market will remain behind and indeed be excluded from the global scene.

Researcher's comment

Support for education in art management/business could be provided by offering scholarships to the hub owners to study art management in the UK or by organizing training courses in Vietnam for local galleries/art dealers and creative hub owners.

3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT & INVESTMENT

Ta Minh Trai, co-founder of ADC Academy said payments from students at ADC Academy covers operational costs for 6 months but the balance must be covered by ADC founders; however after a year, ADC will need more investment. Hatch! a start-up specialising in 'incubating' other start-ups is in the same position and is now looking for additional funding. HubIT founder, Bobby Liu and 5Desire founder Ms. Nguyen also said they would welcome more funding/investment to be able to incubate more start-ups. Another possible type of investment would be to co-create an investment fund, as suggested by 5Desire.

"Financial support could be funding for an exhibition, an event, or a programme", said Ms Minh, Heritage Space owner. She also said "there are many different forms of support and these can be packaged together for specific projects or ideas.

4. NETWORKING/IDEA EXCHANGE/CONSULTANCY

Many creative hub owners like to learn from experts and colleagues via workshops or networking/match making events. Saigon co-working would like to have workshops with ICT experts to share and exchange experiences. 5 Desire thinks it would be a good idea to invite experts/partners/companies from the UK to Vietnam to give workshops/talks for the community about start-ups skills and to share experiences.

Hatch! and 5Desire would like to be supported in match-making with investors/funds HubIT owners want to attract UK companies to invest in Vietnam which is seen as a potentially large market with cheaper yet very talented labour pool.

ADC Academy wants to connect with investors and businesspeople so that they can support the academy and train ADC's students by "match-making" them with companies so that the students can gain further experience and be better able to sell themselves to potential employers.

Researcher's comment

It is important to connect people from the creative and business sector to explore all possible ways to collaborate with each other. Conferences, cross-sector meetings, experience sharing, and case study trips should be organized to provide an inspiring environment for creativity and projects. There should be some real projects resulting from these networking events and these projects should be funded or supported by the British Council.

SOME IDEAS FOR NETWORKING

* A workshop about self-funding creative hubs. Work Saigon and Saigon Co-Working are good examples; Work Saigon raises enough income to cover expenses including its owner's needs and Saigon Co-Working makes money from providing services such as accounting, administration and consultancy services for the co-workers.

* A real project: ADC Academy can work with Hanoi Design Centre to solve challenge of finding suitable local designers. The art and craft exporting business lack good local designers which makes it costly for Vietnamese companies because they have to hire foreign designers to make sure their products fit in the western market.

* A workshop focussing on how to work with local authorities: Tadioto, Zone 9, Station 3A could share experiences about how to deal with changes/authorities.

* A creative project where 'technology meets beauty': ICT people working with visual artists (film makers, designers, animators, photographers and artists) For example: <http://www.cinemadellarte.dk/> (This project won the National Creative Business Cup in Denmark in 2013 for their innovative use of technology to make real time animation).

* A conference to introduce and connect all creative hubs together - an opportunity for them to meet, to share ideas and to build an action plan together in order to build a stronger and bigger creative community.

(10) See more at <http://www.slideshare.net/taminhtra/10-ieu-truong-thiet-ke-khong-day-ban-24251994>

5. COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

PROMOTING THE MENTALITY OF CO-WORKING

Co-working hub owners believe that this way of working is an inspiring and effective solution for freelancers. As the number of freelance workers is increasing globally, there is potential to develop more co-working space. Bobby Liu from HubIT believes “more people need to know about the value of co-working/networking”.

PR and Communication to promote creative hub's activities is an area where Heritage Space would like to have more support. At the moment there are many creative hubs using Facebook as the key medium for marketing their own events.

Researcher's comment

PR and communication in this context should be viewed from a broader perspective. It is about promoting creative industries and developing a market which provides consumers for art and culture and an environment that embraces and understands the value of creativity.



