

# The Mekong Mapping Project



Practitioners' study exploring arts ecosystems, professional development needs and regional collaboration in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam

2018





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This report is not intended to be an academic paper, nor an academic piece of research. It is a practice based research paper, conducted, analysed and reported by practitioners.

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**This project was made possible thanks to**





## About Mekong Cultural Hub

Mekong Cultural Hub is a non-profit organisation, with a mission to build sustainable networks between cultural workers in Asia and to provide personal and professional development opportunities for artists and managers who are working at the intersection of arts and society. Whilst serving and making connections with the wider Asia region, its priority focus is on the Mekong Region (including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam). And its target is to support creative practitioners who are already established in their own contexts – and are ready to widen their networks and their impact by developing regional projects and collaboration. MCH aims to build links within the region, and to give it more visibility, both within Asia and internationally. Whilst the countries in the Mekong Region have a shared history, shared political and economic contexts and opportunities, there is very little knowledge exchange or resource sharing between leaders in the arts sector. Mekong Cultural Hub fills a critical and timely gap in resource for leadership, mobility and access to information for artists and creative practitioners and in doing so, aims to increase the contribution of the culture and arts sector to the Mekong Region’s future development.



### Background

Mekong Cultural Hub grew out of multi-year programs initiated and coordinated by partner organisation Cambodian Living Arts, which has been working in Cambodia since 1998. MCH was founded as an independent organisation in late 2017 with seed funding from Fresh Sound Foundation and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of China (Taiwan). Both Cambodian Living Arts and Mekong Cultural Hub share the belief that arts are at the heart of a vital society, and this philosophy underpins everything that they do.



### Projects and programs

Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH)’s core activities will include:

- Network building and information sharing
- Cultural exchange
- Professional development and training
- Leadership development

These will be delivered in the form of workshops, events and platforms (both in person and online). Some activities will be delivered through ongoing programs, and others will be project based.

For more information please see [www.mekongculturalhub.org](http://www.mekongculturalhub.org)

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# MEKONG MAPPING PROJECT

## APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY





## The Mekong Mapping Project: Background and approach

We initiated the Mekong Mapping Project as the first activity of MCH because we wanted to start the program by connecting and learning from our stakeholders in the region. We also knew from our own experience, that finding and connecting with artists and cultural workers in the Mekong Region, especially if wishing to reach outside the 'usual suspects' is not always easy. Therefore we hoped that a project which could serve the dual goals of:

1. Learning about the current situation regarding regional exchange and collaboration in the region, including interests, priorities, and constraints of cultural actors in the Mekong Region
2. Creating a database, with contact information and profiles for 150-200 artists and cultural workers in the region who are interested in regional collaboration and exchange

Would not only be of use to ourselves, but also be a helpful output for partners and networks outside of the region, who are seeking collaboration and partnership with the Mekong countries.



### Methodology: The importance of networks

Knowing that:

- In some of our target countries, many artists and administrators do not use email as their primary means of communication and may not be comfortable working online
- People are unlikely to respond to an institutional or anonymous survey
- We wanted to target people who would fit the profile that MCH seeks to work with and for (i.e. interested in regional collaboration and having a vision of their work that sees arts playing a meaningful role in social and sustainable development)
- We would need additional support to interpret and analyse the survey results

We decided to gather the survey responses through a network of "Peer Advisors" based across our five target countries.

Using our existing networks, we invited the 9 creative arts professionals<sup>1</sup> shown below to work with us to gather survey responses from 20 people of their networks, and to participate in a workshop to discuss the findings and develop recommendations for actions based on the results of the survey.

# PEER ADVISORS

**Ko Aung Kyaw Tun**  
**Mandalay**  
Guitar Player and Manager at Arts Mandalay

**Chanmaly PANYAPHONE**  
**Vientiane**  
Independent Consultant, also working with Lao Culture Challenge Fund

**Sutthirat SUPAPARINYA (Som)**  
**Chiang Mai**  
Art Professor and Director of Asian Culture Station (ACS)

**Siphai THAMMAVONG**  
**Luang Prabang**  
Traditional Storyteller

**NGUYEN Anh Tuan**  
**Hanoi**  
Independent Curator, Heritage Space

**Khin Khin Yee**  
**Yangon**  
Tourism Professional and Arts Manager

**Wayla AMATATHAMMACHAD**  
**Bangkok**  
Arts Manager, e.g. 'Prayoon for Art', Thong Lor Art Space

**Meta MOENG**  
**Phnom Penh**  
Independent Curator & Arts Manager, & Founder of Kon Len Khnhom

**Sinath SOUS**  
**Siem Reap**  
Director of HR and Community Engagement, Phare the Cambodian Circus

<sup>1</sup> Note that due to personal circumstances the Peer Advisor from Ho Chi Minh City had to drop out of the project. For that reason, unfortunately HCMC is not currently represented in the survey results, nor at the workshop. We will aim to gather survey responses and build up the data at a later date.

## **Methodology: Survey design and distribution**

The survey was designed by the MCH core team, and we asked the Peer Advisors for comments and feedback before it was distributed. It was translated into local languages, and we asked the Advisors to use their discretion as to whether it would be more effective to send it as an online form, ask people to complete it in a spreadsheet, or to fill the form by hand.

Anticipating that the results would be coming back in various formats, and with constraints of time and language on interpreting the results, the survey was designed to be mostly checkboxes and multiple choice options. This was to allow for more straightforward comparison and analysis. Despite that, it was still challenging administratively to compile the survey data, and required a large amount of work from the Project Curator and Curator's Assistant.

We gave the Advisors freedom to select the people to respond to the survey but asked them to:

- Target people who would be interested in regional collaboration, and you think would be good contributors to a regional program
- Try to get responses from people working in a range of disciplines (visual arts, film, performing arts, literature, craft, contemporary, traditional etc) so we get diverse views
- Aim for a gender balance in the responses

We did not mention age as a factor to be considered, and only explored age profiles of respondents after the first round of data had been gathered. For MCH's purposes, we are primarily interested in readiness and relevance of people engaging in regional collaboration – and age need not be a determining factor in that case.

