Wading in the Covid-19 Pandemic:

Fate and Ways Forward for Malaysian Creative Cities

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Abstract

Since the 2019 Wuhan outbreak, the COVID-19 pandemic badly hit all sectors of the global economy. The creative and cultural sectors (CCS) are among the hardest hit. The value chain of CCS (i.e. creation, production, distribution, accessibility to contents) was severely immobilized. In cities, mitigation measures implemented to contain Covid-19 significantly downsized the CCS. Jobs, incomes and livelihoods of creative and cultural employees were threatened. These scenarios question the readiness, resilience and sustainability of CCS, particularly in cities. The fate and way forward of creative cities are now a grave concern. This paper aims to investigate the impacts, developments, reactions and policy responses of Malaysia's CCS and creative cities as Covid-19 unfolds. Based on primary (i.e. interviews) and secondary data, three emerging Malaysian creative cities (i.e. Kuala Lumpur, George Town and Ipoh) were studied. The findings revealed that while government assistance is forthcoming, there is still room for inclusive policies from all tiers of governments and across diverse stakeholders (i.e. private, public, civil society) to reach out to creative employees who are socio-spatially segregated in Malaysia. It is also an opportune time to revisit and reinstate Malaysia's CCS into national development given that these sectors were sidelined even before Covid-19.

Keywords: *Creative Cities, COVID-19, Malaysia, Impacts, Resilience, Strategies, Cultural Policies*[1]

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Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan during late 2019 has altered all domains of life when it morphed into a global pandemic. The highly contagious Covid-19 virus caused countries and cities worldwide to resort to varying degrees of lockdowns contingent upon the magnitude of outbreak within the local community. Mitigation measures and standard operating procedures (SOPs) like physical distancing, wearing of masks and curtailing people in public places were quickly implemented. In many cities, hospitality businesses, tourism and other in-person activities were forced to shut down temporarily and some indefinitely. Amongst the worst hit sectors is the creative and cultural sectors (CCS) when galleries, museums, arts performances and exhibitions came to a halt. Global statistics reported that, together with the tourism sector, the creative and cultural sectors are amongst the worst impacted by Covid-19. Jobs at risk in CCS ranged from 0.8% to 5.5% of employment across OECD regions (Travkina & Sacco, 2020:2).

According to OECD, the crisis experienced by the cultural and creative sectors involves enormous loss of revenue opportunities and is felt unevenly between and across the sector, where some actors (i.e. public galleries, museums) benefit from public support while private small enterprises and freelance creatives could encounter bankruptcy. Undeniably, the Covid-19 crisis has caused a 'structural threat' to the survival of businesses and individuals in creative and cultural production. A recent European study echoed similar sentiments by highlighting that cultural jobs are especially at risk due to the sector's high incidences of structural fragmentation and dependency on live performances and the general public (Montalto, Sacco, Alberti, Panella & Saisana,2020).

Such a gloomy scenario questions the readiness, resilience and sustainability of the CCS amidst an ongoing pandemic that does not show signs of succumbing despite the availability of vaccines. On the Malaysian front, the fate of the CCS and destiny of creative/cultural workers are being tested as well. In response to Covid-19, the Malaysian government ordered the Movement Control Order (MCO) since 18 March 2020 where full or partial lockdowns were imposed on states, cities and districts based on the statistics of infection and severity of spread. Within the CCS, in-person performances halted, and curtains drawn down. Malaysian creatives and cultural employees quickly went out of jobs, just like their global counterparts. Mirroring global trends, Malaysia's CCS recorded a loss in revenues when the Covid-19 virus began to make a firm foothold in the country. From the Cultural Economy Development Agency's (CENDANA) (2020) recent survey, it was reported that 93% of Malaysia creative employees were negatively impacted by Covid-19 and 70% reported that their incomes were adversely affected. A similar percentage (i.e. 70%) also reported that they experienced financial losses. National television also started to give airtime to creatives to voice their plights and lament how badly hit the Malaysian CCS is. The unpredictable and unprecedented pandemic has certainly threatened and made vulnerable their livelihoods.

From a broader perspective, it provokes a myriad of questions ranging from the fluidity of culture and cultural development during shocks to more contested notions of the potential (or danger?) of advocating creative and creative industries as the next mower of a nation or city's structural economic base. More pertinently, the scenario casts the ambivalent question of the viability as well as the promise and peril of a creative city as an urban develop-

ment strategy post Covid-19. These concerns and issues motivated the writing of this paper for the context of Malaysia where the agenda of creative city development and creative economy are now moving to the forefront of national and urban policy agendas. It further provokes the question of whether this is the correct strategic pathway for Malaysian cities. This paper will thus deliberate the fact (and fear?) as to whether the concept and practicalities of creative cities/creative industries will vanish after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Against this backdrop, this paper raises the following enquiry: *What is the fate and way forward for Malaysian creative cities and industries amidst and after the Covid-19 pandemic?* With the Covid-19 pandemic still unfolding, insofar, there is a dearth of in-depth academic research that have been undertaken about the fate and way forward for creative city development in Malaysia. To date, only a few preliminary studies were undertaken by local think tanks (i.e. Think City, Penang Institute) and government agencies (i.e. CENDANA) to depict quick snapshot situation analysis of the Covid-19 pandemic (Think City, 2020; Pan, 2020; Lim, 2020a). Hence, this study is timely to fill a pertinent research gap. The findings that derive from this study will go towards better informed and evidence-based policy-making for the development of Malaysian creative cities/industries in respond to the current Covid-19 pandemic as well as to increase a Malaysian creative city's preparedness, resilience and sustainability in the future.

In an overview, this paper is organized into five (5) sections. The first section introduces the paper, illustrates the problem statement and states the research gap and significance. Section two provides a systematic literature review of the conceptual framework that underpins culture and creativity vis-à-vis sustainable development, the economy and the urban setting during Covid-19. This is followed by the way global creative cities, both in the Western and Eastern worlds, were impacted, reacted and responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Section three briefly outlines the methodology of this paper. Subsequently, section four discusses the way Malaysian creative cities and CCS are impacted and how they responded during the Covid-19 pandemic. Section five concludes the paper by drawing comparisons and lessons from global scenarios before suggesting implications and recommendations to increase the resilience of Malaysian creative cities.

Framing Culture and Creativity Within Creative City Discourse During Covid-19

The following sections will review key concepts to frame culture and creativity within creative city discourse. This will also serve as the conceptual framework for this paper.

Culture as Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development

Since the launch of the 1987 Brundtland Report, the concept of sustainable development has moved to the forefront of policy agenda underpinned by three pillars, namely, economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance. The element of culture was largely absent in the equation despite the fact that most if not all of mother earth's environmental concerns and socio-economic issues have cultural actions and decisions (i.e. people and their actions) at the core. With solutions and strategies being culturally based, the current understanding of sustainable development premised on environmental and economic matters alone might be unsuccessful without considering culture (Dessein, Soini, Fairclough & Horlings, 2015:14; see also UNESCO, 2016). Put simply, looking solely at these three dimen-

sions cannot portray the complexities of existing society (UCLG, n.d.). In response, international bodies like the Council of Europe, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) have started to advocate culture as the missing link and fourth pillar of sustainable development (Dessein et al.,2015; UCLG,2018).

The new approach acknowledges 'dual means' in the relationship between culture and sustainable development. First, to develop the cultural sector itself (i.e. creative & cultural industries, heritage, cultural tourism). Second, to integrate and mainstream culture's role in public policy domains (i.e. the economy, environment, education, social cohesion) (UCLG, n.d.). At the city level, the UCLG has in 2004 adopted 'Agenda 21 for Culture' to be implemented by local governments where indigenous local cultures/traditions converge with new creativity in cities thus contributing to identity preservation, celebration of diversity and recognizing cultural creativity as a promising resource to develop societies and economies. However, the current Covid-19 pandemic is a testing time to deliberate culture in cities and it is contingent upon acknowledgement of culture as 4th pillar. To this end, strong 'political will' to effectuate transparent urban governance and stakeholders' willingness to incorporate cultural creativity in creative city development are pivotal without which the grandeur aspiration to mainstream culture in development can go awry if the concept and entailing processes are understood and implemented indiscriminately.

