

FRIEND, ALLY, LEARNING PLATFORM, & EXPERIMENTATION GROUND

Mekong Cultural Hub:
THE FIRST FIVE YEARS



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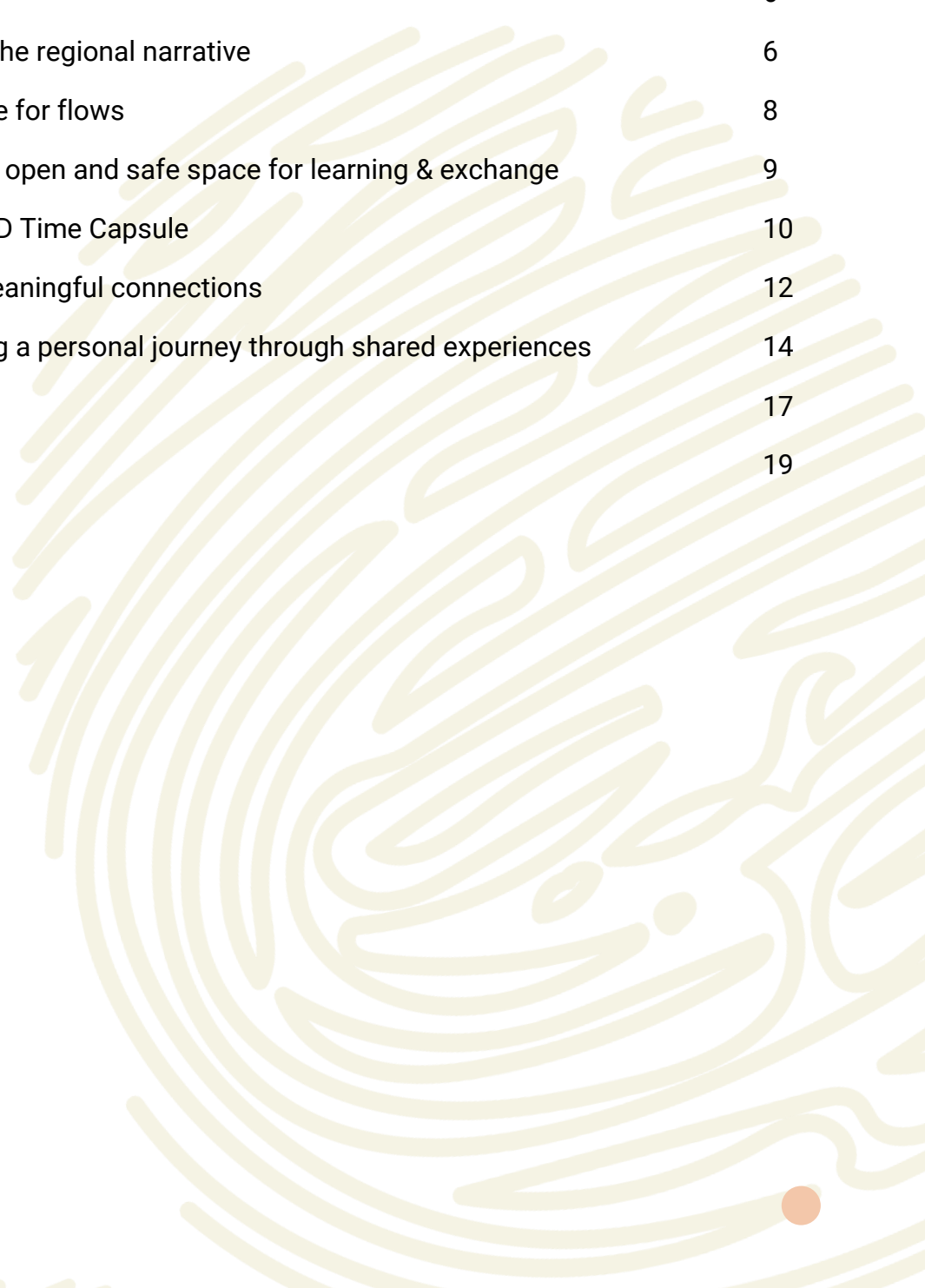
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FOREWORD

From the MCH Team

Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH) was born from a desire and an energy among cultural practitioners within Asia to connect with one another. For too long, the predominant modes and spaces for networking, exchange and skills development were situated in places and contexts far from the realities, opportunities and challenges that practitioners face in their day-to-day life and work. The simple act of connecting with peers from a neighboring country is still a rare and treasured opportunity for many practitioners, especially in the Mekong Region.

