

Report on the contribution of civil society to the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions in Asia-Pacific



IFCCD

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF COALITIONS
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Presentation

The International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (IFCCD) is composed of diverse organisations from the cultural sector in over 30 different countries. Its mission is to coordinate civil society efforts for promoting and protecting the diversity of cultural expressions, including through the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention.

In April 2021, the Federation launched a research on civil society participation in the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions in the Asia-Pacific region, a region where it has few members. This reflects the ratification deficit of the 2005 UNESCO Convention in the region-in 2021, only 16 of the 46 UNESCO Member States in the Asia-Pacific region had ratified the Convention [1]. This research aimed to guide the IFCCD to better define the role it can play in the region and better respond to the needs of civil society.

This research was carried out with financial support from Switzerland.

Summary

This report focuses on the needs of civil society, the main challenges facing the cultural sectors in the region such as artistic freedom, dialogue with governments, gender equality, cultural policies and the treatment of culture in trade agreements. Due to the vastness of the Asia-Pacific region and the time allotted for the study, not all countries and regions in Asia-Pacific are represented in this report. While some challenges and needs may be recurrent in a majority of countries, most are specific to local contexts and particular histories. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the findings of this research cannot be applied to the whole region and that further cooperation will be needed to reach out to civil society organisations that have not been included in this project. Finally, the dynamic and often fragile nature of the cultural sectors requires continuous dialogue with local civil society organisations, as new challenges constantly arise. In this respect, the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot yet be known, especially considering that in most Asia-Pacific countries the fight against the Coronavirus is still ongoing.

[1] Figures do not include Arab States geographically in Asia [UNESCO](#)

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1. Methodology

This exploratory research was launched with the intention of reaching as many civil society organisations and experts of the cultural industry as possible in order to gather opinions and understand local contexts from various points of view. While much of the findings of this study come from the opinions and perceptions of local actors, contextual elements and various data of interest were drawn from publications and reports from organisations such as UNESCO, Freemuse, CISAC, Koalisi Seni, and more.

In the early stages of the project, IFCCD members and allies were able to provide information and contacts in the region, but few of these contacts replied to our invitation to participate in the study. Other organisations were found through online research and were contacted, again with a low response rate. Invitations were then translated into Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, and Malaysian to increase our chances of reaching people in the region. Although this initially helped establish communication with one organisation using only the local language, we unfortunately did not receive its contribution at the time of writing this report. Overall, civil society organisations proved very challenging to reach, which is consequently the main limitation of this study. The most successful way of getting in touch with local participants was through direct solicitation from a previous contributor to the study, which illustrates the importance of building networks in the region.

Another challenge was reaching regional UNESCO offices, resources on the Convention and the cultural sectors in Asia-Pacific. Only the UNESCO Bangkok office accepted to contribute to our research. However, all experts from the UNESCO Expert Facility that were contacted answered the call to participate.

In total, out of 62 invitations (not including those made by other IFCCD members or allies), 16 people participated in the study. Once they agreed to contribute, participants were asked questions during a videoconference discussion or, if they preferred, had the option of answering questions on their own time via e-mail. A list of questions relevant to our study had been previously developed and was adapted to each participant according to their country, their role and their work. Participants could also opt for the short questionnaire to be translated in the language of their choice.

Lastly, it is to be noted that the IFCCD is officially divided in four different regions and, currently, the Mashrek (المَشْرِق) region is included in the broader Asia-Pacific area.

2. Global challenges and assessments

In order to better understand the context in which civil society actors operate, we felt it was important to take a closer look at issues that affect the entire region and certain structural elements of the cultural sectors. This section will review the state of artistic freedom in Asia-Pacific, the participation of women in the cultural sectors, the extent of dialogue with governments, and the treatment of culture in trade agreements.

2.1 Artistic freedom

In 2020, Freemuse reported 148 violations of artistic freedom in the Asia-Pacific region. The countries most affected have been China, Australia, Myanmar and Bangladesh [2]. In Bangladesh, the Digital Security Act (DSA) is a particularly harmful tool against artistic freedom that primarily affects Baul musicians. The government uses this law to censor and arrest musicians under the pretext of religious insult. Rita Dewan, a Baul singer, told Freemuse “I have no confidence in Bangladeshi legal system. Our government does not believe in freedom of expression nor artistic freedom. It is highly religious, biased, conservative system ”[3].

In China, artists and creators of cultural content are persecuted mostly for reasons of political dissent or denunciation of human rights violations in the country. The long-standing “tradition” of human rights and artistic freedom violations in China is gravely affecting the diversity of cultural expressions [4].

In India, the state of artistic freedom got worse in 2020. The nationalist Hindu government has widely censored artists accused of insulting Hinduism or opposing the government. Prosecutors are using Penal Code articles such as sedition (124a) and promoting animosity between different groups (153a) to criminalise cultural expressions that defame the government or Hinduism. Moreover, cultural expressions that address Kashmir risk being censored, as it is considered a sensitive and even dangerous subject by the Indian government [5]. In addition, a theatre festival has been canceled in March 2021 after receiving threats from Hindu nationalist groups [6].

[2] Freemuse [State of Artistic Freedom 2021](#)

[3] Idem.

[4] Freemuse [State of Artistic Freedom 2021](#)

[5] Freemuse [State of Artistic Freedom 2021](#)

[6] [India: Theatre festival cancelled due to threats](#), Freemuse, 2021

In Cambodia, two rappers were arrested and sentenced to prison for 'politically problematic' lyrics in 2020. Members of a satirical poetry group in Myanmar have suffered the same consequences after a performance which allegedly insulted military personnel [7].

Furthermore, in 2020, Freemuse reported many violations of artistic freedom linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Artists in the Philippines, Thailand and Bangladesh have been arrested after expressing criticism of the pandemic response from their respective governments online. China has also tried to censor visual art creations from all over the world in which China was associated with COVID-19 [8].

In Indonesia, Koalisi Seni (Indonesian Arts Coalition) in cooperation with the UNESCO office in Jakarta produced a study on artistic freedom between 2010 and 2020 [9]. The report explains that despite the presence of laws that should guarantee artistic freedom, the judicial system still allows the State to circumvent these laws. Of the 45 cases of artistic freedom violations examined in the study, 17 were accused of promoting Communism, 16 concerned religion and 11 were related to the LGBT community. Another cause of censorship for artists in Indonesia is the promotion of feminism. The situation is particularly severe in Aceh province, where Sharia law is in effect. One of the artistic rights violations still in place in this province is the prohibition of adult women to dance, which went into effect in 2013. According to Koalisi Seni, one of the main causes of artistic freedom issues in Indonesia is the presence of Islamist populist and political groups, which gained strength during the more open and less repressive 'Reformasi' era [10]. Religious groups, sometimes extremist, have since expanded into all spheres of society, and seek to exert control over the arts.