Several advisors also took this opportunity to reach out to people who have not already been involved in regional exchange, and perhaps do not yet have a high profile nationally or regionally, but are people they consider to be doing great work and could benefit from and make an interesting contribution to a newly forming network. This very much fits the spirit of what MCH is trying to achieve, and informed the approach and discussions during the workshop. While Advisors aimed to give us an overview of their arts communities, the selection of responses also represents curatorial choices of who was asked to respond in the first place. Data was collected between January and March 2018.

## **Methodology: Topics and themes to be explored in the survey**

Through the 22 questions in the survey we aimed to find out:



### **Mobility and existing networks**

We wanted to find out people's existing experience of both travel in general and also regional exchange. We wanted to learn about any constraints e.g. access to passports and comfort to travel independently. We also asked for an assessment of people's existing networks, within their own countries and further afield. Our goal is to make sure that MCH is filling a need, and does the right work to make the network as accessible and inclusive as possible.



### **Reasons for wanting to be involved in regional exchange**

We wanted to investigate what people's existing experience of regional exchange was, including studying and fellowships abroad. We also asked what they would seek to gain from regional exchange and collaboration going forward and why they would want to be involved. This will help us to make sure our programs respond to people's needs.



### **Resources and opportunities**

We wanted to find out how easy or difficult it is for people to access resources that they need to do their work, from funding through to partnerships. This can guide us as we select priority topics for training and knowledge sharing, and also to consider some of the constraints people might be facing if they want to join a regional program.



### **Education and language**

Bearing in mind that MCH's programs and projects will always be involving a regional group, we wanted to explore what common entry points people had in terms of education and language. Again this is with the aim of making the programs and the network as inclusive and accessible as possible.



### **Context of arts and culture**

We asked respondents to tell us about the social and development issues their work is engaging with, their existing relationships with government and their knowledge and interest in cultural policy. We see one of MCH's roles as being to support creative practitioners to increase the influence and impact of culture and arts in our region, so we want to learn about the starting point today.

Following the compilation and initial analysis of this data, we designed our follow-up workshop to explore certain issues more deeply.

## Methodology: Exploring Shared Futures (Workshop)

Between March 28th and 31st we gathered 25 people together for a consultation workshop, following the first analysis of the data. In addition to the 9 Peer Advisors, we invited some Advisory Council members of Living Arts International, and some peers from elsewhere in the region (namely Taiwan) who have a demonstrated interest in connecting and collaborating with the Mekong Region, and can be useful partners in future.

The workshop had multiple aims:

- Verify and critique the findings from the survey
- Explore some particular issues in more depth
- Get insights from the participants on how MCH should function and what projects and programs it could usefully offer
- Initiate some new networks and connections for our stakeholders

For this public report, we will prioritise those observations and inputs that are relevant to a wider audience and could be useful for practitioners and agencies wanting to connect with and support artists and cultural workers in the region.

The following elements of the workshop generated information and ideas that influenced the data and information that is shared in the Results section of this document.





## Ecosystem Mapping

The survey gave us a good insight into individuals' situations in the region, but did not give much information about the ecosystems in which they were working. We did an activity to map the various people and institutions locally and internationally involved in meeting needs for training, creation, distribution, policymaking and resource provision in the various countries.



## World Café

Using a world café style format, we gathered input from participants on:

- What kind of programs would help to develop creative skills?
- On a practical level, what role does arts and culture play in society in your context?
- What needs to be considered so that regional exchange programs reach a diverse network and are designed in an inclusive manner?
- What is needed so that regional exchange can be initiated and organised from within the Mekong Region?

These were all areas that we felt needed further investigation after seeing the survey results (either based on information provided or on lack of information revealed through the answers).



## Open Space

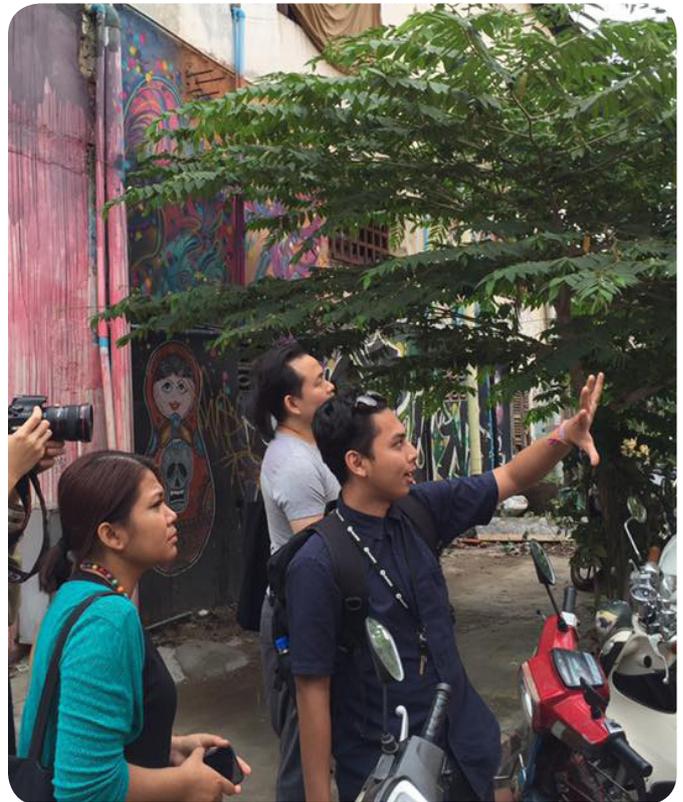
Open Space sessions covered various topics regarding projects to be developed within the MCH framework and ways of working, but one session that was used to enrich this report was a discussion regarding access to information within the culture sector in the region.

## ► Methodology: Results

The results from the survey and the workshop have been organised into thematic areas. These themes were determined after the research and consultation were completed, and aim to respond to the findings and interpretations of the practitioners involved.

As per our introduction, this is not an academic piece of research, and does not purport to provide a definitive overview of the region. It is a snapshot of what we uncovered through our project, and we hope it might be useful to a wider audience.

In the results section we have aimed to keep text to a minimum, to allow for easy reading and to make the data accessible to a wide audience.