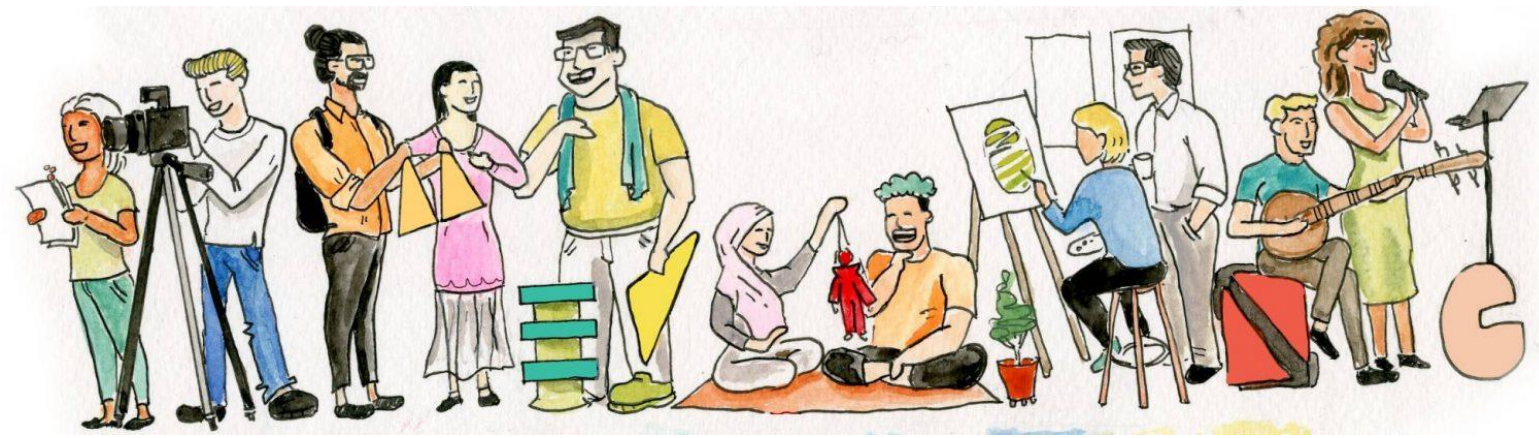
The work MCH has been doing so far has been guided by inputs from practitioners selected from the region each year since 2018, and designated as ‘Fellows’ of MCH. In 2018 we held a workshop with a group of nearly 20 Fellows, to hear what priorities they wanted MCH to focus on. At that workshop, they told us “MCH should make us feel safe, relaxed, joyful and inspired,” it should “be a resource,” “make us visible,” “connect us,” and “enable us to be creative and reflect.” We are delighted that five years on some of the words that Fellows have chosen to describe how they see MCH include “a home,” “a search engine,” “an ally,” and “a field for experimentation.” As we go into the next five years, we will continue to listen to our Fellows, adapting our approaches to keep meeting their needs. While our network has grown across Asia, best demonstrated by nearly 400 people coming together for the first Meeting Point in 2021, we continue to center the Mekong Region in our programs.

We also couldn’t do any of the work we do without the incredible network of local, regional and international peers and partners with whom we collaborate. Nearly every project and program we have been able to run in the past five years has been designed and delivered with at least one partner. This reflects our spirit and commitment to work with and learn from others, and to connect networks and experiences for the good of our wider community. We are deeply grateful to everyone we’ve worked with and look forward to working with both new and old friends in the coming years.

Despite the achievements of the past five years, the majority of the MCH Fellows network are working independently, with unstable income, operating on a project-to-project basis, juggling multiple jobs. They have a strong social conscience and a desire to make their work meaningful – but too often lack support, resources and training. Networks like MCH fill a gap in the ecosystem of the arts in Asia, especially socially-engaged arts. MCH serves as a hub to distribute information, to consult with on-the-ground workers, offering solidarity and raising visibility of the great work happening at the intersection of arts and society in Asia. We take this responsibility seriously and will do more in the next years to spotlight the successes and the issues facing our network.

Our core mission remains to empower our Fellows to bring to life *their* visions for a sustainable and inclusive Asia. And it is that which keeps us inspired. The greatest asset of MCH is our network, and it is their creativity, commitment and passion which continues to make this work worthwhile.





Empowering diverse cultural practitioners to bring to life their visions for an inclusive, sustainable Asia.

MEKONG CULTURAL HUB

Reflections on the first 5 years

Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH) was established in 2018 to address a systemic lack of connectivity among artists and cultural practitioners in Southeast Asia and the Mekong Region by working with people whose own work is at the intersection of arts and society. The priorities of the hub were established after an initial mapping project had identified that individual cultural practitioners, artists, and arts organizations in the Mekong Region share many of the same interests, priorities, challenges and constraints. These challenges range from a lack of resources, sensitive social and political contexts, limited access to in-country training and development, and few opportunities to exchange knowledge and collaborate with peers from neighboring countries. Threats to sustainability and the environment are increasingly tangible throughout the region.

MCH set out to initiate projects and work on collaborations all around Asia. Whereas the central focus is on Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, cultural practitioners from other parts of Southeast, East and South Asia have participated in one or more of the initiatives MCH has organized in its first five years. Since its foundation MCH has connected more than 150 practitioners from the region for professional exchange, co-creation and collaboration.

MCH is a sister organization of Cambodian Living Arts (CLA), which has been working in Cambodia since 1998. Both CLA and MCH are part of the Living Arts International (LAI) family. LAI is a non-profit organization whose vision is for a peaceful, sustainable future with living arts as a catalyst for change. MCH, CLA and LAI share the belief that arts are at the heart of a vital society, and this spirit is reflected throughout our programs. MCH grew out of CLA's Living Arts Fellows program and CLA's involvement in the Young Cultural Innovators program of Salzburg Global Seminar.

This paper presents the main themes that emerged from research conducted in 2022 by external researchers with fellows, alumni, mentors, and partners. The aim of the research was to assess the MCH network as it approaches the end of its fifth year of development.

Online feedback was requested through an opt-in survey to fellows and alumni who engaged with the Mekong Cultural Hub since 2018. The survey was sent to over 140 people and we received 46 responses, approximately a 32% response rate. The objective of the survey was to gather feedback on how people engage with MCH, the values they associate with this connection and their own insights into the organization and its work. Two focus groups were also held with MCH partners, collaborators, fellows and alumni.

THE MCH FELLOWS NETWORK 2018-2022

More than 150 practitioners from across Asia



● = one fellow

Network Development

Mekong Mapping & Research Visits

In its foundation year, MCH began by conducting a mapping survey of arts and culture practitioners from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. 10 Fellows from the five countries, helped to gather information and input from 200 people about their needs and expectations from regional exchange and network building. The Fellows, along with 8 peers from Taiwan, and 4 Advisors, spent 3 days in Phnom Penh to discuss the findings and help MCH develop program priorities.