Culture, Cultural Economy and Wealth Creation

The interrelationship between culture, the economy and wealth creation has been widely contested. Despite strong disapproval of monetizing culture due to its irreproducible values, the benefits of valorizing and commodifying culture are increasing being acknowledged since the 1960s. By 1980s, the concept of 'cultural industries/cultural economy' emerged with a positive label in the discourse as a viable source of employment and income generator (UNDP & UNESCO, 2013). With the rise of the creative and cultural economy globally, there are evidence to illustrate culture-led economic dividend for sustainable development of individuals, societies and nations. For instance, UNESCO (2021) estimated the creative and cultural industries' (CCI) contribution of US$2,250 billion to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) each year. The CCI created nearly 30 million cultural and creative jobs worldwide, generating incomes and revenues for CCI practitioners and companies in developed and developing countries.

Economically, culture contributes to wealth creation not only through its role as an industrial sector (Scott, 1999; Smith & Warfield, 2008; Throsby, 2008), but also as a catalyst towards culture-led urban regeneration. Scholars highlighted the viability of redeveloping or branding cities by leveraging local cultural and heritage identities (Gotham, 2001; Throsby, 2008; Sasaki, 2010; Landry, 2012). Asian cities within UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) have reported how culture helps in regenerating local economy albeit with varying outcomes. The current Covid-19 pandemic is an opportune time to examine the economic prowess of creative cities as they brace the pandemic and build resilience to embrace current and future shocks.

Culture, Social Cohesion, Integration and Societal Well-Being

Culture's role in the societal realm is also apparent. The 'cultural turn' in the social sciences acknowledges not only the separateness but also the interconnectedness of culture with society and/or social structures. It is argued that culture and society have to certain extent an "iterative and reciprocal relationship, in which culture constructs society but society also shapes culture" (Dessein et al., 2015:25). Scholars have highlighted culture's positive impact towards valuing individual and collective societal well-being (i.e. measured as happiness or life satisfaction) (Jeannotte, 2021:3), social cohesion and development of social capital (i.e. volunteering, participation) (Jeannotte, 2017) as well as to foster social integration through interculturality in cities (Bordisky, 2012).

The 'interculturality city' concept is a variant of the creative city with emphasis towards leveraging the benefits of intercultural exchanges, hybridity and ethnic/cultural differences derived from urban creativity and innovation (Bianchini, 2018). This syncs well with the viewpoints of UNESCO's Director-General UNESCO, Irina Bokova, that culture is integral to create a more sustainable socio-economic development through resilient infrastructures that are ingrained in local contexts and underscored by the history and know-how of the people (UNESCO, 2016:3). Clearly, the variegated notions of culture can be manifested as traditional, rigid, static (at times) and place-specific; as opposed to culture which can be fluid as it evolves and morphs to integrate, assimilate and herald new cultural modalities thus interculturality in outcome and nature. This has driven home a key point. If guided by the right conceptual notions and policy prescriptions, culture in all its forms, meanings and manifestations may result in overall social integration, cohesion and societal well-being, especially during trying times like the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Culture-led Creative City Development

The genesis of creative city as a concept somewhat started in Australia during the late 1980s when culture and the way a society's cultural turn impacted urban planning and development. The aim was to integrate cultural policy into urban planning to uplift the material well-being of citizens, particularly vulnerable groups. When the concept flourished in the United Kingdom, North America and Europe in the 1990s, variants of the concept emerged particularly Florida's notion that a creative city and the creative class are key components for innovation and economic growth. Although Florida's (2004, 2008) pro-growth notions are widely critiqued by scholars as being elitist, class-biased and exclusive (Wilson & Keil, 2008; Chatterton, 2000; Rosler, 2011), but on the flip side, a 'culture-centric' creative city model is still being advocated by scholars like Sasaki (2010, n.d.), Bianchini (2018) and Landry (2009). They championed for a socially inclusive creative city where grassroots' creative and cultural industries should be leveraged. In particular, Sasaki (n.d.) has reconceptualized the creative city notion for Japan where he recommended a 'cultural mode of production' by harnessing a city's arts, culture and heritage to drive cultural production and consumption. In the UK during the late 80s and early 90s, Landry advanced the creative city concept as the search for new strategies/solutions to challenge ingrained and outmoded urban planning and urban cultural policies. He also urged urban managers to dare to be different and redress urban issues by creatively adopting 'out-of-the-box' solutions (Bianchini, 2018). It is under these differing guises that cities around the world are now embracing and adapting the creative city concept into their local settings. While the

concept has promise, nevertheless, the downsides of the concept will need to be acknowledged and mediated holistically in the urban setting – a site that is often fraught with issues of socio-spatial inequalities and further exacerbated during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Fate of Creative Cities During Covid-19: A Global Snapshot

As culture and creativity are increasingly acknowledged as catalysts to regenerate urban areas, the concept of creative city development has moved to the forefront of urban policy agenda in many Western cities (i.e. Melbourne, London, Paris, etc.) since the 1980s (Bianchini, 2018; Landry, 2012 Florida, 2008). However, the current unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic has taken its toll on all economic sectors across the global, with the tourism and creative & cultural sectors being amongst the worst hit. Cities that thrived on culture and cultural tourism witnessed unfathomable shocks and economic losses when cultural events & festivals were cancelled, all in-person live performances halted, and cultural spaces/places became empty and remained closed indefinitely. Subsequently, Covid-19 confinement measures (i.e. social distancing, health & safety guidelines) have caused economic detriments to cultural establishments/enterprises by putting 7 million jobs at risk for employees thus creating a 'strong economic and social discomfort at city level' (Montalto et al., 2020: 4). To compound matters, the fate of culture-led creative cities is intrinsically linked to tourism. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2021), international tourist arrival has dropped 74% globally in year 2020. When tourist arrival and receipts plummeted due to international travel restrictions, the CCS in creative and cultural cities also bore the brunt given that tourism somewhat underscores the economic performance of creative cities.

Following suit, a myriad of reports emerged to study how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted jobs in cities that have committed to invest in culture-led urban redevelopment. A recent publication 'European Cultural and Creative Cities in Covid-19 times. Jobs at risk and the policy response' published by the European Commission (EC) reported that in Europe alone, the EC estimates at least 190 cities across 30 different countries have invested in culture as a strategy to drive urban development (Montalto et al., 2019) (cited in Montalto et al., 2020). Key findings from the report showed that cultural jobs are amongst the most at risk of income loss due their high dependency on live events and in-person public audiences. This is exacerbated by the sector's profound structural fragmentation and minimal entitlement to existing social protection system. The precarity of cultural occupations (i.e. freelancing, self-employment, independent contracting) have made them vulnerable where almost one-third (32%) are self-employed compared to 14% in overall employment of the 27 European Union (EU) member states. A city's size and economic diversity are also determining factors where medium-sized European cities that are predominantly 'arts-jobs intensive' are very vulnerable to the pandemic due to the strong linkages of culture and arts to other sectors (i.e. tourism, food & beverage and transport), and their less diversified and smaller job markets compared to bigger cultural cities.

To bounce back, European cities and government have proposed a myriad of measures and recovery plans. For instance, medium-sized European cities that have high share of tourism jobs (i.e. 30-50% of local jobs) are introducing new strategies by shifting focus from interna-

tional tourism to regional/local tourism segment to compensate the loss. National governments also intervened by proposing four main typologies of policy measures, namely, (i) payment of grants already allocated despite closure of cultural institutions and cancellation/postponement of events; (ii) indirect financial aid such as tax and Value Added Tax (VAT) reliefs; (iii) financial support to compensate loss in income; (iv) other support (i.e. advisory services). At the city level, the scenario is rather promising where EU cities have started to support innovative, bottom-up endeavours that are driving the adoption of digital culture or facilitate the creation of new business models or event formats. Many European cities opted and promoted digital culture initiatives via dedicated web pages, organized open air performances that audiences can watch safely from home, online or from their balconies. Emotional and material support was offered to marginalized groups like reading a book over the phone. However, the support and policy responses differ quite considerably across cities of varying sizes. Though all cities have policy responses to support CCS during the pandemic, but it is predominantly European capital cities that have adopted large-scale support plans. The inequality in policy response/support needs to be addressed to deter widening gaps between arts powerhouses (mostly in capital cities) and smaller cultural cities (Montalto et al., 2020:4-5).

