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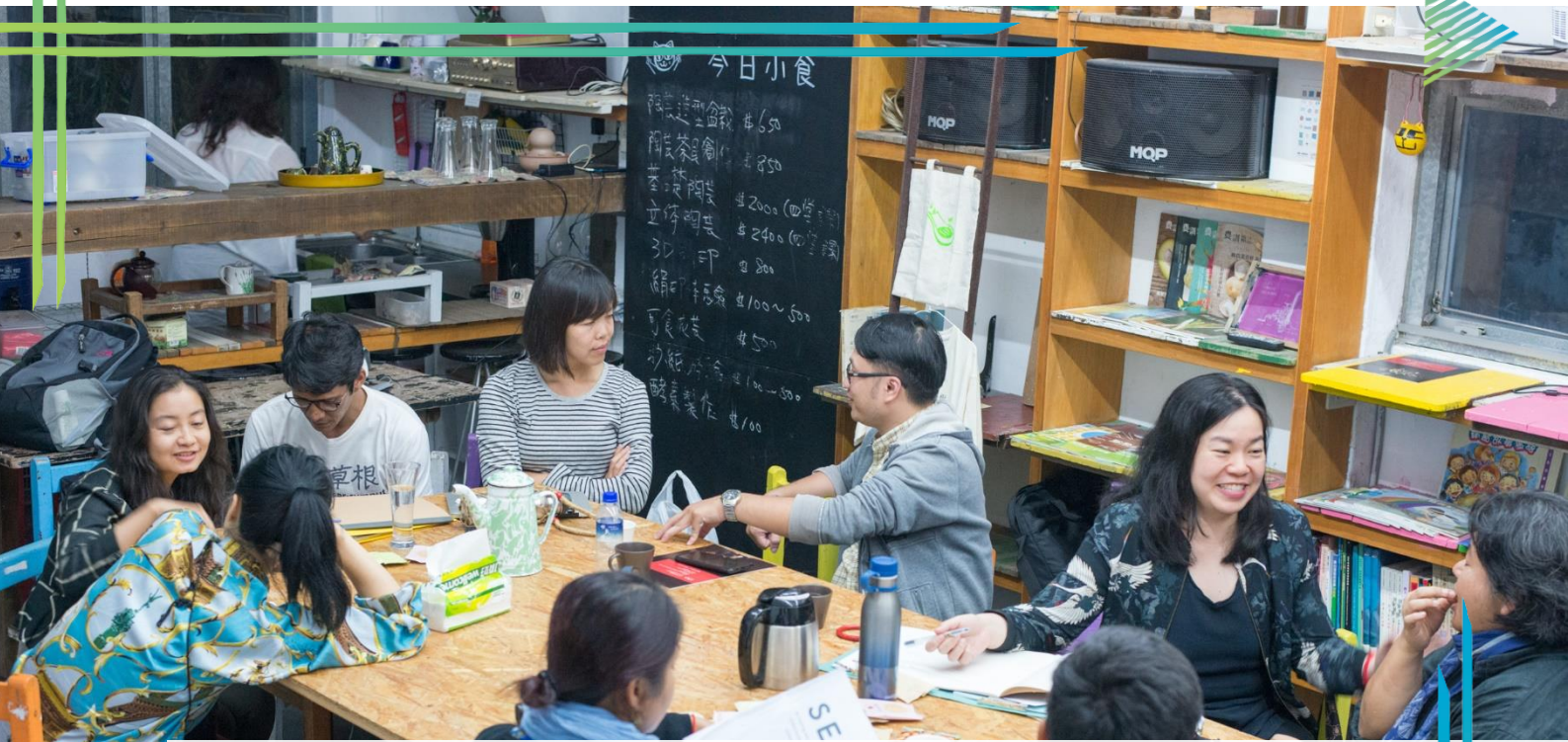
Growth, Vision, Reflection & Listening

Review and Reflections on SEAΔ Fellowship 2018-2021

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Abridged Version

Contents

Introduction

SEAΔ is a programme co-created by Mekong Cultural Hub and British Council that creates space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective leadership. From its first year of implementation in 2018 to the third year in 2020, SEAΔ selected 10 Fellows from 10 countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

This independent review and reflection is initiated by British Council and Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH) upon entering the third year of SEAΔ programme, to see how their effort to support arts and cultural practitioners' individual and collective leadership through this programme aligns with its main goal in expanding the arts and culture contribution to the sustainable development in Southeast Asia.

As a context, the lens of cultural leadership as an overarching research question was initially used as an angle to frame this review and reflection. There were two key questions to be answered by this review and reflection:

- What can this programme tell us about cultural leadership in Southeast Asia?
- What can we learn/share from this programme when designing programmes or initiatives to support cultural leaders from Southeast Asia in future?

Over the course of the year 2021 and the beginning of 2022, this review gathered the learnings from people involved in SEAΔ and their input informed that leadership did not appear as a strong element that would describe their whole experiences and learning throughout the years. Hence, their input has eventually informed a necessity to use a new angle to frame this review and reflection, in order to capture the richness and nuance of the collective learnings as much and as effectively as possible. Therefore, new key questions were added:

1. To what extent can programmes like SEAΔ contribute to sustainable development in Southeast Asia?
2. What are the key lessons for multi-sectoral collaborations (arts and culture sector working with the social & international development sectors) that have been learnt through this programme which could be shared to others seeking to contribute to the sustainable development goals through cross-sectoral partnerships?