In Malaysia, artistic freedom is most often restricted for religious reasons or prevailing 'social values', according to a participant to the study in this country. All artistic performances must be approved and given a permit by the local State governments, most with strict criteria. This greatly limits the visibility of artists, who may be approved in one State, but not in another. Foreign artists are often denied permission to perform in Malaysia, which forces Malaysians to travel to Singapore or even The Philippines to enjoy international performers.

[7] Freemuse [State of Artistic Freedom 2021](#)

[8] Idem.

[9] See [Artistic Freedom in Indonesia 2010- 2020: A Literature Study](#)

[10] Idem.

Lastly, In Singapore, the Film Act is considered restrictive is described as part of a “pervading culture of censorship and self-censorship [that] handicaps the growth of our film industry” [11]. Similar concerns have been raised by one of our contributors in Japan, where freedom of speech may not be as broad as it can be perceived, which ultimately hinders all forms of cultural expression.

2.2 Women in the cultural sector

While it is undeniable that there are women present in the cultural sectors of all Asia-Pacific countries, their success, obstacles, and challenges vary greatly. In India, Bangladesh and Indonesia, women are very present in lower and mid-level positions. However, there are no minimum wage or official regulations, which makes them vulnerable when a crisis like COVID-19 hits—they are not eligible to any kind of support from the government. There is a general feeling that executive positions are hard to attain, that there is a glass ceiling. In Indonesia, for example, women “are still largely underrepresented in creative decision-making roles, representing only 20 per cent of scriptwriters, 19 per cent of producers and 7 per cent of directors” [12]. Consequently, women largely occupy part-time, precarious or unprofitable positions. This phenomenon is also noted in more developed countries such as South Korea and Japan, where gender-based stereotypes and the ‘traditional roles’ expected to be fulfilled by women hinder professional advancement. In a study on gender role expectations in Japan, participants “consistently disclosed that women are supposed to take on lesser roles than their male counterparts” [13]. Pay inequality, sexism and taboos are also observed in those countries.

Another issue women face in the cultural sector is misogyny, harassment and toxic work environments. The audiovisual industry has a reputation for being a difficult work environment for women, although some progress is being made, in part since the #MeToo movement reached Asia. Initiatives and regulations are starting to appear, like the Sinematik Gak Harus Toxic (Cinema Doesn’t Have to be Toxic) campaign in Indonesia that allows women to anonymously report sexual harassment happening in the film industry and its related events. The initiative was set in place due to the “misogynistic, [...] demeaning attitude towards women”[14] that the industry has shown repeatedly. Similar actions have been taken around the region, which indicates progress—but also reveals the dire conditions in which women have to work to be a part of the cultural industry.

[11] Chong Seow Wei, [Why is Southeast Asia cinema still lagging behind?](#), August 2020

[12] Voir [Gender & Creativity: Progress on the precipice](#)

[13] Belarmino and Roberts, [Japanese Gender Role Expectations and Attitudes](#), Journal of International Women's Studies, Vol.20 (7)

[14] See [Gender & Creativity: Progress on the precipice](#)

One contributor to our research in Malaysia mentioned that there did not seem to be particular limitations or a glass ceiling for women in the cultural industry in the country, especially in the more liberal States. Women are very present, even in leadership roles. Of course, women still face the same challenges as men when it comes to freedom of expression and other considerations limiting artistic freedom.

Finally, according to a UNESCO expert, women have more success in activities relating to Heritage than in the cultural sector covered by the 2005 UNESCO Convention. This is partly due to governments promoting and investing more in projects that stem from Heritage, which gives more opportunities for women in this field.

2.3 Dialogue with governments

Governments around Asia-Pacific show different levels of receptivity and willingness to dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs). According to a UNESCO expert, a frequent pattern in Asia is that authoritarian governments have an agency of Culture that is not independent from the central authority. This implies that policies come from the central ideas of government that are then applied to the cultural sector, rather than consulting civil society to define policies that respond to their needs. This is the case of China, which has succeeded in making its cultural industry a colossal economic component by gathering data from the provincial governments and then developing a national strategy that was applied by provinces.

Many other countries have a similar approach, Singapore being one of them. Although they can be successful, these strategies significantly limit to opportunities of dialogue for CSOs when needs occur.

One contributor to the study in India mentioned that while there used to be some level of dialogue between a few States, UNESCO, and CSOs before the pandemic, all communications have since stopped. Unfortunately, at the time of the meeting (May 2021), India was still suffering from country-wide outbreaks of COVID-19 and a return to discussions with government was far from being considered.

In Japan, it has been noted that transparency in policymaking is an issue in all areas, not only for cultural policies. Therefore, dialogue with CSOs is not frequent, especially since very few organisations are openly critical of government policies or take a stance that is not aligned with those policies. Part of this issue stems from the lack of freedom of speech, as we previously mentioned, and the absence of a policy implementation monitoring scheme in which CSOs can get involved.

Macau proves to be one of the places in Asia with the easiest access to government for CSOs and the most opportunities of dialogue. The main reason is the small size of the country, with a population of under 700 000. There are significantly less bureaucracy and people to get through before you reach the person in government that you want to discuss with. Of course, this receptiveness from the Macau government is also due to the peninsula's status as a special administrative region, giving it a high degree of political and economic autonomy from China. However, being very focused on business and economic development, the Macau government has not given much attention to the cultural sector in the past because culture was not seen as a sector with great economic potential. More recently, there have been efforts by the government to promote the cultural sector to diversify the economy, since Macau had been relying on a single sector—casinos—which the pandemic proved to be extremely risky. Due to its size, Macau is limited in terms of industries it can hope to develop, leaving the cultural sector as a valued option.

In Thailand, since the military took control of the government in a coup in 2014, dialogue with CSOs is very rare. Despite the holding of 2019 elections, dialogue is still quite limited. There is clear favouritism in government funding for cultural and creative projects: the State is looking for artists that create nationalist content and show the government in a good light. A civil society organisation in Thailand that participated to our study mentioned that they most often do not receive replies when they reach out to the government for funding or other support, even if the content is not offensive or violating any law, because the State is more interested in 'soldiers' or ambassadors to promote them.

2.4 Culture and trade agreements

Considering the lack of awareness of the 2005 Convention in Asia-Pacific countries and the low rate of ratification in the region, free trade agreements (FTA) rarely include a mention of the Convention, a cultural exception or exemption clause, or any measure dedicated to promoting and protecting the diversity of cultural expressions. However, there are some noteworthy agreements and a few countries do better than most when it comes to protecting their cultural industry.

The Republic of Korea stands out in the region with its bilateral agreements with India, Australia, China, Canada and Viet Nam which all at least mention the parties' willingness to promote cultural cooperation and examine the possibility of negotiating audiovisual coproduction agreements [15]. The agreements with India, Australia and China go further by adding preferential treatment clauses for coproductions, which are subject to an arrangement within the agreement or to one that will be eventually negotiated. With China and Australia, trade agreements also include a relaxation of immigration policies and of importation regulations for artists and crew members involved in coproductions [16]. Furthermore, the FTA between the European Union and the Republic of Korea is one of the very few that include an explicit mention of the Convention and that refer to the specificity of cultural goods and services. This agreement also includes a preferential treatment clause for cultural goods and improves the protection of intellectual property rights in Korea [17].