The plights and perils of the culture sector amidst Covid-19 is also highlighted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020). While the culture sector has provided much solace and comfort to uplift people's spirit during the difficult times of Covid-19, such cultural enrichment comes with disproportionate gains to cultural workers. The increased demand in online services and streaming for music, films, television and entertainment are not in tandem with supply of cultural production when lockdowns and confinement measures have disrupted cultural production (i.e. live performance, recorded media) thus causing closed productions and millions to be unemployed. Cultural workers are further disadvantaged by the gig nature of their occupations like employment contracts and freelance arrangements either on a part-time, on-demand or project-based basis. Though such arrangements provide flexibility and independence, but there are issues related to social security provisions (i.e. health care entitlements, paid sick leave) and the right of workers to be involved in collective bargaining which in turn implicates working conditions (occupational safety & health) and remuneration packages (ILO, 2020:1). All these challenges became more apparent and pressing during the Covid-19 pandemic where the volatility and vulnerability of the media and culture industry are heightened. Broadly, all culture sectors across the globe have been adversely impacted where workforce in the arts, entertainment and creative sectors have been furloughed and employment plummeted as seen in the United Kingdom, Australia, United Stated, Brazil and the Philippines (ILO, 2020: 2). In response, new business models have since emerged and these will inadvertently alter the culture labour market, their working conditions and their rights.

Similarly, the pandemic has struck CCS in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) regions too, especially the arts, entertainment and recreation industries. Covid-19 has severely immobilised the creative value chain, from creation, production, distribution to access of creative contents. Apart from CCS, non-creative sectors that support the entire ecosystem are also affected. Downsizing of CCS has led to loss of revenues and unemployment in all relevant sectors thus negatively impacting OECD cities

and regions. Cities with high concentrations of jobs and businesses in CCS, such as London, New York, Seoul, Norway and France, faced significant challenges (Travkina & Sacco, 2020:7-8). For instance, the Greater London Authority's study (2019) reported a total of 267,500 creative workers in London, supported by 203,200 creative supply chain employees in 2017. According to New York City Comptroller (2019), New York's creative sector provided 293,000 jobs and accounted for 13% of its total economic output. In Korea, the creative content industry has long been the country's main economic engine. It created over 650,000 employments, supporting the creation of over USD 9.5 billion worth of Korean cultural content for export (UNESCO, 2021). These statistics may well reflect the severity of the impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods in the CCS and the local economy in these creative cities. Beyond the immediate impact on jobs and incomes, the deprivation and downsizing of CCS would undermine the vibrancy of cities and communities which ultimately affects citizens' well-being (Travkina & Sacco, 2020:11).

To brace through this period, OECD governments have responded through policy interventions. Broadly, they are divided into four key strategies, namely, (i) Public Funding (i.e. grants & subsidies for CCS firms & individual practitioners/self-employed professionals; compensation for losses; loan provision & guarantee; and investment incentives); (ii) Employment Support (i.e. job retention & income support; unemployment benefits through temporary contracts; (iii) Deferral of Payments & Easing Administrative Procedures (i.e. advanced aid such as reimbursements of tax returns & royalties; postponement/relief of dues; tax relief; and procedural flexibility); and (iv) Structural Change Policies towards strengthening CCS's resilience (i.e. training and employment of creative workers; raising awareness about importance of arts and culture; digitalization of creative and cultural contents; innovation for capacity building towards promoting new potentials for CCS; and copyright licensing towards protecting and supporting the creatives through earnings from copyright levies) (Travkina & Sacco (2020). Additionally, the private, non-profit and philanthropic actors supported CCS by offering short-term liquidity and funding; advance payment of royalties; investments in cultural production and distribution as well as capacity building. While supports are available, the concern is always about the inclusiveness of schemes in adapting to CCS business models (i.e. non-traditional, small-scale, or non-profit) and form of employment (i.e. non-standard, self-employed, freelance, intermittent, contract-basis or hybrid) (Travkina & Sacco, 2020:2-3). In America, commentators revealed an estimated loss of 2.7 million jobs (i.e. one third of all creative jobs) and more than USD 150 billion (i.e. 9% of annual sales) in sales of CCS goods and services during the pandemic. This, in turn, seriously affected American creative centres and cities (Florida & Seman, 2020). Across CCS, the fine and performing arts sectors are the worst hit, suffering estimated losses of nearly 1.4 million jobs and USD 42.5 billion in sales. In supporting the CCS, American federal government initiated a strategy called CARES ART which allows self-employed creative workers to access federal assistance. Additionally, scholars highlighted the need of a broad-based, substantial and sustained national creative-economy recovery strategy. It should be led by local public-private partnerships, supported by federal, state government, national philanthropy and large corporations, in addressing bottom-up needs. In adapting to the new normal, creative talents are encouraged to use their creative skills to venture into other industries and to adopt the shift of focus towards locally sourced culture for domestic-driven production and consumption (Florida & Seman, 2020).

However, not all CCS are negatively impacted during the pandemic. While outdoor leisure activities are refrained during lockdown, people opt for home entertainment such as digital or video games, radio & TV programmes. Reports highlighted that both the gaming industry and the radio & TV sector have somehow benefited from the current crisis. The main digital storefront for personal computer video games, namely, Steam has experienced over 23 million concurrent players during March 2020, surpassing all earlier records (Travkina & Sacco, 2020:23). Through digitalization or streaming online, cities and regions are encouraged to leverage the creative potential of culture in post-COVID recovery. Digitalizing culture can possibly promote greater complementarities between culture and other main policy sectors towards exploring new opportunities for local and regional development. Cross-sectoral integration such as crossover between art & culture and education or health sectors would contribute towards social value creation, well-being and health development (Travkina & Sacco, 2020: 3) as aptly discussed in 2 (c) above. However, the risk of exacerbating inequalities may arise without mindful measures to ensure inclusive digital accessibility across all levels in a society.

In building the resilience of UNESCO creative cities in particular, UNESCO (2020) encourages member cities to use UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) as a platform for inspiration and sharing of experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, cities can seek working partners within UCCN to tap into the potential of culture and creativity towards recovery from the pandemic. For example, leveraging the CCS's fundamental creativity and capability towards generating positive social impact such as well-being development, social engagement and connection as articulated in 2 (c) above. Cities such as Buenos Aires (Argentina), for instance, ventured into virtual museums, online libraries, online sharing of poetry, online concerts/shows to engage and connect broader communities in the quest to make culture and art more accessible. Besides moving online, some UNESCO cities attempted to localise cultural and creative production for local consumption, such as Rome (a Creative City of Film). Rome initiated #Cinemadacasa (Film from Home) to project classic movies on buildings across the city towards maintaining and strengthening social connections during lockdowns. During the pandemic, creativity and culture, in a way, acted as an effective medium for promoting solidarity through intercity collaborations (UNESCO, 2020). In Bangkok in particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has compelled reorganizing performances into new spaces, a bigger mediatization of the festival as well as the growth of new platforms that are site-specific and community-focused (Damrhung, 2022).

To summarize the above discussion, The table in figure 1 below depicts the impacts and strategies undertaken by organisations and creative cities globally. Additionally, the diagram in figure 2 that follows the table surmises and graphically illustrates the various impacts and strategies undertaken by these global CCS and creative cities thus far.