# MEKONG MAPPING PROJECT

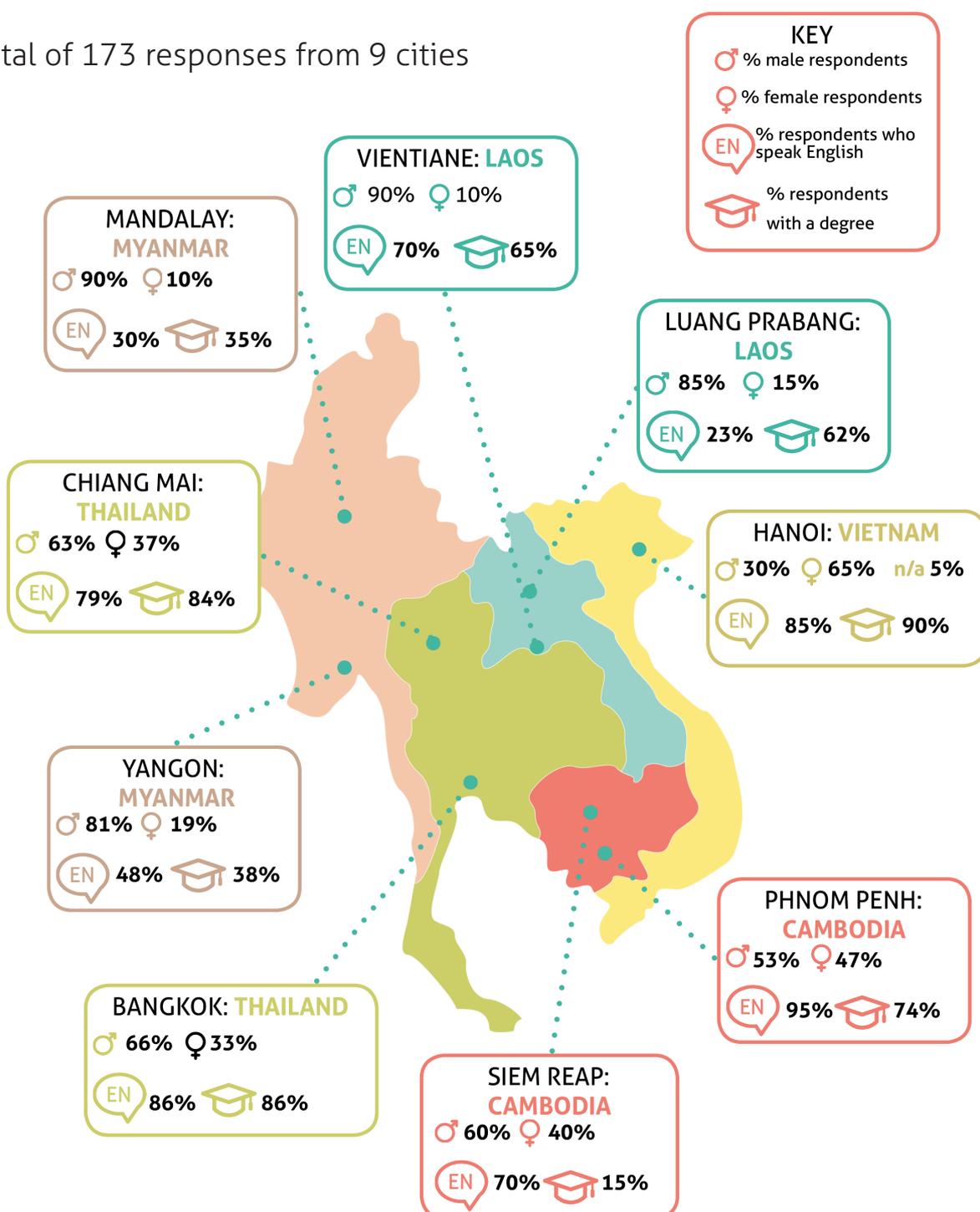
## FINDINGS



# Demographics

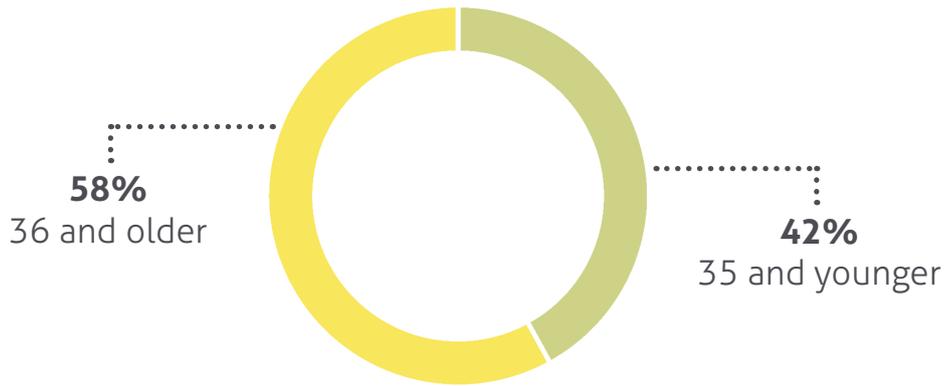
The majority of survey respondents is male, above the age of 35, has a degree - many from abroad - and speaks English well. This raises questions as to the position of artists within the respective communities in the Mekong Region. While there are strong differences between countries and even between major cultural cities within the same country, we wonder whether artists who are ready and interested in regional exchange are people who have privileges of education and resources in their communities. When looking at the data below, we must keep in mind that the overall differences between Bangkok and Chiang Mai are less significant as for example Vientiane and Luang Prabang or Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Countries like Myanmar also have a history of non-degree-based education and few international opportunities in the past due to the political isolation of the country.

A total of 173 responses from 9 cities





## Age

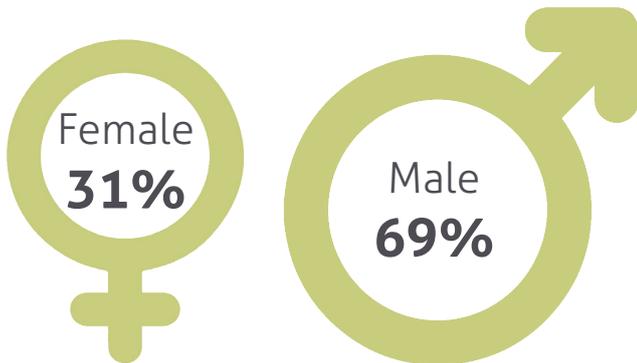


### Comment

- In Cambodia, 90% of respondents are under the age of 35.
- Respondents' ages mostly correlate with those of the researchers, which is likely a result of peer networks.