Regional Reps

From 2019, we initiated the Regional Representatives program. We recruited two people from each of our priority target locations, to help grow the network by building bridges between their local arts communities. We had 12 people serving in this role during 2019-2022, and 11 people serving in 2020-21. The Reps organized several exchanges, initiated creative actions and designed and delivered group projects on topics including expression, eco-museums and urban regeneration.



Professional Exchange

MCH has run three versions of a Professional Exchange program, which focuses on skills development between peer practitioners. In the first edition, we supported 7 people to arrange 10-14 days in-person exchanges in Cambodia, Taiwan, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. During COVID we supported 4 people to conduct one-to-one exchanges online. In the third edition, three small groups exchanged practices related to project development, workshop facilitation and ethics through a series of virtual dialogues involving 13 practitioners.



Curated Conferences

COVID Time Capsule

Over 9 months in 2020-21, three small groups met every couple of weeks to discuss the impacts of COVID, navigating artistic practice in the Mekong region and perspectives on socially-engaged arts. The groups created virtual theatre, exhibitions, video poetry, photo essays and written texts, sharing the outcomes of their discussions with a public audience. In 2022, one group continued their collaboration, opening a virtual COVID time capsule for arts practitioners in Asia to deposit memories and stories.

Arts for Transformation Grants

The Arts for Transformation grants were open to existing MCH Fellows, in support of collaborative projects. With funding of over \$30,000 USD, 10 Fellows were able to implement projects addressing topics as diverse as water management, the present and future of traditional performing arts, and the Rohingya crisis.

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

Cultural Leadership

SEAD

From 2018 to 2021, MCH collaborated with British Council to run the SEAD Fellowship, on culture, leadership and sustainable development. For each of 3 years, we selected 10 Fellows, from Southeast Asia, UK and Taiwan. Each group went through four workshops: EXCHANGE, CREATE, SHARE & REFLECT. Fellows initiated creative collaborations linked to Sustainable Development Goals and reflected on their practice as cultural leaders. In 2020 and 2021, Fellows worked with biotrade projects run by Helvetas, to explore collaboration across arts and development.



DeltaX



A program for SEAD alumni. Fellows worked in small groups, guided by a Curator. Each group produced creative reflections on working at the intersection of arts and society.

Cultural Policy Workshop

MCH has worked with partners including Asia Arts Management (Japan) and Cambodian Living Arts to organize small group conferences on topics such as cultural policy and empowering communities through arts & management. We convened over 40 people to exchange experiences and produce case studies.

AAM Conference

AAM

Meeting Point:
Revealing
ContextsMeeting Point:
From Connection
to Collaboration

In 2021, MCH hosted its first Meeting Point on Art & Social Action. Following the enthusiastic participation from nearly 400 people across Asia, a second gathering took place in 2022, with over 300 participants. The platform brings together people interested in socially-engaged arts in Asia and offers space to connect and showcase work happening in the region. The program is built up over 6-12 months, with MCH Fellows producing sessions, creating participatory art work and hosting local gatherings in their communities.

Publications

Arresting Art

Art & SocialAction
Case Studies

AAM

Connecting
the Dots

Over three years, MCH has collaborated with Artists at Risk Connection and Forum Asia to convene two closed-door workshops and publish two reports addressing the risks artists face across Asia. We also collaborated with AAM to produce and publish four case studies about art and social action: Think Playgrounds in Vietnam, Peace Poetry Festival in Myanmar, My Library in Laos and Klongtoey in Thailand. As of December 2022, totally 14 reports can be found on the MCH Resources page: www.mekongculturalhub.org/resources

Arts for Transformation:
The Case of the Mekong

MCH has curated creative work and case studies generated by our Fellows network into a seminar course for undergraduate students, titled *Arts for Transformation: The Case of the Mekong Region*. The course was taught for the first time at NYU Abu Dhabi in 2022, with 14 Fellows joining as guest lecturers, facilitators and speakers.

Policy & Advocacy



IMPACTS FROM THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

≡ *Research Findings*



Impact 1: Expanding the regional narrative

The participation in MCH by people from across Asia has helped widen the knowledge of different regional contexts and opened new creative opportunities beyond the usual geopolitical connections.



MCH required a shift in the way I view Southeast Asian countries. There was a realization that their experiences were unique and different from the way I've seen them before. There's a tendency to see Southeast Asia as the same, perhaps cause we're all dealing with imperial powers,, etc. Then you realize that the experience of countries in the Mekong is also very distinct and that brings them together very differently from the way I have seen them all my life.

Katrina Santiago, the Philippines

Expanding the regional narrative has also been of value to organizations such as [Arts Equator](#). As stated by Kathy Rowland, co-founder and editor, "MCH provides visibility for the Northern parts of Southeast Asia for those who are quite Sout- looking, and it helps people understand a little bit more because the history is quite different."



SURVEY RESULTS

48%

strongly agree that MCH provided them with new perspectives on the arts in Asia



Fellows gain perspective by being exposed to other realities in the region. As highlighted by Taiwanese MCH fellow Jerome Wang, the political conditions of every country are not the same. "As an artist, we probably have no power to fix all the practical problems. Knowing another side of the world gives me the strength to continue when I encounter problems in my work."

The regional context also provides fellows with opportunities to expand their potential when reaching a glass ceiling on a local level. Dorn Bouttasing, artist and MCH fellow from Laos has been working within a rural community for years. "The way of working is the same and it's hard to progress onto other levels. After participating with MCH I have had the chance to share my work with an international audience."