Please note: This document is an abridged version of the findings from the review. Please visit the link below to read the full report:

www.mekongculturalhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SEAD-Report_Full-version.pdf

A. About SEAΔ

The programme was co-created and co-organised by MCH and British Council. Three Advisors, Marco Kusumawijaya, Tran Luong and Janet Pillai, were involved from the conception to the end of the programme. Throughout the three years, the programme activities were designed and facilitated by Creative Facilitators, Sudebi Thakurata and Nicola Turner. From the second edition of the program. Swiss development organisation, Helvetas joined the team as an implementing partner.

Each year, SEAΔ brought together 10 fellows from across Southeast Asia, Taiwan and the UK to learn from the process and shared activities where each activity was a build, gradually executed leading up to a whole journey of the programme.

EXCHANGE. Setting up the the common ground, a number of areas of concern made commonly understood for the fellows in the beginning of every SEAΔ:

- Mapping the geographical and cultural origins of each of the fellows. Observing and reflecting on the current changes in their region and across the globe, spotting if there are gaps occurred, etc.
- Working around *words.* Since fellows came from various linguistic backgrounds and there was no common language, sharing vocabularies and building common vocabularies, revisiting certain words and concepts to see what they mean to different people and how they could evolve as the fellows' practices evolve.
- Stimulating senses or non-verbal ways of communicating to help making the internal thinking visible to everyone.

CREATE. Creative collaboration was designed to be a container that enables fellows to incorporate SDGs by connecting their creative ideas with development context (Biotrade context since year two) and to exercise their *leadership* or even *cultural leadership* capacity. The emphasis of this kind of creative collaboration was not on its 'project' form, but rather on the process within that collaboration where the experiential learning happened, including the process to redefine the notion of *leadership* and *cultural leadership* that are specific to Southeast Asia context, since their current definitions are mainly informed by Euro-centric perspectives. Within that process also, the facilitators see the core value of a programme like SEAΔ lies. It is when the fellows can shape each other's thoughts through their art forms and/or cultural understanding, even if they are not necessarily working together in a group. It would be a success of the SEAΔ programme if the collaborations could happen at a much larger level, where fellows could help and inform each other, shape each other in seeing the world and caring about the world. Therefore, it is important for the fellows to set a common ground as a starting point of their collective growth during and after the programme.

SHARE. Fellows were encouraged to be more articulate in presenting what they have done, what stories they have chosen, what voices they are representing or not, as well as the kind of SDGs that could be covered directly and indirectly, to regional or global audiences.

REFLECT. Various methodologies of reflecting were introduced to the fellows: from stories to anecdotes, from photos to documentation of different sorts. The reflections could be of their own values, network, future plans, where do they see themselves, how do they want to build their network, etc.

In the first edition of the programme, each of the four workshops described above took place in person, in a different country. A significant shift happened when SEAΔ 1 transitioned to SEAΔ 2, due to the new partnership with Helvetas, which continued in SEAΔ 3. Although the designs of SEAΔ 2 & 3 look similar, the delivery of SEAΔ 2 & 3 were affected by COVID-19 pandemic differently. In SEAΔ 2, fellows still had a chance to meet in person (offline) during the Exchange and Create (visit to the Biotrade project sites) before the COVID-19 pandemic took full effect, and later moved to the online platform for Share and Reflect. This means, the fellows had a chance to build the relationships among them and with the facilitators before transitioning to an online platform. In SEAΔ 3, as the pandemic had taken a full effect, the whole programme was fully moved to an online platform.

B. SEAΔ Learning Outcomes

Learnings on Leadership

Leadership - is one of the notions that was used to describe what SEAΔ is, and has always been there throughout its three years of implementation:

> **"** *a space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective **leadership**.* **"**

The term *leadership* has often been talked about from the Euro-centric perspective. SEAΔ wanted to enrich this perspective by being committed to nurturing Southeast Asia cultural specificity on leadership out of the awareness that the approaches and structures of creative practitioners in Southeast Asia are different from those of Western approach, and are valuable to the global discourses on creative and cultural leadership.

Though there is no unified definition of *leadership* or *cultural leadership* in Southeast Asia that could be agreed by all the fellows, some ideas around it were gathered during the interviews with SEAΔ fellows and almost everyone has different ideas about what *leadership* is. However, the input gathered below could give us insights for the future SEAΔ programme.

- Leadership is working from own heart towards others' heart.

> **"** *People realised when they worked with me, they really liked it. I think I have a good personality. I can maintain relationships for very long. I do what I say, and it really comes out from my heart. People gave a lot of good feedback (of the festival) and they wanted it to continue. That has been a big motivation for me to keep going. It is good to know that the community feels that the festival is important for them, so it is not only about what I think is important.* **"**
>
> *− SEAΔ 1 fellow*

- Leadership is being assured and confident in own capacity and value.

