

Creative Hubs: The Map and The Territory

Creativity in the arts, sciences, design and business used to be perceived mostly as a personal achievement. In fact, the narrative of the 'lone genius' has inspired humankind since the earliest narratives of mythology.

However, in this world of fuzzy logic and messy challenges, the much-adored one-man-show only goes so far. Collaboration across disciplines is an indistinguishable aspect of success in the long term, especially as all activities are increasingly affected by network effects on all fronts.

For networked collaboration to unfold, space and its discontents perform a critical act. This idea of space takes manifold physical and virtual shapes, and can be bundled under the term "hub".

Some creative hubs happen to be solely virtual platforms or aggregators, coalescing the enthusiasm of specific groups around niche issues such as gastronomy, streetscape design, repair culture or biking & women. These hubs remain lean and nimble due to their lack of a permanent, semi-public space, but are able to gather actors and contributors through well-curated events.

Others rely on physical infrastructure which may consist of architectural programs that enable working, learning, prototyping and sharing. These physical hubs are wide-ranging in spatial typology as well, taking a slice of space within industrial heritage buildings, new mixed-use developments, 'old-era' commercial mid-rise building or university campuses. In a way, they become productive parasites within the milieu of the built environment. Their permanence is both a blessing and a curse, as they can foster a certain community culture through persistence of people and things, while the same 'things' can easily become a liability in a volatile environment.

Globally, these virtual and physical hubs, with their shape-shifting nature, proved to be more 'fungible' than expected, with exponential growth rates over the last decade. There are multiple determinants feeding this growth:

- social media that feeds the culture of 'each person becoming a brand',
- digital fabrication that democratizes pathways for product innovation,
- venture capital and governmental funding that carves opportunities for high-risk ventures,
- and most importantly, the need for feeling connected in an increasingly fragmented and stratified society.

Zooming into Turkey, these determinants are prevalent just as much as the rest of the world. Therefore, it is no surprise that creative hubs are sprouting in a rapid rate, especially in metropolitan areas.

This study, led by British Council Turkey and ATÖLYE, is aimed to canvas the terrain of creative hubs in Istanbul only, with the hope that the approach becomes replicable for other cities in Turkey as well.

The tough nature of any mapping exercise is the relationship between the map and the territory, in Baudrillardian terms. After all, given the dynamic nature of these social constructs and the relatively turbulent Turkish economics, it is likely that the map will lose its actuality the day it is published. In fact, just at this moment, a new set of people are probably in the process of establishing a new hub of sorts.

With this in mind, our aim here is not to create a static caption of each node in the network, but rather highlight emerging patterns, commonalities and potential collaborations across. Having said that, we hope that you discover your own paths across this terrain and contribute to this discourse; the texture is complex and nuanced.

The Numbers

In this study conducted between December 2016 and March 2017, we have found about 20 virtual hubs that address various niche issues. On the physical front, there are 10 co-working spaces, 29 research centres, 13 makerspaces, 5 fab labs, 10 incubation centers (mostly university-tied), 2 technoparks and 1 living lab across the gamut. Overall, this amounts to about 100 hubs, the majority of which were established in the last 5 years. An amazing feat.

The Stratas among Virtual Hubs

On the virtual hub side, sensitivities to sustainability, urbanism, maker culture and individual entrepreneurship form overarching themes for individual hubs. Under sustainability, problems pertaining to food (Gastronomika, Slow Food Youth Istanbul, Slow Food Türkiye, İstanbul Permakültür Kolektifi) and transport (Bisikletli Kadın İnisiyatifi, Bisikletli Ulaşım Platformu) lead the way, along with the more generalist ecological film festival entitled Sürdürülebilir Film Festivali. On urbanism, streetscape design (Sokak Bizim) and citizen engagement (Şehrine Ses Ver) emerge. On maker culture, actors such as Çırac Okulu,

Maker Hareketi, İstanbul Hackerspace, amberPlatform, Onaranlar Kulübü and Robotel, fill different parts of the spectrum, offering alternative paths to mainstream capitalist consumption culture. Finally, more specific hubs are Stage-co with their focus on entrepreneurship and Yaratıcı Fikirler Enstitüsü with their diverse set of creative projects with a networked team.