However, the Republic of Korea also has a free trade agreement with the United States concluded in 2006 which does not grant the same protection to the cultural industry. Despite certain reservations whose scope is ambiguous, this agreement increases the liberalization of digital products which could pose obstacles to the protection of the Korean cultural industry in the digital environment [18].

Furthermore, although the quota defining the number of days of compulsory screening of Korean films in cinemas per year was maintained in the agreement, it was reduced from 146 days to 73 days [19]. The film industry has since expressed its opposition to this reduction of quotas, but the debate has fizzled and is no longer a current issue.

[15] See [La Culture dans les traités et accords](#)

[16] *Idem*.

[17] European commission, [EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement](#)

[18] [La culture dans les traités et accords](#)

New Zealand is the other Asia-Pacific country that stands out from the crowd by granting the cultural sector specific provisions in some of its FTAs. The cultural clause included in the agreements by New Zealand has the particularity of having a rather broad scope. It covers both 'traditional' and digital cultural goods and services, in addition to applying to all chapters of the agreement it incorporates [20]. However, there is a limit to the application of these agreements, namely the previous commitments made by the country or countries Party to the agreement that liberalize services supposed to be covered by the agreement. There is thus a contradiction that undermines the effectiveness of the cultural clauses incorporated into the agreements. This is the case with the FTA between Australia, New Zealand and ASEAN. The agreement includes a relatively broad cultural clause that covers digital products, but several ASEAN countries have previous commitments on sectors of their cultural industries. Nevertheless, the New Zealand cultural clause remains an example of good practice which, according to Véronique Guèvremont and Ivana Otašević, deserves to be adopted by other countries in bilateral and regional agreements [21]. It is also to be noted that New Zealand has 17 co-production agreements, including one with China. This is especially important since China has a quota of 34 foreign films per year, and co-productions with New Zealand are not counted as foreign films [22].

[19] Kokas, 'Parasite' was a triumph for a film industry trapped between the U.S. and China, The Washington Post, 2020

[20] La culture dans les traités et accords

[21] Idem.

[22] New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, report on the economic contribution of the screen industry.

3. Civil society implication, obstacles and needs

3.1 Australia

Australia is the only country in the region that still has a national coalition member of the IFCCD. The coalition, founded in 2003, is a multi-stakeholder organisation that "includes representatives from across the cultural industries, including music, film, television, literature, libraries, dance, multimedia and visual arts" [23]. Although it has had different objectives over the years, the organisation has always provided a more unified voice for the cultural sector and a point of contact with international cultural organisations, notably through the IFCCD. The coalition has been instrumental in representing the interests of civil society in the formulation of Australia's national cultural policy, in the ratification of the 2005 Convention and in the development of government support for the sector.

Even though the Australian government has supported the sector in many ways in the past, more recent administrations have resisted civil society's demands for new initiatives or greater support in specific areas. Past governments, mostly between the 1960s and 1980s, have implemented and supported the Australia Council, the National Libraries and Archives, and other agencies that support the cultural sector. They have also created the national schools for the Arts and Screen and instituted various quota systems. In the audiovisual industry, for instance, commercial television operators must air 55% of Australian-made productions while pay channels only need to allow 5% of their budget to local content. To this day, streaming platforms are not subject to any regulation regarding Australian productions [24]. In this regard, the Make It Australian campaign is lobbying the government to push for legislation that would force streaming platforms of over 500 000 subscribers to invest 20% of their local revenue in Australian productions [25]. Regardless, the lack of new regulations to address the changes in the ways content is accessed is a threat to local content and a challenge for CSOs. Another obstacle for the cultural sector is the decreasing support from State and Federal governments that has been slowly cutting resources for most Arts organisations, in particular the public broadcasters. However, the governments have suitably responded to the urgent needs of performers and artists that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, these aid packages are not a long-term solution to the growing challenges in the cultural sector.

[23] ACCD (Activity Report August 2015)

[24] Buckmaster, [Why it's high time Australia had content quotas for streaming platforms](#), NME, 2021

[25] Ward, [A Heap of Aussie Stars Are Pushing for Streaming Platforms to Make More Local Movies and TV Shows](#), Concrete Playground, 2021

Concerning the 2005 Convention, it is well-known within some government circles and policymakers, but mostly among the public servants rather than the politicians, and within departments such as Communication and Arts and Trade. The Convention is rarely discussed or mentioned in policy announcements or in the media. Experts of trade, law and international relations and organisations that have staff dedicated to those fields are more likely to use the Convention frequently.

In short, Australian CSOs need to continue their advocacy efforts for a better protection of local content and adequate, long-term support from the government. There needs to be a more extensive knowledge and usage of the 2005 Convention in order to reach those goals. For needs that arise in the cultural sectors, the ACCD can act as a platform for exchange and the coordination of efforts when a wider response is required.

3.2 Cambodia

Civil society organisations of the cultural sector in Cambodia are dynamic and their numbers are growing. While they all have their own missions, the study showed that many collaborate together and join forces in the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions. The organisation that engaged the most in our study is Epic Arts, which “uses the arts as a powerful tool for transformation, promoting equality and celebrating diversity with people of all abilities” [26]. They aim to provide creative programs that empower disabled people and fight against discrimination. In addition to being well connected with other CSOs in Cambodia, Epic Arts has partnerships in Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, The Philippines, Vietnam and Singapore. The country director of Epic Arts is also a leading committee member of the Cultural and Creative Industries of Cambodia Association for Development and Advocacy, founded by UNESCO, a board member of Cambodian Living Arts, and an advisor to the Ministry of Fine Arts and Culture of Cambodia.

Cambodian Living Arts is another well-established CSO in Cambodia, whose mission is to “promote creativity and innovation in the arts sector, and to build links with our neighbors in the Greater Mekong region and further afield in Asia” [27]. The organisation advocates for improvement of arts education in schools and offers support through scholarships and fellowships.

[26] Written response to our questionnaire by Epic Arts

[27] Cambodian Living Arts [website](#)

As for the non-profit organisation and arts school Phare Ponleu Selpak (The Brightness of the Arts), they offer programmes for “children and young adults to develop their creativity, communication and concentration skills, and to access a sustainable artistic career whilst preserving and promoting Cambodian arts and culture” [28]. Lastly, Phare The Cambodian Circus is an innovative organisation formed in the relatively new social enterprise model that is affiliated to Phare Ponleu Selpak. Their revenues generated from performances and concession sales help fund the educational programmes at Phare Ponleu Selpak [29].