> **"** *Before, I would be more aggressive, I would try to promote myself and ask people "do you want to work together?"... I would try to propose. But in the past few years, I don't promote myself anymore and rather wait for the proper moment to come. Amazingly, in the past few years, I've had more stable work than before. Maybe because some people appreciate what I do, and they feel confident engaging me to work with them. So they just reach out for me. People that I've worked with would continually invite me to work with them. That means they trust me. Also I would like to be invited to more projects that are connected with critical social practice. People always ask me to do more and think deeper with my work.* **"**
>
> *− SEAΔ 1 fellow*

> **"** *How do we redirect our energy to a certain form of leadership is always coming back to, not to say an independent role, but more of your awareness. You are human, you have your own vocation (calling), so how can you fulfil it?* **"**
>
> *− SEAΔ 1 fellow*

- Leadership is the capacity to collaborate.

> ❝ *I don't perceive myself as a leader, but I would love to collaborate. I am more comfortable to see myself as a collaborator, not a leader. How can we shift the idea of being a leader or being a hero to be a collaborator to build a network? That's actually what drives me. (The common idea would be), to be a leader is about putting oneself in the front, so it's either you are being led or you are a leader. But for me it's a question of how we can actually not perceive ourselves as a leader first, but more a collaborator.* ❞

> *– SEAΔ 1 fellow*

- Leadership is the capacity to subcontract things, will, and capabilities that you are not fully having or capable of doing to other people towards collective leadership.

> ❝ *I always love collaborative work and working collaboratively. It's like a feast, where everyone throws ideas on the table. For instance, my team member is good at using jargon, and being the face of the group, but when it comes to the artistic thing, it's my part [..] I know where to put myself in a group, I don't need to invest a lot of my energy towards an area that other team member is more expert of. I know where to position myself.* ❞

> *– SEAΔ 3 fellow*

> ❝ *I got a lot of confusion in the beginning, and I thought I was the only one, but apparently everyone in my group was confused too. The interesting part is when we tried to find our way out together. I feel that everyone has got a leadership capacity already, that really helps.* ❞

> *– SEAΔ 3 fellow*

From various answers above, there are some common threads about **_leadership_** that can be picked up:

1. *Embodiment of one's love and aspiration that overflows to others*: the capacity to create something on the outside is only the reflection and extension of what is on the inside of oneself.
2. *Grounded confidence:* assured of both own capacity and limitation.
3. *Capacity to navigate one's own energy and others in being of service to others*: being able to hold others accountable as much as oneself to move together towards goals that are not only in service to one selves but also for humanity/society.

While it might be difficult to find one definition of *leadership* that would work across different cultural backgrounds that the fellows were coming from, there are some elements that are commonly attached to *leadership* across their different cultures, such as:

- *Growth*: the ability to make deliberate decisions for oneself towards the direction of change and be responsible for its all consequences. For example, deciding to make a career change.
- *Vision*: having a clear direction in moving forward.
- *Reflection*: being able to see and question your own actions and share it with the people you are working or leading.
- *Listening*: the ability to hold different perspectives and take them into account in the decision making process.

The elements above are just some of many other elements of leadership that are suggested to be made clear as a set of qualities that we expect from the fellows to develop in the SEAΔ programme, if it decides to keep the leadership as part of its main purpose in the future.

Learnings on Skills, Personal and Partnership Development

- Skills Development

In their interviews, SEAΔ 1 fellows indicated that in general **SEAΔ has widened their horizons**, as they were exposed to different ideas of other fellows, feedbacks, and encouragement to step outside their comfort zone (both in practice and context) by learning, sharing, and collaborating with each others and also the local people. Thus, inspired them to improve their own practices.

SEAΔ 2 fellows gained a lot in other areas, such as meaningful and solid friendship and reflection of their own practices. Fellows felt that their collaborations with people outside of the arts and culture sector such as Helvetas had helped them to look for the best alternative ways. It was not only about **being flexible** but also about **thinking of more positive and productive alternative ways** to make things happen during the programme.

> ❝ *First, we only postponed our Vietnam trip, and then we planned another thing, plan B. Then plan B was not possible, we moved to plan C. Before, I would be really disappointed after plan B and C, but through this programme, I am kept motivated. Because of these fellows and the kind of people who support us, we can make any plan, even plan Z.* ❞
>
> − *SEAΔ 2 fellow*

In SEAΔ 3, COVID-19 pandemic continued impacting the design and ways of delivery. SEAΔ 3 fellows indicated that they **learned to be more adaptable and tolerant in dealing with less-ideal situations**. They learned to get used to new online tools of working, such as using Jamboard, Miro, and so on. This situation also taught them to not force things too much as their plans could change. In a full-online platform, fellows were aware that they did not have much time to deliver their messages or conveying their message precisely, hence they got to develop skills to **be more articulate** in presenting their ideas or works in such a limited time, and also pushed them **to work harder, to concentrate more and focus their energy** on the things that really matter.

