BRITISH COUNCIL

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Mapping Creative Hubs in Northern Ireland

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Foreword

Since 2014, the British Council has been working with over one thousand creative hubs globally. We see creative hubs as communities of support for creative professionals, as well as catalyst platforms that contribute to an inclusive and sustainable creative economy.

Our definition of a creative hub is 'a physical or virtual place that brings enterprising people together who work in the creative and cultural industries'. However, we acknowledge that in practice there are many definitions of creative hubs, and numerous organisations around the world might not resonate with the "creative hub" designation.

Over the last eight years, the British Council has developed a plethora of programmes, research and tools that have creative hubs at heart. From the Creative HubKit (developed by Creative Edinburgh and Creative Dundee) which has been translated into numerous languages globally; and the Creative Hub Leaders Toolkit (developed by British Council, Hivos and Nesta) published in 2020 which provides practical tools to develop your hub's business model; to programmes like Hubs for Good in Southeast Asia which supported creative hubs as key drivers and catalysts for good in cities or Hubs as Hosts, which brought creative hubs from across the globe to the UK to connect, collaborate and exchange learnings with a variety of UK hubs. You can read more about our work in this area here: https://creativeconomy.britishcouncil.org/

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we planned to carry out mappings of creative hubs across all four UK nations, in an effort to refresh the body of knowledge on creative hubs and their ecosystem. These mapping exercises are for us a substantial source of information, helping us understand how the sector has evolved, what kind of impact creative hubs generate, and what are the current trends. They also offer a valuable resource for our international work, highlighting the richness and diversity of the creative hubs landscape in the UK.

This report is an introductory exercise in Northern Ireland, aiming to develop a baseline understanding of where creative hubs are situated and what their successes, needs and challenges are. It also considers social and economic impacts of hubs and their ability to respond to global challenges. It complements the Mappings of Creative Hubs we published in 2020 & 2021 for England and Scotland and for Wales later in 2022.

We wish to extend our thanks and appreciation to the creative community across Northern Ireland, who were generous with their time and input for this research exercise and to Marianne Kennerley, Director at Boom! Inc Studios, Bangor for completing this report.

British Council Creative Economy & Northern Ireland Teams

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1. Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

This report was commissioned by the British Council as part of a UK-wide mapping of the creative hubs and with the intention to gain an initial understanding of the creative hubs sector in Northern Ireland.

The British Council uses a specific definition for creative hubs, to help frame their international programmes. This definition sees creative hubs as 'physical or virtual places that bring together enterprising people who work in the creative and cultural industries'.

The creative sector in Northern Ireland [1] covers advertising, architecture, arts and antiques, computer games, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, TV and radio, music, performing arts, publishing, software/digital media. [2] According to the Creative Industries Council, there are an estimated 2,040,000 jobs in the creative sector in the UK, with 75% of them outside London. The Creative Industries Council also states that the UK's creative industries are developing new jobs faster than other sectors. [3]

Between 2011 and 2018, creative industries employment mushroomed by 30.6 per cent, compared to the UK average growth of 10.1 per cent during that period. In the wider creative economy, the total number of UK jobs is 3.2m or 9.6 per cent of all UK jobs. Employment in the UK creative industries is growing at four times the rate of the UK workforce as a whole, according to the latest official statistics from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). [3]

Nesta, the innovation charity, has developed in 2015 a series of recommendations to create 1 million new jobs in the UK creative economy by 2030. [4]

In 2016, Belfast was recognised in a research report commissioned by the British Council, as a city at an earlier stage in the provision of art spaces and support to the creative industries. [5]

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[1] **A National Statistics Publication**: Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/documents/ur_report.pdf

[2] **Department for Communities**: Role of creative industries in the economy https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/creative-industries

[3] **Creative Industries Council**: Creative Industries Employment 14% Above Pre-Pandemic Level https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/facts-figures/creative-industries-employment-14-above-pre-pandemic-level

[4] **Nesta**: why the UK needs one million creative jobs by 2030 https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/why-the-uk-needs-one-million-new-creative-jobs-by-2030-and-what-the-government-can-do-about-it/

[5] **British Council**: The Creative Hubs Report, 2016 https://creativeeconomy.britishcouncil.org/media/uploads/files/HubsReport.pdf

1.2   Research Methodology

This research was conducted in March and April 2022, as the world emerged from the global pandemic into an uncertain climate with the war in Ukraine, where the impacts are not fully realised. The methodology used to gather information was based on research methods, including desk-based research, surveys, conversations, documentation and site visits.

Our initial desk research identified 69 organisations with a focus that either fitted the British Council's description of a creative hub or somewhat fitted the description. We established contact via email and invited participation in a survey. This was followed up with site visits to 4 venues.

A smaller number than anticipated responded to the survey request, including local government supported organisations to independent creative hubs, however with a good representation from the diverse creative hubs in Northern Ireland, we understand this to be the first mapping of its kind and hope it will potentially provide a baseline for further research.

1.3   Why didn't people participate?

From the feedback we received, hobby groups, regional art clubs or societies felt they did not fit the description of a creative hub. We must also recognise that some groups of artists may wish to categorise as alternative collectives and do not identify fully with some of the descriptions presented.

The term 'creative hub' has many complex meanings which go beyond the day-to-day activities, this can make it challenging for a group to understand what a creative hub is. We acknowledge that in practice there are many definitions of creative hubs, and numerous creative organisations around the world might not resonate with the "creative hub" designation.

1.4   What is the creative industry landscape in Northern Ireland?

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Communities (DfC) is the government lead on the creative industries and identify them as:

> 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'.

It should be noted from the beginning that all industries in Northern Ireland are working in the backdrop of a post-conflict society. In addition, the lack of a functioning Northern Ireland Executive has resulted in delays in the publishing of a refreshed Programme for Government, (the last PfG was 2011 - 2021), which is continuing to impact on budgets and therefore funding.

Northern Ireland has a thriving and fast-growing creative technology economy, with GVA rising by 70% 2009-2013, compared to 15% for the whole creative industries sector and 5% for all Northern Ireland industries. At the time of this report, there were over 1,300 creative technology

businesses registered here, and 44,000 people around 5% of our total workforce is employed in the creative economy. [6] Locally, employment in the creative industries accounted for 29,000 jobs in 2019. This represented 3.4 per cent of total employment in Northern Ireland.

The GVA for the creative industries increased by 12% between 2018 and 2019 (£1,170 million to £1,311 million), compared to a 2.7% increase for total GVA. Overall, GVA for the creative industries has generally increased over the trend period from 2010 to 2019.

In 2019, there were 3,325 creative businesses in Northern Ireland, accounting for 5.1% of all business units in Northern Ireland. The number of creative enterprises increased by 1% in 2019 compared with 2018.

There were a total of 65,600 businesses in Northern Ireland in 2019, an increase of 4% from 2018. The proportion of creative enterprises relative to all businesses in Northern Ireland remained steady at around 5% from 2014 to 2019. [6]

1.5   Overview of impacts created by the hubs in Northern Ireland

Measuring and understanding the impacts that creative hubs make is a complex and time-consuming process. As a brief overview, the greatest impact is created in social well-being and quality of life, the cultural creation of new work and cultural networks.

Impacts are recognised in education, training, talent development, retention, cultural research and development. There are further impacts created in areas such as ecology, financial and health. A full analysis is discussed in the next section.

2. What are the creative hubs in Northern Ireland?

2.1   What types of hubs does the creative sector in Northern Ireland include?

The definition of a creative hub is complex and evolving as we move from the "artist hothouse" to "homes for collectives" and now to creative hubs that incorporate digital and move to the metaverse. Our initial desk research identified just under 70 potential creative places and spaces that could fit into the British Council's definition as a creative hub being "a physical or virtual place that brings enterprising people together who work in the creative and cultural industries."

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[6] **Department for Communities**: Economic estimates 2022 https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-creative-industries-cconomic-estimates-2022.pdf

We also identified 23 groups that exist only on digital platforms e.g., Facebook groups.
26% of the organisations identified responded to the survey sent out to them, which is a smaller number than anticipated. We understand this to be the result of a feeling of misalignment with the creative hubs definition provided, as testified by a few respondents. Those who responded to the survey represent a diverse range of creative hubs across Northern Ireland, from public sector supported organisations to independent organisations.

These spaces included informal artists' hothouses, collective workspaces, art studios, centres, a hobby group, a lab, a print workshop, an innovation hub, an impact hub, a network, an informal group or cluster, alternatives focussed on experimentation and others.

Figure 1: Survey Response to Question 3

3.)How do you identify your Hub ?
17 responses

Category	Responses
Artist Hothouse - informal arr…	1 (5.9%)
A workspace for your collecti…	4 (23.5%)
Art Studios - a number of wo…	9 (52.9%)
A Digital Platform - no bricks…	1 (5.9%)
A Center - a formal space.	6 (35.3%)
A Hobby Group.	0 (0%)
A Lab.	0 (0%)
A Print Workshop.	1 (5.9%)
An Innovation Hub.	2 (11.8%)
An Impact Hub.	1 (5.9%)
A Network - Digital or In Rea…	4 (23.5%)
An informal cluster or group	1 (5.9%)
Alternative - Focused on exp…	2 (11.8%)
Other (use the comments bo…	6 (35.3%)
An Impact Hub	1 (5.9%)

From our survey we can see that:
53% identified as art studios
35% identified as a formal art centre
35% identified as other e.g., Hacker/Maker Space
23% identified as a workspace for collectives
23% identified as a network
11% identified as an innovation space
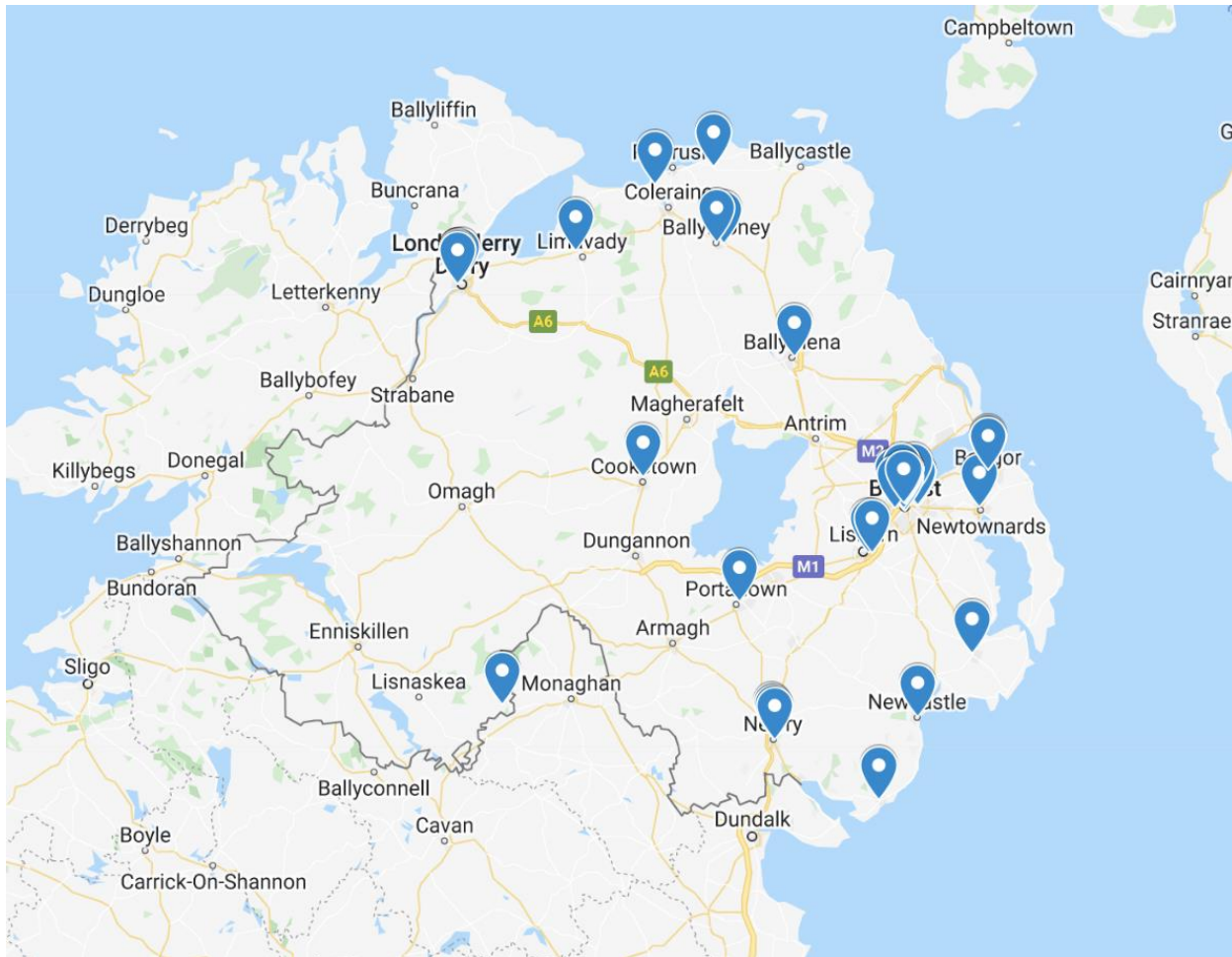11% identified as alternative spaces