Impacts	Strategies	Region/ Organisation	Source	Strategies (based on themes)
Loss of Employment	# Job retention	• OECD	Travkina & Sacco (2020)	Employment support
	# Temporary work contracts	• OECD	Travkina & Sacco (2020)	
	# Training & employment	• OECD	Travkina & Sacco (2020)	Capacity building
	# Skills development (via online workshops)	• UCCN	UNESCO (2020)	
	# Promotion of creative talents	• UCCN	UNESCO (2020)	
Loss of Income	# Grants & subsidies	• EU • OECD • UCCN	Montalto et al. (2020) Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Financial aid
	# Compensation for loss	• EU • OECD	Montalto et al. (2020) Travkina & Sacco (2020)	
	# Loan & guarantee	• OECD	Travkina & Sacco (2020)	
	# Deferral / waiver of payment & procedural flexibility	• OECD • UCCN	Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	
	# Tax returns & royalties	• OECD	Travkina & Sacco (2020)	
	# Tax reliefs	• EU • OECD • UCCN	Montalto et al. (2020) Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	
	# Copyright licensing to protect & support through copyright levies	• OECD	Travkina & Sacco (2020)	
	# Fundraising campaigns	• UCCN	UNESCO (2020)	
	# Training allowances	• UCCN	UNESCO (2020)	
	# Donation of food & material supplies	• UCCN	UNESCO (2020)	Food & supplies aid
Downsized creative & cultural sectors	# Incentives for investments in cultural production & distribution	• OECD • UCCN	Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Financial aid
Continued on the next page	# Adoption of digital culture # Online streaming & virtual programmes for distribution of creative & culture contents	• EU • OECD • UCCN	Montalto et al. (2020) Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Digitalisation

Figure 1. Table of COVID-19's impacts on the creative & cultural sectors and strategies towards resilience – a global overview. Source: Compiled by authors from Montalto et al. (2020); ILO (2020); Travkina & Sacco (2020); Florida & Seman (2020) & UNESCO (2020).

Impacts	Strategies	Region/ Organisation	Source	**Strategies** (based on themes)
Continuation of the **Downsized creative & cultural sectors**	# Business advisory services # Medical Consultation	• EU • UCCN	Montalto et al. (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Consultation
	# Crossover of CCS with other main sectors (e.g. education, health & technology) towards co-creation for shared values	• OCED • UCCN	Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Cross-sectoral integration
	# Sharing of knowledge & experiences # Collective partnerships among cities/regions	• UCCN	UNESCO (2020)	Intercity or regional collaborations
	# Formation of new business models & event formats # Venturing new possibilities/ opportunities	• EU • UK, Australia, United States, Brazil & Philippines • OECD • UCCN	Montalto et al. (2020) ILO (2020) Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Business restructuring
	# Awareness raising about importance & appreciation of art & culture # Cultural infrastructure development	• OECD • UCCN	Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Capacity building
	# Local public-private partnerships towards recovery of national creative economy	• America	Florida & Seman (2020)	State-market partnerships
Degenerated local vibrancy	# Emphasis of local contents for local creative creation/ production & consumption	• America • UCCN	Florida & Seman (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Localising production & consumption
Affected social well-being	# Widening access to art and cultural contents through virtual/online platforms towards positive social engagement & connection	• EU • UK, Australia, United States, Brazil & Philippines • OECD • UCCN	Montalto et al. (2020) ILO (2020) Travkina & Sacco (2020) UNESCO (2020)	Active social engagement
	# Medical consultation for physical & mental health	• UCCN	UNESCO (2020)	Consultation

Figure 1. Continuation of the Downsized creative & cultural sectors and the rest of the table of COVID-19's impacts on the creative & cultural sectors and strategies towards resilience – a global overview. Source: Compiled by authors from Montalto et al. (2020); ILO (2020); Travkina & Sacco (2020); Florida & Seman (2020) & UNESCO (2020).

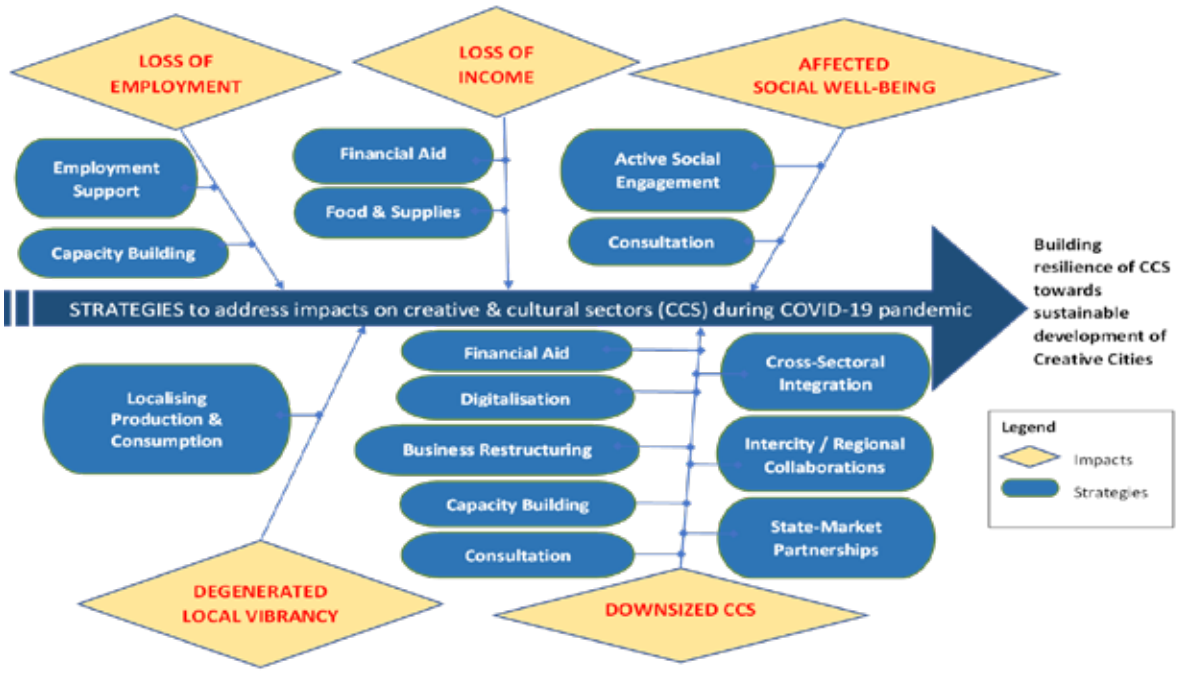


Figure 2. Global strategies to address impacts on CCS towards resilience & sustainability during COVID-19 pandemic. Source: Analysis and illustration by authors (2021).

Methodology

A purely qualitative research approach was administered to address the research question for this study. Qualitative techniques like online interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used. The interviews and FGDs involved key informants who were purposively sampled, and they comprised of stakeholders in Malaysia's creative and cultural sector, urban managers, policy-makers, state think-tanks, urban dwellers and civil society groups (i.e. NGOs). An interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions was used for both the interviews and FGDs. The questions touched on the concepts and frameworks (i.e. Agenda 21 for Culture, etc.) reviewed in section 2.0, with specific focus on the role of culture and cultural development in Malaysian cities. Additionally, aspects and questions pertaining to culture's role in relation to the economy, society and city in view of Covid-19 were also framed in the interview protocol. The interview protocol was vetted and endorsed by the university's Human Ethics Committee. Written and oral forms of informed consent were obtained prior to interviewing and conducting FGDs with the key informants.

In addition, secondary data related to the latest developments, reactions and policy responses of Malaysia's CCS and creative cities (towards Covid-19) were collected from national blueprints, government websites, reports and journals to supplement and complement the above qualitative component. Based on triangulation, the primary and secondary data were then thematically analyzed to flesh out key themes pertaining to the impacts and types of strategies that Malaysian CCS and creative cities adopted/adapted in order to be resilient in light of Covid-19.

Malaysian Creative & Cultural Sectors and Creative Cities During Covid-19: Fate and Interventions

Like cities in Europe, Australia and North America, cities in Malaysia are showing keen interest to promote arts, heritage and culture. Major Malaysian cities like Kuala Lumpur, George Town, Kuching, Johor Bahru and Ipoh have openly stated their aspirations to be acknowledged as cultural and creative cities. Increasingly, these cities are putting extra efforts to develop and promote their respective cultural endowments, heritage, cultural and creative industries. However, it is pertinent to mention that it is only in the last decade that policy rhetoric and initiatives have gradually introduced the informal use of the label 'creative cities' or 'culture-led urban regeneration' into Malaysian urban agenda. With the concept still at its infancy under the trial-and-error phase, the Covid-19 pandemic kicked in and disrupted aspiring Malaysian creative cities. The following sections will chronicle the scenario of three emerging Malaysian creative cities, namely, Kuala Lumpur, George Town and Ipoh in their quest to survive and be resilient amidst the on-going pandemic. Before discussing each city in turn, the next section will briefly illustrate national level interventions and strategies for Malaysia's CCS where these initiatives are expected to be cascaded down to the city level.