While it was a huge challenge for fellows to navigate the projects online, to communicate and coordinate not only with their team members but also with Helvetas' project managers, they successfully managed the situation and are even proud of what they have achieved. Through such difficult situations, fellows developed the skills **to have a lot of trust in others** they had never met in person, to **build relationships, to listen to other people, and to see their different strengths** and use them to put together a new project. This whole process is what fellows feel really valuable that came out from the SEAΔ programme.

Being able to come out successfully navigating these challenges has given them **confidence to try new and different things** that they have never done before with the people they may or may not have the chance to personally meet. Despite the challenging situations, they had to improvise and quickly adapt to the new online working tools and go through all that no matter how difficult it was. They saw it as an opportunity for artists to think creatively.

> " *We had to figure out ourselves on what to do next to finalise the output for the project. Doing the project is very valuable because it requires our skills and professionalism to deal with the situation.* "
>
> *− SEAΔ 2 fellow*

> " *I had to work with my team member remotely and also our remote videographer and remote interlocutor, that's our contact person, through Helvetas. Everything is remote and you need to have a lot of trust in others that I had never met personally. We started to build this relationship together with this project.[…]I enjoyed the process even though it's kind of turbulent and full of challenges in all different kinds of meanings. But in the end, I enjoyed the process and was proud of the original outcome that we came up with. It definitely gave me some kind of confidence that I can do something like that, since I had never done a film before, not my expertise.* "
>
> *− SEAΔ 3 fellow*

- ● Network Development

The opportunity for going on an experiential journey together with other Southeast Asia arts and cultural practitioners is one of the things that attracted fellows to join SEAΔ. Fellows across cohorts expressed their enthusiasm on this matter in their application forms. Fellows of SEAΔ 1 expected that the people they meet in SEAΔ would expand their professional network, while fellows of SEAΔ 2 and 3 envisioned that the new networks would lead to mutual feelings of ASEAN community which would be an asset to encourage creative solutions for the common problems they shared across the region.

In their interviews, most of the SEAΔ 1 fellows expressed that they feel they benefited from networking with each other. As they went through the experience together for a year, their understanding of each other got better at both personal or professional levels. Through this network as well, fellows can know what is happening in each other's country directly from their respective fellows. It is easier to update each other's situations because they are friends already. Communication with other fellows and the mentors that continues after the programme finished is deemed as a **reliable and continuous support**.

> *When I need something like guidance, connecting me to another project, support to do my work, now I know to whom I can go to get ideas about the project and guidance on contact persons. The fact that I know I can contact them anytime is also important. There is more possibility to work together even after the programme ends. It's good to keep working and connecting with people in the group.*
>
> *− SEAΔ 1 fellow*

SEAΔ 2 fellows also expressed their gratitude for the networking they got from the programme. However, due to the way the SEAΔ 2 programme was delivered, it was moved from in-person meeting to an online platform at the last part of the programme due to COVID-19 pandemic, the regular interactions and meetings via Zoom in the programme somehow served as a support system in going through difficult times. This results in their regular networking to grow into **lasting friendships**. Some of the fellows even continued to **collaborate in a project** after the programme ended, like SEA*5, an alliance created by five alumni of SEAΔ 2. MCH and British Council supported the group with a follow-up project grant in 2021 to further their collaboration.

The collaboration resulted from their friendship has been really grounding, inspiring and supportive for the fellows to keep continuing their works. It has also helped the fellows in **becoming more resilient** in doing community-based works. They feel a **sense of camaraderie** to honour the traditions in the communities they work with, their perspectives, languages, as well as their actions. Hence, though a fellow might be doing individual action in their respective countries but it feels collaborative at the same time.

COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect SEAΔ delivery in year three - it continued to be delivered online. The same feeling towards networking in SEAΔ 2 fellows also shared by fellows of SEAΔ 3. By being together in going through challenging times, the fellows felt they gained energy and inspiration from each other. The journey that they went through together in SEAΔ has been **vital in providing fellows with emotional support, comfort in each other, anchor** and **shared values.**

> *In the beginning of the SEAΔ programme, we had to join CREATE. I felt like it has been a long time since COVID-19, we need inspiration, especially creative energy. The fellows are already creative, so I really missed that energy. During that hard time, we still got that energy. That's the good thing about SEAΔ.*
>
> *− SEAΔ 3 fellow*

> *It is really what I got from SEAΔ − that people that I worked with in this programme, they have a very good heart, they all try their best, under different certain circumstances and challenges. To do our best and to contribute to our common goal.*
>
> *− SEAΔ 3 fellow*

- ### Reflection of own Practice

SEAΔ presents itself as a space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective leadership. This means, reflection is at the heart of everything that SEAΔ did. All the learnings, whether they are positive or negative, are tools for growth. Experiential learning that SEAΔ provided acted as a space for fellows to reflect on their own practices.

Prior to joining SEAΔ, fellows across cohorts expressed their interest in deepening and reflecting on their works in relation to others and bigger visions. They believed that arts and culture have the potential to do more for the betterment of the society/community.

In all the interviews with SEAΔ 1,2,3 fellows, most fellows felt that SEAΔ has brought them realisation of how their works/practices contribute to a larger world. They were able to find the relevance between their own works in local and global contexts. They also

realised that if they would like make a significant contribution to the society, collaboration with other sectors is inevitable and necessary even though it is very challenging to do, as they need to re-think and re-imagine ways of negotiating themselves and their practices to make an impact while dealing with the complexities that this multi-sector collaborations bring.