All of the aforementioned organisations—and more—have recently come together and created a coalition to facilitate the coordination of their missions and increase their influence on the Ministry of Culture “in an effort to help artists through economic hardships faced during the COVID-19 pandemic” [30]. Funded by UNESCO, this coalition will conduct research on the cultural sector and unite voices of artists and creators in Cambodia for a better implementation of cultural policies. The coalition wishes to have the cultural industry valued adequately and not be relegated to a secondary priority by the government.

Although civil society is generally well organised in Cambodia, challenges are still significant for organisations. Difficulties in obtaining long-term, reliable funding are very present. Epic Arts also raised the issue of finding qualified personnel to conduct its activities. Another major financial obstacle is that the Cambodian government does not offer tax rebates for NGOs, which increases the organisations’ financial burden. Furthermore, although the 2005 Convention is ratified in Cambodia and some cultural legislation is in place, “it is rarely enforced to its fullest potential: instead, informal practices in public administration stifle progress of the sector” [31]. For example, intellectual property and copyright legislation is quite lax. Another problem is the lack of knowledge in professional fundraising and successful practices among the CSOs, which increases financial issues. There are also concerns that the local market is too weak to sustain artists and creators, which calls for further regional cooperation. Finally, it was noted that the understanding of the meaning of ‘Diversity of Cultural Expressions’ among CSOs, the government and other relevant stakeholders is flawed.

[28] Phare Ponleu Selpak [site web](#)

[29] Phare Ponleu Selpak [website](#)

[30] Khmer Times, [UNESCO funds new organisation](#), 2021

[31] See UNESCO's [Backstage: Managing Creativity and the Arts in South-East Asia](#), 2021

Therefore, there is a need for capacity-building initiatives in management and fundraising. Training on the 2005 Convention, its significance and objectives is also crucial for government officials, but also CSOs. There is clearly a desire for Cambodian CSOs to develop a stronger network of partnerships internationally, in order to sustain creativity and exchange knowledge but also to reach wider markets for artists and cultural practitioners. More lobbying efforts to push for the government to enforce current policies and better implement the objectives of the 2005 Convention is needed.

3.3 Indonesia

Our main contributor to the study in Indonesia is Koalisi Seni (Indonesia Arts Coalition), an association of individuals and organisations officially formed in 2012 by a cross-disciplinary group of arts practitioners who envisioned a healthier arts ecosystem in Indonesia. Their mission includes policy advocacy in the arts sector, promoting the establishment of an arts endowment fund in Indonesia, as well as strengthening the management of knowledge and network among members within the organisation. Koalisi Seni currently brings together 294 individuals and organisations from 21 provinces in Indonesia. Their members represent all sectors of the cultural and creative industry, ranging from music, literature and film to arts management, graphic design and performing arts.

Koalisi Seni is the only organisation in Indonesia that takes part in policy advocacy at the national level and in discussions with government officials and other stakeholders. Their efforts have had a much-needed impact on cultural policies in Indonesia. For instance, in 2015, the organisation was involved in redrafting the initially problematic Cultural Bill into Law No.5/2017 on the Advancement of Culture, which defined the government as a facilitator in empowering communities that are the owners and the driving force of Indonesian culture and mandated the National Cultural Strategy to be elaborated in a bottom-up participatory manner. Koalisi Seni also actively participated in the drafting of the National Cultural Strategy by facilitating a series of forums for stakeholders as part of the Cultural Congress in 2018. The results of the forums were regarded as critical contributions to the National Strategy formulation.

Another essential way Koalisi Seni participates in the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions is through monitoring and evaluation of the Advancement of Culture Law, which was done in 2019 and 2021.

Their monitoring analysis and policy recommendations resulted in further discussions and the official signing of regulations that were previously stagnant at the hands of the State Secretariat Office. Furthermore, Koalisi Seni engages in research and policy reviews to then communicate findings to the public and relevant institutions. One example is their publication of *The Impacts of Art on Society* in 2019, aimed at encouraging public support for arts and culture. Lastly, Koalisi Seni offers its members a capacity building program called Kelas AKSI (Advokasi Kebijakan Seni Indonesia) or Indonesian Arts Policy Advocacy Class. The class will be open to the public next year.

Koalisi Seni is also actively engaged in monitoring and promoting artistic freedom. In 2019, the organisation helped a nationwide network of Indonesian musicians organise the dismissal of the Music Draft Bill which, if passed, would have threatened musicians' freedom of expression. In collaboration with UNESCO Jakarta, Koalisi Seni published a report on artistic freedom in the country from 2010 to 2020 and continues to raise awareness by facilitating follow-up discussions and workshops with various stakeholders.

The film industry of Indonesia had a quota system that came into effect in 2009 and aimed to dedicate 60% of screen time to local productions, but it was never actively implemented. In 2016, the government repealed the film industry from the Negative Investment List (NIL), meaning that foreign investment is now allowed for up to 100% of capital income [32]. This new regulation has been welcomed favorably by Indonesian filmmakers, who see it as a long-awaited opportunity to revitalise the industry and compete with big productions from Hollywood or Bollywood, for example. Although this measure could potentially have long-term effects on the authenticity of productions or the autonomy of local filmmakers, an expert in the region maintains that the benefits outweigh the risks.

When it comes to the 2005 Convention, which is ratified in Indonesia since 2012, the Ministry of Education and Culture holds workshops and seminars to raise awareness on the Convention prior to the Quadrennial Periodic Reports (QPR). Outside of these events, the Convention is not significantly being used as a primary reference in formulating policies, including the Advancement of Culture Law. However, the government did use UNESCO's Culture for Development Indicators (CDIS) in the making of Indeks Pembangunan Kebudayaan Indonesia (Indonesian Cultural Development Index) in 2018.

[32] Latorre, Revision of Indonesia's negative list & Indonesian film industry, 2016

The obstacles that civil society organisations face in achieving the promotion and protection of diverse cultural expressions include a deficiency in resources and support, a lack of understanding and respect by the general society about the importance of arts and culture, and the absence of political will. In this regard, the budget allowed for the Cultural Endowment Fund was cut from IDR 5 trillion in 2018 to 1 trillion in 2020. Another major obstacle relates to the problematic violations of artistic freedom, which are enabled by a lack of data, knowledge, and monitoring efforts on artistic freedom, as well as the continuing failures by the State to respect, protect, and fulfill these rights. While Indonesia has ratified the Convention and produced QPRs, the country has never once accounted for the condition of artistic freedom in those reports. There is an obvious attempt by the government to hide and dismiss artistic freedom violations and to silence subversive voices, even through hate speech.

In reaction to these obstacles, one of the needs for CSOs in Indonesia is core support for organizational development, in order to help the organizations be more resilient and be able to raise funds through public support and program donors. There is also a need for policy advocacy in targeted areas, for example policies that would help gender equality & non-binary artists, or that would enhance arts education in school to foster respect and interest in artistic activities, rather than reducing them to extra-curricular occupations. Lastly, platforms for networking, such as a potential Southeast Asian coalition, would allow for better collaboration and exchange of knowledge in the region.