6. OTHER KIND OF SUPPORT

INFRASTRUCTURE AND MATERIAL SUPPORT

Many creative hubs would welcome support in practical areas such as expanding or restructuring the physical space or providing better facilities. Saigon Hub wants to restructure their premises by dividing the space into a social area with entertainment like table tennis or billiards and a working area to provide more space for Vietnamese co-workers to relax and chat so that they can open up a little bit more and work better with each other. ADC Academy would like to have more new design books for their library. At the moment they have a bookshelf in the corner of a class room, most of the books were donated by ADC's owner. Work Saigon has a library space but very few books. Ga O's co-director needs a more powerful computer to edit their films. He would also appreciate funding to cover their project assistants travel and food expenses. HubIt needs a private phone booth for the co-workers to make phone calls in privacy. Saigon Outcast's founders would like to improve their premises and make the best use of it by working with an interior designer to re-design the space.

A FEW LAST WORDS

This is an exciting new period for the creative scene in Vietnam. The main players are now the young creative hubs set up or relaunched in the last 5 years. They are contributing significantly to the development of the country and they inspire millions of people. Compared to their predecessors, they have become much more independent in term of self-sustainability. They are able to connect with the broader community thanks to economic development, globalization and the advantages of the internet.

However, these young creative hubs are still inexperienced in terms of developing their businesses and ensuring a long term future. It is important to create a helpful environment for them to grow. It is necessary to build a stronger and more helpful society around them in which local authorities are supportive and understanding; and there are more consumers for arts and creativity, and more support for the sector in terms of funding, investment, skill training and co-working.



LIST OF CREATIVE HUBS IN VIETNAM

Ha Noi

NO.	SPACE	ACTIVITIES	WEBSITE/ FACEBOOK	ADDRESS
1	Heritage Space	Exhibition, art talk, music show, library, art shop, fashion boutique	www.facebook.com/HeritageSpace	Dolphin Plaza, 28 Tran Binh Street, Hanoi
2	Manzi	Gallery, exhibition, art talks, performance, art shop, café&snacks	www.facebook.com/manzihanoi	14 Phan Huy Ich Street, Hanoi
3	CUCA	Art courses and art talks for local community	www.facebook.com/cucavietnam	No fixed space
4	BlackBox	Experimental Theatre, music shows, art workshops, dance classes, art for personal development classes	www.facebook.com/blackboxvn	56 Nguyen Khuyen Street, Hanoi
5	Nha San studio-Nhà San Collective	Art studio, art performances, art festivals, café	www.facebook.com/NhaSanCollective www.nhasanstudio.org	24 Ly Quoc Su Street, Hanoi
6	Hano Rock city	Bar, music shows, art&culture events	www.facebook.com/hrc.hanoi	28/52 To Ngoc Van Street, Tay Ho, Hanoi
7	CAMA ATK	Bar, café, music festival and music events	www.cama-atk.com	73 Mai Hac De Street, Hanoi
8	TPD	Film classes and workshops	www.tpdmovie.com.vn/cms2/	51 Tran Hung Dao Street, Hanoi
9	DOC LAB	Film, photography, multimedia workshop and classes	www.hanoidoclab.org	56 -58 Nguyen Thai Hoc Street, Hanoi

NO.	SPACE	ACTIVITIES	WEBSITE/ FACEBOOK	ADDRESS
10	Dom Dom	Experiment electronic music workshop and classes, music festival	www.facebook.com/domdom.hanoi	No fixed space
11	Click Space	Co-working space, networking events	http://clickspace.vn	76 To Ngoc Van Street, Hanoi
12	Hub.IT	Co working space, networking, IT and Mobile apps start-ups consultancy	www.facebook.com/hubITasia	Tung Shing square building, 2 Ngo Quyen, Hanoi
13	Hatch	Start-ups incubators and acclerators, community events	http://hatch.vn	House 15 lane 150 Ho Ba Mau lake road, Hanoi
14	Wunder Lab	Co-working space, networking	www.facebook.com/wunderlabvietnam	35B Nguyen Binh Khiem Street, Hanoi
15	Hanoi Design Center	Working studio and showroom of Vietnamese craft products	http://hanoidesigncenter.com/	91 Au Co Street, Tay Ho, Hanoi
16	CHULA	A showroom of contemporary fashion design, an art space, social hub for visual arts, music performance and film screenings	www.chulafashion.com	43, Nhat Chieu, 396 Lac Long Quan Street, Hanoi, Vietnam
17	Work room four	Art, fashion and design studio & classes, exhibition, cultural events, co-working space	www.workroomfour.com	Packexim Building, Tower 1, Floor 24, No 49, Lane 15 An Duong Vuong Street, Hanoi
18	Dao Anh Khanh studio	Artist house&studio, annual festival with music, performance art & installation	www.facebook.com/daoanhkhanh	No.7 alley 462 Ngoc Thuy road, Gia Lam, Hanoi
19	Đờ luych Art Bar	Bar, café, occasionally exhibition, music performance	www.facebook.com/DoLuych	No.19b, lane 12 Dang Thai Mai Street, Hanoi
20	The onion cellar	Café, film screening, music events	www.facebook.com/onion.cellar	170 Doi Can, Hanoi
21	X-98 a reborn Zone 9	Café, restaurants, fashion boutique, game studio, animation studio		No.98 alley 97 Hoang Cau Street, Dong Da, Hanoi