## Gender



### Comment

In Laos and Myanmar, very few women were surveyed. Highest numbers of women participating in the survey were found in Vietnam and Cambodia.



## Degree

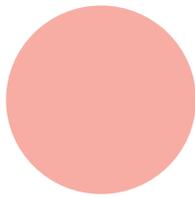


### Comment

- Most people with degrees were found in Thailand and Vietnam, least in Myanmar.
- In Myanmar, respondents mostly receive education and training in the country and were the least likely to study abroad.



## Self Classification



**66%**  
Artist



**43%**  
Arts manager

**26%**  
Researcher or other



**10%**  
Policy maker



## Affiliation



Independent  
**60%**



Organisation  
**31%**



Collective  
**28%**

\*Note that for both of these questions, participants were able to select more than one answer.



# Ecosystem

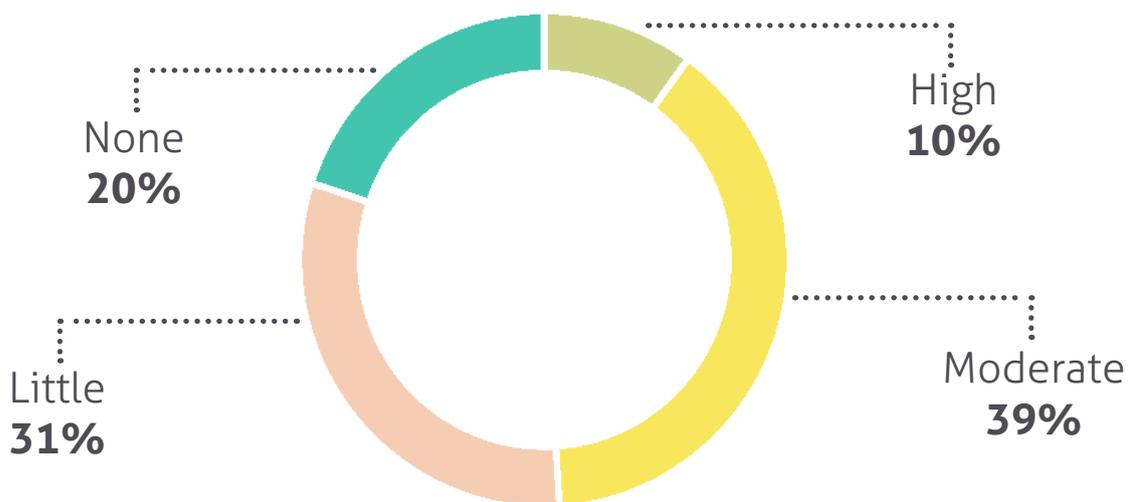


## Cultural Policy

The findings suggest that there is much room to extend and improve the quality of working relationships between governments and the cultural sector: From better knowledge and understanding of cultural policies and policy processes, to developing mutually beneficial dialogues. The relationship between cultural practitioners and their respective governments might currently be limited or strained in some countries like Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia due to bureaucratic and political hurdles or patron-client relationships instead of a merit-based system. However, the arts ecosystem exercise revealed that many cultural actors acknowledge the importance of governments in addressing societal issues and seek a closer cooperation. One idea was the formation of a mediating group to coordinate communication and dialogue between government and arts community. Cambodia’s Cultural Task Force coordinated by UNESCO currently seems to be only forum of such kind in the region. In Myanmar, which currently has no explicit cultural policy, and Laos, whose cultural policy is in development, such mediation might even help to inform governmental actors about the sector’s needs and build a platform for future dialogue.



### Knowledge and Understanding of Cultural Policy



### Comment

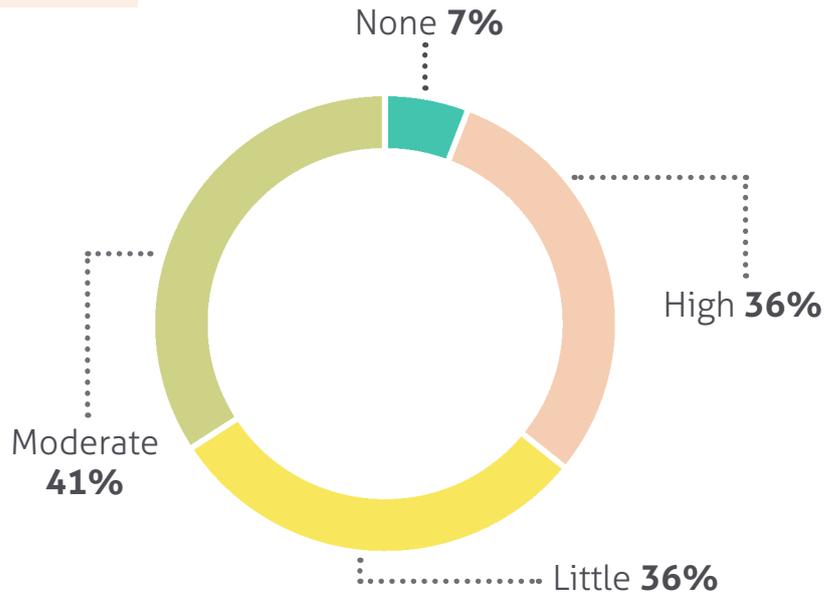
- While respondents in Vietnam, Laos and Thailand are comparatively well informed about cultural policy in their countries, there is not much perceived knowledge and understanding of it in Cambodia.
- There is a significant difference in knowledge and understanding of cultural policy between different cities in some countries, namely Phnom Penh-Siem Reap and Yangon-Mandalay.