In Malaysia, the nation's National Creative Industry Policy (NCIP) divided the creative and cultural sectors into 14 sub-sectors under three categories: (1) Multimedia, (2) Cultural Arts, and (3) Cultural Heritage as illustrated in Table 2 below. More recently during the Creative Economy 2021 Forum, the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (DoSM) reported that a total of 45 classified industries are grouped as creative industries (CI) based on NCIP's above categorisation. As of September 2020, there are 31,792 creative establishments in Malaysia with 859,900 employees and the industry contributes 1.94% to Malaysia's national GDP (DoSM, 2020). No doubt, the share of creative industries in terms of establishments, employment share and GDP contribution is still relatively low compared to other industries/sectors, but Malaysia's strategic economic vision that is gradually inclining to the creative economy is rendering the creative industries as budding industries that are fast garnering policy attention at the federal, state and even city level.

MULTIMEDIA	CULTURAL ARTS	CULTURAL HERITAGE
▪ Film & TV ▪ Advertising ▪ Design ▪ Animation & Digital Content	▪ Crafts ▪ Visual Arts ▪ Music ▪ Performing Arts ▪ Creative Publishing ▪ Fashion & Textiles	▪ Museum ▪ Archives ▪ Restoration ▪ Preservation

Figure 3. Table showing National Creative Industry Policy (NCIP). Fourteen sub-sectors of the Creative Industries Classification. Source: Compiled by authors from the NCIP.

As an emerging industry that is neither economically vibrant nor socio-culturally matured yet in Malaysia, the Covid-19 pandemic has arrived at a most inopportune time and disrupted the nation's CCS badly. Mirroring global trends, the CCS in Malaysia are experiencing similar fate like their foreign counterparts. Many are struggling to sustain a livelihood

after losing their jobs or income sources since the first Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020. Subsequent forms of partial/total government lockdowns and restricted movements further devastated the sector. To keep Malaysia's CCS afloat, there are interventions from the government through various agencies as illustrated below. As the government entity overseeing Malaysia's CCS, Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) was the earliest to intervene by launching funding initiatives in April 2020 to support practitioners (i.e. visual arts, performing arts, independent music, craft sectors) through the first lockdown. Later, in July 2020, the Malaysian government launched PENJANA, a plan for Creative Industries under the National Economic Recovery Plan, to support CCS towards recovery and resilience. PENJANA (National Economic Recovery Plan) allocated RM225 million funding for distribution to Malaysia's CCS through government agencies, namely My Creative Ventures Sdn. Bhd (My Creative), CENDANA and Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) (Ministry of Finance, Malaysia, 2020).

As the government's investment arm to spur Malaysia's creative industries, My Creative focuses on 10 creative sub-sectors (i.e. Content Creation; Music; Fashion; Performing Arts; Visual Arts; Literature; Traditional & Cultural Arts; Culinary Arts; Design; and Creative Education). With PENJANA's allocation, My Creative will support the creative sectors through grants and loans. The schemes aim to support digitalization of live events/exhibition; continuation and recovery of creative content production, distribution and marketing; content partnership among local/regional/international stakeholders; revival of creative businesses and creative entrepreneurs. Additionally, complementary programmes were initiated to facilitate, advise and guide creative practitioners to enhance digital marketing through corporate collaboration with global/domestic digital or social media platforms (My Creative Ventures, 2020). Following PENJANA's allocation, CENDANA expanded its funding initiatives by tailoring nine funding programmes to facilitate the creation/development and promotion of Malaysian art and cultural contents. MDEC also offers Digital Content Grant to support industry players in the field of animation and visual effects. These assistance and support by CENDANA, MyCreative and MDEC mirror global strategies reviewed above.

In February 2021, Ministry of Communications and Multimedia launched Malaysian Creative Industry Stimulus Package (PRISMA) as a short-term initiative to further assist Malaysian creative industry players to revive and sustain their creative businesses in compliance with new normal restrictions. The package amounting RM89.2 million launched 32 programmes under four categories (i.e. film; music; digital creative content & visual arts; performances & crafts) in the form of grants, loans and broadcasting slots. The ministry expects to generate at least 40,000 job opportunities towards benefitting more than 9000 creative industry players through programmes administered by My Creative Ventures, CENDANA, MDEC, National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS) and Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) (Malay Mail, 2021; www.kkmm.gov.my). Under PRISMA, agencies like My Creative Ventures, CENDANA and MDEC have launched more initiatives to extend support to a wider scope and larger groups of practitioners.

Due to the continuous spike of Covid-19 cases, impacts to the CCS have worsened this year (i.e. 2021) despite the execution of Full Movement Control Order (FMCO) since 1 June 2021. Immediately, the Prime Minister announced the allocation of RM100 million from the total RM150 billion Package of National People's Well-Being and Economic Recovery Pack-

age (PEMULIH) as aid for local arts and creative industry. The aid will fund and incentivise creative works/digital contents, career opportunities, upskilling programmes and Social Security Organization (SOCSO) for approximately 8000 practitioners (Suraya, 2021). Besides public funding, public-private-community partnership aid initiatives are gradually emerging where CENDANA collaborated with Yayasan Sime Darby Food Aid Programme Second Cycle and local community partners to assist artists and cultural workers in need (Maganathan, 2021). The CCS, in particular, ought to be spotlighted and receive adequate support given that arts played a significant role in supporting the well-being of individuals who stayed home during the pandemic (Binson, 2021). In Malaysia specifically, the Communications and Multimedia Ministry had organized a virtual concert (#MuzikDiRumah)(Translation: #MusicAtHome), inspired by "together at home project by international artistes. The #MuzikDiRumah program comprised eight 45 minutes mega concerts, 38 half-hour mini-concerts, and 84 performances, featuring Ayda Jebat, The Rain and such, broadcasting via their YouTube Channel.[2] Additionally, # Commune for Arts – a free virtual programme – was formed and organized by theatre actor/director Ho Lee Ching to assist and help people cope with the pandemic and manage their mental health.[3]

Generally, the federal government through its ministries and agencies, assumed the leading role to support Malaysia's CCS through financial aids, capacity building programmes, advisory and networking support. The government has initiated programmes to encourage inter-industry and cross-industry collaborations and partnerships towards supporting the recovery of the entire national economy. Nevertheless, the practicality, effectiveness and inclusiveness of the support schemes are the main concerns. Although PENJANA, PRISMA and PEMULIH (Protection of the People and Recovery of the Economy Assistance Package) were promptly launched in response to the way Covid-19 impacted Malaysia's CCS, it is unknown and questionable whether the resource allocation and decision-making processes had involved effective conversations between stakeholders and the government. Without understanding the actual needs and challenges of individual practitioners or industry players in the different creative sectors or subsectors (each functioning differently), it is impossible to effectively prescribe practical solutions in an inclusive manner. This plight was noted when art and cultural practitioners highlighted the incompetency or limitations of the government's support. Some criticised CENDANA's fund as a 'short-term balm.' To ensure recovery and sustainability, they call for consistent long-term support to rebuild the fragmented and fragile CCS ecosystem (Chan, 2020). However, to successfully reach out to every creative employee can be a challenge by itself. During an interview, CENDANA highlighted the challenge of reaching out to artists, particularly senior artisans/ crafters, who are mostly living in remote areas and inaccessible to internet connection (especially those on the East Coast and East Malaysia). Creative individuals that are inaccessible to online information and application process are likely marginalized. To reach out to the marginalized group, CENDANA seeks support from local art communities across the states. No doubt, the outreach of support to all levels/sectors/groups/individuals within the CCS ecosystem at all states/districts/cities/towns/rural areas is pivotal towards ensuring quick recovery, sustainability and resilience of Malaysia's creative economy. In the subsequent sections, the case studies at the city-level will illustrate how each Malaysian city responded to Covid-19 and deliberate the state, market and civil society nexus in facilitating the recovery and enhancing resilience of each city.