3.4 Japan

Japan's cultural sector and its governmental management is quite unique in the region. The music sector, for instance, is one of the few in the world where digital streaming and downloads have not yet completely taken over. In 2017, only 5% of revenues from this industry came from streaming platforms and online downloading, due in part to the high popularity of CDs and CD rentals [33]. It was that same year that the first free version of a streaming service, in this case Spotify, was approved by the Japanese government. Another surprising reality of Japan's music industry is that only 25% of CD sales are from non-Japanese artists [34]. Streaming platforms are progressively growing, and related policies should be monitored closely. As for the film industry, despite a slight decrease since 2012, Japanese films continue to be very popular and hold over 50% of the market share [35].

[33] Scandinavian Traveler, [WHY IS THE MUSIC INDUSTRY IN JAPAN SO STRONG?](#)

[34] Idem.

[35] Chan-heum, [Frenemy of Korean Film: Screen Quota](#), The Argus, 2020

The industry remains quite local however, mostly because of the language. Up until the 1990s, there was an effort to market the films globally, but because of a decline in productions since this decade, the focus is now primarily on the domestic market and, therefore, the content mostly appeals to Japanese audiences. Nonetheless, that is not to say that the cultural sector of Japan is small or unprofitable. Japanese music such as J-Pop or Kawaii metal as well as anime and manga comics attract audiences worldwide—the manga industry alone generated almost 613 billion Japanese yen in 2020 [36].

Civil society organisations from the cultural sector are numerous but sparse and mostly uncoordinated among themselves. There is generally no connection between the organisations, but there is currently a project for a network to link these organisations on a multilateral level, to push for dialogue with government and policymakers. This initiative started last year in the context of the *Resiliart* movement launched by UNESCO.

Part of the reason why there is a lack of mobilisation from civil society is the transparency issues in government discussions. While there have been organisations supporting arts and culture engaging with politicians before, open debate was not achieved. Another factor is freedom of speech issues, coming from social norms and ‘cultural pressure’, that discourage civil society organisations from advocating an opposite stance as the government. It should also be noted that the funding by the government that is allocated on a yearly base, making it difficult for organisations to plan ahead for long-term projects. Advocating for modifications of these regulations and cultural policies in general is almost impossible because there are no specialists of arts and culture in the government system and no Ministry of Culture or even Tourism, so potential policies in that sector are rarely looked at.

With respect to the 2005 Convention, it is still not ratified. One of the main obstacles is in the way it was translated into Japanese by the government: the literal translation of the Convention there is ‘Convention of Cultural Diversity’, which does not have the same meaning as ‘Diversity of Cultural Expressions’. This causes confusion on the comprehension of the Convention and compromises the advocacy efforts for its actual goals. It is unknown whether this translation was deliberately made to be ambiguous.

[36] Statista, [Manga industry in Japan - statistics and facts](#)

Considering these challenges faced by Japanese CSOs, there is a need for raising awareness about the Convention and the importance of diverse cultural expressions, as well as clarifying the true objectives of the Convention. Explaining the distinction between the ‘Diversity of Cultural Expressions’ and general ‘Cultural Diversity’ is crucial. Workshops that could demonstrate the benefits of ratifying the Convention, such as the impact on cultural policy, strategic development of the cultural sector, artistic freedom and cultural rights, would be beneficial. In addition, increased possibilities of collaboration between CSOs, through platforms or networking activities, are needed to develop cohesion in civil society and allow for a stronger voice to be heard by policymakers.

3.5 Macau

While Macau may be small, its cultural sector is gaining momentum. As we previously noted, Macau was—and still is—a single sector economy based largely on the casino business. However, the pandemic was devastating to Macau’s casinos and economy, the GDP dropping 70% in 2020 [37] The government is therefore seeking to diversify its economy, leaving an open door for the cultural sector to establish itself as a new, durable source of revenue and economic growth. Before, the government did allow for some funding to artists and creators, but the access to that funding was strenuous since the cultural sector was seen as a ‘sideline’ rather than a major industry.

Additionally, Macau’s deeply liberal economic system offers no preferential treatment or protection to local artists and creators, leaving them to compete with Hollywood movies that are widely distributed in Macau. In spite of that, a local filmmaker did indicate that there is momentum and that people appreciate filmmakers trying to tell the stories of Macau. Our other contributor in Macau, a university professor, added that even though there may not be laws to enforce the protection of local content, in a small community like Macau, sometimes social norms achieve more than laws. An interesting method for the government to promote the cultural sector at least locally is by encouraging casinos to provide entertainment originating from Macau. Regardless, some creators believe that there would not be a need for pushing local content on casinos if the industry was better promoted and supported and thus, stronger. Another limitation of the cultural sector of Macau is the lack of communication with the business sector, as they tend to see each other as competitors rather than allies. There is a misconception that culture is not lucrative, but in reality, the two sectors are complementary.

[37] Statistic provided by one of our contributors in Macau

Artists and cultural practitioners in Macau do collaborate with each other, but mostly due to the size of the community rather than through an official platform. In light of new challenges such as the pandemic, a better implemented 'official' organisation would prove useful, to bring artists together but also in a broader regional perspective. Macau is an excellent entry point into Asia for international players who may want to collaborate artistically, but there are no facilitating agreements for co-productions, for instance. These types of policies, like a tax rebate system, are needed so more people want to go to Macau and engage in co-productions, hire local crew and organise joint projects.

There are however 'official' CSOs in Macau that are actively engaged in the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions. One of them is Chiu Yeng Culture Limited, whose mission is "to promote artistic and cultural developments of Macau, to fortify synergies in the local community and create a sustainable employment environment for young local artists and creative entrepreneurs" [38]. Its founder, Sabrina Ho, is a UNESCO partner involved in the empowerment of young entrepreneurs in the cultural sector since 2017. Chiu Yeng Culture Limited initially accepted our invitation to contribute to the study but we unfortunately did not receive a follow-up to include in this report.

Other needs for CSOs in Macau consist of incentives, cultural exchange programmes, information on what is done in other countries, and awareness on the 2005 Convention. Awareness-raising in the casinos would be worth exploring, to show owners how to increase the cultural diversity of what they offer in their establishment. Demonstrating how the cultural industry can benefit the economy and vice versa is essential in a capitalist environment like Macau. In addition, explaining how the creative industry can be a useful player in innovation and sustainability and how artists contribute to society's advancement. In this regard, Chambers of Commerce could be a good ally and help unite business and culture. Dialogue with the Cultural Bureau to explore ways to facilitate co-productions and international collaborations is also key to bring together culture and business.