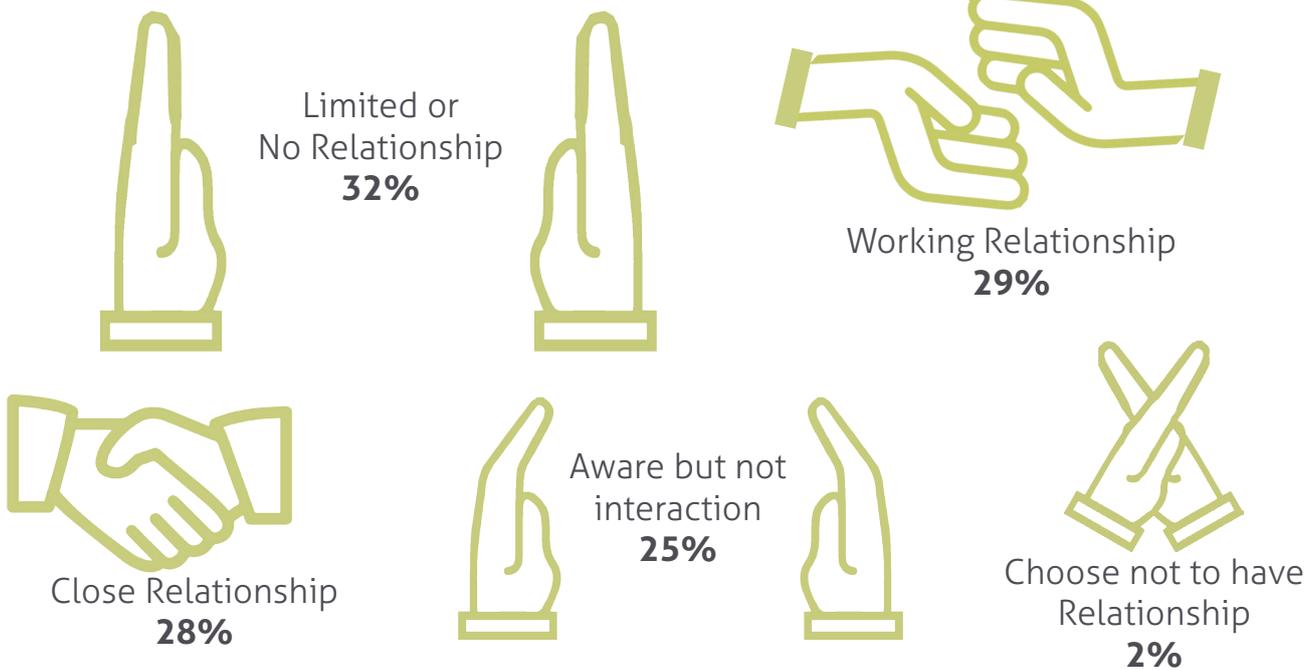
## Interest in Cultural Policy

### Comment

- Respondents in Thailand are comparatively less interested in matters of cultural policy than the other countries.
- The strongest disinterest was witnessed in Myanmar's second city, Mandalay.



## Relation with Government



### Comment

There are significant differences between the countries. While in Cambodia there are mostly limited relationships, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand's relationships with their respective governments are either good or non-existent; Laos respondents included more public sector officials than the other countries, so the data shows close relationships.

### Next Steps

Build capacity among cultural leaders from the community to have the skills, knowledge and networking ability to influence or initiate creation of advocacy groups and joint cultural task forces, and also invite government officials and private sector representatives.

## Networks and Resources

Networks often determine access to information and resources. This includes both networks across borders and networks within countries. The research showed variation in the strength and nature of networks across the region, which affects the flow of knowledge and resources. While in some countries city networks such as in Thailand are very strong, others rely more on disciplinary networks that may be organised around professional associations like in Myanmar. Where the cultural sector is rich with non-profit and arts organisations, as for example in Cambodia, information flows benefits from strong networks. It became also apparent that some places rely much more on digital spaces instead of physical spaces to share and converse, such as in Vietnam. Across all countries in the Mekong Region, artists and creative practitioners identified Facebook as the prime social communication channel in the digital space, with Line and Instagram coming in second. In several countries, the status quo of networking is being challenged by a tech-savvy young generation with constantly improving English skills. It becomes clear that anybody wanting to engage with artists and arts managers in the region should allow for time and budget in order to build personal relationships and become familiar with the respective arts ecosystem.



### People-to-people exchange



#### Comment

- People-to-people exchange and friendship networks are very important across the Mekong Region, especially in Laos and Myanmar, where digital communication is used less for professional networking and accessing information.
- Language abilities, technology skills and internet access are other factors impacting means of communication and access to information.



## Access

|  | Partnerships | Knowledge | Space | Audience/Market |
|--|--------------|-----------|-------|-----------------|
| No access to resources                         | 17%          | 9%        | 17%   | 16%             |
| Know where to look but not sure how to access  | 15%          | 9%        | 12%   | 17%             |
|  | 40%          | 40%       | 41%   | 40%             |
| Sometimes able to find but don't always get it |              |           |       |                 |
| Comfortable finding resources                  | 22%          | 36%       | 25%   | 21%             |

### Comment

**Partnerships** - Respondents in Luang Prabang found it particularly difficult to access and build partnerships.

**Knowledge** - In Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand, respondents felt very comfortable accessing knowledge, whereas it is more difficult in rural Laos.

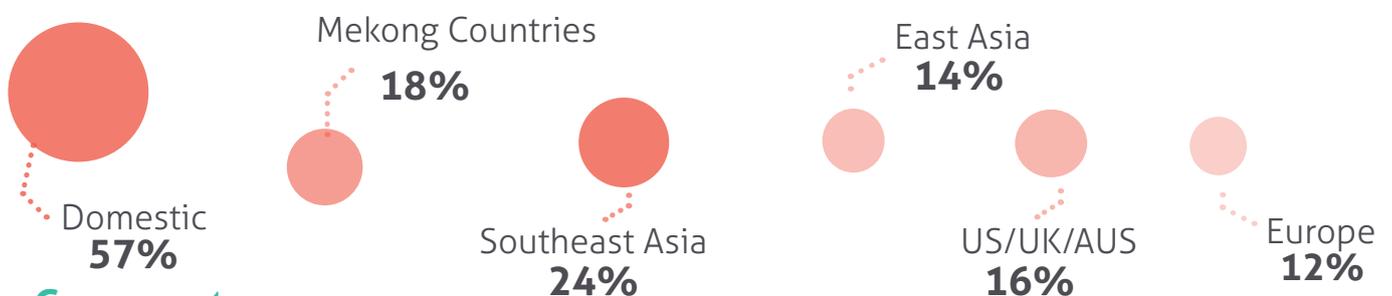
**Space** - While respondents in Cambodia and Vietnam found it comparatively easy to access spaces, secondary cities in Laos and Myanmar experienced difficulties.