The Stratas among Physical Hubs

Among physical hubs, multiple parameters can be crossed for detecting patterns.

In terms of location, Besiktas, Sisli, Kadikoy, Sariyer and Beyoglu districts emerge as key attractors for such hubs, which is not a surprise given their transit accessibility. Kagithane is emerging as a less-expected underdog with a rising number of hubs opening in recent years. Outliers are either municipality-connected hubs, such as Basaksehir with Basaksehir Living Lab and Kartal with TAK, or hubs within existing company headquarters such as Uskudar with 3Dortgen, Kocaeli with Arcelik Garage, Pendik with GE Garage and Üsküdar with Vitali Hakko Library by Vakko. Other outliers are Eyup, Esenler, Cekmekoy and Bayrampasa, and it is natural to expect that more hubs will open in similar peripheral districts across the city.

In terms of sector, academic hubs are on the rise, with both private sector universities such as Koc, Ozyegin and Sabanci, opening entrepreneurship-focused hubs, and public universities such as ITU and Yildiz, opening technoparks. Meanwhile, Bilgi University seems to have more of a social-incubation focus, whereas Kadir Has University has a maker-focus with its Fab Lab. Across, the nature of these hubs are more opaque, as the admissions is informed by a structured process, mostly addressing existing students, graduates or specific applicant companies.

Coworking spaces rank high in terms of number and diversity, attracting freelancers, small companies and innovation-focused branches of large companies. Perhaps the key difference among them is their business model focus: while some such as Kolektif House, Workinton and DokuzBucuk are scaling rapidly with a real-estate business model at their core, others such as Joint Idea, Impact Hub and Habita remain in one or two locations, and thus focus further on their existing community. ATÖLYE happens to be an outlier, because although it does offer a workspace, its focus is more on member interaction and joint projects in a single location.

In terms of makerspaces and Fab Labs, there are various threads. Makerhane and Maker Atölye focus more on education via workshops, whereas Iskele47 caters to a small group of specialists, and ATÖLYE's FabLab to a bit-wider, but still specialist audience. These hubs

are complemented with corporate ventures such as GE Garages and Arçelik Garage, and niche hobbyist-maker groups such as Bitti Gitti.

In terms of research-centric hubs, an emerging bundle is those of Consulates, with French, German, Swedish and Dutch research institutions, coupled with local non-profit engagements by IKSIV, SALT and Doga Dernegi, among others.

Finally, niche-group think-tanks also exist, such as Gelecekhane, KotSifir, Bugday Dernegi and Permakamp, becoming physical manifestations of mission-driven communities around futurism, architecture and ecology.

Funding

Looking across the whole spectrum, it is interesting to note that almost %70 of them are funded either via individual sources, corporations or academic institutions. Meanwhile, the portion funded solely by government is non-existent. This is a radical finding when compared to the UK, where local councils and the government take a significant role in helping the creative establishments both in their early days as well as for their sustenance.

This resource scarcity in local context has led to interesting, hybrid business models, using local networks to craft bespoke, one-of-a-kind partnerships. For instance, TAK's cooperation with local government to find its space, while being funded by a private consulting firm and an NGO, is quite unique. Similarly, universities are venturing into establishing such hubs in a civic-minded way, fulfilling the role of 'civic libraries' for youthful entrepreneurs to gather and work at no cost. This area of research is certainly a fruitful one, and a more in-depth, cross-cultural study across TIMBI (Turkey, India, Mexico, Brazil, India) could lead to very interesting findings.

Conclusion

We are pleased to present this body of work as a first approximation on this subject matter. The project does capture a moment in time, fleeting by definition, and it also is inevitably superficial in terms of each hub's mission articulation. We hope that this map invites you to explore the actual territory by connecting with these hubs on your own, and seeing the reality for yourself. Have a pleasant journey.