

Partner South East Asia

The Việt Nam Connections

Report: March 2022

Highlights

- This session explored the connections between the UK and Việt Nam through three artistic collaborations, and a tour through Việt Nam's cultural landscape.
- The collaboration between Việt Nam's Kilomet109 and UK's Lola Lely Studio connected designers and artisans in both countries for an exchange of cultural heritage and craft skills.
- The Monsoon Festival in Hà Nội is the result of a connection with the Great Escape in Brighton. The British Council invited Nguyễn Quốc Trung and Mai Thang to the music event in the UK. Inspired by their experience, the duo went on to organise the Monsoon Festival.
- Mất Trần Ensemble and Tòhe from Việt Nam collaborated with Welsh based Hijinx Theatre on *Eye See Ai*, an augmented reality experience that connected artists, viewers and locations in both countries. *Eye See Ai* challenged people's perceptions of what disabled artists can produce.
- From north to south, Việt Nam's six cultural cities have their own unique cultural identity and strength.

Overview

The session focused on three UK-Việt Nam collaborations covering music festivals, theatre and sustainable design. It also took the audience on a tour of Việt Nam's cultural landscape from north to south, in the context of arts and culture.

Donna McGowan, Country Director Việt Nam, British Council, introduced the organisation's role in fostering UK-Việt Nam connections. As the organisation celebrates its 30-year presence in the country in 2022, it will continue to facilitate arts and culture connections and network-building between the UK and Việt Nam.

Besides supporting artists, creative practitioners, entrepreneurs and SMEs, the British Council works with central and provincial governments on strategies and policies that influence the cultural and creative ecosystem. It partnered with the [Việt Nam National Institute of Arts and Culture Studies](#) for the [Cultural and Creative Hubs Vietnam project](#) that targeted six key cultural and creative hubs.

The British Council also collaborated with UNESCO and UK experts to assist the Vietnamese government with the drafting of the [National Strategy for the Development of Vietnamese Cultural Industries to 2020, with a Vision to 2030](#).¹

Since 2018, the British Council has been focusing on inclusive growth projects to protect and revitalise music and film heritage that is under-represented or at risk of disappearing.

To address human trafficking and unsafe migration, it helps youth unions in Vietnam to build their capacity and develop creative approaches to the issue through the three-year project [Backstage to the Future](#). In [Tackling Modern Slavery in Vietnam](#), it uses theatre performances to educate vulnerable communities on human trafficking and how to access the criminal justice system.

¹ The Strategy put forward specific measures on state management mechanism, human resources training, resources mobilisation, social awareness raising, market development and enhancing international integration in cultural industries.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the British Council offered digital learning through 17 online learning courses, delivered by UK and Việt Nam partners. Almost 3,500 people graduated from at least one of these courses.

Craftsmanship, heritage and sustainability: A conversation between Thảo and Lola

Kilomet 109 × Lola Lely Studio



Image courtesy of the artists.

Thảo Vũ is a slow fashion pioneer and Founder and Creative Director of [Kilomet109](#). She works with artisans around Vietnam to grow, spin, weave, print and naturally dye Kilomet109 fabrics. The garments are then hand-stitched at her Hà Nội design studio.

Lola Lely is a British-Vietnamese Designer and Artist based in London. She founded [Lola Lely Studio](#) and [Wax Atelier](#). Her works link contemporary practices and technology with age-old techniques.

Thảo and Lola met at working arts centre [Somerset House](#) in London four years ago. This led to [Crafting Without Borders](#), a pandemic collaboration that connected H'mong artisans in Việt Nam with artisans at Lola's design studio. Through the project, they found new ways to combine traditional textiles or methods.

Although Việt Nam and the UK are worlds apart, Thảo and Lola's teams share similar values and approaches to working with local and traditional materials. Thảo appreciates handcrafting

for the human energy it uses. For Lola, each piece of work is like an artist's handwriting, with its own uniqueness and subtle differences. This makes them stand out from mass-produced items.

Moving forward, Thảo and Lola want to encourage their artisans to be more experimental and empower them to design their own products.