> " *One of the things that I always have to rethink and reimagine, along the way is the idea of how you can negotiate yourself to make an impact. In engaging people to work with you, you always have to negotiate. For example, the ethics of using money from problematic sources for the work that we do. How can we negotiate these complexities? Do we actually lose our purity? Or can we expand our way of doing things?* "
>
> − *SEAΔ 1 fellow*

Furthermore, collaboration with other fellows on a project during a programme also gave realisation for some fellows **in ways of seeing their own practices, their capacities, as well as their limitations and strengths**.

> " *[Though] some of my experience in SEAΔ was very uncomfortable, it reminds me to really slow down. After I met and worked with the other fellows, not only I realised my limit, I also realised my strength. After SEAΔ, I really recognise that for my personality and capacity, I am good at making my local practice more deeply. So maybe I don't have to be in a rush to show/present my works to other people in other contexts. So now, I really shift my focus to my local practice. Maybe I don't reach out to people in other countries because it's not my thing.* "
>
> − *SEAΔ 1 fellow*

On the other hand, there are also some of the fellows who used SEAΔ as a **platform to pause and relearn about themselves**, before deciding which personal and professional directions to go next, and also to contemplate and question their own motivation to keep or even start doing arts and cultural practice in the Southeast Asia region.

> *I tried to use SEAΔ as a platform for me to re-learn. Because everyone is in the middle of their career. So it's about time to ask yourself whether you want to stay here or you want to explore something else. There's also a part of me that thinks that it's a very interesting point to get back to my inner-self and then see what happens in my own community. Because I usually have a lot of practice with the local community in my field, but for regional or international networks, I'm still very in the beginning. That's the personal part for me. It helps me grow and see which stream I will swim.*

— *SEAΔ 2 fellow*

> *Before joining SEAΔ, I quitted my job. It's been a year now. I think it's interesting to see how I put myself in those new circumstances. Suddenly I do lectures, sometimes I do production management, sometimes I go back to screening and project management. It's like a mixture of intellectual and practical works. I realise, maybe in the future, I really need to find the balance between those two. If I can find a daily job that could balance my artistic practice, it would be great. Before SEAΔ, the artistic part was just a 'fun' part to keep me balanced. But the daily job is the daily job. But at the same time I really like management work. The SEAΔ programme made me realise that it's not hard to work creatively and management-ly because I've done both during the programme.*