Partners who collaborate with MCH also found value in the deep connections they establish at a regional level with both the organization and the team. Manojna Yeluri, Artist at Risk Connection's (ARC) Asia Regional Representative, remarked how ARC relies on stakeholders and networks such as MCH. "With MCH's knowledge of the landscape in the region and the Mekong region in particular – there is a lot of trust and a relationship with grassroots organizations."

There is a lot of trust and a relationship with grassroots organizations

Dian Ika Gesuri, Indonesian independent researcher, observed how MCH is always open to the ever-changing landscape of the arts in the region. "They get to know the people and the partners they work with not just to collaborate but also to cultivate relationships. MCH is open to any type of dialogue and is not shy to ask difficult questions. They really get to know their partners and the people they are working with. As a group we can do better together and really push for the value of arts and culture in the region, especially when support is not always available."

MCH is not shy to ask difficult questions

Commenting on the role of MCH within the region, Kathy Rowland, stated that within the institutional landscape of Southeast Asia, MCH and what it sets out to achieve is unique. "Creative collaborations in the region are often funded through an imbalanced power dynamic that is often driven by national agendas. MCH brings together different blocks within the region, trying to connect not an obvious group of countries."

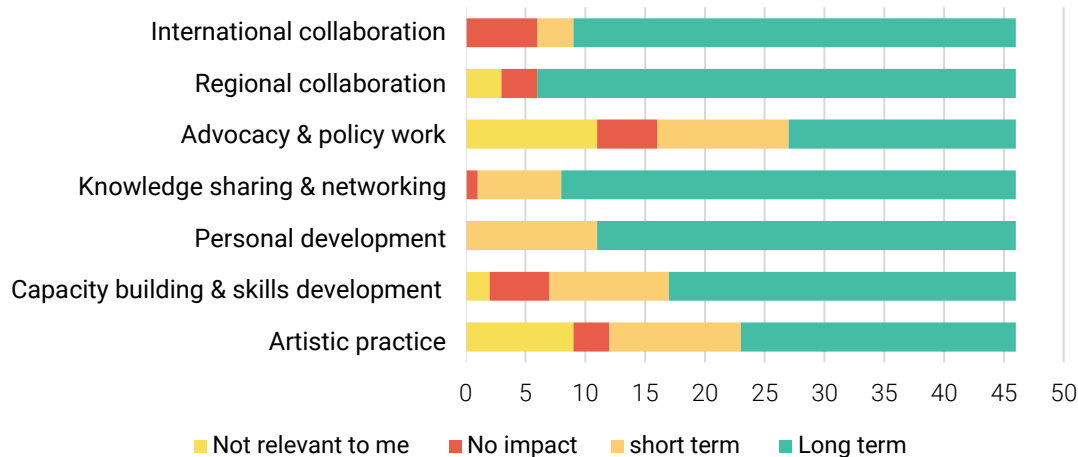


SURVEY RESULTS

- **Regional collaboration** emerged as the most impactful long-term outcome from the respondents' participation in MCH
- The most registered short-term outcomes were artistic practice, personal development and advocacy & policy work
- Across all impact indicators identified in the survey, **68%** were considered by respondents to be **long term**.



Short and long-term impacts of engagement with MCH



CASE STUDY

Space for Flows

By Regina Yuching Lin, Taiwan, Khin Thethar Latt (Nora) Myanmar, Raslene, Indonesia

Space for Flows is a group of three female artists/artisans from Taiwan, Indonesia and Myanmar. They first met during an MCH Fellowship (SEAD 3) during 2021 and over the past year they have been coming together in their online space where they can freely share ideas, thoughts, feelings - whatever they are facing and experiencing in the current time. This started from their own shared challenges as female artists in Asia, and the changes they have experienced in their respective contexts over recent years. From forces of patriarchy, gender stereotypes, social space, political control, and pandemic threats they felt a shared sense that their space was shrinking. They asked themselves: after twenty years of expansion in social and cultural spaces, how do female artists feel and react to an ever-shrinking world? Although they haven't yet had the chance to meet in person, their online coming together gives them much needed Space for Flows through the co-creation of projects such as In small Things Forgotten and Remembered.

What triggered the creation of the project?

In Small Things Forgotten and Remembered targets young female artists/artisans from Taiwan, Indonesia and Myanmar and asks what impacts the period of COVID and associated unrests have brought to them, their lives, and artistic practices. What did they lose and/or discover? If COVID and other associated unrests end tomorrow, are there some things they don't want to lose and forget? Through this collaborative project, we try to capture activities, practices, thinking and dialogues of young female artists/artisans from Taiwan, Indonesia and Myanmar, in this seemingly ever-shrinking "new normal." In Small Things Forgotten and Remembered aims to provide a micro-level perspective, from the lenses of gender, ethnicity, practices and everyday life, to counter the macro narrative of high politics which tends to dominate and define what this era is about.

What value does regional cooperation give to the project?

The team, Space for Flows, and the project, In Small Things Forgotten and Remembered are embodiments of regional cooperation growing out of the platform provided by MCH, to explore and understand the deeper level of regional problems.

Were there any challenges to the co-creation and co-management of the project?

So far it is good, the communication was good, the understanding was great, and most importantly, the support we gave each other was super helpful.

How important was MCH in the process and in the implementation of the project?

Without the fellowship program, this project wouldn't have been initiated and wouldn't happen today.

What was the impact of the project on you and on the other fellows?

The exploration, the findings, and the learnings from each sub-project we are working

Are you planning any future projects together?

Yes, hopefully we can manage a mini-exhibition in three countries for the research we are working on now.



