

What is scheduled for next year

- > We plan to produce a short documentary (about 20 minutes) showcasing the various benefits that creative hubs have brought to Hanoi and to youth in particular.

If the COVID situation improves in Vietnam, and if the researchers based outside of Vietnam can travel there for fieldwork, we plan to investigate the ongoing institutionalization of creative hubs.

We will revise the two papers submitted this year once we get the reviews' back.



Type of products planned for next year

- > Multimedia co-production
- > Scientific publication



Youth transgression in the Vietnamese Creative City

HANOI

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THIS CASE STUDY LOOKS AT THE FIRST GENERATION OF CREATIVE HUBS (I.E., FOR THE MOST PART OPENED DURING THE 2010s) IN HANOI IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVATED THEIR ESTABLISHMENT, WHETHER/HOW THEIR USERS AND FOUNDERS ENGAGE IN TRANSGRESSIVE ACTIVITIES, AND WHAT ROLE THEY PLAY AS A NEW TYPE OF PUBLIC SPACE IN THE CITY.

Highlights

- > The aims of this project are twofold. First, to understand the patterns of emergence and disappearance of "independent art spaces/creative hubs" in Hanoi which are operated by or attract youth. Second, to investigate how the founders and users of creative hubs either believe they are, or actually are, transgressing official and cultural norms with regards to their use of/actions in such spaces.

For the purposes of this study, creative spaces or hubs are defined as including some sort of art-linked creation/creativity. This might be linked to visual art, music, dance, clothes and other goods design and creation and meetings and exhibitions regarding any of these. Co-working spaces might also be present, but we are not focusing on sites that are only dedicated to co-working; nor are we interested in spaces that are predominantly IT hubs. However, in a larger creative space, these features, plus bars and cafes might also be present.

More specifically we want to know:

- > what are the motivations and strategies of the individuals creating/organising/appropriating creative hubs in Hanoi? What rules and norms do they transgress (if any), why, and how?
- > While the tenants of these creative spaces might not be youth themselves, we are interested to know: how are youth being considered in the creation of these spaces by others (if the creators are older), and how do youth interact with these spaces and in what roles?



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What was accomplished this year

- > We wrote and submitted a journal article based on a critical review of the literature on the question of creative hubs and creative city discourse/policy in East and Southeast Asia (the paper is currently under review);
- > We wrote and submitted a journal article based on over 80 interviews with the founders, tenants, and users of 10 creative hubs in Hanoi. The paper was submitted to Urban Studies and is currently under review.
- > We are conducting follow-up research (remotely) on the ongoing institutionalization of creative hubs in Hanoi after the listing of the Vietnamese capital as a “Creative City of Design” by the UNESCO.



Preliminary results

Hanoi’s creative hubs, like their counterparts in the West and in other parts of East and Southeast Asia, are locales that provide space for individuals to create and collaborate, network, and take part in community engagement and business development in the cultural sector. The creative hubs which proliferated during the 2010s are however generally modest in size compared to some of their overseas counterparts, ranging from art spaces for visual arts and performances, to locales for talks and exhibitions, sometimes also featuring small commercial outlets. Most are community-led and operated spaces and have been established and have developed without state funding. In a context wherein the state has long been weary of independent cultural production (especially in contemporary or experimental form), Hanoi’s hubs are confronted with various forms of state controls and are frequently restricted in their activities. They must deal with state censorship of the public events and activities they organize or else they face stiff fines. Some of them have also been deemed too transgressive and forced to close temporarily and permanently. Yet, despite the numerous barriers these spaces face, they have become important sites for the gathering and formation of the city’s emerging contemporary arts scene and countercultures. We find that the operators and users of Hanoi’s creative hubs employ a range of subtle political engagement techniques and resistance tactics in their attempts to remain in operation. Drawing conceptually on Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s (2017) notion of ‘informal politics from below’ (or “life politics”), we argue that creative hubs seek to provide spaces of (partial) autonomy from governmentality in Hanoi. Our analysis further shows that artists, intellectuals and other cultural producers use these spaces to challenge state controls. They do so not by lobbying formal institutions for policy changes, but instead by enacting the more open and free sociocultural milieu they seek, from the bottom-up.

