A need for space

Updated October 2024 (original: June 2023, November 2023)

This short report has been compiled by Creative Coathanger on behalf of the Working Group for Creative Spaces in the Scottish Borders on the need for a creative hub in the Scottish Borders. This report is based on prior work done by CABN (2019) and recent work done by the Working Group. The Working Group consists of Creative Coathanger and Transform ARTs (CIC) and in discussion with CABN, Moving Images and independent creative businesses who are working in collaboration with [redacted], an experienced cultural property developer. This group was formed in late 2022 and has been working on collating a working proposal for the establishment of creative hub in the Scottish Borders and who are currently running Little Art Hub (LAH) in Galashiels as a meanwhile (temporary) art space). Creative Coathanger and Transform Arts have and remain active participants in LAH.

This paper outlines 1)identified needs, 2)evidence of value of creative cluster investment, 3) models of good practice and 4) capacity building and 5) a Creative Hub proposal.

1. IDENTIFIED NEEDS for Creative Spaces

CABN survey: July 2019

In 2019 CABN conducted a survey to gauge demand for creative spaces and facilities survey. This survey had 24 questions and had 132 respondents although not every question was answered by all. There were some concerns around the framing of the questions which led to ambiguous answers: more than a third of respondents (39%)[1] of those respondents who said they were interested in a creative facility in the Scottish Borders, declared themselves a professional artist, and more than half (48.5%) said they were from self-employed creatives, with 14.5% declared as sole trader and 13% as working for a social enterprise or voluntary organisation. Nearly a quarter (24.25%) were from students (17%) or recent graduates (8%). However, overall, this does indicate that the demand from the sector has come from a predominantly freelance or sole trader, which is typical of the industry at large, and significant recent graduate or student body, which reflects the local offer of higher education. The sectors represented in this survey covered predominantly the applied arts and design, textiles and fashion (40%), with music and performing arts (27%) and cultural development (11%) as largest sectors represented. It is not clear if respondents could

[1] Please note percentages have been rounded up or down to nearest 0.5 unless it was significant to state otherwise.

choose more than one option, which is likely in the sector that supports portfolio careers. Additionally, 19.5% of respondents were engaged in delivering training or education. In terms of time spent, there was an even split between those who spend more than half their working week as a creative, and those who worked towards a full time equivalent. From this diverse but key creative audience, it was clear that a near majority wanted a shared workshop space with specialist facilities (49.58%), with nearly a fifth wanting office space (18.5%) and open plan space (18.5%) with more than a quarter wanting flexible short term studio hire (28%) or community hire (9.25%). In addition, the majority wanted this space to function as an exhibition space (52.10%), events space (34.5%), teaching space (34%) and rehearsal space (20%). It was clear that majority of respondents (59%) were currently working from home but a large majority (73.5%) were interested in the joint space and facilities if on offer. The proposed use of space of such a facility would be a majority of private studios or office (locakable)(59%), shared studio or office space (37.5%) and hot desking (3.5%). In addition the need for flexible space for short term hire (35%) and rehearsal space (18%) was a significant requirement. Critically, of the respondents (109) who answered the cost question, the majority (58%) would only be prepared to pay less than £100 per month for this type of space with only 26% prepared to pay between £150 to £200 per month. This means that such a facility is unlikely to be a viable commercial proposition but rather a social and developmental one, and economically important one as we will outline below. In short, there is an established need for affordable workplaces of the multi-disciplinary and shared nature to support creative micro businesses to work, produce, teach and rehearse.

Precursor:

This survey was the result of many years of ongoing discussions with various creatives in the Borders in the preceding years on the need for studio spaces and facilities. This had included site visits to possible spaces with SBC Facilities representatives in circa 2013 touring several venues in Selkirk to acquire additional studio space facilities. The properties shown were not aligned with the needs of the group.

Creative Coathanger -Transform Arts Survey:

Two events have impacted the current situation: 1) the aftermath of the pandemic on the creative industries, leaving it more precarious than before, and 2) the uncertainty surrounding the transition of CABN towards an independent organisation. In early 2023 Creative Coathanger and Transform Arts conducted another survey to get more specific detail on exactly who might need a space (named individuals), what type of space requirements (specifics) and what sort of facilities they would a) need and b) contribute to the ecosystem. From this limited survey (13 participants), there was a clear need for a creative hub with an average rent spend of £150 per calendar month. If ten tenants were able to pay this then would raise around £ 1,500 per month. This would enable some rent revenue to be raised but additional commercial activity might be needed.

Going forward, a loose group of interested parties, including all of the above parties (CABN, Creative Coathanger, Transform Arts and Moving Images and others), are working towards taking the creative hub idea forward with support from property developer [redacted] and is seeking support from SBC and SOSE to enable the development of a Creative Hub as a necessary engine for the creative industries in the Scottish Borders and to support economic growth, social inclusion and local innovation. We outline below the evidence of this from external studies.