**Audience/Market** - Vietnamese respondents were most comfortable accessing audiences and markets.



## Networks

% of respondents who rate their networks in the following areas as 'good' or 'excellent'



### Comment

- Non-Mekong Southeast Asian countries are more successful in establishing networks with cultural practitioners from the Mekong Region than the region itself.
- As the low numbers of networks with the West show, the Mekong Region is still marginalised in the global discourse.

## Next Steps

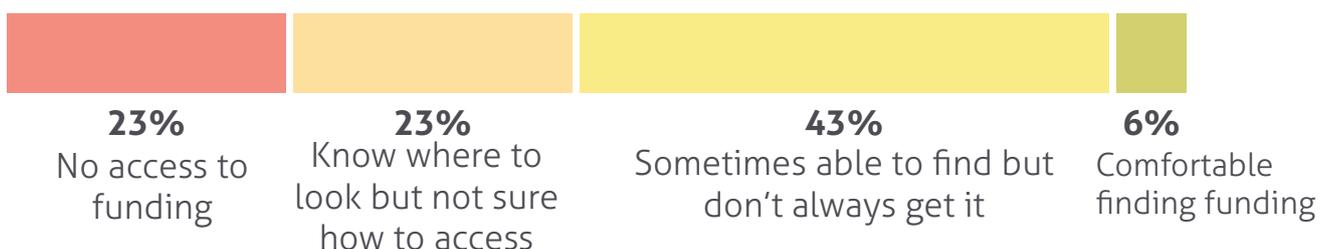
- Empower cultural practitioners to enrich their networks, practice cultural leadership and access resources.
- Investigate researchers' suggestions of developing a people-to-people information network, organising workshops on how to access information and participate in regional programs (e.g. how to answer an open call), making mobile resources available, and facilitating regular events targeted at artists with little access and exposure.

## Funding Ecosystem

Access to funding sources appears to be among the most difficult tasks for artists and creative practitioners in the Mekong Region. While in all countries governmental support plays some role in the funding environment, there is a clear trend of funding towards traditional arts. Researchers also found that several governments favour supporting their own state activities, events and artists with considerable control over the respective narrative of the artistic work. This presents yet another need for the independent arts community to learn more about cultural policy and engage in bridge building. While corporate funding and sponsorship deals are steadily increasing, Myanmar still relies heavily on community funding for local festivals. International agencies such as Japan Foundation, British Council, Institut Français, Goethe-Institut and others are key actors in the Mekong funding environment for the arts. Interestingly, they are often perceived as part of the local community rather than as foreign governmental actors. In countries like Cambodia and Thailand, local arts organisations are currently starting first grant-making activities.



### Access to Funding



## Relationships Arts // Society

Every survey respondent reportedly worked on at least one societal issue in relation to their artistic or arts management practice. On average, people worked on five issues - demonstrating a strong interest in working on issues of sustainable development. Discussions revealed that the most natural way to engage in regional collaboration and networking is by organising people around a shared need or interest. Environmental themes with the river being an obvious connector came up multiple times indicating that artists want to see a practical purpose in their work. This might be a good way to bring people together as the majority agrees that the arts play an important role in addressing societal issues. Even though respondents and researchers did not identify other purposes the arts may serve other than raising awareness, there was consensus that any engagement addressing the relationship between arts and society and regional collaboration must not be superficial and instead require robust research and deep reflections. Interestingly, in Cambodia, people felt empowered by institutions to address topics in their own communities.



### Social issues interlinking with arts practice

**67%**  
Cultural  
diversity

**60%**  
Identity

**52%**  
Gender

**47%**  
History

**47%**  
Inclusion

### Comment

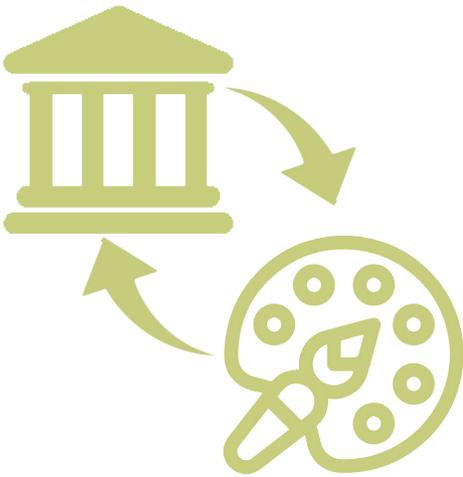
- Topics that respondents were least active in through their arts practice were disability and employment.
- Cultural diversity was defined very broadly, including themes of LGBTQ/gender, ethnic minorities, class and other kinds of societal divisions. This theme is particularly strong in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.
- Identity topics were strong in Vietnam and Thailand, whereas history also resonated with respondents in Cambodia. Preservation was a hot topic in Laos and Myanmar.
- Gender issues resonated most strongly with people in capitals, whereas preservation was a topic more frequently addressed in secondary cities such as Luang Prabang and Mandalay.
- Other topics that were mentioned frequently during the researchers' sharing session include freedom of expression, growing political authoritarianism and the challenges that development creates for the environment.

**44%**  
Preservation

**44%**  
Environment



## Who is initiating?



### Comment

In Myanmar and Laos, NGOs working on social issues often approach artists to work together, whereas in other countries artists and cultural practitioners often take the initiative. In Myanmar, however, researchers reported of increasing *artivism*.

### Next Steps

- Explore whether artists and cultural practitioners are connected to other sectors and platforms? If so, how?
- Investigate whether there are regional artists/arts organisation collectives dedicated to social issues such as the Green Arts Lab Alliance?
- Find out what artists need to research societal issues and address these in their art?