Case Study 1: George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site

With a diverse array of cultural endowments, George Town (capital of Penang state) is well-positioned to be a cultural capital. This statement morphed into reality when the 2008 UNESCO inscription enhanced and reaffirmed George Town's position due to the city's rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage that fulfilled criteria (ii), (iii) and (iv) of the Outstanding Universal Value. While George Town's distinctive cultural accolades attracted global attention, they were in fact the foundations of the city's socio-economy and ecology. The year 2008, in particular, was significant for Penang. Besides obtaining the UNESCO inscription, there was also a switch in political leadership when the opposition party took over following a landslide victory. Post-inscription saw George Town heritage site gradually transforming into an inviting locale for gentrifiers and investors. Following suit, property prices spiked manifolds, tourist arrivals heightened, and the role of creative and cultural industries were fast making a marked presence in the heritage site. Former General Manager of the World Heritage Office highlighted that shophouses and everyday life in the heritage site were experiencing *"new function, new use and new life"* (Tan, 2015: viii). A renaissance of sort illustrated George Town's cultural turn that is inclined to leverage and commodify culture and subsequently cultural/heritage tourism. Culture and creativity were increasingly attached to economy, and this was further affirmed when the state transformed and rebranded their portfolio from 'Penang State EXCO Office for Tourism, Arts, Culture and Heritage (PETACH)' to 'Penang State EXCO Office for Tourism and Creative Economy (PETACE).' The aspiration to economise culture is succinctly written on PETACE's website: *"The introduction of the Creative Economy portfolio comprising of the arts, culture and heritage reflects the Penang's direction and vision to make this industry an economic powerhouse in future."*[4] Though scholars have cautioned the indiscriminate economization of culture (Lim, 2020a; Galloway & Dunlop, 2007), a recent study of George Town indicated that businesses acknowledged the importance of heritage to sustain business activities, which includes tourism. In turn, this links the role of tourism in supporting George Town's economic vibrancy (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2020: vii).

When the Covid-19 pandemic set in and Movement Control Order was imposed since 18 March 2020, George Town's arts and culture sector was not spared either with economic disruptions that threatened livelihoods and sustainability of an ecosystem that is small, flexible yet fragile, disorganised and unregulated (Pan, 2020; Khoo, 2020). Given the way arts, heritage and culture are intertwined and underscore George Town's tourism (Lim, 2020a:4; see also Throsby & Petetskaya, 2020), the severity of disruption within the tourism sector has inadvertently and adversely impacted traditional and modern creative and cultural industries within the heritage site (Lim, 2020b). State-organized functions like the George Town Festival, George Town Heritage Celebration and Art Penang were cancelled. Other private arts programmes like Open Studio, Penang Youth Gender Equality Drama Competition, Penang International Wind Music Festival were also disrupted. Overnight, artists and cultural workers lost their livelihoods and had to quickly search for new business models to survive, sustain and be resilient.

In George Town, strategies to keep the cultural and creative sector afloat derived predominantly from the state. Penang Institute's (state think-tank) championed and voiced their concerns through their policy briefs by highlighting the challenges (i.e. precarious freelance work, over-reliance on state funds), suggesting possible solutions (i.e. immediate support

for individuals/groups/SMEs, subsidies, digitization of contents/processes) and a push for better policies to be formulated for a sector that is so diverse and precarious (Pan, 2020; Lim, 2020a). Additionally, the State Official for PETACE has announced an Aid Package to empower the arts sector. The package is divided into three phases. In Phase 1, RM200,000 is allocated to assist and encourage individual/group artist(s) to migrate their contents online. A Facebook page "Show Penang" will be created to promote local arts contents. In Phase 2, the state will assist local arts associations to rebuild themselves by lessening their operational costs for programmes. Strategies include subsidization towards rental of spaces (i.e. Dewan Sri Pinang, KOMTAR Auditoriums), re-commencement of contributions towards arts in a group or physically by the state, promotion of tickets from arts association in schools and to have regular dialogues between key stakeholders in the local arts industry and the state. Finally, in Phase 3, the state endeavoured to develop and promote local arts contents and ticketing by re-starting the George Town Festival and Art Penang in 2021, allowing arts association to promote via LED billboards owned by PETACE and to rope in the private sector by urging them to 'adopt' an arts organization.[5] As argued by scholars (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2020), the public good-nature and non-market benefits of George Town's cultural heritage have established a convincing case for continuous public support and investment. This is especially pertinent during such difficult times of Covid-19 where private and small enterprises and local communities in the CCS are adversely impacted in one way or another. The following quotes illustrate voices from George Town's local communities pertaining to Covid-19, cultural development and how they were impacted in the city.

> Since Covid-19 started and lasted for almost two years now, the streets in George Town heritage site are empty. Our businesses are badly impacted as there are no tourists around the city anymore. (Muslim money changer, interview, 16 Aug. 21)

> Culture needs to be mainstreamed and taught to the young. We do not have a Culture Masterplan and we definitely need one. Even a Masterplan for a short timeframe will do especially during such trying times like Covid-19 now.
> (Executive Secretary of Chinese Clan Council, interview, 13 Aug. 21)

> The existing guidelines are more for the tangible heritage of George Town. We need policies for the intangible heritage which are the people in the city and their lifestyles and cultures. Yes, we definitely need a Culture Masterplan before all is lost and gone.
> (Consultant/expert in Indian community, interview, 17 Aug. 21)

> I have zero income from the shop. The whole of last year I've been spending money from my savings. I'm considering letting my staff off. I have been paying him (the staff) full salary until the last two months where I reduced his salary to half. I'm considering switching him to part-time from next month onwards.
> (Owner of photography studio & souvenir shop, interview, 19 Aug. 21)

Case Study 2: Kuala Lumpur as the Cultural Capital of Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur (KL), as capital city of Malaysia, has been earmarked and doubled up as the nation's de facto cultural capital. The city not only boasts its own unique cultural heritage endowments to establish national identity and character; but is also a fecund site for for-

eign investments and capital accumulation. The 1980s and 1990s, particularly, were defining moments when then premier Mahathir welcomed globalization and neo-liberalism in all development realms. Underpinned by a laissez-faire economy, KL underwent significant transformations, massive urban development and modernisation (Sirat, 1997). The city then aspired to be a global city with Kuala Lumpur orientating its material infrastructure, socio-economic activities and cultural/symbolic spaces towards a grandiose global outlook (Bunnell, Barter & Morshidi, 2002). Despite negotiating these contesting local and global forces and cultures, KL is often perceived as the cultural hub/node that is more privileged compared to other Malaysian cities due to KL's capital city status thus inherent biasness with concentration of state-of-the-art infrastructure, amenities, funding and capacity building initiatives within KL.

However, KL and the city's CCS were not spared when Covid-19 hit. In fact, with the high concentration of creative and cultural activities and employees in the capital city, it could imply that KL was bearing a bigger brunt compared to other smaller cultural cities across Malaysia. For instance, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre's (KLPAC) management screamed out their plea for immediate support to save performing arts industry from drowning. Due to the cancellation and postponement of shows, the centre had lost more than half a million in April 2020 (Cheema, 2020). The management was forced to cut their staffs' salary, from the initial 40% to 60% during the current MCO (Hasham, 2021). Apart from KLPAC, other KL-based performing arts establishments such as Istana Budaya, ASK Dance Company, Ramli Ibrahim's Sutra Foundation also struggled to sustain (Cheema, 2020). The following quotes reflect the impacts of the pandemic on some KL's creative practitioners.

> The art market is very slow now. Even though there are virtual art exhibitions here and there, the art collection market is rather less active. (Malay visual artist, interview, 10 July 21)

> During every lockdown, I'm stuck in my studio, which is also the place I live. While outdoor activities are not permitted, I have stopped going out to the city to paint on walls. What I can do is merely practising my sketches and frequently post my works on social media to share with my followers. (Malay street artist, interview, 1 August 21)

To stay afloat, the CCS in KL relied predominantly on state funding though with mixed successes. KLPAC's management criticized the support schemes as 'red tape solutions,' which reacted inefficiently in securing survival of the art industry (Hasham, 2021). During an interview with a state cultural agency in December 2020, it revealed the limitation of PENJANA's allocation for the arts and cultural sectors. With PENJANA's allocation, CENDANA only managed to fund less than half (i.e. 42%, 632 out of a total 1500) of the applicants who are mostly from Selangor and KL. The following quote succinctly illustrates the scenario and issues related to support and outreach.