Impact 2: Enabling an open and safe space for learning and exchange

MCH has been instrumental in providing a safe and open space, both virtual and physical, for shared knowledge and exchange across the region.



Based on the experiences with MCH, I still want to connect with fellows from Mekong. From 2020, COVID19 outbreak and the tragedy in Myanmar, I realized that the freedom of the people is limited. Through art and exchange programs, I am looking for platforms where people can tell their stories, share their concerns through different forms such as poems, writing, film, theater, manga,,, etc... I know that it is somehow risky to talk about politics directly and publicly. The same problem happens all over the world, and I think it is urgent to speak about it now.

Fellow, Myanmar

Fellows commented how MCH provided them with the mental space and the emotional support to have difficult conversations across diverse topics such as freedom of expression, human rights, and cultural work. Fellows also stated that their MCH experience was an opportunity to learn from their peers, often inspiring them and giving them courage to continue their journey.

MCH provides fellows with mental space and emotional support

The process of multilayered support and mutuality is indicative of the level of engagement that each fellow is voluntarily invited to contribute to – be it in its governance such as the work of the Regional Representatives or in curatorial matters such as the Meeting Points. As fellows learn about new people, new contexts, and work with people with different skills, they are also developing themselves as part of the process.



SURVEY RESULTS

85%

expressed a **high level of satisfaction** with the MCH programs they participated in, with a score of four or five out of five.

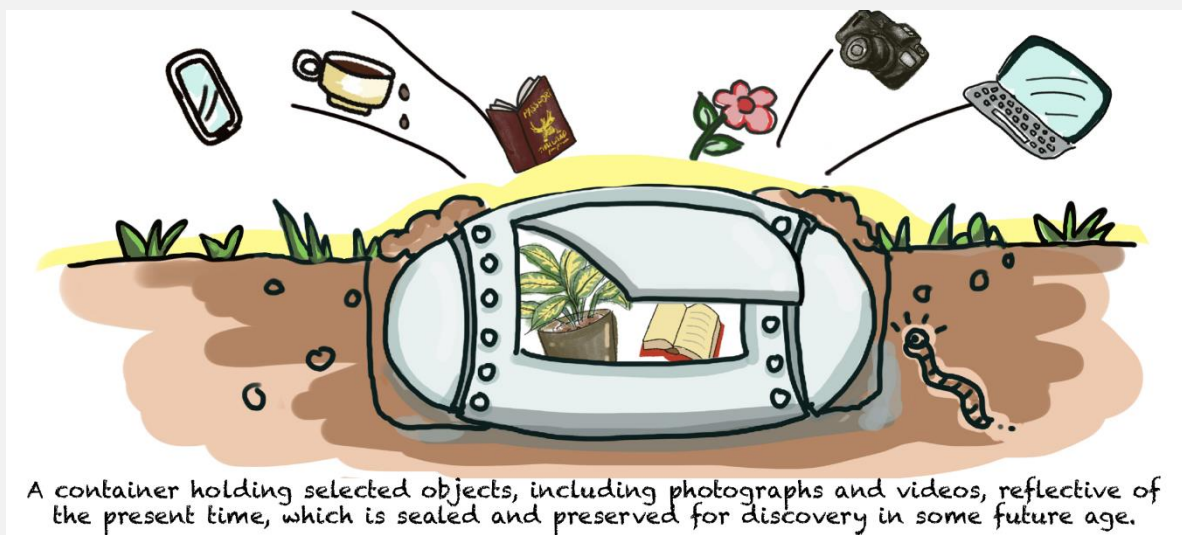


Dian Ika Gesuri noted that MCH is not only about the depth of the feeling when participating in its activities but the depth of the thinking when engaging in any of the programs. “You must have the emotional capacity to listen to other people. The diversity can take place because MCH has the attitude to contain the ideas rather than being a decisive organization with a preset agenda.”

CASE STUDY

COVID Time Capsule

Arief Hamizan, Malaysia; Narumol Thammapraksa (Kop), Thailand;
YuChing Lin (Regina), Taiwan; and Jeffrey Tan, Singapore



The artists have been involved with MCH since 2020, beginning with the Curated Conference on COVID and the arts, facilitated by Anmol Vellani from Bengaluru, India. Each artist developed a creative project as an imaginative response to the year-long discussions and research, which were presented at Meeting Point 2021. They decided to continue the monthly conversations for another year and came up with the collaborative COVID Time Capsule project, which was presented at Meeting Point 2022.

The COVID Time Capsule is a virtual project that invited artists and other people associated with the arts from different parts of Asia and the world, to contribute a picture of an 'object' and recount (in written, video and/or audio form) how it captures for them an enduring memory of the pandemic. They also conducted physical local workshops in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore to begin the process of generating contributions to the time capsule through a face-to-face exchange between invited participants. The COVID Time Capsule remains a live project and new contributions continue to be added to the collection.

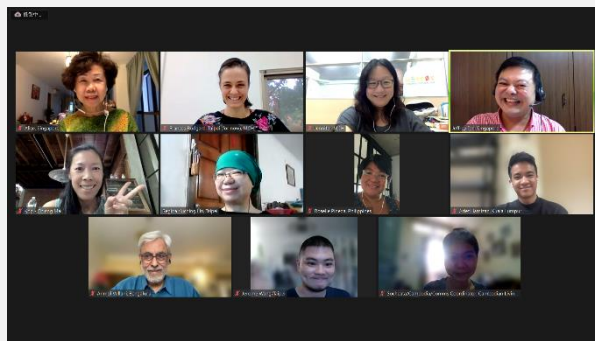
What triggered the creation of the project?