## Mobility & Exposure

While a lot of people in the Mekong Region receive their foundational arts education and first degrees within their home countries, a considerable amount of people go abroad for advanced training. Many artists in the region often also present or perform their arts outside of their home country. Ability to speak English is often an enabler for international activity as information how to access funding from international sources is often communicated in that language only. While there is a strong interest in participating in regional collaboration, there is a clear disconnect with how many artists and cultural practitioners have actually been involved in joint projects. It is obvious that the culture sector in the Mekong Region wants to collaborate and it is now up to agencies wanting to be involved in that, to find out how best to facilitate increased mobility and exposure.



## Passport



Have passport  
**89%**



No passport  
**11%**

### Comment

The majority of respondents without a passport are from Laos and Myanmar.



## International Travel

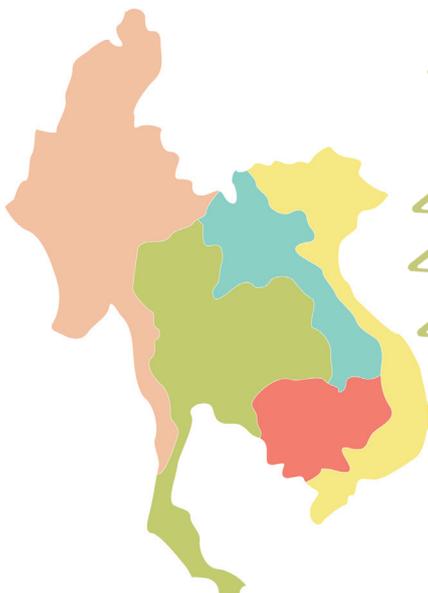


### Comment

The majority of well-travelled individuals are from Thailand and Vietnam, whereas people in Myanmar and Laos outside of Vientiane have least experience of travelling abroad.



## Professional Experience Abroad



Studied abroad **39%**

Had fellowship abroad **22%**

Joined regional program as participant **49%**

Represented themselves in the region **24%**

Co-created program with partner in another country **42%**

Hosted a regional program in their own country **16%**

### Comment

Hosts of regional collaborations were predominantly found in Vietnam and Thailand.



## Interest in regional collaboration

Interest in regional project collaborations  
**71%**



## English language ability



**66%**  
Rate their English language capacity  
as good or excellent

### Comment

- In Laos and Myanmar, English language proficiency wasn't as widespread as in the other countries.
- With the exception of Lao-Thai, few respondents have skills in other languages of the Mekong Region.

### Next Steps

- How can the gap between great interest in regional collaborations and few actual projects be addressed?
- Identify viable models for the flow of information about regional opportunities.
- Explore project ideas suggested by researchers: study/exchange trip, festival homestay, arts camp, regional festival, trans-Mekong cultural caravan

## Professional Development Needs

The majority of artists received training from government art schools. It remained unclear, however, where arts managers received their training from. When asked what creative skills training people were requesting, respondents did not clearly define their expectations. There was a consensus among the researchers that creativity could not be taught but only stimulated, and any training should include not just artists and producers, curators, choreographers and the like but also arts administrators. Discussions also identified a need for new media and technology training: how it interfaces with the arts but also basic training on how to use technology, e.g. to apply for grants. Other proposed training themes include cultural policy, how to work on cross-cultural and cross-border issues, community-based arts practice, socially engaged art, creative entrepreneurship, curatorial practice and how to access funding and resources. In discussions it became clear that some form of English language training is needed for many people to engage cultural professionals that usually do not have access to regional networks. The majority of people strongly embraced the idea of peer-to-peer support instead or in addition to more formal training models.



### Interest in regional activities



### Comment

Respondents from Myanmar and Laos are very interested in training opportunities, whereas Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand were more strongly invested in developing joint projects.

### Next Steps

- Explore what creative skills are and how creativity can be stimulated?
- How can basic language and technology training be organised to improve artists' participation in regional activities?
- What models of people-to-people and peer-to-peer support are viable in the Mekong Region?

## Taiwan-Mekong Relationship

One of MCH's missions is to raise the visibility of the Mekong Region elsewhere in Asia and internationally, and to build sustainable networks between practitioners that can benefit the personal and professional development of people in the region. Therefore we used the opportunity of the workshop to organise an interaction and cultural exchange with one existing and committed network, i.e. the arts community in Taiwan. Taiwan is interested in knowing Southeast Asia better and by inviting participants from Taiwan, we wanted to explore what are some of the reasons behind their interest in the region, what are the existing experiences of exchange, and what could an increased network between Taiwan and the Mekong Region offer to practitioners in both areas. This model of bridging connections with arts communities in other parts of Asia is something MCH hopes to continue to highlight the role that culture is playing in our changing societies. Present at the workshop we also had representatives from India, Singapore, France and USA.

The Taiwanese participants expressed strong interest in long-term exchange models that also include an obligatory module of sharing experiences back home in order to increase the impact of exchange programs. Identifying common topics is key for collaboration and dialogue as they should form the foundation of any exchange activity. Environmental issues came up multiple times as such a key topic, as well as historic relationships and interdependence of the Mekong Region and Taiwan, including the imagined geography of the Mekong Region. Both Taiwanese and Mekong participants also identified the friction between contemporary and traditional arts as an important topic that a collaboration could be based upon. Other ideas that emerged suggested stronger interlinkages with other sectors such as science and business, and formulated the need for different engagement models for emerging and advanced artists.





## Southeast Asian population in Taiwan



**90%**

of foreign nationals in Taiwan are from Southeast Asia (1.2m in total)



## Children in Taiwanese schools with at least one Southeast Asian parent

**5%**

of all children in schools have at least one parent from SEA



### Comment

Since 2018, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, Burmese, Khmer, Malay and Tagalog are taught in primary schools in Taiwan.

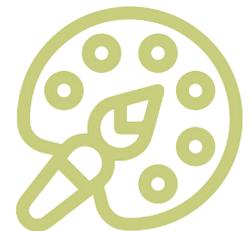


## Cultural Connection Between Taiwan and Southeast Asia



Since 2015, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of China (Taiwan) has a Southeast Asia Advisory Committee made up of artists and arts managers from the region as part of their Southbound Policy focusing on people-to-people exchange.