> CENDANA initial funding programmes targeted mainly KL's applicants. However, we did receive applications from other states like Penang. With PENJANA's funding, we are now targeting practitioners across states in the country. Among all targeted practitioners, we received the highest number of applications from crafters. Crafters and also the independent musicians are far more in need of support if compared with visual or performing artists…We encountered

> challenge to reach out to practitioners in rural areas, like crafters who are mainly based in kampung (villages) and not accessible to internet. We need support from intermediaries such as the local groups. One factor that challenged us to reach out more to the relevant practitioners is because many applicants are reluctant to read, to understand and to fill in the application forms. (CEO of government cultural agency, interview, 17 Dec. 2020)

In a way, KL's creative community has had the privilege of obtaining first-hand information about funding since CENDANA is based in KL. However, non-KL practitioners, particularly those living in rural areas, rely on intermediaries (i.e. local government institutions, local creative agencies/local arts and culture groups) for effective dissemination of information on support programs. Therefore, good state-private-civil society collaborations and partnerships are pivotal towards ensuring inclusive distribution of available support to target groups.

In rendering aid to artists in Klang Valley in particular, besides PENJANA's initiatives, CENDANA collaborated with the private sector (i.e. Yayasan Sime Darby) to launch COVID-19 Food Aid Programme. A total of 118 Klang Valley-based artists benefitted from the initiative. Additionally, as an initiative to engage the local public through art and culture during lockdown, the Culture, Arts, Tourism and Sports Department of Kuala Lumpur City Hall launched project "Kombo Budaya DBKL" (Culture Combo DBKL) to regularly broadcast recorded performances by local artists, including musicians and dancers who have to work from home on DBKL's Facebook. The platform serves to promote local art and cultural practitioners (Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur, n.d.).

Case Study 3: Ipoh – Morphing from Old Mining Town to Creative City

Ipoh is the capital city of Perak state. The city's creative movement emerged in the old town vicinity in 2012 within a private adaptive redevelopment project called Sekeping Kong Heng at Jalan Bandar Timah. Burgeoning local creative entrepreneurs within the site has spurred creative production and consumption around Ipoh old town (i.e. artisan market, mural trail, hipster cafes, art & cultural lanes, museums & art spaces). This period marked Ipoh's cultural turn which has gradually put art, culture, heritage and creativity in the vanguard of local development. With the aspiration to regenerate Ipoh's economy, the local government (i.e. Ipoh City Council) drafted a 'Special Area Plan (SAP) of Ipoh Town-Tin Heritage City 2020' in 2014 where conservation-centric urban regeneration and creative place-making strategies were adopted (Ipoh City Council, 2014). The local council's efforts were supported by the state government and complemented by private initiatives. In 2018, Perak's State Exco for Tourism, Art and Culture committed to develop Ipoh as a creative city by capitalizing the city's local gastronomy and art as the way forward. Subsequently, the state government through its creative agency, People of Remarkable Talents (PORT), actively nurture, promote and develop the local CCS through local programmes and events. In November 2019, the state government launched Dana Kreatif Perak@PORT (Perak Creative Funds) (Khoo & Chang, 2021). During the initial phase of establishing the local creative scene, Perak encountered a change of state government in April 2020. "Art" and "culture" are now parked under the State Exco of Housing, Local Government and Tourism (www.perak.gov.my).

Similar to George Town and Kuala Lumpur, the COVID-19 pandemic hit hard on all developing CCS and subsectors in Ipoh. All physical art and cultural festivals/events were cancelled. Artisan markets, museums and art spaces stopped operations during lockdowns. Individual practitioners struggled to sustain their livelihoods while art venues were strained to maintain their spaces and businesses. The following quotes echo the struggles of Ipoh's creative and cultural workers towards sustaining their creative endeavours.

> The pandemic has seriously affected my work. Some orders have been cancelled. Some foreign clients are unable to come over to collect their customized orders. Payments ended up being delayed. Also, supplies of raw materials are disrupted. (Chinese artisan, interview, 16 July 21)

> I have stopped making kavadis since the pandemic. Other than kavadi, I usually supply polystyrene art creations to wedding decorators. Due to the pandemic, I have stopped all my creations. (Indian kavadi maker, interview, 19 July 21)

Since the initial MCO in March 2020, PORT has responded rapidly to support local creative communities. According to PORT's general manager, besides practitioners, people working backstage are also asking for support. The greatest impacts are seen among local musicians, buskers and performers. To ensure the creative communities continue to engage in creative production during pandemic, PORT organized online events (i.e. competitions, workshops, public forums, sharing sessions by creative workers & etc.) as platforms for showcasing local creativity. With no extra allocation, PORT initiated online charity art auctions and exhibitions to raise funds for C19 Fund@PORT as its corporate social responsibility. The fund was later complemented by a donation from a private foundation located in Kuala Lumpur. The accumulated fund is donated to local practitioners and supporting workers in need. The fund has benefitted 60 local creative workers in 2020. The support provided by PORT are further elucidated below.

> We do our best to support local practitioners and their supporting workers who are struggling to survive and sustain their livelihoods now. C19 Fund@PORT is part of our corporate social responsibility (CSR). Recently, we partnered with three other Ipoh-based stakeholders to launch Books Flash Sale online. 100% of the proceedings go to the fund as donations to the local busker community.
> (General Manager of state government creative agency, interview, 9 July 2021)

Through Dana Kreatif Perak@PORT 2020, PORT funded 41 art projects in the fields of music, film, visual arts and performing art with the state's allocation of RM167,000. Additionally, PORT is partnering with CENDANA and My Creative Ventures to disseminate information on federal government support to Perakians through online and offline channels. Currently, PORT is helping CENDANA to reach out to Perak claimants for the upcoming cycles of COVID-19 food assistance program. In supporting Malaysian visual artists, including young, emerging and established artists, PORT recently collaborated with nine art groups/art spaces/artist collectives based in Perak, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur to launch a social media platform, namely, Artaidartist. Artaidartist will showcase and market fine artworks through

virtual exhibitions. Fifty percent of each artist's artwork sold at the exhibition will be given to other participating artists whose artworks are not sold. The initiative demonstrates the solidarity of art community in supporting each other towards sustainability and resilience. This echoes UNESCO's aspirations (2020) that creativity and culture foster a positive social connection through collaborations during the pandemic.

Apart from PORT, the Malaysia Handicraft Perak Branch and the National Department for Culture and Arts (JKKN) Perak, under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), play an active role in creating local awareness of national support system, recovery initiatives and support platforms to reach out to local beneficiaries. Recently, on 12 July 2021, JKKN Perak organised an online forum to invite MOTAC and JKKN (Headquarters) representatives to brief on incentives and support offered by the ministry. However, local participation was low and limited to certain groups or fields of practitioners and organizations. Not a single Chinese art group joined the forum. The lack of engagement by various ethnic groups or CCS will jeopardize the dissemination of support in an inclusive fashion. This in turn could affect the recovery and sustainable development of the local and national creative economy due to ineffectiveness of stakeholder partnership and the disconnectedness of state-market-civil society relationship.

The federal government initiatives like PENJANA, PRISMA and PEMULIH are applicable across all 13 states in the country. These initiatives are expected to cascade down to the city level. In addition to federal government support, the governments at the state and local levels have also introduced their own local initiatives and strategies towards resilience. Table 4 compares the local strategies embarked by Kuala Lumpur, George Town and Ipoh during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the pandemic persists, efforts will be continually expanded, and other viable strategies may be imposed along the way to increase local resilience of Malaysian creative cities. Thus, Table 4 is valid at the time of writing this paper and non-exhaustive in nature to spell out all initiatives and strategies at city and state level. Table in figure 4 attempted to use the similar themes derived from figure 1's table (global scenario) to analyze and map the scenario for the three case study cities. It was found that while most of the impacts and strategies found in Malaysia mirrored those globally, but two elements namely employment support and cross-sectoral integration were not particularly evident at the city level. Table 4 provides a snapshot overview by comparing and contrasting the types of local strategies provided by three Malaysian cities (i.e. Kuala Lumpur, George Town, Ipoh) in response to Covid-19's impacts.