— *SEAΔ 3 fellow*
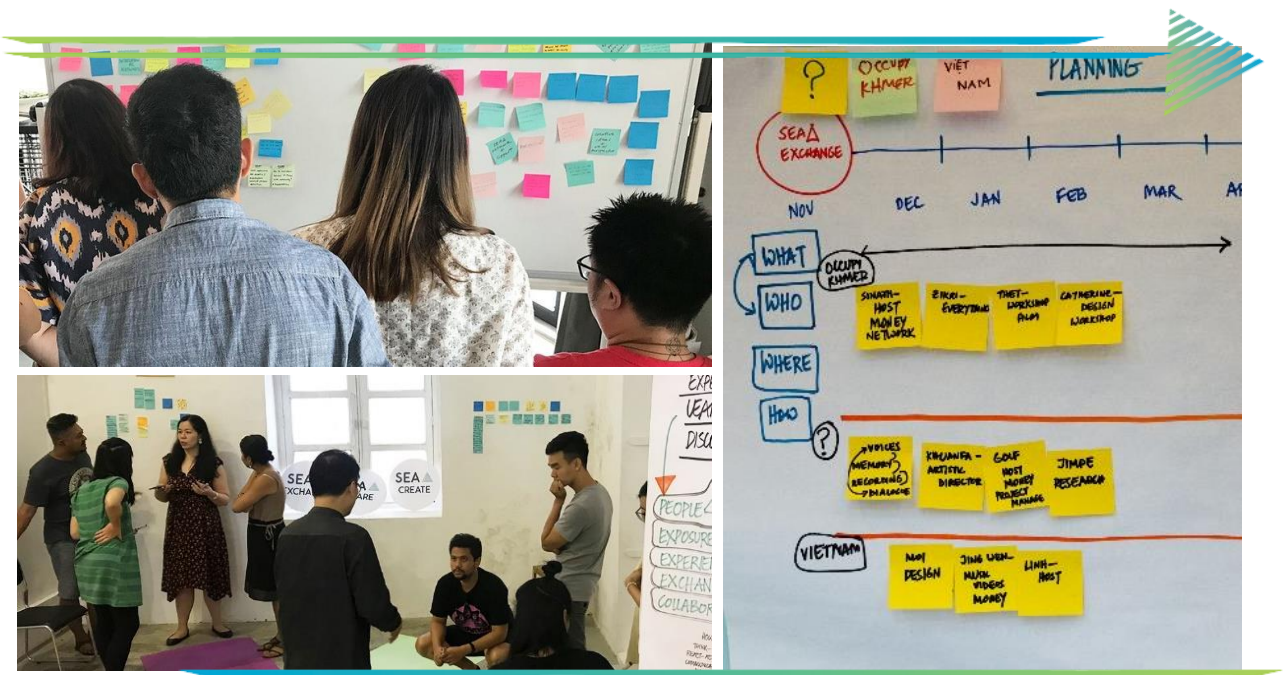
C. Key Questions

Question 1: SEAΔ - Arts, Culture and Sustainable Development

To answer the first Key Question of this review and reflection: *"To what extent can programmes like SEAΔ contribute to sustainable development in SEA?"*, the learnings that happened in SEAΔ are viewed from two perspectives: 1) Outside in, looking at SEAΔ from an objective perspective and 2) Inside out, looking at SEAΔ from the subjectivity of the people involved in it.

The extracted key learnings from both perspectives and the aspirational actions to take for the future SEAΔ programme lead us to conclude that *SEAΔ* has started the thinking and exploration towards the effort to enlarge the arts and culture contribution to sustainable development in the Southeast Asia region. In its 3 years of its implementation to do so, *SEAΔ* has faced significant internal and external challenges in its journey to reach its goals. Despite these challenges, new and valuable learnings have emerged and revealed the real complexity of not only the reality of running a programme like *SEAΔ,* but also at a larger scale, the complexity of how arts and culture can actually contribute to sustainable development. Suffice to say, a programme like *SEAΔ* has contributed to sustainable development in the Southeast Asia region quite significantly by **daring to explore a new depth of understanding of the complex intersection of arts, culture, and development.** If shared with other organisations, this exploration of new depth of understanding could inspire other organisations who are working on the same lane to really **look at their programmes in relation to their effort to integrate arts and culture with development with critical mindset and openness to learn new things that might not be necessarily expected.**

Question 2: Multi-sectoral Collaborations Process and Lessons Learnt

To answer the second Key Question of this review and reflection: *"What are the key lessons for multi-sectoral collaborations (arts and culture sector working with the social + international development sectors) that have been learnt through this programme which could be shared to others seeking to contribute to the sustainable development goals through cross-sectoral partnerships?"*, there are two aspects of this question that need to be unpacked first to provide a more contextual framework in answering it. The first aspect is the **notion of *development*,** and the second is **arts, culture, and development positioning**. Unpacking these aspects would also help us to direct our energy towards asking the right questions rather than knowing the correct answer, because this question is just the beginning of our bigger journey towards multi-disciplined collaborations that could happen in the intersection of arts, culture and development.

The notion of *development*

It is worth acknowledging that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was born from a long trajectory of *development* as a concept brought by the West. For decades, *development* has been an industry in itself. By acknowledging *development* as a concept and how its approaches have been evolving since its first initiation, it gives us a starting point to understand how SEAΔ's missions to enlarge the space of arts and culture in sustainable development can actually be situated. Various input from fellows on their perspectives on development can be largely categorised into two:

- **At scale: Progression**. This means betterment of critical aspects of our lives: humanity, society (social development), city (built environment), as well as climate and natural environment, that if combined with the evolution of humans' consciousness and behaviours will result in better impact for all the sentient beings, the planet and the next generations to come.
- **At Depth: Engagement, honour, humanity**. This means development at the human or community level, which might be outside of the SDGs framework and what the political leaders and politicians envision about development. It is about putting the core value of development into people's engagement, honour, and humanity.

Depending on the direction SEAΔ is heading, it is important to **determine the concept of *development* that it envisions to go towards**, which includes on what scale and depth is the *sustainable development* that SEAΔ wants to focus on. Having a clear idea of what it is, would help not only to direct SEAΔ energy to be more effective, but also attract the right fellows who are part of the journey.

Arts, Culture, and Development Positioning

SEAΔ works in the intersection of arts, culture, and development, and it attempts to enlarge arts and culture contribution to sustainable development. However, the position of arts and culture's relevance to development might not always be clear. As a result, there has been quite an uncertainty in navigating the SEAΔ programme effectively. There are aspects that need to be unpacked before we dive into the entanglement between these sectors, if we look at them as *sectors*. From a sectoral perspective, arts and culture as sectors are not clearly represented in the SDGs, since there is no clause in the SDGs that speaks specifically about them. In addition, as elaborated in the previous subchapter, *development* as an industry/sector also contributes to our limited imagination on what arts, culture, and development can create together.

There is no clear-cut answer on how arts and culture *should* be positioned in relevance to sustainable development. Multiple vantage points could be used. It is now a matter of choosing **which positioning would be most effective and feasible for SEAΔ to run**. Whatever it would be, it must be narrowed, clearly defined, and shared with all the partners and fellows, so that the collective energy could be directed to the same point. Hence, resulted in a more tangible impact. Below are some suggestions gathered from the fellows, facilitators, and advisors that could give us various perspectives of what kind of relationships that arts, culture, and sustainable development can create.

- **Relating beyond the utilitarian way.** Arts and culture have potential to be transformational for sustainable development. The relationship between arts, culture and development might not necessarily be interdependent, but they could inform each other symbiotically. If this relationship is established, people working in the arts and culture field would no longer look at sustainable development as merely another theme to tell their stories of or perform about particular community development issues, or in other words, in a practical or *a utilitarian way*. Vice versa, people working in the sustainable development field would stop seeing arts and culture as merely communication materials to tell their stories.