The primary trigger was the group's concern about the likely disappearance of discoveries and knowledge in the arts that were gathered in restrictive COVID times, especially new art-making methods and innovative art projects. The idea initially proposed—to document a handful of outstanding COVID-inspired projects—was abandoned for various reasons, but the original concern lingered in the COVID Time Capsule project, although the latter was wider in scope, as it aimed to capture a larger universe of COVID-related stories and memories of people in the arts.

Were there any challenges to the co-creation and co-management of the project?

Due the re-opening of borders, all four group members were traveling at different times during the execution of the project. Thus, it was challenging to find common meeting times and to schedule our various in-person workshops, but we managed.

Projects co-created by culturally diverse partners can get stalled by disputes and misunderstandings, but ours was a positive collaboration, wherein we built on each other's ideas, and generously accommodated viewpoints different from ours. Perhaps the year we had already spent working on another project had forged mutual trust, empathy and understanding, making our subsequent interactions entirely constructive and trouble-free. We worked together like a group of old friends, not merely as collaborating artists who had converged to undertake a particular project.



How important was MCH in the implementation of the project?

MCH was crucial in the implementation of the project. Without their grant and technical support, it would have been impossible for us to start off on this project or keep it going or ensure that it came to a satisfactory conclusion! Particularly critical to the smooth functioning of the project was the creation and management of the project's web page, for which MCH staff took responsibility.

What was the impact of the project on you and on the other fellows?

The COVID Time Capsule project demonstrated the vital need for artists to have a platform to share their reflections, especially to make sense of what they had experienced in the immediate past, to ask questions that nobody raises and to delve into areas of experience that might otherwise not be recalled or recorded. It was heart-warming to see how this project opened conversations with people beyond our usual circles. The nature of the submissions to the time capsule—which memorialized suffering and loss, while celebrating human ingenuity and courage—astonished us at times, going well beyond what we had collectively imagined. Finally, the contributions shifted our own respective experiences of COVID into fresh perspective, helping us to process them with new eyes.



Are you planning any future projects together?

We are still processing the impact of this project and have some thoughts for a new project which could be presented in two years' time at the next Meeting Point in 2024.

www.mekongculturalhub.org/COVID-time-capsule



Impact 3: Creating meaningful connections

In the past five years MCH has built a community with a sense of purpose and connection that goes beyond the measurable outcomes of its programs. MCH fellows, alumni, mentors and partners demonstrate a deep and personal connection with the organization and the diverse people who make MCH.

Dian Ika Gesuri stated that MCH has the capacity to see the values of each person and connect these values together. "MCH is great at creating an environment where people can share who they are. By being that person, the other person entering the room can feel safe in also being whoever they are."

Spaces for solidarity and commonality

Fellows expressed consensus about the fluidity and the diversity that MCH allows to exist. MCH fellow Katrina Santiago stated that MCH doesn't require participants to view things in one way. "It welcomes this complexity and allows the diverse contexts to exist. It tries to find spaces for solidarity and commonality and if there are none then nothing is forced upon us any of us. There's never any pressure to come up with something right. It's always exploratory and experimental and that perhaps is what allows it to be very dynamic."

Allows it to be very dynamic

Research participants remarked how MCH is one of the few organizations that is process oriented. MCH facilitator Janet Pillai highlighted how 'MCH allows both participants and mentors to develop a process that is suited to a particular time or condition. This allows space for experimentation to take place at a comfortable pace and in ways in which young people organize themselves.'

Anmol Vellani, theatre director, writer and teacher from India, identified MCH as one of the few organizations that has understood that collaboration is much more than an in-out, time bound process. "It has the generosity to understand that collaboration can take all kinds of directions. MCH has understood what collaboration could mean, what it involves, its risks and how much time it takes

There's meaning in bringing people together

on the ground to develop something that matures into something meaningful between participants. It's not just about ending up in something in which you will exhibit or perform but there's meaning in bringing people together." It is the personalized approach toward collaboration that has ultimately made MCH's work so meaningful and successful over these years.

Janet Pillai highlighted how the MCH team has very good and strong knowledge of the interests and strengths of all participants making project partnerships and collaborations easier and more personalized. MCH fellow Wilson Yeung stated that "MCH has an excellent cross-cultural team who provides professional and engaging ways to engage our creative community while providing us with community cultural development skills and creative approaches in the Asian region."

Programs such as SEAD and DeltaX (a program for SEAD alumni) allow fellows to get to know themselves better. The reflective part of the process is key, and participants embrace their friendships and are supportive of each other through a sense of togetherness and emotional connection. This was even more meaningful during the pandemic, where virtual engagement became the only option. As stated by one fellow from Myanmar, “It’s not really the project that we are benefiting from but it’s the presence of the people we are doing the project with, the time and the quality of time with them. The most valuable thing is the emotional connection that is created through this process together.”

Connection is created through the process together



SURVEY RESULTS

81% of respondents strongly agree that MCH helped them **meet new people**

Mentors and facilitators observed how fellows had been spontaneously supportive of each other. For example, they noted how initially, fellows were reluctant to reflect on their projects and those of others but slowly began to contribute more to what the others were producing. Over time it became more comfortable for them because of the trust and friendship that was developed over many years. Meaningful connections require time and the space for relationships to develop and for trust to be built. It is not by sheer coincidence that many fellows and alumni have participated in more than one MCH program. This allows them to engage through different programs with different people across the region through a process of sharing, learning, and collaboration over a few years.

MCH connections have also led to new collaborations outside the organization. As demonstrated in the Space for Flows case study, MCH served as an important platform for the three artists to meet, leading them to develop new collaborations based on mutual interests and concerns, independently of MCH.