The remainder of responses were around 5% defining as a HotHouse, a digital platform, a print workshop, an impact hub or an informal cluster.

This data demonstrates that we have a diverse range of hubs in the Northern Ireland creative sector but art studios are the most common description used, approximately half surveyed identified as this.

2.2 Where are the Hubs in Northern Ireland?

Differentiating between digital, urban & rural, approximately 65% of the Northern Ireland population live in urban areas and 35% in rural areas and we can see this reflecting in the locations of the creative hubs across Northern Ireland. [6]

Figure 2: Map showing Creative Hubs in Northern Ireland
Creative Hubs in Northern Ireland

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[6] **Department for Communities**: Economic estimates 2022 https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-creative-industries-cconomic-estimates-2022.pdf

Figure 3: Map showing Creative Hubs in Derry~Londonderry

Figure 4: Map showing Creative Hubs in Belfast
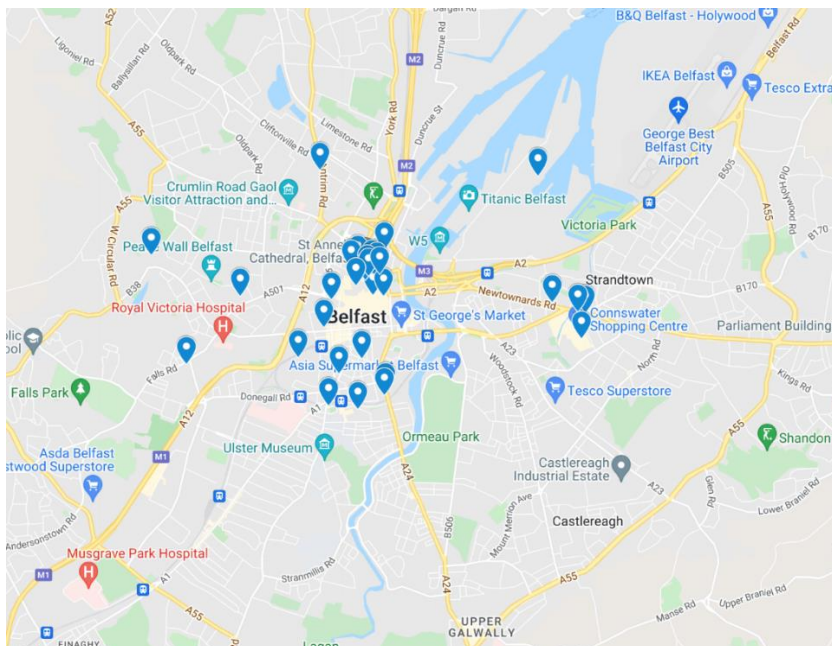
By adding the hubs to the maps, we understand that the majority of hubs are to the east of the of Northern Ireland, in line with the capital city of Belfast and denser populations. The rural areas are not serviced by creative hubs, especially the mid-Ulster and southwest Ulster areas.

It should be noted that these hubs are not all creative hubs as per the British Council definition, however they may offer part or some of the description.

2.3   The people who use the creative hubs

We considered hubs on the makeup of their users [regular] and audiences [occasional]. There was a mixture of majority male or majority female within individual hubs, with 1 hub majority other and 2 hubs not recording gender preferences.

50% of the respondents are working with people from minority ethnic backgrounds and 37% with deaf or disabled people.

Approximately a third are working with Carers and Asylum Seekers. 6 hubs specifically mentioned that they do not work with specific groups and that their work is for everyone.

The age range of people using the creative hubs ranged from 0 years to 75 and above years. 100% of the hubs surveyed worked with people between the ages of 26 years to 55 years. (The age group with the most people in Northern Ireland in 2020 was the 50-59, closely followed by 30-39 age group).
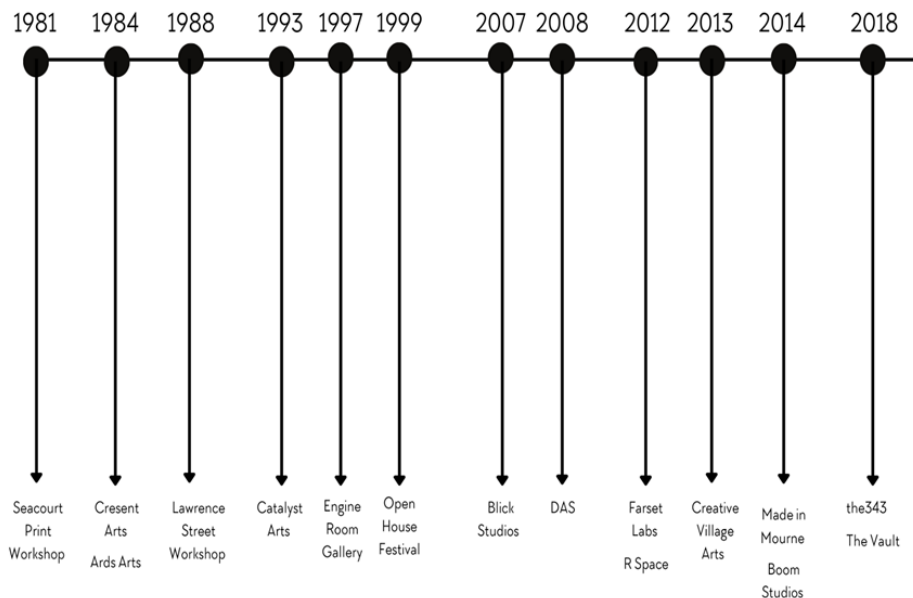
2.4   Timeline of the creative hubs' development among survey respondents

Looking at the establishment dates of the respondents, we can identify 3 trends across creative hubs' timeline of the last forty years:
- that government supported art centres were established in the 1980s
- tech and digital focused hubs in the 2000s, &
- social enterprise models in the 2010s

Figure 5: Timeline showing creative hubs development in Northern Ireland

The establishment of art centres in the 1980s in Northern Ireland would reflect the phases of development in a post conflict society, the re-establishing of infrastructure in town and city centres.

1981	1984	1988	1993	1997	1999	2007	2008	2012	2013	2014	2018
Seacourt Print Workshop	Cresent Arts	Lawrence Street Workshop	Catalyst Arts	Engine Room Gallery	Open House Festival	Blick Studios	DAS	Farset Labs	Creative Village Arts	Made in Mourne	the343 The Vault
	Ards Arts							R Space		Boom Studios	

The tech and digital hubs developed in the 2000s and the social enterprise models could be attributed to the change in trends and the needs of the creative industries i.e., the emergence of the digital industry.

3. Profile of the creative hubs

3.1 Who are the creative hubs? (Northern Ireland creative hubs in numbers)

We identified and contacted 69 hubs in our initial phase of the research. It should be noted that these hubs are not all creative hubs as per the British Council definition, they may resonate with only offer part or some of the description. 26% of them offered responses to the research survey they were sent.
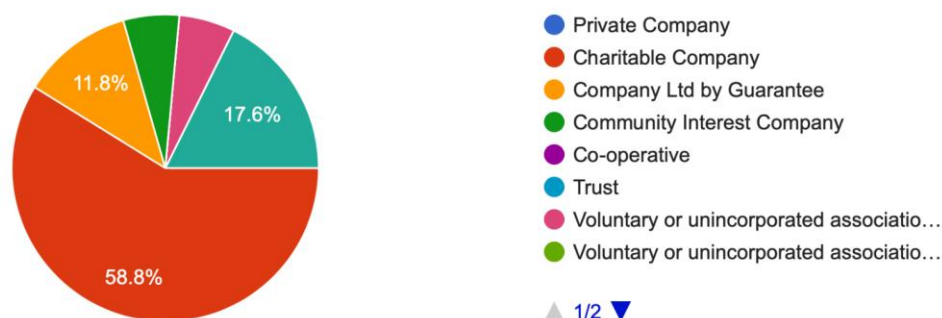
Ards Art Centre	Down Arts	Pollen Studios
Array	East Side Arts	Project 24,Bangor (No longer functioning)
Artcetera studio	Eighty81(No longer functioning)	
Arts Ekta		PS Squared
Ballymena Community Arts Partnership	The Designerie	Queen Street Studios
	Farset Labs	R-Space
Community Arts Partnership	Fashion and Textile Design Centre	Seacourt Print Workshop
Bannworks		Sliabh Beagh Arts
Belfast Exposed	Flax Art Studios	Sticky Fingers
Belfast Print Workshop	Flowerfield Arts Centre	Strule Art centre
Between Pictures Project	Glasgowbury	Tada / Beyond Skin
Blick Studios	Golden Thread	The 343
Boom Studios	Hubflow	The Burnavon
Braid Arts Centre	In Your Space Circus	The Courthouse Bangor
Catalyst Art	Innovation Factory	The Courthouse Shared Space
Cathedral Studios (No longer functioning)	Island Arts centre	
	Lawrence Street Workshops	The Designerie
Centre for Contemporary Art	MADE in Mourne (No longer functioning)	The Duncairn
Codo Drops NI		The Engine Room Gallery
Coleraine Arts Society	Midtown Makers	The Hub Newry
Conway Mill / Artists at the Mill (No longer functioning)	Millennium Court	The Roe Valley Arts & Cultural Centre
	Nerve Centre - Derry	
Creative Exchange	Nerve Centre - Belfast	The Vault
Creative Village Arts	NI Science Park	Theatre and Dance NI
Crescent Arts Centre	Oh Yeah Music centre	University of Atypical
Cultúrlann Mc Adam Ó Fiaich	Open House Festival	Usfolk
DAS	Ormeau Baths	We Help Musicians NI
Derry print workshop	Platform Arts	

3.2 What are the creative hubs in Northern Ireland?

Figure 6: response to Question 4 of the Survey

4.)What is your legal structure?