NO.	SPACE	ACTIVITIES	WEBSITE/ FACEBOOK	ADDRESS
22	Zo project	Focus on arts and craft, showcase products made from Dó paper (giấy Dó) of Vietnam, community events	www.facebook.com/zoproject/	124 Au Co Street, Tay Ho, Hanoi
VIRTUAL HUBS				
23	Hanoi Grapevine	An online website sharing all art and culture events in Vietnam, occasionally organiser of art exhibitions	http://hanoigrapevine.com	Virtual space
24	Andofotherthings	An online website featuring art, culture events, insight articles, interviews about the art scene in Vietnam.	www.andofotherthings.com	Virtual space

Ho Chi Minh City

NO.	SPACE	ACTIVITIES	WEBSITE/ FACEBOOK	ADDRESS
1	Station 3A	art gallery, fashion boutiques, décor furnitures and art, art fair	www.nhaga3a.com.vn www.alternativeartarea.org	3A Ton Duc Thang Street, District 1, HCMC
2	San Art	art gallery and studio, artist residency, art talks	www.san-art.org	3 Me Linh Street, District Binh Thach, HCMC
3	Ga O	art gallery and studio, artist residency, art talks	http://thestartnetwork.org/ www.facebook.com/thestartnetwork	Road 41, Lam Van Ben Street, District 7, HCMC
4	The Start Center	coworking space, networking for start-ups		18bis/14 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai Street, District 1, HCMC
5	Work Saigon	coworking space, café, events, photo studio, design classes	www.worksaigon.com www.facebook.com/WORKsaigon	267/2 Dien Bien Phu Street, District 3, HCMC
6	Saigon Coworking	shared work space, an investment fund and consultancy for start-ups	http://saigoncoworking.com	101 Cu Lao, W.2, District Phu Nhuan, HCMC
7	SaiGon OutCast	music events, graffiti, bar, community events	www.facebook.com/SaigonOutcast	118/1 Nguyen Van Huong Street, W.Thao Dien, District 2, HCMC

NO.	SPACE	ACTIVITIES	WEBSITE/ FACEBOOK	ADDRESS
8	ADC academy	Art and graphic design educational center, networking and community events	http://adcacademy.vn	3rd floor, MH building, 728-730 Vo Van Kiet Street, District 3, HCMC
9	Ca Phe Thu Bay	Every Saturday art talks about all subjects for the community	www.o.facebook.com/caphet-hubay	Trung Nguyen Coffee, 19B Pham Ngoc Thach Street, W.6, District 3, HCMC
VIRTUAL HUBS				
10	YxineFF	Annual short film festival, internet base. Stop activities in December, 2014.	www.yxineff.com	

Other Cities

NO.	SPACE	ACTIVITIES	WEBSITE/ FACEBOOK	ADDRESS
1	HUE NewSpace Art Foundation	A private art foundation/ Artist residency programme founded by twin artists Le Ngoc Thanh & Le Duc Hai	www.newspacearts.com/	15 Le Loi Street, Hue City
2	HAI PHONG Area 21	An old living quarter renovated into a shopping and entertaining area with art shops, café, restaurant	www.facebook.com/area21.hp	21 Tran Phu Street, Hai Phong
3	HOA BINH Muong culture art house and museum	An private ethnic culture museum and an art workshop space for contemporary artists from Vietnam and abroad	www.facebook.com/baotangkhonggianvanhoa_muong	Tay Tien road, Hoa Binh city, Hoa Binh province, Vietnam

Image courtesy of journalist Trương Uyên Ly, Mat Wright, Thinh Hoang and creative spaces including ADC Academy, Manzi and Nha San Collective

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