There are already several artistic connections between the Mekong Region and Taiwan, such as Emerald Initiative and Youth Cultural Gardeners.



### Comment

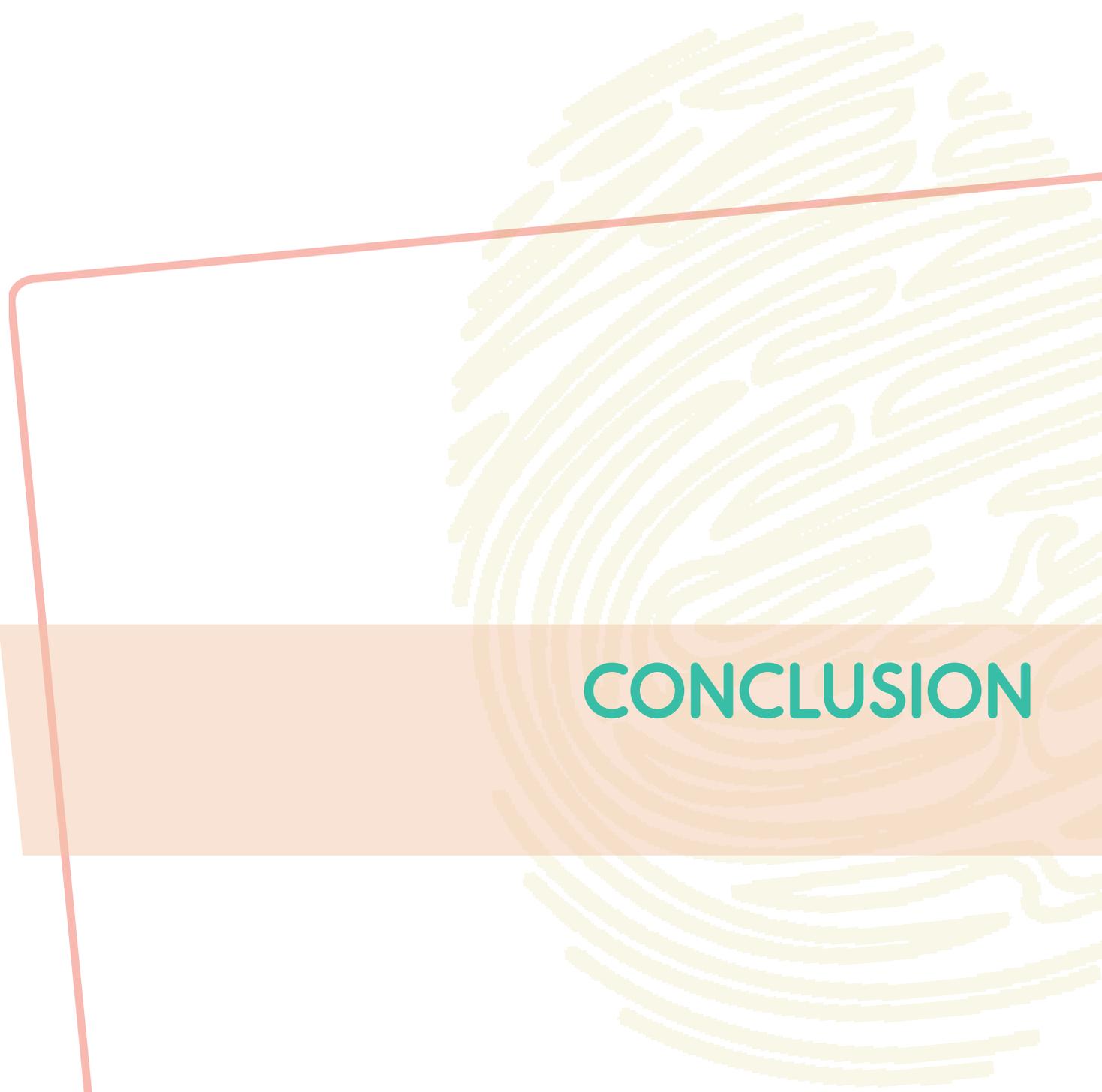
Myanmar and Laos currently have the fewest links to Taiwan.

Taiwanese workshop participants described their society as rather westernised with many links to US and Europe, and expressed a strong desire to connect more with Asia, specifically Southeast Asia, and to close knowledge gaps.

REFERENCES: Repositioning Taiwan in Southeast Asia: Strategies to Enhance People-to-People Connectivity; By Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao and Alan H. Yang; January 11, 2018

SE Asian languages to be included in school curriculum; From Taiwan Today 201w6-12-12

Taiwan's schools to offer courses in Southeast Asian languages; By Teng Pei-ju, Taiwan News, Staff Writer; 2017/10/13 15:43



# CONCLUSION





## Conclusion

What cannot be interpreted from this report is the dynamic energy of the workshop, which itself seems to indicate a strong desire from people to connect and collaborate and a lively participation. Main conclusions:

- People-to-people connections are the most important source of information and resources in the Mekong Region currently. These individual networks should be nurtured and expanded to include artists and arts managers who have had fewer opportunities, privileges and access.
- Artists care deeply about the way their countries are developing, especially when it comes to cultural diversity and identity as well as environmental issues, and would benefit from more education and support on how to implement their activities more deeply, effectively and collaboratively.
- There is a very strong interest for regional collaboration, and creating joint projects around common societal topics emerged as a natural way to enable such collaboration.
- There is strong potential for creative practitioners to influence how their own arts ecosystems are functioning. Offering opportunities to build skills and develop approaches, and to see other models that have been working could help them to be an active agent in their arts ecosystems and make a difference on a national level.
- Chances need to be created for people to organise projects and present work in their own countries and in their region. Local and regional issues addressed by the arts need to have a direct impact on local communities.
- Countries do not know each other well. Resource need to be invested to allow relationships to develop, people to exchange and to stimulate each other's creativity.
- Language is a barrier but we have to come to terms with it. If governments and funders want to help and grow networks and capacity, they should support training of English and/or other Mekong and ASEAN languages. And in the meantime, people organising training and exchange need to keep language simple and clear in order to make participation easier for a wider group of people and to ensure new voices and perspectives are included.

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