17 responses

- Private Company
- Charitable Company
- Company Ltd by Guarantee
- Community Interest Company
- Co-operative
- Trust
- Voluntary or unincorporated associatio…
- Voluntary or unincorporated associatio…

△ 1/2 ▼

59% of the organisations surveyed are charitable companies
18% are other (a co-op, local authority run, awaiting formal registration by the Charity Commission)
6% Community Interest Companies
6% are unincorporated

4. Governance

4.1 Origin Stories

The majority of the organisations were established by people coming together over a common need at grassroots level, usually a need for space to work or deliver from, or a need to generate income.

Their individual "origin stories" reflect a moment in time and a place and a motivation to solve a problem in their community. This aligns with learnings from the British Council's global work with creative hubs, where these types of organisations often have a mission to create impact locally by addressing the needs and issues of their local communities.

> "We are a voluntary charity launched in 2012 to answer the glaring need to provide low-cost artists' studios in the northwest of Ireland and support artists in their career development." Creative Village Arts, Derry
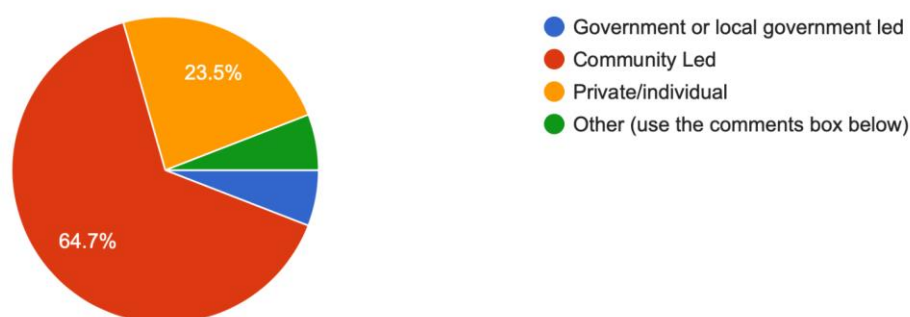
"We believe that music, art, culture and festival events are the regenerative force that will transform Bangor from its seafront dereliction and failed retail sector into a modern seaside town." Open House Festival, Bangor

"Hundreds of commercial and industrial buildings are vacant and decaying all over Belfast. Many long-term empty properties stay that way for years, even decades. We were established in 2017 to make use of these spaces and to provide a platform for artistic talent to flourish." Vault Artist Studios, Belfast

Figure 7: response to Question 6 on the Survey

6.)How did your hub establish?

17 responses

- Government or local government led
- Community Led
- Private/individual
- Other (use the comments box below)

65% of the hubs were established by the community
23% were established by a private entity or individuals
6% were local authority projects
6% were others

4.2 The common purpose

Analysing the purpose and aims of the organisations that responded to the survey, we can identify a collection of common themes. Not every organisation has all these aims, but this gives us a collective list of the primary objectives that the creative hubs in Northern Ireland are working towards. In no particular order, these are:

1. Regeneration
2. Workspace
3. Support
4. Business development
5. People
6. Promotion, Showcasing & Audience Development
7. Education
8. Collaboration & Innovation
9. Resource Development
10. Environmental Impact

4.3 Internal governance

The majority of organisations foster a participative leadership or transformational leadership approach, none of the hubs used a top-down style of leadership.

This would be expected from charitable organisations and echoes the nature of the wider creative and cultural sector.

29% of the organisations have a Board of Trustees that include members and non-members
41% of the organisations have a Board that is made up of hub members only
12% have a management / director team
6% are managed by committee
6% are an informal group
6% are other

5. Business Models

The organisations that we have identified as creative hubs are varied in the services that they provide, from showcasing and exhibition spaces, to training opportunities. The main services offered are:

76% offer showcasing and exhibition opportunities
70% offer training and workshops
65% offer studio spaces
65% offer networking opportunities
59% offered co-working space
53% offered access to equipment and resources
53% offered venue hire

41% offered membership, rehearsal & performance space, sign-posting to opportunities, opportunities for paid work

None of the organisations offered financing, and there were low percentages offering cafes, incubation, 1-2-1 business support, funding, retail, links to academic institutions, bookshops or mobile working.

5.1   The Creative Hub & Human Resources

Just under half of the spaces surveyed had under 50 members, with 30% having 50-100 members, the hubs that have larger numbers may have included their audience members as hub users.

Figure 7 - response to Question 14 on the Survey

14) How many members does the Hub have? (Members could be fee paying members, regular or registered users, studio holders etc.)
17 responses
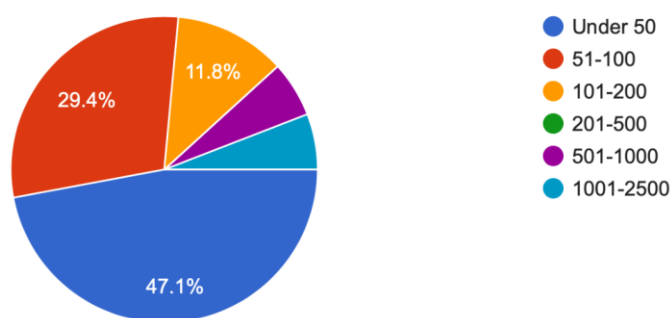
53% of the hubs employed full time staff
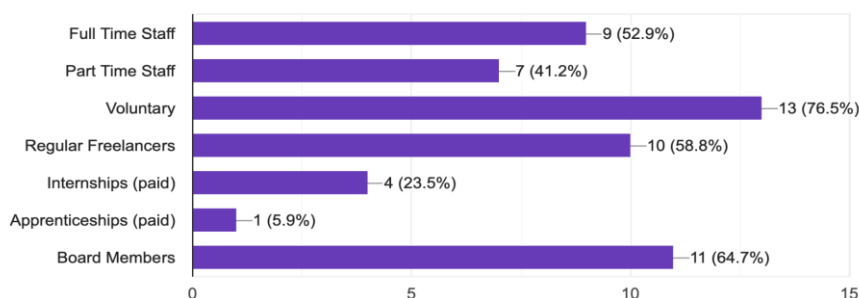41% used part time staff
76% used volunteers
59% used freelancers

Figure 8 - response to Question 7 on the Survey

7.)Does your Hub employ or engage..... (Please tick all that apply)
17 responses

We could understand that the reliance on volunteers in the sector demonstrates that the sector is under-resourced and lacks staff capacity. However, as the majority of the business models are also charities, volunteering would fit with the charitable purposes. This figure could be attributed to leveraging the in-kind support that people wish to give to charities. 65% of the organisations have Board Members.

5.2   Income Generation & Sources of Income

The organisations surveyed described generally having several streams, 6 organisations (35%), just over a third or respondents, are reliant on a single income stream for 100% of their income.

The most utilised method of income generation is rental (this could be studios, workspaces or retail space) and the least used was private investment and ticket sales.

The top five methods of generating income are:

1. Rental
2. Public sector contracts or tenders
3. Grants
4. Sales of service or memberships
5. Sale of products

Other methods used to a lesser degree are loans, private investment, and ticket sales.

Physical spaces

The survey shows that 76%, 13 of the respondents have 1 location that they offer their services from.

Only one hub has several locations, and none of the hubs have international offices. The Northern Ireland creative hubs or creative spaces are not formally connected through a network entity.

Through 2020 & 2021, as a result of the global pandemic, we saw more use of digital platforms for creative practitioners to connect. (e.g., Facebook Groups)

6.   Impacts

Measuring and understanding the economic and social impacts that creative hubs make is a complex and time-consuming process. Creative hubs and other creative organisations use different means to assess their impact, when and if they do it. Different funding instruments might require different sets of data, and in lack of a universally agreed tool for all creative organisations, it becomes rather difficult to assess their impact in depth through only a mapping exercise.

This research did not aim to measure the impact of the creative hubs, but intended to understand how they relate to global development through the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals. We did this by gathering data to understand the outputs and outcomes and the goals that they contribute to.

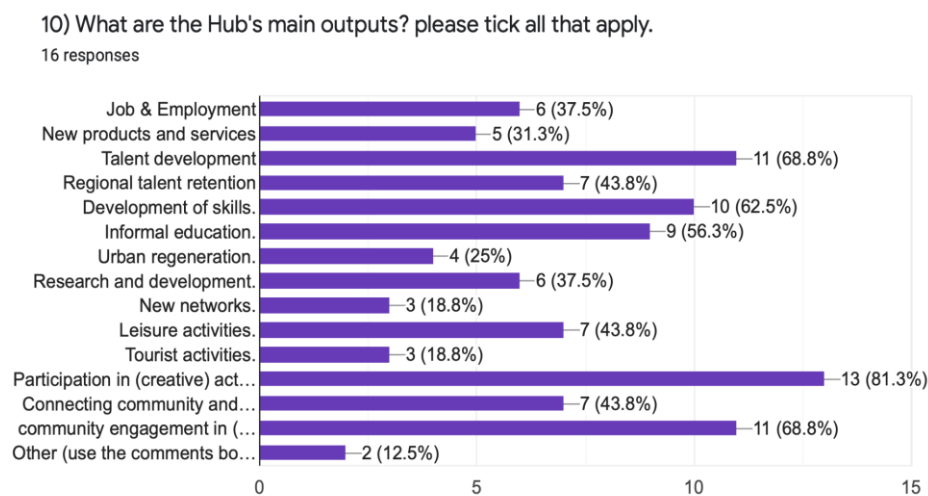## 6.1 What do the creative hubs in Northern Ireland do?

The creative spaces in Northern Ireland identified 16 outputs. (We understand outputs as impacts that are measurable and can be quantified easily. It could be a product or a service).

Referring to the survey, we can identify the outputs of the Northern Ireland creative hubs as (in order of strongest to weakest):

1. Participation in Creative Activity - 81%
2. Community Engagement - 69%
3. Talent Development - 69%
4. Development of Skills - 62%
5. Informal Education - 56%
6. Leisure Activities - 44%
7. Regional Talent Retention - 44%
8. Connecting the Community 44%
9. Jobs & Employment - 37%
10. New products and services

Other outputs recorded (in a smaller percentage) were new products and services, urban regeneration, new networks, and tourist activities. The artist's own practice, health & well-being and showcasing local art were also suggested as outputs.

Figure 9 - response to Question 10 on the Survey

10) What are the Hub's main outputs? please tick all that apply.
16 responses

Who Benefits from the Northern Ireland Creative Hubs

Through these outputs we can surmise that those benefiting from the hubs in Northern Ireland are:

- People participating in creative activities in Northern Ireland

- People who are creating services or products in the creative sector

- People employed in the creative hubs

- People who are self-employed in the creative sector or work for a creative sector organisation

- Organisations that invest in the creative sector

- Local councils in areas where creative hubs are located

- Building owners who lease buildings to creative hubs and the estate agents or management agents involved in that process

6.2   Outcomes of Northern Ireland's creative hubs

Through these outputs and the activities in the hubs we can identify key outcomes:

81% provide participation in creative activity
69% provide community engagement
69% provide talent development
62% provide development of skills
56% provide informal education
43% provide regional talent retention
43% provide leisure activities
43% provide connecting community and community development
37% provide jobs & employment

6.3   Working towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Through the outputs and outcomes, impacts are created in the wider population.

Referencing the United Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 11 key actions identified in the "A Global Agenda for the Cultural and Creative Industries" Report in December 2021, we asked questions that would indicate a performance indicator against the goals.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

We identified the following SDGs as being the most relevant to the Creative Hubs in Northern Ireland:

- Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

- Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- Goal 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

- Goal 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Contribution to this goal is achieved through the social impacts that the creative spaces generate through their activities and outcomes. We can attribute the higher percentage of the Participation in Creative Activity - (81%) output and community engagement (69%) to this.

