

# The BUKAS Lab: Opening artsience exploration and futures literacy in the Global South

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## Abstract

BUKAS is a physical space and collaboration platform for pluridisciplinary and intersectoral initiatives in art, design, technology, and futures literacy centered around the context of the sustainable development and socioeconomic justice in the context of the Philippines in particular and the Global South in general. In this institutional presentation, we describe the constitution of BUKAS and a sampling of its current and past projects and initiatives.

## Keywords

Global South; sustainable development; open and distance learning; international collaborations; postcolonial partnerships; creative industries.

## About BUKAS

BUKAS ([bukas.upou.edu.ph](http://bukas.upou.edu.ph)) is a physical space and collaboration platform for pluridisciplinary and intersectoral initiatives in art, design, technology, and futures literacy. Referencing the ideas of openness (“*bukás*”, in the Filipino language) and of futures (“*búkas*”), the name of the space points to a vision for a future that is both inclusive and filled with possibility. Its activities center around the context of the sustainable development and socioeconomic justice in the context of the Philippines. BUKAS is unique in the Philippine context because of its administrative structure and management; the themes and inter disciplinary approaches it nurtures; and the types of projects that it currently supports.

## Partners

BUKAS is an initiative of the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies at the University of the Philippines – Open University (UPOU) and its partner, Space Ecologies Art and Design (SEADS). Each partner brings a unique contribution to the platform.

## UPOU: Opening artsience education in the Philippines

Established in 1995, UPOU pioneered online teaching and learning in the Philippines and is the leader in the study and practice of open learning and distance education in the country. It is part of the University of the Philippines system of campuses and is mandated by law to lead in the development of digital and remote learning technologies and services to all publicly funded higher education institutions in the country. Like all public universities in the Philippines, undergraduate education is free at UPOU, making it accessible to a broad range of Filipinos in the country and overseas. In 2008, UPOU supported the large-scale creation of an artsience installation, Biomodd [LBA2], as part of its undergraduate program in Multimedia Studies. This work eventually led to numerous iterations of the project across the world and eventually contributed to the founding of SEADS.[1] The BUKAS space is physically located in UPOU’s building in Quezon City (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The BUKAS space at UPOU’s Quezon City building. ©Diego Maranan.

## SEADS: Deconstructing paradigms of the future

SEADS ([www.seads.network](http://www.seads.network)) is a transdisciplinary and cross-cultural collective of artists, scientists, engineers and activists. Its international membership spans countries including Belgium, the UK, Malaysia, Kosovo, the US, and the Philippines. SEADS actively engages in deconstructing dominant paradigms about the future and develops alternative models through a combination of critical inquiry

and hands-on experimentation. Over the past years, the collective has created a range of paradigm-shifting projects in which different domains such as visual art, neuroscience, ecology and space technology are blended in unique ways. SEADS methodologies center on community building, co-creation and bottom-up design. SEADS embraces a hacking and open-source ethos, with the goal to engage as many people as possible in the activities and ideas that they initiate. While SEADS' is most well-known activities for its artistic output, SEADS has an educational pillar through collaborations between UPOU are often channeled. [2]

### Sample Projects

While UPOU and SEADS have collaborated in the past on other projects, we describe some of the recent and ongoing projects between these two organizations that are explicitly supported through the BUKAS platform.

### Creative Turn in the Sciences (Philippines)

Supported by the British Council's Connections Through Culture program, this project explored and described the state of arts/science activities and collaborations in the Philippines, with a focus on their relationship to local creative economies and creative industries. The main contribution of the project was the SHARES framework for enabling arts and humanities contribution to science research and translation. The research also uncovered is a nascent arts/science community of practice in the Philippines that could benefit from recognition and support. [3] UPOU and SEADS provided avenues for disseminating the research results to national and international publics.

### Wearable Futures Hackathon

The Wearable Futures Hackathon is a 12-week-long, hybrid learning experience that was collaboratively created by UPOU staff and students. This undergraduate course (which is currently running as of this writing) explores wearable technology, e-textiles, speculative design, and futures thinking. [4] It is the first of its kind in the country to emphasize the importance of speculative and art-based thinking in the context of imagining and anticipating future

issues. Student projects that are currently being prototyped include a glove that Filipino farmers can wear to automatically detect and display soil pH, a device that publicly displays one's carbon footprint, a physical wearable token for exchanging highly sensitive political information, and anti-sexual-assault underwear. SEADS and another partner organization, the Metafuturism Lab, ran speculative design and wearable computing workshops at the BUKAS space, and continue to provide ongoing mentorship to the students.

### Emerging Futurist Residency Program

The Emerging Futurist Residency program is a hybrid virtual/in-person residency focuses on supporting and nurturing exploration of multidisciplinary teams of artists, scientists, designers, engineers, and activists in futures thinking and futures literacy in the context of the Philippines. The residency is the first of its kind in the country, welcoming perspectives and proposals that foster long-term strategies and address themes of deep time and deep history; intergenerational thinking and planning; indigenous perspectives; connecting the past with the future; critical digital literacies; and speculative design. In return, residents are asked to give research/artist talks to the public; inspire students through the creation of educational resources or mentorship; document their creative and research practice; and participate in public engagement events. The 2022 Residency program focuses on a radical critique and reimagination of the *terno*, an emblematic but problematic style of dress particular to Filipino culture that has been coopted by political elites. [5]

## Conclusion

The BUKAS Lab represents an example of an ongoing international collaboration between public educational institutions in the Global South and international arts/science communities. By finding common ground and shared concerns, BUKAS Lab partners contribute to both local and global discussion on the role that transdisciplinary, speculative, and creative practices can play in the context of complex, uncertain, and turbulent realities.

## References

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