SURVEY RESULTS

65% of respondents stated that they somewhat or to a great extent **collaborated independently** with fellows outside of MCH



The meaningful impact of MCH is not exclusive to its fellows and alumni but also to its mentors and facilitators. Anmol Vellani, theatre director, writer and teacher from India who has also mentored MCH fellows recalls how much he has learned from just being involved with MCH and the positive impact it has left on his own intellectual growth, the connections he has made and the projects he has created.



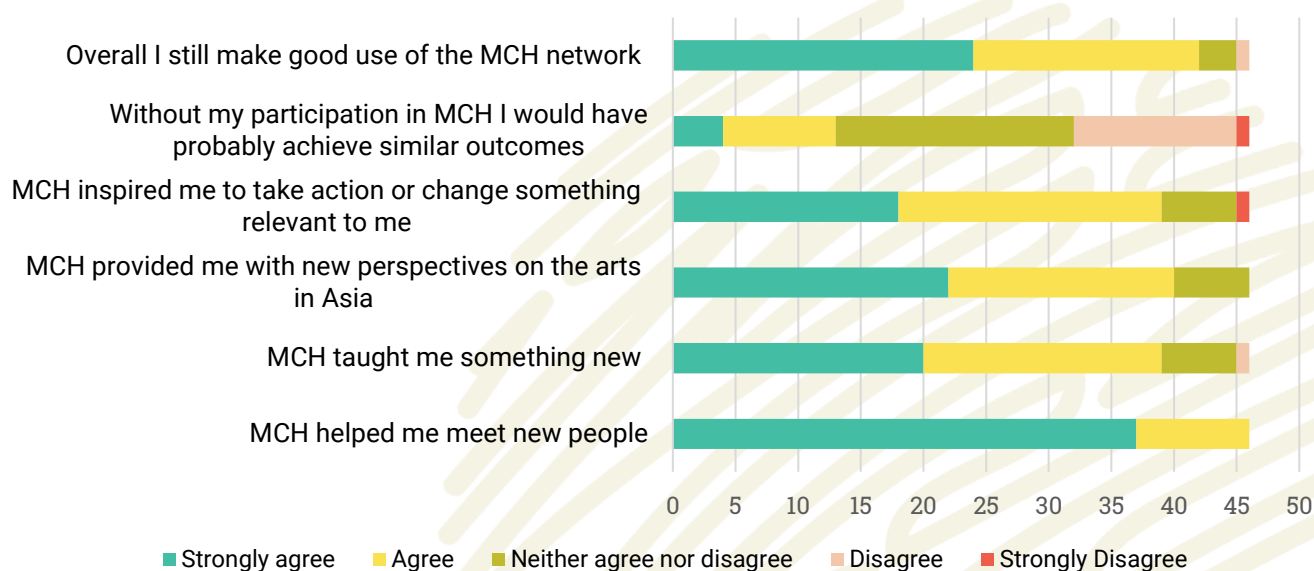
Impact 4: Empowering a personal journey through shared experiences

While fellows may have participated in the same programs, their journeys have been unique and personal; inspired by the encounters they made, the mentoring they received or their intellectual curiosity, each person's experience is rooted in a process of change, reflection and action. Some have radically shifted their perspectives and others have sought new career paths. Most made new friends and others followed new creative opportunities.



SURVEY RESULTS

What participating in MCH activities has resulted in for Fellows



A word cloud generated from the survey inviting fellows to share what they value most in participating in MCH illustrates some commonalities among respondents, namely, **arts, people, networking, experiences, friendship, sharing and knowledge.**



During the focus group, fellows also discussed what MCH meant to them. Without prompting, they attributed different characteristics to the organization, highlighting the specificity that shaped their individual MCH experience.

MCH as *a* mother

MCH is a mother with strong leadership and a team that is giving and supportive, especially during COVID. It is flexible in approach and matches the needs and desires of the participants. MCH is like family.

Joanne Mun, Malaysia

Research participants lauded the openness and empathic approach of the MCH team in providing support and assistance to each fellow.

MCH as a home

We can't all be present face-to-face but for me a home is a space for sharing, a space for exchange and a space for connection with other artists. MCH is a second home.

Soy Chanborey, Cambodia

The virtual and physical spaces that MCH has created over time, ranging from curated programs to open forums for conversation, from workshops to fellow-led initiatives, have been instrumental in creating a welcoming space.



MCH as a friend

I never think of MCH as a funder but as an organization that helps us grow as a professional. The relationship is dynamic, and the approach is friendly.

Gayatri Nadya, Indonesia

Participants described most funders as faceless and remote, while MCH is seen to be closer to artists without a prescribed relationship of ‘funder and beneficiary.’ As outlined by Manojna Yeluri, “MCH is not just about funding but also about wellbeing and human rights. It is valuable that MCH can guide people in the right direction informally through its vast network.”



MCH as an ally

In Southeast Asia and in the Philippines, you don't really have a lot of allies, or you don't feel like you have a lot of people who want to listen, so MCH really provided me with the space to speak about things that were important to me.

Katrina Santiago, the Philippines



MCH as a field for experimentation

MCH is more like a ground for experimentation because they don't really tell you what you must do but you get to decide what you want to do. What you get from it is a result of your own decision.

Regina Yuching Lin, Taiwan



MCH as a learning platform

MCH is a learning platform where you get to know people and their work by attending events and engaging with them. I learnt more from the people, the issues that they work on and from the cultural differences.

Lattapol Jir, Thailand

Anmol Vellani describes MCH as an extremely strong learning organization. “It is very fluid, and it is self-correcting. This is a rare quality which is not easily achieved given the width of the constituency and the areas across which it works. Being in conversation with so many different people requires significant investment in time and resources. This culture is inbuilt in MCH’s way of working. MCH has the right attitude to go about doing it.”