76% identified Well-Being, the creation of new work and networks as the main social impacts
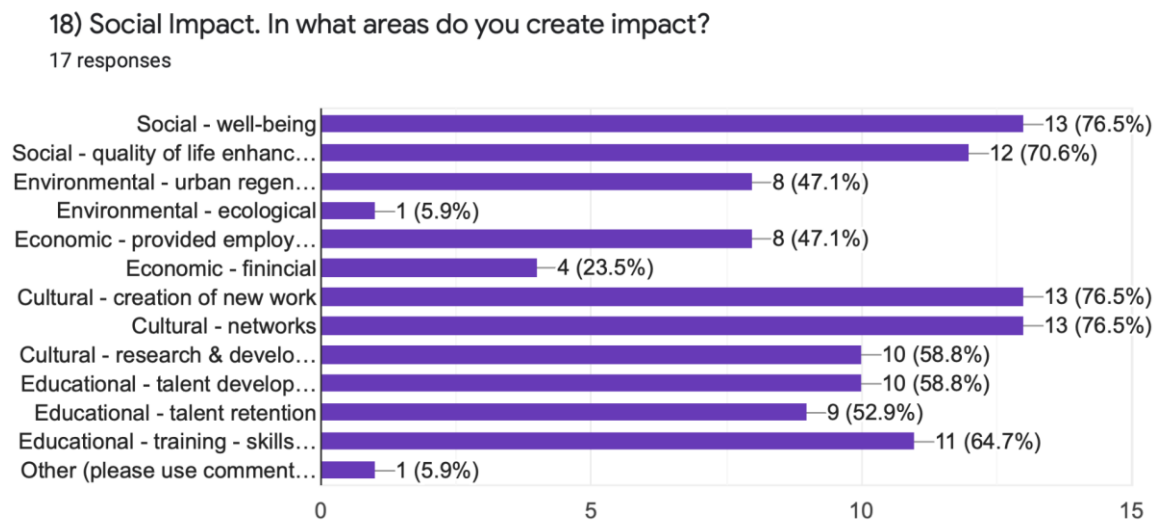
70% identified quality of life enhancements

65% identified training and skills development

59% identified cultural research, development and talent development

Urban regeneration, ecological themes, providing employment, financial, and health improvements are also identified as contributing to this goal.

Figure 10: response to Question 18 on the Survey

18) Social Impact. In what areas do you create impact?

17 responses

Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all &

Goal 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Contributing to economic growth is not always a priority for creative hubs, as it can challenge the values that those hubs hold. In the creative hubs' context, "financial resilience or financial sustainability" are often used, with organisations requiring financial growth to support the creation of further impact. For example, providing more studios, owning buildings, redevelopment or self-supporting activities are all aims for the future.

- 47% of the hubs surveyed are providing employment opportunities
- 23% are creating financial impacts
- 35% of organisations work with 11-15 freelancers in a usual year
- 29% of organisations work with 0-5 freelancers
- 18% worked with 30 plus freelancers
- 12% worked with 6-10 freelancers
- 6% worked with 16 - 25 freelancers

This indicates that organisations are sourcing skills and expertise from the sector as the majority of creative practices are freelance, self-employed or contract workers, adding to the cultural and creative eco-system in Northern Ireland (assuming that they are buying local).

Figure 11 - response to Question 19 on the Survey

19) Economic Impact. How many casual, non-contract, freelancers do you work with in a usual year?
17 responses

Legend:
- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-25
- 26-30
- 30 plus
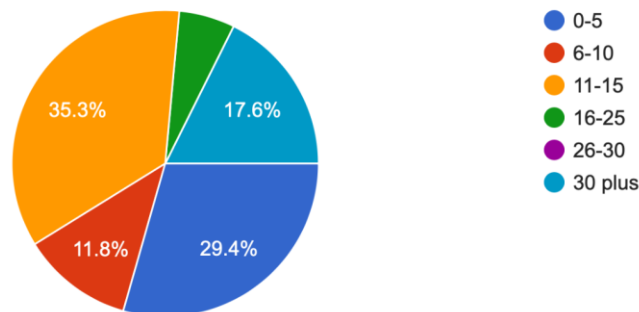
Specific financial impact requires further analysis to fully understand the growth or resilience of the creative hubs in Northern Ireland.

Figure 12: response to Question 21 on the Survey

21) From year 0 to current has your your turnover changed. (Please give an indication of percentage increase or decrease.)
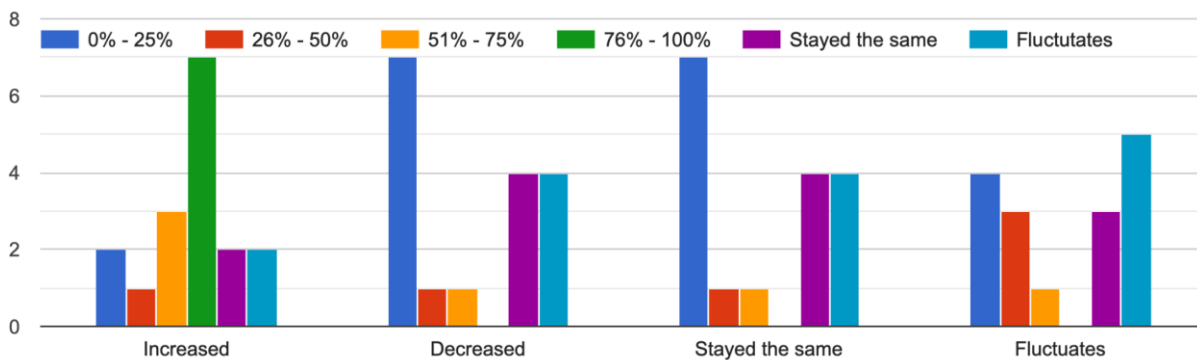
This data indicates that 48% of the hubs have seen an increase in income of between 76% and 100%.
- 24% have an income that fluctuates
- 11% have seen an increase in income of between 0% and 25%
- 11% of the hub's income has remained the same
- 5% have seen a decrease in income of between 0% and 25%

This demonstrates that over half of the creative hubs surveyed have grown their income streams.

Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Environmental Sustainability

The organisations indicated that a majority of respondents declare the most important factor when selecting energy suppliers is affordability, with:

- 53% purchasing this way
- 18% of the organisations are choosing sustainable energy
- 6% were using the (wood) waste that is created to heat their hub

In Northern Ireland 40%+ of energy is renewable with most suppliers offering green tariffs. This indicates that some are moving towards selecting more sustainable sources of energy.

Figure 13: response to Question 22 on the Survey

22.)Environmental Impact. When choosing energy suppliers, what do you prioritise?
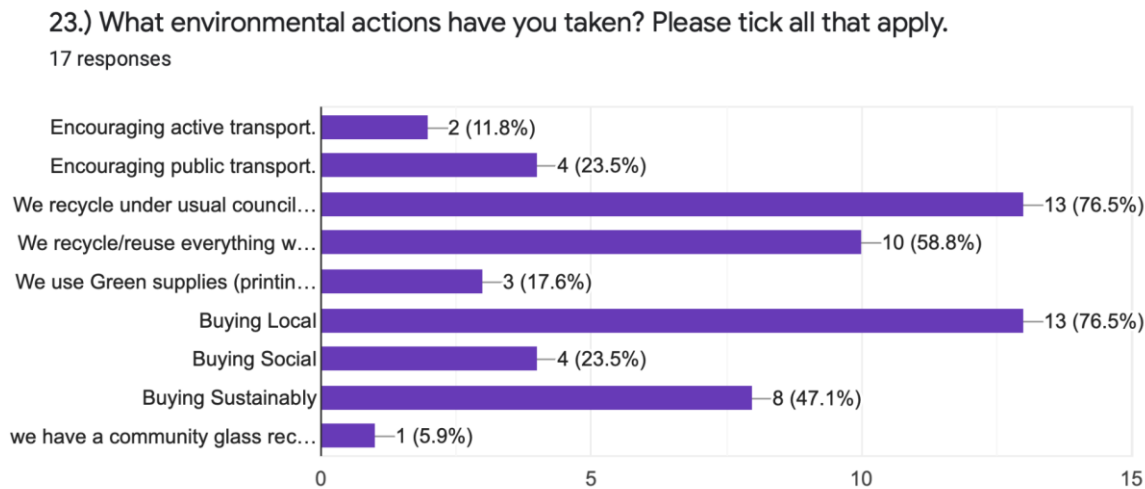17 responses
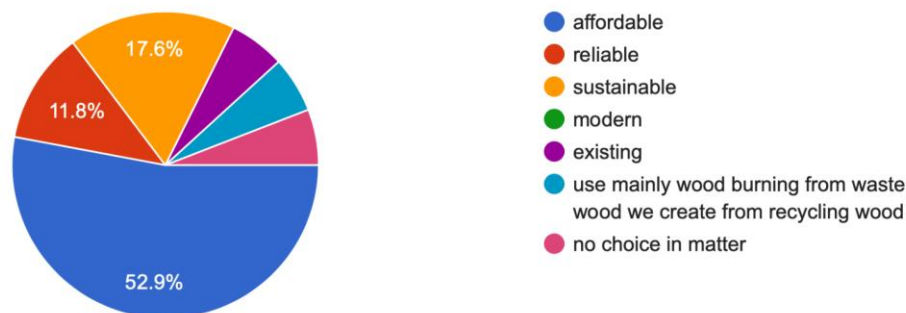
Most organisations (77%) are using the usual recycling schemes offered by local councils, with

- 58% recycling everything that they can
- 76% are buying from local suppliers
- 23% are buying socially i.e. from social enterprises
- 47% are buying sustainably from "green" suppliers
- 12% are encouraging active transport ie walking / cycling
- 23% are encouraging public transport

Figure 14: response to Question 23 on the Survey

23.) What environmental actions have you taken? Please tick all that apply.
17 responses

Encouraging active transport.	2 (11.8%)
Encouraging public transport.	4 (23.5%)
We recycle under usual council…	13 (76.5%)
We recycle/reuse everything w…	10 (58.8%)
We use Green supplies (printin…	3 (17.6%)
Buying Local	13 (76.5%)
Buying Social	4 (23.5%)
Buying Sustainably	8 (47.1%)
we have a community glass rec…	1 (5.9%)

7. Case Studies

We approached four hubs in Northern Ireland to have a deeper discussion on being a Creative Hub in Northern Ireland. We talked to different types of hubs in different locations, including urban and rural, young and old, and with different governance models.

The method was site visit & interview.

7.1 Midtown Makers - Ballymena

Website: http://www.midtownmakers.co.uk
Location: Ballymena,
Structure: Charitable Company (Ballymena Business Hub Project)
Employees: 3
Turnover: Unknown

Midtown Makers Photo Marianne Kennerley

The 360 View
Midtown Makers Studio and Shop is a Ballymena Business Centre regeneration project with the remit to "give crafters a place". Recognising the need to provide affordable town centre retail space for local craft makers and a desire to help regenerate Ballymena Town Centre. A vacant retail property was acquired and transformed into an award-winning creative retail environment.

Mission Statement
"Promoting enterprise", to give people a chance to start and build a business at an affordable rate, as well as town regeneration.

Description
One location: a previous department store that had been empty for 7 years prior to 2015. The ground floor is an open plan space, where walls, shelves and pergolas are set up to sell locally made craft products. The first floor has 6 rentable offices and a meeting/function room space along with 2 hot desks. The building is nearly in full ownership of the Ballymena Business Centre.