- **Using SDG 17 as an overarching theme.** SDGs are applicable as a framework or lens to approach development. However, it is important to also question the SDGs themselves as a framework and having more profound dialogues about each SDG goal. There is no specific clause in SDGs that speaks about arts and culture, that it makes positioning arts and culture vis-a-vis sustainable development is rather tricky. As an alternative, we could use SDG 17 (*Partnership for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*), which works at a systemic level to be the core of the programme design, rather than individually taking each goal in SDGs to justify the activities in SEAΔ programme literally. The SDGs are best understood as a system, which is how they are interconnected with other elements within a bigger picture. Some of the fellows' perspectives align with this idea: 1) Art is an inseparable part of a society, by connecting them with their senses and emotions; 2) Art is a medium to understand issues that are hard to discuss, such as trauma in one community. From the lens of art, trauma can be understood in a more empathetic way; 3) Art is valuable in connecting people who do not necessarily share the same language or knowledge.

- **Seeing the bigger picture.** Socially-engaged arts are encouraged to connect the artists' creative responses to both the specific and bigger societal issues. But then the question is, what can arts and culture realistically contribute to address societal issues. Here are some ideas: 1) Demanding more justice to make the lives of the people more meaningful in this already unequal world; 2) Bringing more happiness to people's lives, through the works that we do; 3) Going radical and all the way to contribute to policy changes. Some of the fellows' perspectives that align with this idea:
    - Arts and culture can reflect what actually is missing in the community through knowledge sharing, that eventually also builds the community capacity in dealing with certain issues.
    - Art's contribution to society is being informative by trying to bring something out in an artistic way to impact people, so they could understand what is going on about specific issues.

Key Lessons from the process of working collaboratively: Arts, Culture, Development

Collaboration is a process, but collaborating well is a skill that is honed over time. In a successful collaboration, not only are conditions and the right skills required, but the process of collaborating itself also needs to be carefully carried on to ensure it is fair. Conditions such as a shared cause and trust; and skills such as open-mindedness, communication, organisation, long-term thinking, adaptability and debate are some of the crucial skills to develop if we want to do collaboration well. In SEAΔ, collaboration happened between different people at different layers and scales. Key lessons learnt from the fellows, Helvetas, facilitators, advisors, and Mekong Cultural Hub in their multi-sectoral collaborations were gathered, and can be categorised into two directions: Inward and Outward. Inward learning means the learning that happened **within** the selves and each organisation, whilst Outward Learning means the co-learning that happened **with** the other selves and other organisations. Seeing the learning process through these two directions would help to create a more solid foundation in multi-disciplines/multi-sectoral collaborations.

D. Recommendations for the future SEAΔ Programme

Below are recommendations for the future SEAΔ programme that are informed by our all individual and collective learnings gathered via this review.

What The Programme Could Be

Intersection of Arts, Culture, Development, and Leadership

Narrow down the SEAΔ's area of work to be more focused and effective. Decide on which areas of intersection that SEAΔ actually wants and is able to focus on, as well as how deep SEAΔ wants to go if it decides to work within the areas of intersection of choice. Narrowing, deepening and sharpening this programme not only could help the organiser(s) to measure the level of programme complexity and match their capacity to carry the programme, but also minimise mis-match expectations between the organiser(s) and the fellows.

Level of Depth

Deepen the level of criticality towards the arts, culture, development, and leadership intersection both in concept and practice. One of the ways is by unpacking belief systems in the relevance to Arts, Culture, and Development, as a preliminary process before jumping in to doing the actual collaborative work in the community. In addition, if Southeast Asia regional collaboration specificity is kept in the future programme, it is important for fellows to get preliminary dialogues to reach a common ground, common goals, or some point of negotiation that could be used as a starting point for all the participants before they really engage themselves in a project in the community.

Leadership

Make the leadership element more visible (if the leadership element is kept), deliver and exercise it as its own separate module with the leadership capacity framework of choice. It must be made clear to what kind of leadership SEAΔ aspires to hone and how it wants to hone it according to the focus of intersection of choice, i.e. leadership for community, for arts/culture institution, or something else, and a set of leadership qualities that we expect from the fellows to develop in the SEAΔ programme is established. Without purposely setting some indicators of what leadership is or aspired to be within SEAΔ, the leadership part would risk being overwhelmed by other things along the way as it is the quality that could mainly be observed individually. Common threads of fellows' perspective on leadership that had been captured throughout this review process could be used to inform the kind of leadership element for the future programme.

Alternative point of view: SEAΔ could attempt to find a kind of specificity other than geographical that is derived from the inter-sectoral interactions that it creates between arts, culture and development. The path that SEAΔ has forged to encourage more meaningful and contributive relationships between these sectors requires a whole different level of leadership capacity in order to navigate the complexities along the way. For instance, being able to question or even deconstruct one's own ideology and practice could become an important skill for arts and cultural practitioners to have if they want to be fully engaged in the community, as they are prone to be too focused on their own works and how they present themselves. The same way as the ability to think bigger at systemic level and deeper to question every notion or paradigm before they engage themselves in the community, as the

nature of multi-sectoral collaborations is full of complexity that the silo-thinking and utilitarian ways of collaborating between sectors are no longer relevant.