As the federal territory and the capital city of Malaysia, KL's creative practitioners are geographically advantaged where they can instantly and conveniently gain access to all forms of federal support. In this regard, KL creatives are likely to be more dependent on national strategies provided by the federal government. This could imply that KL's local government need not play as heavy a role compared to local governments of other Malaysian creative cities which are smaller in size and further in proximity.

Impacts	Themes *(Similar themes derived from Table 1 were used to analyse the Malaysian context).)*	Local Strategies **(initiated by State & Local governments)**	Malaysian Cities		
			Kuala Lumpur	**George Town, Penang**	**Ipoh, Perak**
Loss of employment	Employment support		Employment support is not evident in these cities.		
	Capacity building	# Promotion of local creative talents via online platforms	✔	✔	✔
		# Upskilling programmes (via online workshops)	✔		✔
Loss of income	Financial aid	# Project grants & funding	✔	✔	✔
		# Cash donations			✔
		# Rental subsidies		✔	
		# Fundraising for setting up COVID-19 fund			✔
		# Competition awards			✔
	Food & supplies	# Food Aid Programme	✔	✔	✔
Affected social well-being	Active social engagement	# Public engagement through online broadcast of arts and cultural contents	✔	✔	✔
Degenerated local vibrancy	Localising production & consumption	# Restart & development of local art & cultural events		✔	
Downsized CCS	Financial aid	# Funding migration of contents online		✔	
		# Rental subsidies		✔	
		# State's contributions on art groups/ associations		✔	
	Digitalisation	# Showcasing & promotion of creative practitioners on digital platforms	✔	✔	✔
		# Broadcasting & promotion of local arts & culture contents on digital platforms		✔	
		# Virtualised arts & cultural events & activities		✔	

Figure 4. Table showing COVID-19's impacts on the creative & cultural sectors and strategies towards resilience at city-level: the Malaysian context. Source: Compiled by authors from fieldwork, 2021.

Impacts	Themes *(Similar themes derived from Table 1 were used to analyse the Malaysian context).)*	Local Strategies **(initiated by State & Local governments)**	Malaysian Cities		
			Kuala Lumpur	**George Town, Penang**	**Ipoh, Perak**
	Business restructuring	# Adaptation of digital marketing & promotion	✔	✔	✔
	Capacity building	# Awareness raising about local creative productions & contents	✔	✔	✔
	Consultation	# Local advisory & networking services on available supports & funding opportunities		✔	✔
	Cross-sectoral integration		Cross-sectoral integrations are not evident in these cities.		
	Intercity/Regional collaborations	# Inter-city partnership in distributing aids & supports	✔	✔	✔
		# Inter-city stakeholders' collaborations in creating shared supporting platforms	✔		✔
	State-market partnerships	# Promotion of events in schools		✔	
		# Promotion of private adoption of arts organisations/ events		✔	
		# Dialogues between state and industrial stakeholders		✔	✔

Figure 4. Continued. Table showing COVID-19's impacts on the creative & cultural sectors and strategies towards resilience at city-level: the Malaysian context. Source: Compiled by authors from fieldwork, 2021.

Conclusion and Way Forward

As one of the worst hit sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic, the global CCS is at a cross-roads when in-person and live events halted or operated below normal capacity causing job losses, contract cancellations, deficits and such. To resuscitate and keep the sector afloat, various forms of interventions are mobilized by governments both in the developed and developing world. In hindsight and from a theoretical and practical standpoint, the role and future of the CCS have generally taken a dichotomous route. While the public- and social-good nature of CCS is beneficial to the wider society as espoused in 2 (b) (especially during Covid where people found solace in cultural and artistic immersion), the economic viability of the sector though promising has been critiqued as being socially exclusive. Arguably, the economic impacts of CCS vary and are distributed and benefitted dispropor-

tionally across creative employees (i.e. producers, creators, extras, freelancers, etc.), institutions and creative cities within society and across geographies. With burgeoning theoretical discourse deliberating the socio-economic value of culture and the way culture/creativity intersect with urban planning in creative city-making, this paper has attempted to investigate these claims where each of the above case study were analyzed to depict their local scenarios during Covid-19.

The above findings of budding Malaysian creative cities revealed that national and state/city level assistance (i.e. funding, capacity building, etc.) are present, but the way they cascaded down to each city is shaped by local state and civil society dynamics. The Malaysian case studies somewhat mirror global trends where there are instances of socio-spatial inequalities playing out when allocating assistance/funding where creative cities at major urban centers (i.e. Kuala Lumpur) or those cities (i.e. Ipoh) with stronger political will fare better and rebound quicker. Solo creative employees, smaller creative establishments and cities at the fringe are at risk of being side-lined and escape policy attention. As CCS braces to survive and be resilient, the element of 'creativity' has been optimized optimally with the emergence of new business models/formats and heightened digitalization of the sector which are commendable strategies. The Malaysian CCS is currently adopting and adapting to digitalization albeit in different scale, nature and magnitude. These measures, however, invite a different set of issues particularly concerning the economic and social welfare and well-being of creative employees (i.e. creators/producers/backstage workers) in terms of intellectual property rights, patents, employment rights, employee's perquisites and such. Additionally, issues of digital illiteracy and digital divide within Malaysia's CCS and across creative cities need to be addressed accordingly too. These issues will singularly or collectively impact the individual Malaysian creative employee and ultimately the social and cultural sustainability of the broader sector. Thus, recommendations like having clearer policy measures and even devising a Culture Masterplan at the city level should be duly considered by Malaysian cities that aspire to leverage on creative and cultural sectors.

With Covid-19 still unfolding, the road to recovery is anticipated to be long and rocky. With the private sector and creative employees still struggling to brace the pandemic, dialogues and policy emphasis from all tiers of governments and across diverse stakeholders (i.e. private, public, civil society) are crucial to truly fathom the hidden issues, struggles and challenges so that practical recommendations and policy changes that are inclusive and all-encompassing can be proposed. In every crisis, nonetheless, there is always an opportunity to change for betterment. In this case, the Covid-19 pandemic might serve as a blessing in disguise to revisit, restructure and give a new lease of life to Malaysia's CCS which has been largely marginalized even prior to Covid-19. As a developing nation, Malaysia has always prioritized Science & Technology over CCS thus downplaying and relegating arts, heritage and culture to the backseat. The Covid-19 crisis further degenerated Malaysia's CCS. However, with the imminent importance of culture and creativity in all spheres of development (as espoused in 2.0) coupled with global recognition of the prowess of creative cities to brace Covid-19 and to bounce back stronger, it is hoped that this crisis will be a turning point for Malaysia's CCS and creative cities alike. There is a clarion call to push the 'reset button' for Malaysia's CCS by according to them due recognition of prominence in the socio-economic and cultural realms as well as to be placed on a level playing field with other sectors/industries. A duly recognized and vibrant CCS will ensure economic and

socio-cultural sustainability of the sector which in turn underscores the resilience and success of Malaysian creative cities during Covid-19 and in anticipation of future shocks in the future.

Endnotes

1 Coronavirus (COVID-19) and cultural and creative sectors: impact, innovations and planning for post-crisis https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/culture-webinars.htm.

2 KKMM launches #MuzikDiRumah with over 300 Malaysian singers, musiciansfeatured in 136 performances streamed online (Source: https://www.malaymail.com/news/showbiz/2020/04/09/mcmc-launches-muzikdirumah-with-over-300-malaysian-singers-musicians-featur/1855125).

3 How the arts and mental health can have a positive connection (Source: https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/culture/2021/10/10/how-the-arts-and-mental-health-can-have-a-positive-connection)

4 Penang State EXCO Office for Tourism and Creative Economy (PETACE). Source: https://petace.gov.my/ (Date accessed: 5 July 2021).

5 Pakej Bantuan Sektor Kesenian Pulau Pinang , YB Yeoh Soon Hin, EXCO Pelancongan, Seni, Budaya dan Warisan Pulau Pinang. (TRANSLATION: Aid Package for Penang's Arts Sector, His Honorable Yeoh Soon Hin, Executive Official for Tourism, Arts, Culture and Heritage, Penang).

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