Origin Story
Established in 2014 and led by a community of makers that already existed. The Ballymena Business Centre identified an opportunity to regenerate a town centre space and provide supporting services to these small businesses and open up accommodation for other businesses. They developed the community of active craft sellers from 10 to 84.

Purpose (The Why?)
The Vision of the overarching Business Centre is to see Ballymena become a thriving and vibrant economic area driven by enterprise and support entrepreneurship.

Founder Story / Key Person Story
Jim Stevenson was part of the original/core group of crafters that used the space as a pop-up shop initially. He then took on a part-time role to develop the project. As the project has grown his role has developed into a retail manager, coach, mentor and community leader.

Values
- Trust in the community of makers
- Space for testing and trying projects and ideas
- Welcome to everyone
- Authenticity - knows the place, and the culture of people that live there

Hub Model
Charitable company with a Board of Trustees
Delegating initiative to team members
Roots Up approach, nurturing a project with local roots

360 View: "Making Community Work"
Themes/Expertise
- Rural craft and services to support makers
- Innovation: reacting to the market and the community
- Benefits to wellness of making and crafting
  "There is so much in the craft sector that is of benefit to people"

Challenges/Needs

- Sustaining business to ensure survival long-term
- Moving into the tourism sector to support tourism in the area
- Establishing appropriate accommodation to support the growth of Midtown Makers
- Overcoming preconceptions of locally made products being too expensive
- Overcoming the "another charity shop" preconception
- Barriers of the craft sector - "snobbery" within the sector
- Lack of opportunities to connect with other creative spaces and share experiences

Partners/Stakeholders/Collaborators

The support from the Business Improvement District /Business Centre sustains the Midtown Makers, financially and providing support services.

Impacts

Wellbeing, quality of life, urban regeneration, ecological impacts, creation of new work, network of makers, talent development & retention, and community and economic development.

Income Generation Strands

Rental of spaces for retail

Services

Midtown Makers identified themselves as a space for a collective to work, with a formal set up (an enterprise centre) and a network of makers. They provide space for co-working, studio spaces, performance and rehearsal space, training and workshops, incubation, access to equipment, skills and resources, 1-2-1 business support & mentoring. Venue Hire: Workshops. Retail space with no commission. Wellbeing Groups.

Role in the local community

- Talent Development & retention
- Skills Development
- Urban regeneration
- Benefits of participation in creative activity & community engagement. A place for "a wee bit of craic"
- Sustainable energy consumption
- Recycling everything possible, buying local, social, sustainable where possible

Role in local economy (outputs)

- Providing jobs and employment opportunities
- Providing attractions for the Leisure & Tourism sectors

- Supporting and collaborating with 30 plus freelancers per year
- 76% plus increase in turnover since 2014, with some fluctuations
- Demonstrating the opportunity in the immediate area & providing confidence to others to take on space. (A number of buildings on the same street are being converted to ground floor small shops, with apartments above, which is a change of use)

Intentions/Hopes
- Continuing with the establishment of a 2nd retail space
- Confident in increasing and sustaining membership levels and financial sustainability
- Very confident in working with the local community, increasing products & services
- Not as confident in influencing politics
- Bringing a clear creative element to the town of Ballymena

Trends
COVID-19 Global Pandemic & Recovery. During the pandemic Midtown Makers:
- Provided Additional support using webinars
- Encouragement given to their makers to go to digital sales
- Rent was relaxed through the lockdowns
- 1-2-1 support given at an individual level

To support recovery Midtown Makers are:
- aiming to create more space for makers to expand their businesses
- investing in new signage and lighting of the premises

The impact of the UK leaving the EU has meant:
- a reduction in tourists to the town centre
- slower impact of changes in the supply chain
- increasing costs of raw materials like wool
- sending orders to the UK has increased in price and was interrupted for a while, moving to European suppliers
- shortages of materials

Working in a post conflict society:
- doesn't feel relevant to Midtown Makers
- provoked responses with some of the products that they sell and highlights a need for "Made in Northern Ireland" brands

Observations
As we try to resolve the problem of what high streets are without retail, Midtown Makers gives us a glimpse of a solution with a 'more than' retail approach.

- This space cares about you, you as a person, not the potential that is in your wallet.
- Being greeted in your native language, English, Ulster-Scots, French or Mandarin is a clear demonstration of that.
- This creative hub creates an authentic experience, leaning into the Mid-Ulster character.
- The hub understands its members, through everyday connection that the hub leader provides.
- This hub leans into its community through building relationships with the individuals, and as a result of this the individuals return.
- The team that is there every day knows the name of your dog and who to expect to see on a Tuesday morning.

This organic approach takes retail to a new place, as this is also a place where people want to be, a "Third Space" that is welcoming and cares for you, that also sells local craft to exist. Jim repeated "Everyone has a story to tell", and that individual talents and skills are appreciated.

This hub demonstrates the importance and the values that hub leaders bring to these projects are beyond the job description, in this case motivated by a passion to serve the individuals in the community, caring without question.

The hub leaders are of the community, embedded in it clearly demonstrating the ethos & values of the community. There is a risk that the loss of such hub leaders will have a massive impact on the enterprise.

7.2 Made in Mourne - Kilkeel

Website: https://madeinmourne.com
Location: Kilkeel, Northern Ireland
Structure: Company limited by Guarantee, Charity, Social Enterprise
Employees: Team of 7
Turnover: £120k

Made in Mourne (closed Autumn 2023) Photo Marianne Kennerley

360 View
"inspire and support the idea stage"

Made in Mourne was a social enterprise close to the centre of Kilkeel, the southernmost town in Northern Ireland in the rural coastal Mourne region. It was a hub dedicated to inspiring, educating and supporting local businesses. It had a ground floor retail space and a business hub offering co-working, meeting rooms and offices.

Mission Statement
"Inspiring & enabling our local makers, artists and creative entrepreneurs to grow together".

Made in Mourne was a space that inspired, educated and supported local businesses, entrepreneurs and talented individuals by offering a co-working environment and providing the opportunity to network and build relationships.

As a Social Enterprise, their aim was to continue to develop the support network by opening up opportunities for digital training, business growth and collaboration through community groups, all of which were previously unavailable in this rural coastal environment. They believed that by providing the right facilities and support networks, they could grow the local economy and enable job creation, thereby helping small businesses to thrive.

Their passion and their priorities were their people, the community that surrounded them and the generations that benefited from their support and encouragement. They were there to educate and inspire their local community, provide a safe haven to learn and engage, envision and create, develop and grow. "We are MADE in Mourne."

Description
Made In Mourne provided a spacious and innovative working environment and networking events from dedicated premises in Kilkeel, comprising the [Craft] Shop and [Business] Hub. It offered meeting rooms, and private or shared office spaces, with no long-term lease commitment. It provided connection to high-speed internet and a place to concentrate on work for as long as is needed.

Origin & Founder Story

The story of Made in Mourne began, when a local entrepreneur, Jenna Stevenson found herself moving a successful business from Belfast City to her hometown in the heart of the Mourne Mountains.

Quickly Jenna discovered that things weren't straight forward, and with her new offices based in the middle of a field, with very poor Wi-Fi connection, it quickly became apparent that change was needed.

Reaching out to other local businesses, Jenna started networking with a group of like-minded individuals who she discovered had similar problems. Meeting on a monthly basis, the group realised there was an opportunity to develop a creative working space in Kilkeel which would support and facilitate local businesses.

In August 2017, the group found the perfect property and began to put their 100-day plan in place to bring their vision of a social enterprise to life. The aim was to provide a fresh and stimulating environment to support and celebrate talented creatives whilst enabling local entrepreneurs to carry out and showcase their work without barriers. The project was very much a community crowd collaboration, where businesses and individuals throughout the local area played their part by donating materials, labour and services to help deliver the project from inception to realisation in just 100 days!

Purpose (The Why?)

Their aim was to provide a fresh and stimulating environment to support and celebrate talented creatives whilst enabling local entrepreneurs to carry out and showcase their work without barriers.

Values

Creating jobs and employment opportunities
Supporting the businesses and makers in the area

Hub Model

Functioning as a social enterprise, through the company & registered charity model.
Made in Mourne generated income through a membership model, with different layers, community to office space. It supported the community that surrounded it through training, support, opportunities to generate income and neutral space. It provided a retail space to support local artists, designers and makers from the area.

360 View: Themes/Expertise

- Social enterprise
- Business start-up
- Creative and arts business and practice
- Retail
- Rural development

Customers/Service Users
- 70/80 makers on an ongoing basis
- Local residents purchased gifts and visited the coffee shop
- Local businesses and sole traders required office services

Challenges/Needs
- There are a lack of opportunities, poor internet connectivity and physical isolation in an economically deprived rural area.
- The organisation is in transition from a founder-led project to a self-sufficient social enterprise.
- There were unclear costs of the buildings and rates information.
- They require further resources in Events Management.
- They wish to ensure that they generate income in suitable ways to support social enterprise.
- There are many challenges in the management of older spaces and buildings.

Partners/Stakeholders/Collaborators
- Local small businesses, micro-businesses, people behaving like a business
- Local tourism operators
- Community Development & Support Organisations

Impacts

Through the connection of local residents to local businesses they expanded networks of local creative people and enterprises. This helped to grow the local economy and enabled job creation by helping businesses thrive.

The benefits which flowed from this are heightened confidence, purpose, creative capacity & professional development among new & emerging Mourne artists.

Made in Mourne enhanced awareness & knowledge of the general public in all aspects of art and creative processes through engagement with artists & participation in creative activity.

They contributed to community development, community enterprise and economic development through education and training. They also contributed to rural development.

Income Generation Strands & Services
- Layers of memberships, Community, Hub Member, Retail Member, Virtual Office, Venue Hire
- Events - Business Support, Networking, Training along with leisure art courses with wellness benefits
- Offered a co-working environment and provided the opportunity to network and build relationship

- Helped entrepreneurs to raise their profiles and build sustainable growth through training and collaboration
- Retail Space (commission-based sales) selling on behalf of the maker
- Small coffee shop

Role in the local community
- Providing a neutral location within a divided local community. It has allowed organisations like Youth Action to engage with young people from different community backgrounds, giving them a safe place and a voice in their hometown and community.
- Showcasing the Kilkeel area to locals and tourists

Role in local economy (outputs)
- grow the local economy
- enable job creation
- helping small businesses to thrive

Trends
COVID-19 Global Pandemic and recovery, during the pandemic Made in Mourne opened and closed their space as required. To support recovery, they moved to online selling and developed other locations for retail.

The impact of the UK leaving the EU has meant:
- a reduction in tourists to the area
- slower impact of changes in the supply chain

Working in a post conflict society:
- is experienced by Made in Mourne
- the hub provided a neutral location within a divided local community

Opportunities
- 2nd location in a different tourist destination
- Extending current location through further provision for businesses
- Improving /updating facilities
- Remote working in a tourist destination (some employees were working from their holiday accommodations for longer throughout the year)
- Leaning into history of the building and ties to entrepreneurship
-

Observations
- Different types of support provided by the hub, with a focus on bringing small businesses into the space
- Local council is detached from the enterprise hub
- There is a grey area from start-up activities that have become embedded in the organisation and the IP implications that go along with that

7.3   Blick Studios - Belfast

Website: https://www.blickstudios.org
Location: Malone Road, Hill Street, Cotton Court, Belfast
Structure: Limited Company with Charitable Status
Employees: 3
Equity: £79884

360 View

Established in 2007, Blick Studios can be considered as the original creative hub in Northern Ireland. The first that fully fits the description and business model. It contains a wealth of experience within its walls in terms of the creative sector, creative entrepreneurship and facilitating a space to support these aspects.