Using technology for inclusive theatre performance: A conversation between Thu, Trang Linh and Ellis

[Tòhe](#) × [Mắt Trần Ensemble](#) × [Hijinx](#)



Image courtesy of the artists.

Nguyễn Thị Mộng Thu is Social Affairs Manager of [Tòhe](#), a creative playground where children benefit from their own play.

Phạm Trang Mỹ Linh is Artistic Director and Founder of [Mắt Trần Ensembles](#), which champions inclusive performing arts.

Ellis Wrightbrook is Senior Producer at [Hijinx Theatre](#), one of Europe's leading inclusive theatre companies.

Thu, Trang Linh and Ellis collaborated on [Eye See Ai](#), an augmented reality experience created by Hijinx and supported by the [British Council Arts Digital Collaboration](#) Fund. All three have experience working with people with autism and learning disabilities.



Photo credit: [Hijinx Theatre](#)

The pandemic and concerns about its impact on the community inspired *Eye See Ai*. It was a platform for children to express themselves, showcase their artworks and make new friends. The team wanted to highlight accessibility and the disadvantaged communities' right to be visible.

The project used augmented reality (AR) technology to take the artists to different places in Cardiff and Hà Nội'. Their performances were filmed against a green screen.

Using a mobile app, the audience could view the performances against a location background. For example, someone in Việt Nam' could see artists from Wales performing against a background of the Hoàn Kiếm Lake in Ha Noi. Ellis hopes that *Eye See Ai* can challenge people's perceptions of what disabled artists can produce.

The festival connection: A conversation between Quốc Trung, Mai Thang and Adam

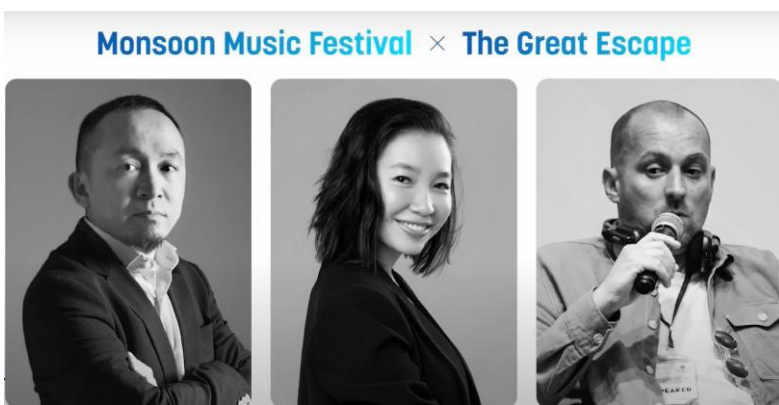


Image courtesy of the artists.

In this conversation, [Monsoon Music Festival](#) was represented by **Nguyễn Quốc Trung**, Music Composer, Producer and Director, and **Mai Thang**, Programmer, Music and Conference. They spoke with **Adam Ryan**, Head of Music of [The Great Escape](#).

The Monsoon Festival is held at the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long, an iconic historical place in Hà Nội.' It features a wide range of music such as indie, rock, hip-hop, world music and jazz. The Great Escape in Brighton is a festival that showcases new and emerging talents of different genres from around the world.

The trio met through an introduction by the British Council, which invited Quốc Trung and Mai Thang to The Great Escape. Inspired by the festival, they organised the Monsoon Festival back home and featured artists from The Great Escape. Similarly, Adam hopes to bring Vietnamese talents to the UK.

Panel discussion: Cultural cities profile

[Hanoi Grapevine](#), represented by **Trương Uyên Ly**, Director, and **Nguyễn Vũ Tú Hằng**, Manager of Business Strategy, presented the cities profile. This session was hosted by **Nguyễn Phương Thảo**, Head of Arts Việt Nam, British Council.

Hanoi Grapevine provides bilingual content in English and Vietnamese of contemporary arts and culture events, together with art reviews, artist interviews, news, introductions to indie films, and open calls for creative practitioners. It's also a platform for arts and culture research, creative workshops and inspiring talks.