[38] [UNESCO and Sabrina Ho Sign Strategic Partnership to Support Youth Cultural Entrepreneurs, 2017](#)

3.6 Malaysia

The coordination of efforts to promote and protect cultural diversity in Malaysia proves to be challenging for CSOs, largely due to the different legislation and prohibitions from State to State. Because artists are limited to certain areas of Malaysia for performing, their growth, potential for collaborations, visibility, and revenue are restrained. For this reason, many artists leave Malaysia to be able to grow and perform elsewhere. In addition, Malaysia's 'cultural economy' remains quite a small market, representing only 1,6% of the GDP in 2014, compared to 5% to 7% in neighbouring countries [39], despite such a generous definition that includes the following sectors: Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Music, Literature, Film/TV/Gaming Content, Fashion & Design, Traditional & Cultural Arts, Creative Education, Creative Technologies and Culinary Arts [40].

In the country, there is some funding provided by the government to support the creative industry, including through the MyCreative program. However, this funding comes in the form of loans or equities and does not offer grants or subsidies. Businesses—not individuals or non-profit organisations—have to demonstrate their rentability projections in a five-year plan [41]. For new or small organisations and individuals, this is most often not a viable option.

Malaysia also has a Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) which aims to “develop the arts and culture sector within the creative industry” [42] by acting as a connecting platform between different stakeholders and collecting data on the sector to adapt policies accordingly. Although it is a governmental agency, CENDANA includes an advisory panel composed of civil society actors “tasked with providing independent advice and recommendations” [43]. CENDANA claims to provide aid ‘where it is needed’, but according to our participant in the study, the agency’s actions have been quite limited since 2018.

However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Malaysian government has created the Malaysian Creative Industries Stimulus Package (PRISMA) under the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia. This package should help support culture professionals during difficult times when performing may not be allowed for sanitary reasons.

[39] MyCreative News, [The Gap in the Creative Industry Ecosystem of Malaysia](#)

[40] Idem.

[41] MyCreative [site web](#)

[42] CENDANA [site web](#)

[43] Abas, A. [PM declares 'cultural economy' as a new asset for Malaysia](#), New Straits Times, 2017

In short, Malaysia's government appears to value the cultural sector and to promote its potential, but it is unknown whether its initiatives are readily accessible for civil society and if CSOs are truly included in the policymaking process. Further consultations will have to be made with CSOs in Malaysia in this regard.

What is clear, however, is that international collaborations are crucial for people in the cultural sector of Malaysia for them to realise their potential. Our contributor to the study mentioned that collaborations are most frequent with Indonesia, but that they are not significantly highlighted. A cultural exchange program with Japan is also in place and is fully funded by Japan. However, most initiatives and opportunities are concentrated in Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, and very little promoted elsewhere.

As a result, there is a need for raising awareness across Malaysia to inform artists and creators of programs available to them, as well as informing the public and policymakers about the benefits of the 2005 Convention. Luckily, English is omnipresent in Malaysia, which can facilitate communications and potential international partnerships and trainings. Building a stronger network of CSOs and individuals is also much needed if civil society's needs are to be considered in policymaking. Easier access to funding would allow organisations to form and the cultural sector's market to get stronger. Lastly, capacity-building activities for existing organisations, to help with management and funding, would prove beneficial.

3.7 Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea, or South Korea, has probably the most developed and successful cultural sector in all of Asia-Pacific. It has the particularity of being not only dynamic and well-established in the region, but also managing to reach Western cultures as well. Korean content from music to film, animation and dance has become a major player in the global creative economies. Sometimes called the Korean wave, the rising popularity of Korean cultural products worldwide can be partly attributed to the implication of the government in promoting the cultural sector, by recognising the economic potential of the sector long ago. Not only has the Republic of Korea ratified the 2005 Convention in 2010, it has also been a key player in the region for the implementation of its objectives and has been involved in many activities relating to the Convention. Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has funded and organised various projects in collaboration with UNESCO, in addition to promoting Korean arts and culture through a network of Korea Cultural Centers in 27 countries [44].

[44] Korean Culture and Information Service [website](#)

However, the success of the Korean cultural industry has generally not been achieved through engaging with civil society, but rather through a top-down approach. According to the Korean National Commission for UNESCO (KNCU), the 2005 Convention is not very well-known at the field level. In this regard, there is a need for increasing information-sharing efforts. Capacity-building would also be needed for organisations that have expertise in some areas, but not in others. Another issue is the unbalanced representation of civil society groups in relevant discussions and activities, because there are many different groups with different priorities and hearing all of them is challenging at times. Korea, like nearly all countries, is noticing a drastic change in the way creative content is consumed, new streaming platforms being the primary medium. KNCU mentioned that research and monitoring will have to be done to evaluate the possible impacts for Korean artists and the diversity of cultural expressions in Korea and the region, but some forums have already been held and concluded that new opportunities as well as challenges will emerge. At the moment, while it is one of the fastest moving industries of the region, the Korean government and regulations cannot keep up with the rapid changes happening in the cultural sector. There will need to be a push for the government to take action and adapt policies to the new, digital reality of the cultural industry.

3.8 Thailand

The main contributor for our study in Thailand was Thailand Music and Arts Organisation (TMAO). This CSO organises events such as workshops, artistic collaborations, and even lessons for young artists in Southeast Asia. They hold a yearly symposium where artists from many different countries can participate in music concerts, art performances, interdisciplinary workshops, intellectual panel discussions, and sessions for young artists. TMAO is also involved in different cultural and creative festivals. Part of their mission is to promote cultural diversity and foster a creative economy in Thailand and Southeast Asia. Additionally, they aim to showcase Thai traditional arts in a new light, to make it modern and interesting for a larger audience. The organisation collaborates with the Southeast Asia New Music and Art Foundation (SANMA) for curating yearly programs and supporting artists. It has also received grants from the Japan Foundation in the past as well as the British Council for their current project Connecting through Cultures 2021. One of their ongoing projects is also to build a digital archive with artists' consent, to showcase works past and present. Lastly, this relatively new organisation, founded in 2016, has already realised numerous project-based collaborations internationally, in countries like China, Switzerland, Japan, and the Netherlands.

One of the challenges faced by Thai CSOs is the complexity of the registration process as a non-profit organisation. Some organisations have no other option but to register as private companies, which then makes them ineligible for some types of funding, tax deductions, or even grants from international organisations. Furthermore, since Thailand has not ratified the 2005 Convention, CSOs do not qualify for financing from UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD). Another obstacle for artists and cultural practitioners is the widespread illegal copying of content, due to the troubled economy and low salaries in Thailand. Moreover, the definition of the cultural industry is understood differently depending on the Ministry and there is a lack of "reliable cultural statistics and data to assess the contribution that the sector makes to national GDP" [45]. This causes cultural policies to be inconsistent and unclear. CSOs such as TMAO take it upon themselves to promote the diversity of cultural expressions through their social media platforms and international collaborations, and resort to private IT companies to protect their content from illegal download.