Blick provides fully serviced shared workspace and private office space to 70 creative and digital small and start-up businesses (with 115 people) across 3 different locations. They also provide virtual services, hire meeting rooms and event spaces and run events, workshops and courses to help build community and provide support for small and start-up creative and digital businesses.

More recently it has added new projects advocating for women (Womenfolk), and celebrating local design through Belfast Design Week, the organisation's annual festival of design.

Mission Statement

Blick Shared Studios is a social enterprise that provides fully serviced, creative and affordable shared space, facilities and resources for creative and digital start-ups, freelancers and small businesses.

Set up by a group of creative entrepreneurs to fill a gap in the market for suitable workspace for creative businesses in Northern Ireland, they provide studio and office space within Belfast and Derry~Londonderry.

Their spaces have a creative and professional work environment and a friendly, informal and supportive atmosphere that encourages communication, collaboration and inspiration. Their workspaces are affordable and with flexible leases which takes the risk out of renting property. They are also fully serviced which eliminates hassle for residents so they can concentrate on

growing their businesses. Meeting rooms and event spaces are available free of charge for their residents and at affordable rates for non-resident creative businesses.

They offer virtual services for creative businesses just starting out that are not able to afford workspace or for those happy to work from home but seeking a professional public image for their business. Sharing resources such as internet, utility costs and meeting rooms as well as minimising unnecessary overheads keeps our services affordable. Blick Studios have a small team of staff and offer a friendly and personal service to all their clients. The hub is interested in collaborating and working with other creative organisations and building their business to become a profitable, recognised and respected brand whilst maintaining their independence and brand values.

Description
Currently working from 3 locations in Belfast.

The Malone Road venue offers private and shared workspaces. There are meeting rooms and board rooms available and a larger ground floor event space.

Housed in a converted warehouse in Belfast's creative Cathedral Quarter, the Hill Street location offers private and shared workspace to over 30 small and start-up creative businesses. Nearby is the Cotton Court location with shared workspaces and private workspaces.

Alongside the physical spaces Blick Studios have a number of creative industries business projects that support and create opportunities for local creatives. This includes virtual services, networking, professional development and training showcasing and project work.

Origin Story
Blick Studios was set up in 2007 by a group of creative entrepreneurs struggling to find suitable creative studio space in Belfast. The first studio was a rented warehouse in the City Centre which we set up with the help of £5000 from UnLtd.

With support from Ulster University and Belfast City Council, they moved Blick Studios to its first permanent space on Malone Road in Belfast. They focused on becoming independently sustainable by renting studio spaces, event spaces and offering virtual services and by the end of 2008 provided space to 15 different creative businesses.

From 2008 – 2010, Blick Studios ran a variety of events and courses to support small and startup creative businesses.

They identified a need to create more interactive and engaging enterprise events and set up Creative Camp Belfast – an interactive un-conference style event design to connect local creative entrepreneurs and encourage them to share their stories and speak on various topics.

In 2016/17, Blick secured a 3-year contract to manage the creative hub in Derry~Londonderry, to provide incubation space, workspace and events and support for the creative industries within the city, and develop the brand and concept for Eighty81 Creative Workspace on behalf of Ilex Urban Regeneration.

Blick Studios noticed a growing market for their services and opened a second set of premises in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter providing workspace for an additional 18 businesses.

2015 was the Year of Irish Design which enabled Blick to secure funding to run a variety of design events and, as a result, co-found Belfast Design Week.

Purpose (The Why?)

By providing space on favourable terms, Blick Studios enables people to start, grow and work within creative industry businesses and creates more job opportunities.

Their services aim to reduce stress and anxiety of independent work by resolving workplace problems like negotiating leases, managing utilities and creating a professional environment.

The spaces are rented solely to people working within the creative industries, which nurtures talent, creativity and innovation.

The permanent gallery and multi-purpose space benefits the public through enabling a higher level of education, understanding and knowledge of the arts, crafts and creative industries.

The information and support network helps bring together artists, crafts persons and creative industry businesses. This network allows people to develop relationships, encourages collaboration, networking, peer learning and provides support and inspiration.

Founder Story / Key Person Story

Christine James (CEO) co-founded Blick Studios in 2007, with a background in fashion design. She returned to Northern Ireland from Italy to set up her own fashion design business and recognised a need for creative workspace in Northern Ireland.

Christine has been managing Blick Studios since it was founded, having an overall responsibility for the running and development of Blick and its associated projects. Christine is passionate about the creative industries, building creative communities, encouraging diversity within entrepreneurship and supporting and championing creative entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland and internationally.
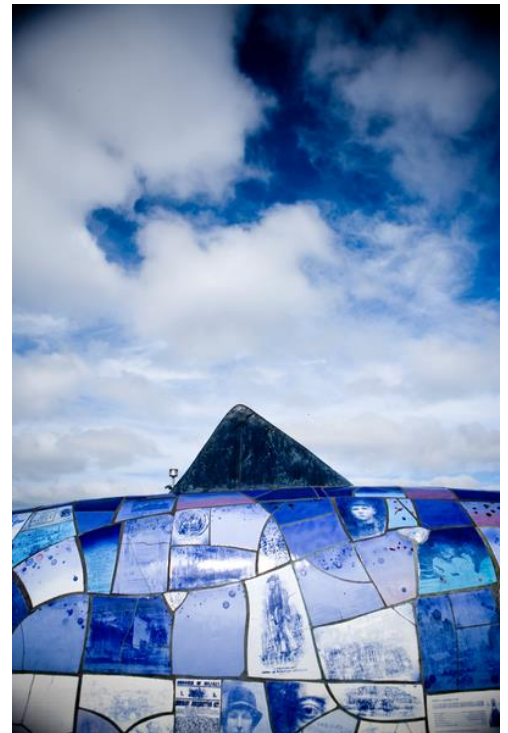
Rosy James has been working with Blick Studios since it began in 2007 and alongside Christine has worked to grow Blick from scratch into the organisation it is today. With a background in Economics, Rosy is responsible for the finance and operations at Blick Studios and has a strong interest in entrepreneurship and the growth of small businesses.

Values

Independent: to remain an independent financially sustainable social enterprise

Entrepreneurial: to maximise opportunities and be flexible and business minded in approach to remain financially independent and sustainable

Inclusive: be inclusive and open minded to new ideas and new people and be an organisation open to everyone

Industry Focused: remain focused on the needs of creative industry entrepreneurs

Innovative: be innovative and forward thinking to provide sustainable solutions to the needs of creative entrepreneurs

Hub Model

Charitable company with a Board of Trustees, delegating operational responsibilities to team members. Blick Studios is a non-profit social enterprise recycling profits generated from its workspace and business services to help build community and provide events and support for start-ups.

Themes/Expertise

- Creative Industry
- Creative Entrepreneurship
- Design and Digital Sector
- Events to support the creative sector

Customers/Service Users

Start-ups and existing businesses and people working within the creative industries as well as the general public. Artists and craft makers seeking to set up, grow or work within an existing creative industry business.

Challenges/Needs

Northern Ireland is a small geographic location, creating challenges in sustainability in a small marketplace. Wider challenges for female leadership were identified. Ensuring the organisation does not drift from the vision and aims when working with local government or external partners.

Partners/Stakeholders/Collaborators

- Local digital and creative businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurs
- Local Education establishments
- Local Government
- City Centre landlords and estate agents

Impacts to 2017

Across four sites, Blick Studios has supported 70 small creative businesses to grow and over 90 businesses benefited from virtual business services.

Blick encouraged networking and collaboration, with 63% of resident businesses getting opportunities for collaboration and 56% saying it had helped them broaden their network.

56% of resident creative businesses sales were export-based sales to outside Northern Ireland. Blick helped support and create jobs in the creative industries – total jobs created by responding companies increased by 60%.

They supported 8 graduate creative entrepreneurs with free workspace & support through the graduate residency programme.

Blick supported approx. 1059 creatives at free creative industry networking and business events.

Approximately 650 members of the public viewed their exhibitions or visited 25, a design-led Pop Up which gave more than 40 local designers the opportunity to promote and showcase their products.

They started two new online weekly initiatives – #opportunitymondays & #eventswednesdays to highlight some of the best local opportunities and events for the creative sector.

Blick also started the Womenfolk project to highlight female design entrepreneurs. From a member of their Womenfolk community:

> "I really love Womenfolk and it's been a really great resource/encouragement for me in being a one-woman band."

Income Generation Strands
- Rental of workspace
- Rental of event space
- Project work / tenders
- Design and delivery of events and festivals

Services
- Associated co-working space services
- Virtual office services
- Project work

Role in the local community

Blick Studios creates a wide range of impacts including jobs, new products and services, talent development, regional talent retention, informal education, urban regeneration, research and

development, new networks, innovative models of organisation, quality of life enhancements and resilience.

Role in local economy (outputs)

Space is rented solely to people working within the creative industries, this nurtures talent, creativity and innovation. These factors help people start and grow and work within creative industry businesses and create more job opportunities.

Trends
COVID-19 Recovery

Blick Studios closed entirely for months due to the UK government stay at home order during the pandemic. They reopened with reduced activities and services and reduced staffing due to some staff being placed on furlough. Due to COVID-19, they moved most of their exhibitions to outside spaces. Blick Studios are seeing workers, previously based in London returning to Northern Ireland and working remotely more and more. These individuals are testing how working from a different space works for their lives.

UK exit from the EU

Initially there were concerns within the governance of the organisation, but there have been no noticeable impacts with only some supply chain interruptions.

Post Conflict Society

This doesn't feel relevant to Blick Studios

Observations

The creative industries have been identified as a significant opportunity for wealth and job creation. Blick Studios fulfil the unique needs that creative businesses have providing open, well designed creative spaces with a community of like-minded people where they can collaborate and share ideas. These factors reduce stress and anxiety.

With the digital era leaping forwards as a result of the global pandemic, people are coming back and working remotely, but reaching globally.

Blick Studios has a wide remit within the creative sector. There are common themes that emerge and opportunities for collaborations between the intersections of different industries.

Blick supports varied business models and ways that people can work with public/private sectors and through alternative routes to funding.

Future Needs

A network for the creative hubs in Northern Ireland would enable the sharing of ideas, methods, and allow space to break out of the day-to-day role.

7.4 Boom! Inc (Boom Studios) - Bangor

Website: www.boomstudios.org.uk
Location: Bangor
Structure: Social Enterprise, Charity, Ltd Company
Employees: 1
Turnover: £70,000

Boom Studios., Bangor Photo Marianne Kennerley

360 View

Boom! Inc (Boom Studios) is a crafted, social enterprise that provides a vibrant workspace and head-space for the local creative industry.

Mission

The aim of Boom Studios is to establish an independent, charitable body that will coordinate a vibrant space for those in the arts and creative industries. To support emerging and established artists and creative practitioners to develop a socially engaged practice in order to provoke wider participation in arts, culture and creative activity by local residents within Northern Ireland.

Boom Studios has been established to carry out business as a non-profit distributing social enterprise and in particular to coordinate a shared workspace with rentable studios, establish a project communication space and to provide opportunities and supporting services for local creative enterprises.

Boom Studios work:
  i.   will enable artists/designers/craft/creative enterprises to work within a shared workspace
  ii.   will encourage opportunities for their members to develop their own practice through collaboration
  iii. will raise awareness and increase contact to the Arts & Creative Industries aiming to break and challenge preconceptions of the industry
  iv.   will provide space to plan and develop those enterprises that are members through peer-to-peer support and development.