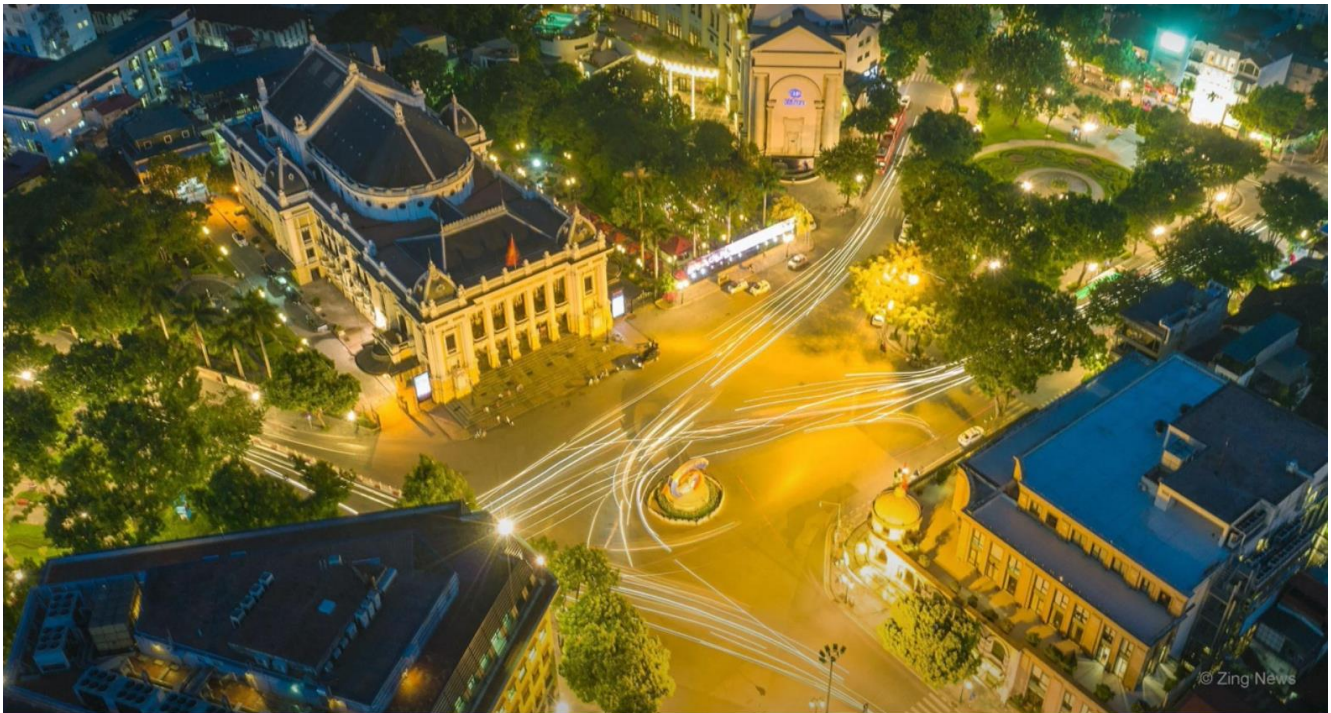


Screenshot from the event [recording](#). Clockwise: Trương Uyên Ly, Nguyễn Vũ Tú Hằng, Nguyễn Phương Thảo

The presentation was based on the Cultural Cities Profile Việt Nam commissioned by the British Council. Ly and Hằng took the audience on a journey through six cities, from north to south, featuring preservation to innovation.

The [National Strategy for the Development of Vietnamese Cultural Industries](#) created in 2016, is an important policy for cultural heritage, design, digital creativity, architecture and urban planning. The six cities presented in this session feature these characteristics.

Hà Nội: Creative capital



A city view featuring the Hanoi Opera House. Photo credit: Screenshot from the event [recording](#).

This capital city is known for contemporary design and crafts, and cuisine. Its creative industries comprise design enterprises, art businesses, fashion houses and creative hubs.

