

SOUTHEAST ASIAN CREATIVE CITIES STRENGTHEN TIES THROUGH RENEWED REGIONAL MOU IN KUALA LUMPUR

KUALA LUMPUR, 18 November 2025 - Creative leaders from across Southeast Asia have renewed the Southeast Asian Creative Cities Network (SEACCN) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), reinforcing a stronger, unified regional commitment to advance creativity-led urban development and boost Southeast Asia's global competitiveness.

Hosted by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) and Think City and officiated by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), YBhg. Dato' Shaharuddin bin Abu Sohot, the Nov 15 signing brought together four national level organisations that advocate and drive their cities' creative economy agendas.

The signatories were Malaysia's Think City (represented by Managing Director, YBhg. Dato' Hamdan Abdul Majeed), Thailand's Creative Economy Agency (Senior Specialist, Ms. Montinee Yongvikul), Indonesia Creative Cities Network (Executive Committee, Ms Dwinita Larasati), and the Creative Economy Council of the Philippines (President & Founder, Mr Paolo Mercado).

The renewal comes at a time of rising momentum for the region, reflected in Kuala Lumpur's recent designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Design.

In his launching address, Shaharuddin described the renewed MoU as a meaningful step forward for South-East Asia's creative ecosystem.

"In Malaysia, culture and creativity have long been central to our national identity. From the richness of our tradition to the vibrancy of our creative industry, these sectors have shaped how we see ourselves, how we express who we are and how we connect with the rest of the world," he said.

Hamdan echoed the importance of unified regional action, noting that Southeast Asian cities face similar urban and social challenges and stand to gain significantly from deeper collaboration. He noted that cities across the region are rediscovering the power of culture and creativity, not just as soft assets but as strategic drivers of regeneration, identity and resilience.

"Here in Kuala Lumpur, the Warisan Kuala Lumpur initiative, launched by Prime Minister YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, is reigniting interest in our historical and cultural heart. It's in this context that we warmly congratulate Kuala Lumpur on its recent designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Design," he said.

The renewed MoU sets out a shared mission for Southeast Asian cities that recognise creativity as a driver of sustainability and community well-being. It focuses on placing culture and creativity at the centre of urban regeneration and economic development, strengthening the creation and exchange of cultural content, nurturing ecosystems that elevate creative talent, promoting wider access to culture and embedding creativity within city and regional policies.

To achieve this, SEACCN will concentrate on six key action areas: knowledge exchange; joint regional projects; exchanges involving artists, academics and policymakers; research and evaluation; policy support; and public awareness.

The MoU aims to expand membership to include more cities – especially those aspiring to develop creativity-driven urban agendas and welcomes partners across sectors who share an interest in cultural and creative development.

Thailand's Montinee Yongvikul said the renewal of the MoU was timely as there is growing acceptance from governments in the region on the importance of the creative economy.

"This MoU will further enhance collaboration to elevate culture, design and creativity as drivers of prosperity," she said.

The Philippines' Paolo Mercado concurred. "We are a region of more than 600 million people, yet we have not fully unlocked our collaborative strength. Southeast Asia's creative scene has long been a hidden gem," he said.

Meanwhile, illustrating how local wins potentially feed into regional progress, Dwinita Larasati shared the Indonesian experience in ensuring creative cities thrive. "In Bandung, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia and creative practitioners successfully pushed to get the Creative Economy Bill passed. That was a win as it set a legal baseline for the creative economy," she said.

Founded in 2014, SEACCN started off as a regional platform for cities in the region to collaborate at a time when the creative economy was not yet widely recognised as part of national development. Over the past decade, cities in the network have shared best practices, co-hosted festivals and design weeks and introduced creative urbanism programmes that addressed local social, economic and environmental needs.

Today, with more Southeast Asian governments embracing creativity as a driver of growth, the renewed MoU positions the region to move forward with stronger alignment, deeper cooperation and a unified voice on the global stage.

- END -

About Think City

Think City is an impact organisation established in 2009 to create more sustainable and equitable places for the benefit of all. Our knowledge, skills and strategies focus on urban solutions, the environment, social communities and the cultural economy. Think City is a wholly owned subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad (the sovereign wealth fund of the Government of Malaysia). For more information, log on to thinkcity.com.my.

About SEACCN

Established in 2014, the Southeast Asian Creative Cities Network is a regional platform that supports cities in placing culture and creativity at the heart of sustainable development. The network strengthens collaboration through knowledge sharing, partnerships, pilot projects and policy support, helping advance creative practitioners, community participation and inclusive urban growth. Membership is open to organisations and individuals involved in the creative economy in Southeast Asia.

Caption



MOTAC Secretary-General YBhg. Dato' Shaharuddin bin Abu Sohot (standing left) and Think City Board of Director Ms Suryani Senja Alias witnessing the MoU signing. The signatories are (from left) Creative Economy Council of the Philippines President & Founder, Mr Paolo Mercado; Thailand's Creative Economy Agency Senior Specialist, Ms. Montinee Yongvikul; Indonesia Creative Cities Network Executive Committee, Ms Dwinita Larasati and Think City Managing Director, YBhg. Dato' Hamdan Abdul Majeed.



Signatories of the MoU with their signed documents. They are from left Creative Economy Council of the Philippines President & Founder, Mr Paolo Mercado; Thailand's Creative Economy Agency Senior Specialist, Ms. Montinee Yongvikul; MOTAC Secretary-General YBhg. Dato' Shaharuddin bin Abu Sohot; Indonesia Creative Cities Network Executive Committee, Ms Dwinita Larasati; Think City Board of Director Ms Suryani Senja Alias and Think City Managing Director, YBhg. Dato' Hamdan Abdul Majeed.



MOTAC Secretary-General YBhg. Dato' Shaharuddin bin Abu Sohoh delivering his launching speech.



A panel discussion, *Shaping Creative Cities In Southeast Asia* was held in conjunction of the MoU signing. Moderated by Sustainability Cities Advisor Neil Khor (third from left), the panelists were (from left) Thailand's Creative Economy Agency Senior Specialist, Ms. Montinee Yongvikul; Indonesia Creative Cities Network Executive Committee, Ms Dwinita Larasati Creative Economy Council of the Philippines President & Founder, Mr Paolo Mercado; and Think City Senior Director Ms Izan Satrina.