Vibrant Space - Boom Studios:
  v.   will have a positive contribution to the regeneration of Bangor and the local area
  vi.   will provide a non-commercial project communication space for use of any creative enterprise, practising artist or project associated with creative practices (The project communication space is accessible by members of the public)
  vii. is diverse and open to all creative and artistic practices that can demonstrate a professional offering

As a Financially Independent space – Boom Studios
  viii. aims to develop an autonomous self-sufficient and viable financial model
  ix.   REACHOUT
  x.   will facilitate communication & collaboration with the local community in a variety of ways

Description
- Currently 2 locations in central Bangor
- Boom Studios has 25 workspaces
- It has a large space, "The Workshop" where they run their Creative Days programmes.

Marianne Kennerley, Boom Studios, Bangor

Origin Story
Inspired and informed by their individual experience at Project 24, Bangor, Boom Studios was established in December 2014. A small group of local creative practitioners wished to create a vibrant workspace where they could develop their individual enterprises.

Boom Studios took over a vacant town centre building, in Bangor, Northern Ireland. The former Clinton Cards building was a "blank canvas" and has since created 24 workspaces, housing artists, designers, makers, writers, photographers, arts facilitators… at any stage of their career. It supports, nurtures and assists those involved to develop their work, whatever that looks like.

By placing creativity bang in the centre of Bangor, Boom Studios makes a positive contribution to the regeneration of Bangor City Centre, creating opportunities to link traditional local businesses with the local creative industry.

Boom Studios hopes to present an innovative business model for sustainable arts and creative activity.

Purpose (The Why?)
The purpose of Boom Studios is to facilitate the evolution of the arts for the public benefit by education and through participation in arts and creative arts. This is achieved through the coordination of a shared workspace, a project communication space and provision of opportunities and supporting services for local artists and creative practitioners.

Founder Story / Key Person Story
Boom Studios was founded by three artists & designers who came together following on from Project 24 (a local government managed regeneration project). They began discussing what an independent studio space could look like. This led to research and visiting potential buildings in the city centre of Bangor. In December 2014, Marianne Kennerley took the legal responsibility of a 6 month licence on the top floor of a 1969 decommissioned bank building. This led to the establishment of 7 studios and a space to "do something in".

Within 12 months, two of the founders had moved on and Marianne decided to continue, establishing a constituted group, then a Board of Trustees enabling the founding of Boom! Inc. Marianne has continued to be, in her words, 'the legs that run Boom Studios" establishing income streams to support the employment of staff and the financial sustainability of the organisation.

Marianne Kennerley has a background in the clothing and fashion industry. On returning to Northern Ireland in 2005, she experienced three redundancies in a row from the garment industry. She returned to education to continue her design training at a Masters level at Ulster

University. Through this process and the projects created, Marianne discovered social enterprise and through her experience at Project 24 in Bangor, realised a need for independent workspaces for creatives in the city centre and the value this would potentially bring. In 2014, the conversation developed into action with the establishment of Boom! Inc (Boom Studios).

Values
Work - Tenacity and integrity
Vibrant Space - fit for purpose, respectful to the needs of the sector
Independent – adaptable
Reachout – welcoming & innovative

Hub Model
Charitable company with a Board of Trustees
Delegating tasks to the Studio Director
Grassroots approach

Themes/Expertise
Participative Arts & Creative Activities
Community Development
Creative & Social Enterprise
City Centre Regeneration

Customers/Service Users
Local creative practitioners, start-ups and enterprises
Local families and people who wish to engage in creative activities
Visitors to the Bangor area

Challenges/Needs
Developing reliable income
Working with an older property
Stretched resources enabling bespoke support to members
Establishing staff roles and creating jobs

Partners/Stakeholders/Collaborators
Local creatives
Creative facilitators
Other organisations that wish to use creative activities to meet their goals
Local Government
Local businesses

Impacts

Wellbeing, quality of life, urban regeneration, ecological impacts, creation of new work, network of makers, talent development & retention, community and economic development.

Income Generation Strands

- Rental of space
- Workshops, classes
- Art Services
- Professional support

Boom Studios, Bangor Photo Marianne Kennerley

Role in the local community and impacts

Since Boom Studios began operating in December 2014 and as it has established itself as a social enterprise and charitable organisation, it has delivered and developed the following activities. (All activities are supported by and managed by the management and trustee team who are now experienced in the delivery of these activities).

1. Provision of studio spaces for artists, designers, makers and creative practitioners. Housing 72 creative practitioners from visual artists, photographers, animators, social entrepreneurs, art therapists, writers and musicians. There are currently 24 workspaces available.

2. Provision of a year-round artistic and creative programme.
   The Boom Studios Creative Days Programme has been established by artists wishing to deliver arts, creative or cultural activities to other artists or to the wider public. This programme has developed organically over the last six and a half years and has three clear themes and key outcomes to the programme. The intention is to deliver a high standard of artistic, creative or cultural activities that are engaging, unique and generate income for the organisation and the facilitator. The themes of the programme are:

   - Trade - Professional Development Forum: to support and develop the local creative sector though a programme of meet-ups, training and skills development.
   - Creative Days: a year-round programme of workshops: to provide an engaging and relevant programme of artistic, creative and cultural experiences for local residents and visitors.
   - Reach-Out: Community / Social Impact Projects: to deliver artistic, creative and cultural experiences for those with challenges in participation, working in partnership with other organisations.

3. Providing opportunities for artists to work and financially support their practice

4. Developing a creative hub

Role in local economy (outputs)

Northern Ireland's creative industries are thriving; however the next few years will pose many challenges for the arts and creative sectors, forcing organisations to become inventive in the way in which they develop and fund their work.

Trends

COVID-19

Boom Studios leaned into the 'opportunity' that the pandemic presented. It experimented and innovated to create a digital version of their activities. This included providing online meet-ups, training and online workshops. This space has changed their focus from buildings to digital, and the embedding of digital skills developed during 2020 - 2022 into the organisation continues.

UK exit from the EU

This has opened doors to engage with European creative hubs.

Post Conflict Society

This rarely impacts on the work that Boom Studios carries out however it has worked on Good Relations and PEACE funded projects. Boom Studios is a neutral space where everyone is welcome.

Observations

As societies try to re-design the centre of towns and cities, Boom Studios is providing an example of activities that can occupy these large spaces that are a hangover from pre-digital banking and retail. Boom Studios provides a reason to come to Bangor's centre beyond the routine of a prescription or posting a parcel. This creative hub has listened to the needs of its immediate community and innovated in response. They demonstrate that art spaces, designer-maker spaces, galleries and collectives, as well as digital co-working spaces can exist together, creating a micro-circular economy that is self-sustaining.

Future Needs

As they move beyond the start-up phase and into the sustainability phase, Boom Studios require a strong trustee team and operational team to support this work.

8. Future

The organisations who responded to the creative hubs research survey in Northern Ireland in this report shared their visions for the year 2030.

In collating these visions for the future, we identified four key expectations of the creative spaces.

Regeneration
This theme had different ideas including a wider more strategic view of the area that included involvement in designating a town into a city and bringing life to an area. A recurring theme is the development of individual buildings into purpose-built spaces and civic spaces, with galleries, residency spaces, fit for purpose studios spaces, retail space and provision of a safe environment for local groups along with being part of something bigger like a social and healthcare hub.

National/International recognition
The need for recognition could be achieved through joining national networks like Tate Plus or partnering with stakeholders in major project bids. Developing a well-established gallery space with input from local and international links. Establishing recognition of the cultural and collaborative activity of a place.

Economic Regeneration
Economic regeneration could be achieved through changing the entrepreneurial landscape for creatives and providing services (like workshops) that have energy and are self-generating.

Sustainability

Sustainability through the provision of spaces for experimentation and support for local and international creative practitioners. Recognition that the hubs still exist and "haven't gone away".

9. Challenges

Looking at the future aims helps us to identify the challenges that the creative hubs in Northern Ireland face and their needs. Through the survey and in deeper discussions with the four case study hubs, we have identified the following challenges:

Maintaining **Financial Security**, resilience and sources of income to enable creative spaces to exist in Northern Ireland will always be a challenge.

Many grassroots creative hubs are sitting outside the public funding route, choosing to develop a portfolio of services that generate income. The complications of revenue funding versus capital funding are making it challenging to raise the investment needed to sustain forgotten spaces for community benefit. The tension between the hub being the people, not the building, generally means that revenue funding has been more accessible than capital funding.

The number of **People Exiting** the sector caused by lack of secure income or secure employment will create challenges in the provision of services to the communities.

There can be a lack of D**igital Skills** within creative hubs and difficulties in accessing digital infrastructure and equipment.

Articulating Impact with low staff resources and high productivity means that little resources are available to commit to monitoring and evaluation. There is also low income available to support this activity.

The creative hubs in Northern Ireland are **relatively recent** and **autonomous** and are creating a new template for their work. Developing **confidence** of individuals in the sector and sharing their deeper sector knowledge externally are important and ongoing aspects for the future.

Historical reliance on funding at an individual level, the entrepreneurial approach is often not the first method of income generation expected. This can be attributed as a "hangover" from a funded post-conflict society that has received one billion five hundred seventy million Euros between 1999 and 2020. [7] The motivation not to play "**The Funding Game"** was a challenge identified especially by female hub leaders.

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[7] **Northern Ireland PEACE PLUS** programme https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/102/northern-ireland-peace-programme

It raised challenges of a sector that leans to female leadership but where many prefer independence and freelancing over the challenges of an often complex (sometimes even viewed as nepotistic) funding environment. [8]

The **Charity Commission of Northern Ireland** has had a number of delays and setbacks in recent years. There are between 7,000 to 12,000 charitable organisations in Northern Ireland, with only 6,100 registered as charities as of January 2020. This has created a difficult process, where long waiting times can be seen as having a direct impact on the development of new creative hubs entering the sector. [9]

We can look at the hubs that have opened and closed quickly, this research identified 5 hubs that have dissolved. These hubs were impacted by top-down activities where a larger organisation identified an opportunity, invested in resources (staff, buildings, branding) but did not invest in community creation or community development, expecting to attract hub users through existence only. There was an absence of a "hub leader" in these projects, a core person who is 'in' and 'of' the community.

10. Needs & Opportunities

The **workforce** of the creative hubs needs support, ensuring that they are not forced to leave the sector as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, financial hardship, reduced well-being and poor health. The creation of secure work, with opportunities for career development and progression will ensure future engagement and commitment.

A more robust development, employment and enterprise training framework that **supports the freelancers** who use the creative hubs will support the hubs in the longer term. The introduction of sector wide policies that support living wages for the creative sector, including creative hub staff would be beneficial. [10]

Resources are required to enable **recognition of the value** of the work being delivered and investment into an evaluation framework for creative hubs. This can create recognition nationally and internationally and enable sector-wide communication of impacts.

Investment in **digital skills & infrastructure**, equally available across the region. An **organised network** of hubs to support innovation at the grassroots, will build resilience of the hubs and enable a sense of belonging to a sector that can inform larger communities of influence.

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[8] **The Irish Times**, Newton Emerson https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/newton-emerson-the-north-is-riddled-with-nepotism-1.2791337

[9] **Civil Society**, The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland needs a 'cultural reset' https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/the-charity-commission-for-northern-ireland-needs-a-cultural-reset-review-reveals.html

[10] **Visual Artists Ireland**, Basic Income for The Arts Pilot Scheme https://visualartists.ie/basic-income-guarantee-for-artists/

As many hubs sit outside the publicly funded sector, they provide an opportunity for local people to invest and support hubs in their village, town or city directly, embedding the hubs further within the community.