The [Vietnam Creative Hubs Initiative](#) was founded in 2018 as a multi-purpose incubator to connect and advocate creative hubs. Hanoi Grapevine as a member of this group, runs a programme called [Proactive Audience Network](#) to connect and expose audiences to Hà Nội's diverse art scene.

Huế: Royal culture



Huế imperial citadel. Photo credit: [Cultural Cities Profile Việt Nam](#).

This ancient royal capital in central Việt Nam holds a few UNESCO titles for its tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

While Huế is famous for its historical imperial palaces, it also attracts local and international tourists with cultural events such as the Biennial Hue Festival, Hue Traditional Craft Festival, Hue Cuisine Festival and Hue Ao Dai Festival.

Đà Nẵng: Tourism culture



The Golden Bridge in Ba Na Hills. Photo credit: Screenshot from the event [recording](#).

Đà Nẵng is a youthful, dynamic city that's popular with digital nomads in the region. It provides opportunities for international collaborations, particularly in design, communication and media content. Đà Nẵng has the potential to become Việt Nam's creative start-up centre.

Hội An: Living heritage



One of Hội An's quaint streets. Photo credit: [Cultural Cities Profile Việt Nam](#).

Cultural tourism has been the main driver of Hội An's creative industries for many years. It became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. In 2019, the city received close to five million visitors per year.

In the coming years, Hội An is expected to develop into a hub for design, crafts and performance. An influx of contemporary artists from across Vietnam has been establishing workshops and studios in the city over the last few years.

Đà Lạt: Architectural heritage



Đà Lạt railway station. Photo credit: [Cultural Cities Profile Việt Nam](#).

This diverse and multicultural city has a strong urban heritage featuring French colonial architecture and an emerging independent side. It has more than 20 ethnic groups, each with their own traditions, cuisines, festivals, rituals and art practices.

Đà Lạt also has a strong institutional base linked to universities. It is home to the Association of Writers, as well as independent artists.

Hồ Chí Minh City: Smart City



The Nguyen Hue apartment building which has been repurposed to house F&B shops.

Photo credit: [Cultural Cities Profile Việt Nam](#).

Hồ Chí Minh City (HCMC) is Việt Nam's largest city and economical hub. It has three targets:

- To be a smart city by 2025.
- To be South East Asia's economic, financial, trade, science-technology and cultural centre by 2030.
- To be Asia's economic and financial hub by 2045.

The city plans to reach these targets by developing its creative private sector, with a focus on key cultural industries – cinema, performing arts, fine arts, photography, exhibitions, cultural tourism, fashion and advertising.

The importance of arts and culture to Việt Nam’s development can be seen in the active collaborations between public and private sectors, as well as central and local governments. An example is the collective approach to push the agenda of Hà Nội as a UNESCO Creative City of Design. [Vietnam Festival of Creativity & Design \(VFCD\)](#), an initiative by RMIT University Vietnam, and the government-organised [Vietnam Design Week](#), are two parallel events.

A similar public-private connection is the Huế Festival held in the city’s citadel. It attracts artists, musicians, fashion designers and theatre companies from as far as Hà Nội and HCMC.

HCMC is a dynamic city open to collaborations. While big players in the cultural industries like cinema studios, publishers and advertising companies are firmly established here, the local government is creating new public spaces for locals and visitors to engage in cultural activities.

National-regional connections can be seen with initiatives and strategies to preserve tangible and intangible assets. Huế’s city inventory contains 1,000 tangible and intangible heritage assets registered for intensive care and protection. While the city’s policy for the Huế imperial complex is focused on restoration and preservation, it also safeguards and promotes intangible cultural heritage such as crafts, rituals, costumes, cuisines and arts.

Đà Lạt’s city government has developed policies to preserve and promote its historical architecture heritage with flexible regulations on preservation management. This allows heritage villas to be used for state or commercial purposes.

Hội An has a 2012-25 master plan for heritage preservation and development of the ancient city so that heritage sites and communities can live in balance. Its people are encouraged to live with their heritage to safeguard it.

Read the full report [here](#).