Something that would be extremely useful in Thailand for artists is an organisation that provides endowment, scholarships and grants. Our contributor mentioned the ASCAP Foundation in New York that has been of great help to him, but there is not a similar entity in Thailand. Projects such as opening a residency program for international artists in Thailand would also allow for better exchange and fostering of creativity, while simultaneously benefiting tourism. Advocacy for better policies in the cultural sector is needed, and even though the government of Thailand is challenging to reach, raising awareness on the 2005 Convention and its potential benefits is necessary. The Bangkok regional office of UNESCO could be a great ally in those efforts.

3.9 Arab world

Although part of the Arab world is not geographically in Asia, we believed that including this region in the study would only increase the plurality of opinions and findings of our research, in addition to uncovering similarities in the needs and challenges of CSOs in Asia-Pacific to those in the Arab world. The contributor to our study from this region was Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy (Culture Resource), a non-profit organisation based in Lebanon that "seeks to support artistic creativity in the Arab world and to encourage cultural exchange within the region and beyond" [46].

[45] See UNESCO's [Backstage: Managing Creativity and the Arts in South-East Asia](#), 2021

[46] Culture Resource [website](#)

The organisation provides support to artists from the Arab world with capacity-building activities, mobility grants, training programs and cultural policy research. Publications on their research projects are available to the public in Arabic, with some also available in English and French.

According to Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy, cultural sectors of the Arab world vary greatly depending on the country, mostly because of political, social and economic instability in the region. Although artists and creators are active, the industry is not sustainable because the States do not institute policies that could empower the sector and make it structured. Therefore, individuals and organisations rely on donations and grants to conduct their activities. One of the problems with advocating for cultural policies and legislations is that dialogue with governments is either absent or dysfunctional.

In Lebanon, for instance, culture is not a priority considering the economic and political situation. Besides, the Ministry of Culture is quite weak, which leads to unbalanced and unsuccessful discussions with the cultural sector. However, as the government officials change, some ministries suddenly become more inclined to engage in dialogue with CSOs. Regardless, the process is highly unstable.

However, as the government officials change, some ministries suddenly become more inclined to engage in dialogue with CSOs. Regardless, the process is highly unstable. Artistic freedom is also cause for concern in many Arab countries, problematic topics being religion, political dissent, nudity, and other taboo subjects in the region. Some laws prohibit forms of artistic expression and artists will censor themselves for their own protection.

Although there are UNESCO offices everywhere in the region, their work is often focused on archeology and Heritage rather than arts and culture. There is also a feeling that information included in UNESCO Global Reports concerning the Arab world is minimal and that local civil society points of view are rarely solicited, which is why Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy produces his own reports that include information collected from the field locally.

Consequently, one of the needs for CSOs in the Arab world is increased partnerships and funding from international organisations, in part to fund cultural policy development programs.

In Lebanon, demonstrating the economic potential of the cultural sector to policymakers could lead to policies and programs from the State that would be mutually beneficial. There needs to be measures like tax exemptions to give a chance for the cultural sector to be more sustainable. In the meantime, joint projects between artists and organisations in the region and internationally are a great way to strengthen the cultural sector, offer visibility to artists and foster creativity and innovation without relying on an unstable government.

3.10 Other countries

Although we were not able to reach representatives from these areas, some countries and regions were mentioned by our participants as having potential for further engagement on the objectives of the 2005 Convention and civil society implication. These include Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Vietnam, Central Asia, Mongolia, and the Pacific Islands.

For instance, according to UNESCO, “Bangladesh is home to prominent creative sectors and artists, and benefits from an avid local audience. The country is a globally renowned platform of contemporary cultural and creative based-research, events and exhibitions” [47]. There have also been occasions in Bangladesh for civil society, government officials and other stakeholders to meet and voice their concerns and needs. A contributor to our study stated that the UNESCO cluster office in Almaty was very active and held activities in relation to the 2005 Convention. Similar claims were made about the UNESCO offices in Apia and Dhaka. Considering these statements, it was surprising that neither UNESCO offices nor CSOs in Bangladesh engaged in our study.

As for Vietnam, there were mentions of the government being quite involved in the promotion of cultural expressions and efforts to strengthen the creative economy. Further attempts to connect with CSOs and resources in those areas are worth making to enhance regional collaboration and advance the cultural sectors of Asia-Pacific as a whole.

[47] UNESCO, [Reshaping Cultural Policies for the Promotion of Fundamental Freedoms and the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in Bangladesh](#)

4. Resources in the region

Aside from monetary funding from their governments and donors, CSOs also need access to information, training and platforms to exchange practices and find partners. This type of support can come from various international organisations that are active in Asia-Pacific.

4.1 UNESCO regional offices

For information on the 2005 Convention and related activities, the obvious resources, at first glance, are regional UNESCO offices. However, as the Bangkok regional office mentioned, the budgets dedicated to this Convention are very limited. This may explain why this was the only UNESCO office that agreed to contribute to the research. Nonetheless, even with small budgets, some UNESCO offices are able to carry out great projects and were mentioned by other contributors to the study as trusted allies. The Bangkok office had done many projects in Myanmar in the past, but the political unrest in this country has stopped cultural activities sponsored by UNESCO. Currently, projects are mostly taking place in Thailand and Lao PDR with some on a Southeast Asian regional level.

In Thailand, one of the current projects relates to the film sector, which has voiced its interest in the establishment of a Film Council. The UNESCO office is therefore trying to merge the film sector's needs and interests with the government's interests and exploring ways for the government to support the industry. Thus, the office is facilitating dialogue between civil society and government officials to help CSOs achieve their goals, even if the Convention is not ratified in Thailand. Another valuable project carried out by the Bangkok office is a study on the situation of the creative industry in Thailand, which will include the government's perspective as well as civil society's point of view. The information is being collected from webinars and interviews organised by the office and will serve as a way to advocate for civil society's needs and for the government to pick up some of its recommendations.

4.2 International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC)

A resource in the region for training and information on copyrights and neighbouring rights is the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC), a non-profit organisation that works to “enable collective management organisations to seamlessly represent creators across the globe and ensure that royalties flow to authors for the use of their works anywhere in the world” [48]. CISAC works with collective management organisations (CMO) of many Asia-Pacific countries and offers them expertise regarding copyright collection and neighbouring rights.

In August 2020, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the Japan Copyright Office (JCO), and CISAC organised a collective management training for representatives of copyright offices and CMOs in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and The Philippines. CISAC has 29 members in the Asia-Pacific region and a regional office that offers training and access to information to creators, artists and cultural organisations [49]. Online trainings and seminars were also conducted during the pandemic. Furthermore, CISAC provides its members with business tools and services, such as the musical Works Information Database (WID) that was renewed in 2021 [50]. The organisation’s annual reports allow members to be informed about “the Confederation’s activities and achievements at the hub of its network of authors societies around the world” [51] as well as current events, movements and challenges. CISAC’s work is essential in a region like Asia-Pacific, where artists and cultural practitioners are often underpaid and where illegal downloads are notorious.