Developing a portfolio that is a mix of income streams will create financial resilience.

Northern Ireland hubs have an opportunity to promote **their innovative financial models** in line with Nesta's recommendations to create 1 million jobs in the creative sector by 2030. [4]

The Northern Ireland hubs did not **recognise international profile or trade** as a priority, their focus is serving locally and offers an area that could be more widely developed.

The development of a **better evaluation tool** that is owned by the creative hubs sector, capturing the powerful story to tell, beyond annual accounts and reports to funders, that demonstrates the passions of the hubs to serve their creative and wider communities and the everyday lives of the hubs. This would enable a deeper understanding and showcase the often hidden work and the ripples created by that work that flows and multiplies from the creative hubs. It is recognised by the Northern Ireland Department for Communities that telling the story of this growth sector could enable more support for these types of organisations.

Collective bargaining is often used within the hubs to access and share the cost of resources. Could this technique be lifted to work across the creative hubs sector, for example with the purchasing of sustainable energy sources?

Northern Ireland has an advantage of **identifying trends** before they arrive in the country as they tend to take time to reach us and where we are able to see reactions and trends from the rest of the UK and prepare responses. Identifying best practice policies in other areas could improve the creative hubs sector and align Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK and internationally.

There are opportunities to **collaborate** with other well-established sectors in Northern Ireland, for example, there are hubs located in areas of tourism, but only 3% of the hubs are providing tourism activities directly. Made in Mourne for example was providing products for local tourists. There is potential for creative hubs to collaborate with local tourism activities and offer work solutions for the new-found "remote worker and/or tourist" markets.

The **Belfast City & Growth Deal** (a £1.9 Billion infrastructure investment from Westminster) to support activities in Northern Ireland that includes innovation, digital, regeneration, tourism, skills, infrastructure investments is welcome news. This presents opportunities for creative hubs to act as delivery partners for innovation and support new creative hubs that are under development across Northern Ireland. Creative hubs can engage with local councils with the potential to be seen as an operator of these spaces and provide multiple wrap-around activities, services and spaces.

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[4] **Nesta**: why the UK needs one million creative jobs by 2030 https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/why-the-uk-needs-one-million-new-creative-jobs-by-2030-and-what-the-government-can-do-about-it/

11. Themes of Northern Ireland Hubs

Working in a post-conflict society

Creative hubs see themselves as neutral spaces, where conflict themes and community division are left at the door. They have created spaces that house neutral communities, outside "those other communities" in Northern Ireland. This positive outcome challenges the idea of what 'communities' are in Northern Ireland, with an underlying or unsaid question of "Are you a protestant creative hub or a catholic creative hub?" These challenges come from the wider community and from some politicians. This is a reflection of Northern Ireland becoming an increasingly diverse and progressive society. The creative hubs in Northern Ireland are 'new' community spaces where politics and religion are left at the door and simply "not relevant" and do not impact on the strategic decisions for the hubs.

Recovery from the Global Pandemic

There is **rising unemployment** in the sector caused by the pandemic and creative professionals leaving the sector as a result of lack of work during the pandemic and afterwards. The creative industries have the potential to be a crucial part of the ongoing post-pandemic recovery process. [11]

UK exit from the EU

The impact of the UK's exit from the European Union has not been as significant as expected for Northern Ireland creative hubs. There were some impacts discussed that have been common across a number of sectors, where the supply chain of goods or raw materials has been interrupted or become more expensive.

12. Future & Recommendations

Creative hubs are not yet referenced as infrastructure for the creative industries, although the Northern Ireland Government recognises more traditional libraries and museum settings as the infrastructure required to support the sector.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Screen are recognised as the key organisations of the creative sector. However, the Department for Communities and Northern Ireland Government recognise "promoting innovation, R&D and creativity" as key priorities in rebuilding and rebalancing our economy with the creative industries as important drivers of economic and social innovation. [12]

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[11] **Thrive,** Covid-19 and the challenge of recovery for the NI arts and culture sector
https://wewillthrive.co.uk/resources/news/covid-19-and-the-challenge-of-recovery-for-the-ni-arts-and-culture-sector

[12] **Matrix,** Creative Technologies in Northern Ireland https://matrixni.org/take-survey-creative-technologies-northern-ireland/

"Creative Northern Ireland"
Early on in this process, the research recognised that the creative hubs are disconnected from each other, with no formal network in place. Looking to other regions, it is evident that the creative hubs have organised to advocate and influence.

A Framework for Recognition

The provision of a consistent evaluation tool, like a social impact template that all of the creative hubs could use would be beneficial to the sector. A "flexible evaluative framework" would allow hubs to articulate their value consistently in order to ensure their long-term sustainability". [12]

This evaluation would enable understanding of the contribution creative hubs and creative industries can make in economic development, regeneration and social inclusion and help recognise the close economic relationships with other sectors such as tourism, hospitality, museums, galleries, heritage and sport.

Through enabling the creative hubs to develop and embed an evaluation framework, for example 'The Social Value Engine' [13], the creative hubs sector will be better positioned to support the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to report against the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. [14]

As new platforms, **Digital Hubs** need further mapping as there may be useful data for example around engagement and creativity and where makers and professionals belong to several hubs and provide wider demographics of users.

Political stability
Political stability continues to be of great importance in Northern Ireland and is required to ensure work and livelihoods for all.

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[12] **Matrix,** Creative Technologies in Northern Ireland https://matrixni.org/take-survey-creative-technologies-northern-ireland/

[13] **Department for Communities**: Economic estimates 2021 https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/creative-industries-economic-estimates-2021.pdf

[14] **Rural Community Network**, Social Value & Impact https://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org/programme-categories/socialvalue/

13. Observations & Conclusions

In this report, it is the view that Creative Hubs represent 'future spaces' in Northern Ireland, challenging traditional business models, methodologies and past traditions. They are places of ideas, experimentation and innovation that benefit the wider community. With a higher percentage of the hubs registered as Charities, they are recognising the triple bottom line and the impacts that creative hubs have beyond profit making.

However, creative hubs need resources to continue this work. Investment to support the empathetic and authentic hub leaders will enable creative hubs to transform others at an individual level, supporting them, housing them, connecting them, providing work, strengthening the ecosystem of the creative sector and developing the cultural and creative economy.

The creation of a recognised pathway and framework to evaluate their work, will develop the confidence of these creative places and spaces, enabling the development of deeper authentic partnerships with government bodies, local government and other potential stakeholders.

Creative hubs in Northern Ireland have a strong community focus which is demonstrated through the high levels of participation in creative activity and social engagement. Most hubs work out of one location indicating that they are not immediately interested in diversification and entering other geographical locations, their focus is on their local and immediate community.

Creativity, Arts and Culture were positioned as key indicators of recovery from the global pandemic and wider economic and social development in Northern Ireland with engaged audiences an indication of renewed confidence in society.

The generic creative hub, without a theme that serves its community is confusing and difficult to understand. A hub that leans into its community is resilient, e.g., Blick Studios serves the digital and creative community, Midtown Makers serves the rural arts and crafts sector, Boom Studios serves families and local residents, whilst Made in Mourne focused on serving the local tourism sector. The advantages of having creative hubs gravitate around the soft skills of networking, collaboration, the act of creation and expression; and the experiences that you can move forward with, is vital to their strategic success and long-term growth.

The success of the projects that are community-led indicates that a grassroots community approach successfully embeds creative hubs into the community leading to support from that community, a sense of place and ownership and enabling future sustainability.

When we compare these to the creative hubs that have not established, hubs that have opened and closed quickly, we can see that the top-down approach is not as successful. Ideally a community that exists provides an opportunity for investment, rather than provision of a space attracting the development of a new community. The creative hub is the community of people, not the building.

With one third of the organisations surveyed, those reliant on one income stream to finance the organisation may be 'exposed' and at a high risk and the lack of financial resilience in other creative hubs in Northern Ireland would illustrate similar risks.

The Creative Hubs working in Northern Ireland still represent a relatively 'young' sector, as indicated by most hubs having one location and no hubs indicating that they are working on projects beyond Northern Ireland (nationally or internationally). The hubs do have the advantage of looking across the UK or beyond to see peer methods in development and in sustainability. They can benefit from delays, trends (or pandemics) which allows space for hubs to watch and learn from counterparts in the sector.

Creative Hubs that fit 100% into the definition used by the British Council are few and far between in Northern Ireland. As cultural, artistic and creative places, they are evolving, with many reliant on public sector funding and 'having skin' in the public 'funding game'.

The Northern Ireland Creative Hub is an output of a time, a place and the people that use and support them that moves and adapts as the world around them changes.

Appendix

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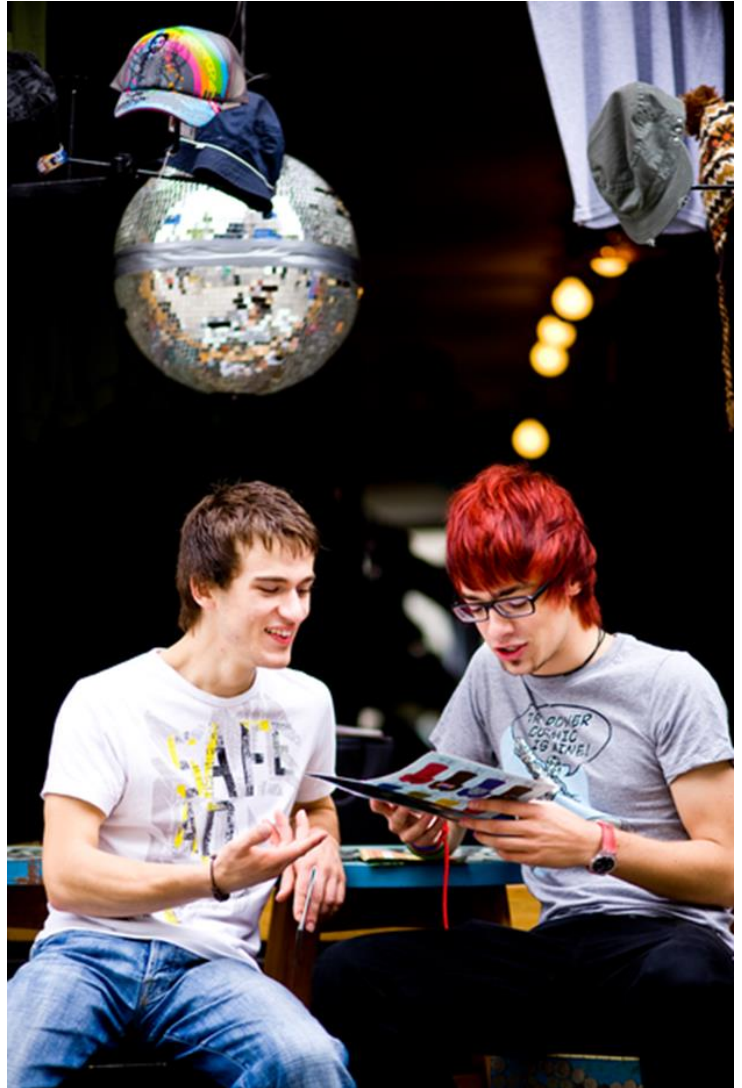
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British Council

The British Council is the U.K.'s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Our work in arts is a cornerstone of the British Council's purpose to build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries. We find new ways of connecting with and understanding each other through the arts, to develop stronger creative sectors around the world that are better connected with the UK.

We help artists to break new ground, support creativity and innovation, increase capacity by building skills to support livelihoods and cultural enterprise, extend safe spaces for creative exchange and contribute to research and policy.

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