Experiential Learning
If the *experiential learning* element is kept, travel and being physically in the context are non-negotiable aspects of the programme.

Optimising the Process

Indicator of the Fellows' Learning Progress
Clearly define and share what SEAΔ means by '*contribution of arts and culture to the sustainability/sustainable development*' with all the fellows, partners, and contributors of SEAΔ to reach common understanding

Establish relevant and integrated sets of indicators both short and long term to gauge the breadth and depth of the fellows' learning in the context of arts and culture' contribution to societal issues/sustainable development.

Learning Mechanism within the Organisation(s)
Create and design decision-making processes and mechanisms to *improve-as-we-go* to ensure effective and efficient learning within the organisation(s). In a programme with multiple partnerships such as SEAΔ, a decision making process to improve things is prone to be more complicated and not straightforward. A clear structure between partners/collaborators is important to create so that each collaborator can be held accountable according to their specific roles, and the learning resulting from such collaborations could be efficiently and effectively incorporated back to the organisations.

Embedded tool to capture the narrative and intangible shift
Create an embedded methodology to document individual learnings and reflections and extract collective learning in an iterative way. In a programme like SEAΔ, main learnings are intangible and hard to quantify. Thus, an embedded methodology to extract our collective learning back to the organisations is needed since most of the learning goes to individuals in the organisations. Gathering the learning only at the end of the programme would be reductive and insufficient in capturing the intangible growth of each individual.

Diversity in the selection committee
Have a different mix of people in the selection committee. This could include having someone who can bridge the older with the younger generation to bridge the conversations and understanding between different generations. In addition, it could also be useful to have people who are more connected to the social/development issues, such as arts and human rights, arts and migration, refugee, underprivileged, to encourage people who are interested and work in these particular issues to join the programme.

Keeping the programme coherent

Have the programme be more streamlined to keep it coherent and continuous from the start until the end. The lack of continuity, disconnection between intention, approach, and final output need to be addressed in the future programme.

Improve co-organisers and collaborators' capacity to navigate complexity. SEAΔ is a multi-partnerships programme that provides a lot of opportunities to grow. Hence, the co-organisers and collaborators need to improve their capacity by using some tools and skills that are supportive in navigating the complexity and moving forward.

Optimising Partnerships/Multi-sectoral Collaboration

Optimise the arts and culture potential in sustainable development
To optimise the arts and culture potential in sustainable development, partnering organisations can:

- Use system thinking in practice and introducing system thinking to artists and cultural practitioners.
- Apply a more programmatic approach, a Road Map that can comprehensively capture the Theory of Change of Arts, Culture, and Development, as well as Strategic Direction of all the partnering organisations.
- Give enough time to sit and design the programme together and have a common direction and goals, in which arts and culture contribute to sustainable development.

Optimise the quality of multi-sectoral collaborations
- **Bridge an inevitable tension between artists/cultural practitioners with development practitioners in looking and approaching the** *development*. Artists and cultural practitioners have different perspectives from development practitioners on many notions, including differences in ways of communicating. These differences must be bridged if they want to develop something that works for them. There is a need to find a third way that would be a win-win for both parties and also ways to navigate the inevitable tensions in multi-disciplines/sectoral collaboration - a *process-focused one.*

- **Have a facilitator to facilitate the learning of collaboration among the organisations.** MCH believes that they would be benefited from having someone to connect and facilitate the multi-partnerships, to help them to reach decisions, and to acknowledge the lessons learned or something that needs to be done. Though this could be the role that Mekong Cultural Hub takes, when there was an absence of someone who was specifically assigned to capture and connect all different learnings, conflict resolutions became challenging to achieve as people would direct their energy to patch the conflict' consequences without truly understanding the underlying issues.

- **Build authentic/genuine connection with the community before working with them.** Before working with the community, fellows would require to know the people in the community first to build a genuine connection. The challenge is, barriers such as distance and language differences were still hard to break through. Reflecting on this case, the future SEAΔ programme needs to create an environment, ways, and tools that allow such authentic connection between the fellows and the people in the community they are working with.

- **Invest more time to learn to properly collaborate**. When partnered up with Helvetas in the second year, instead of co-developed a new structure together, British Council, Mekong Cultural Hub and Helvetas tried to fit the partnership into their existing programmes' structures, resulting in a shaky partnership foundation. Therefore, it is best to invest enough time to set up a solid partnership with other organisations. With enough time, the partnering organisations could better understand each other and the notions of art, culture, and development intersection, reach common ground and ideology and create different activities.

Acknowledgements
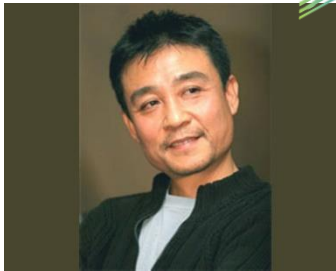
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