MCH as a search engine

MCH connects you to the person you need to exchange ideas. It's a kind of search engine where I can find anything I want.

Bin Kiphavong, Lao PDR

ONTO THE NEXT 5.



The goals that MCH has set out to achieve 5 years ago are even more valid today. With growing political authoritarianism, artists unable to connect because of COVID and artists getting the least attention from governments, there is greater need to build solidarity among themselves and across regions to be mutually supportive.

Anmol Vellani, Facilitator

In 5 years, MCH has set the foundations for a fluid and dynamic platform that is built on grassroots organizational culture that is transformative, empowering, and empathic. Participants have experienced deep connections with the work of MCH and it has served as a catalyst for their personal and professional growth.

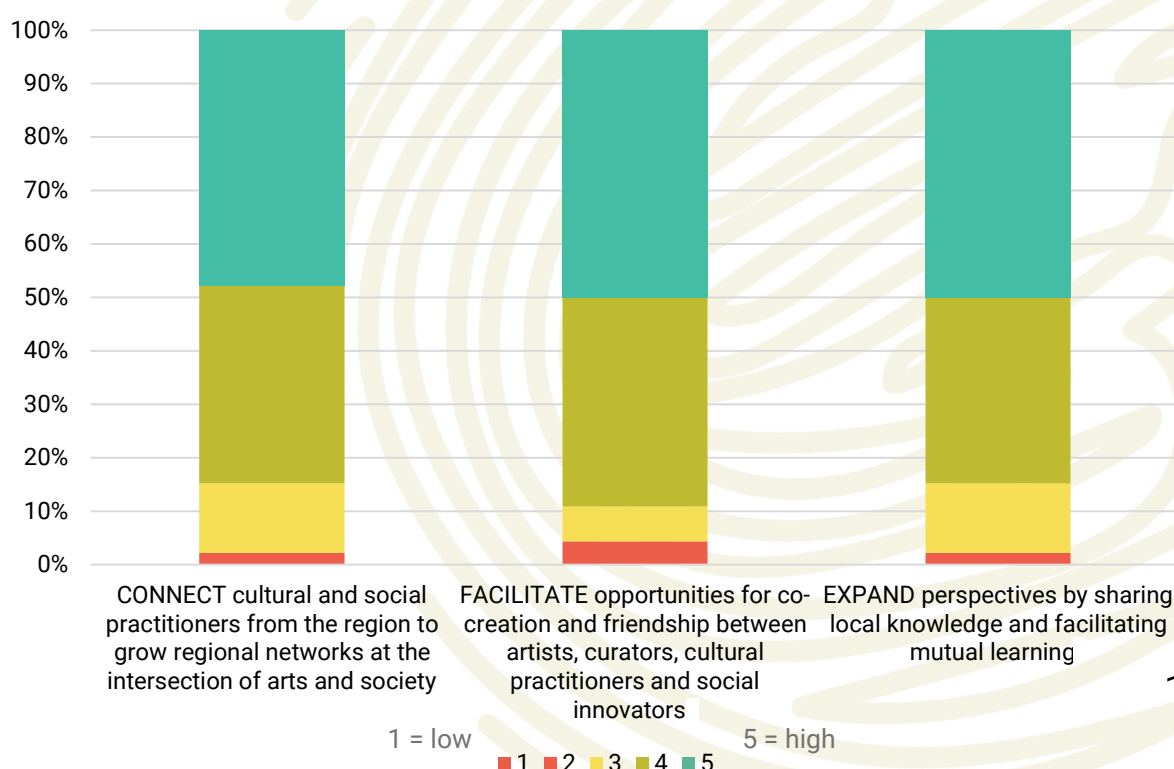
Some participants have highlighted some challenges, particularly during the pandemic and noted that the disruption caused by COVID created diverse experiences. In looking forward, those who experienced MCH activities in person remarked on the importance and value of the human connection and recommended that face-to-face connections remain especially since virtual connections have been normalized in a post-pandemic environment.

Other recommendations included longer engagement in programs and more efforts to facilitate further opportunities for collaborations.



SURVEY RESULTS

How effectively does MCH....



The sense of urgency to speak and act about cultural and social matters remains

Fellows, alumni, partners, and mentors agree on the urgency and relevance of extending MCH's original mission to the next 5 years. The sense of urgency to speak and act about cultural, social, environmental, and political matters, in increasingly hostile contexts, remains vital and is arguably more pressing than ever.

A balancing act is required to ensure that the fluid approach and deep engagement that has defined the organization's success is sustained, while widening its reach to those who so far have been unable to participate.

Arts and artistic expression are not confined to the cultural sector but are in fact embedded in the fabric of everyone's life and manifest themselves in many different forms. It is in the best interest of any cultural organization to be fluid and engage with as many different people from different sectors as possible to amplify the potential and relevance of arts and culture in a heated planet, rife with conflicts.

MCH's role as an Asian-led organization for cultural practitioners in the region has had a significant long-term impact on those who have had the privilege to form part of the MCH family. People are the organization's best assets, and its mission has been validated and remains critically important. As MCH moves forward, its fellows, alumni and partners continue to seek value in what MCH stands for – connectivity, co-creation, friendship, knowledge and learning.

MCH will continue to remain relevant while its fellows continue to seek value in what it stands for



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Supporters & Partners

During the first five years



Mekong Cultural Hub is a regional initiative of Living Arts International, a non-profit organization which believes the arts are at the heart of every vital society. Living Arts International's other initiatives include Cambodian Living Arts.



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