4.3 British Council

The British Council is another main player in the region for civil society organisations who wish to establish partnerships, fund projects, increase mobility and collaborate with artists from other countries. While one of the goals of the British Council is to build bridges between the cultural sectors of Asia and the United Kingdom, the organisation also funds and organises initiatives that mostly benefit the development of Asia-Pacific cultural sectors. For example, the Creative Spark Higher Education Enterprise Programme seeks to develop creative economies and teach enterprise skills for participants in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

[48] CISAC

[49] CISAC [Annual Report 2020](#)

[50] CISAC [Annual Report 2021](#)

[51] CISAC

The British Council also developed a Creative Communities Learning Lab in collaboration with Southeast Asian professionals which offers training and information for cultural practitioners on three themes: “managing digital communities, new ways to monetise creative work, and strategies to develop original, innovative online course content for creatives” [52].

Another project led by the British Council aimed to promote gender equality, social cohesion and the empowerment of women and girls in South Asia. The initiative included workshops for “female artists, graphic novelists, and illustrators from across South Asia and the UK to explore themes of overlooked heroines from the past and imagined heroines for the future” [53] which were carried out in multiple ‘WOW’ Festivals. In Southeast Asia, the British Council co-created the SEAD programme with Mekong Cultural Hub that brings together fellows from ten countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan and the United Kingdom [54]. This project is only one of many examples of how the British Council enables regional cooperation but also exchange with United Kingdom artists and creative professionals.

One contributor to our study mentioned some difficulties, however, that the British Council may face in certain countries due to its United Kingdom origin. In China, for example, engaging artists and government officials in collaboration and dialogue can be challenging when the two countries are in a commercial conflict or in a diplomatic strain. Even in a country like New Zealand, the desire to move away from the colonial past and increase indigenous empowerment causes the British Council to be less trusted and solicited. Regardless, the British Council is extremely active in Asia-Pacific and around the world and has realised countless projects that have trained, informed, and given visibility to culture professionals in over 30 Asia-Pacific countries.

[52] British Council, [Creative Communities Learning Lab](#)

[53] British Council, [South Asia: supporting gender equality and social cohesion](#)

[54] British Council, [SEAD programme](#)

4.4 Japan Foundation

The Japan Foundation is similar to the British Council when it comes to its mission and activities. It encourages cultural exchange and supports collaboration between Japanese and international artists through various activities. Some of the ways the foundation promotes Japanese arts and culture include providing “financial assistance for performances or co-productions in North America and European countries that aim to introduce Japanese performing arts to local audiences” [55] supporting individuals and non-profit organisations for cultural exchange projects, and managing a database of Japanese performing arts [56]. Although fostering Japanese arts and culture is a central element of the Japan Foundation’s goals, the organisation also allows for artists and cultural professionals from across Asia to be given a platform and showcase their practice through a network of regional offices. Currently, there are twelve liaison offices for the Japan Foundation in Asia-Pacific.

4.5 Korea National Commission for UNESCO (KNCU)

The Korea National Commission for UNESCO (KNCU) is an additional resource for artists in the Republic of Korea and in the region. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission helped artists and creators by providing emergency living funds, organising online performances, and even collaborating with “artists and students who love comics to submit cheerful visual messages to encourage collective social distancing and hygiene efforts” [57], thus combining COVID-19 awareness campaigns with the promotion and visibility of *manhwa* (comic/cartoon) artists.

When it comes to the 2005 Convention, the Commission is carrying out small projects, such as a national forum to discuss how to implement the objectives of the Convention in the Korean context. They also translate UNESCO Global Reports into Korean so that Korean artists and creators may stay informed. Recently, KNCU has been conducting research on discrimination, gender issues and online bullying from the perspective of the 2005 Convention. While these preoccupations concern cultural rights and human rights issues, the Commission is also trying to relate the 2005 Convention to these social issues and evaluate their impact on the culture and creative industry. Overall, KNCU is an important and active organisation in Asia-Pacific for the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

[55] Japan Foundation, [Performing Arts](#)

[56] See [Performing Arts Network Japan](#)

[57] UNESCO news, [KNCU COVID-19 Response](#)

4.6 Academic programs

Lastly, although they may not be accessible to everyone, there are great academic trainings that are being developed in universities that can provide artists with management and entrepreneurial skills in combination with Arts studies. For instance, Monash University in Melbourne, Australia offers an array of courses in Arts, such as double degrees in Business and Arts and a master's degree in Cultural and Creative Industries. This master's degree is an interdisciplinary program that leads to a thorough understanding of the cultural sector and its potential, cultural policymaking and governance, as well as cultural economy" [58]. Similar academic trainings were mentioned in the Arab world as well.

[58] Monash University, Cultural and Creative Industries

Conclusions

The immensity and diversity of the Asia-Pacific region are reflected in the findings of this report. Local needs and challenges for CSOs are influenced by the wealth and development of their country, the political system and current officials, the language, the strength of the cultural sector, historic contexts, and whether or not their country has ratified the 2005 Convention.

However, there have been recurring patterns in the region. One of them is that there is a certain level of distrust towards Western organisations and even UNESCO, because they have not in the past adapted their approach to local contexts and realities, rendering it patronising at times. It is imperative that international organisations establish durable relationships with local organisations, not only to better understand their evolving needs, but also to ensure that the connection with CSOs lasts beyond its individuals. There have been many accounts of partnerships ceasing when the main contact leaves the organisation or retires.

There is also a general diagnosis that regional cooperation is hindered by the variety of languages and cultures, and that it is difficult for international organisations to be successful in areas where English is not prevalent.

Another conclusion of the research is the weak knowledge and understanding of the 2005 Convention among governments, but also civil society. Raising awareness on the Convention, its meaning and its potential in local contexts is essential. Trainings need to be tailored to the regional audience to interest CSOs and make an impact. In many places, the lack of engagement on the 2005 Convention is due to competing priorities, such as fundraising, gender equality, human rights, and climate change.

Lastly, the lack of data on the cultural sectors of Asia-Pacific is one of the great obstacles for advocacy. The contribution and potential of the cultural sectors to local economies are often unknown, which restrains CSOs from efficiently campaigning for their goals. More research and data collection will need to be done in the coming years.

Nevertheless, discussions with our contributors have shown that CSOs and individuals in Asia-Pacific are extremely interested in increasing their partnerships and developing an international network. Artists and cultural practitioners are passionate about their work and many expressed their wish to be more involved in activities promoting the diversity of cultural expressions.

Annex

Invitations, replies and participations by country of origin or organization

| Country/organization | Invitations | Replies | Participations |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| Australia | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Bangladesh | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Cambodia | 8 | 3 | 1 |
| Hong Kong | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| India | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Indonesia | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| Japan | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Kazakhstan | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Macau | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Malaysia | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| New Zealand | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Philippines | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Republic of Korea | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| Samoa | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Singapore | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Thailand | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Arab world | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| UNESCO Experts | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| UNESCO Offices | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| International associations | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 67 | 23 | 17 |