2. EVIDENCE OF CREATIVE CLUSTERS and CREATIVE HUBS as economic and social drivers

As outlined above the, the economic rationale for the creative hub is not a viable option when considered as purely financial proposition. However, significant research into the creative industries across the UK over the last two decades has demonstrated that the creative industries does have economic impact through both cumulative effect and through creative clusters impact.

Covid 19 has fundamentally changed the nature of the workplace and has demonstrated that working and connecting worldwide is possible and indeed productive. It will in the long term likely change the viability of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) in the Scottish borders, as a rural region with affordable living and working spaces but still connected to major cities (Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle).

The creative sector in the Scottish Borders as evidenced in the Cultural Strategy (2014) was estimated to generate revenue of almost £60m p/a, which is larger than forestry and fisheries combined which are acknowledged and recognised as key sectors in the region. The creative industries as a whole was one of the few growth industries in the UK: the creative industries grew its Gross Value Added (GVA) by 43.6%, compared to growth of 17.7% across the UK economy, before the disruption caused by the Covid19 global pandemic, or the impact of Brexit could be measured (Dec 2020) both of which has affected the CCI particularly hard. In Scotland the creative industries are one of the seven key growth sectors (Scottish Government, 2007,2019). The creative industries have been recognised as ‘combining of technical and creative skills, collaborative working across and beyond the sector, entrepreneurialism, social enterprise and revenue generation’ (Scottish Government, 2019: 2) play an increasingly important role in economic, social, cultural, technological and environmental transformations.

The role of *organisations* that provide support and resources for growth oriented entrepreneurs in entrepreneurial ecosystems that represent the economic, social and cultural environment within a region has been well documented (Spigel, 2016) and rely of supportive policy provision, in this case the UK Industrial Strategy (2017), written in response to the UK exiting the EU. Understanding where and how creative ecosystems and clusters exist has been the subject of various mapping exercises. A UK map created by the Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) (Siepel *et al*, 2020) offered evidence of a *creative cluster* in Edinburgh and highlighted a cluster in Galashiels, south east of Edinburgh. The PEC mapping, however, did not have enough granularity to identify the rich ecosystem of creative microbusiness as identified in the map created South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSe) (EKOS, 2022). The PEC map highlighted 85 firms in the Galashiels cluster. More recent research by the PEC (2021) acknowledged the role cultural infrastructure can play in rejuvenating places, and the growing evidence and holistic understanding of the impact of cultural investment to lead to 'positive economic and social outcomes at a local level'.

The Creative industries is dominated by freelancers and sole traders - up to 47% compared to 15% across the workforce as a whole according to UK wide research (2017)– and 89% of creative businesses employing fewer than five people. It is therefore critical to understand this as this will determine the support and infrastructure if we are serious about supporting, nourishing and growing the creative industries in the Scottish Borders. Most of these businesses do not want to 'grow' in the traditional sense of a linear growth economy. Instead many freelancers are by their nature resilient and agile, able to respond quickly to demands of new projects, clients brief and creating new products and services. Furthermore, many businesses outside of the CCI also rely on this creative workforce, particularly the hospitality and education sector who employ many creative businesses in a freelance capacity. As such a healthy and supportive ecology is needed. Finally, we suggest that the CCI are providing useful models for alternative economic models, which follow a Quadruple Bottom Line: profit, people, planet and purpose.

The Preston Model of Community Wealth Building (CWB) is an innovative policy intervention that ensures that local growth benefits local communities. Recent research has shown that this Preston model not only worked for the regional economy at large (growing from 39% to 79.2% increase in local spend by local procurement), shifting unemployment from above to below UK average, it also worked specifically for the creative economy, underpinning a 9% increase in turnover for local creative businesses in the period reviewed (2019/20). We propose that this model should be embedded in the Cultural Strategy for the Borders to support the local creative economy.

Creative Coathanger hosted the Creative Business Works Festival in February 2023 which found that 69% of the survey respondents felt that studio space capacity was a relevant local issue, of which 31% felt that studio spaces needed priority attention and 27% noted it impacted their creative business (Ruthless Consulting, 2023)

3. MODELS of GOOD PRACTICE

There are many existing models of shared creative hubs. These can roughly be divided into three different categories: 1) public organisations, 2) private organisations and 3) co-operatives.

Case study 1: Walsall Council has recently secured £3.7 million from the DCMS to support the development of a Grade II listed Guildhall building into a Creative Industries Enterprise Centre with a maker-space that provides support and facilities for creatives across art, technology and science. These models are not as common but are required for larger strategic developments.

Case study 2a: WASPS is the the UK's largest studio provider is a registered charity with over 40 year's experience (since 1978), providing artists, makers and creators with affordable workplaces. It supports 1000 artists across 20 buildings across Scotland, including the WASPS at St Mary's Mill in Selkirk which is currently under threat due to the condition of the building and lack of secure tenancy provided by SCBC. It has invested over £30 million in regeneration old buildings into creative hubs across Scotland. There is also Out of the Blue in Edinburgh as a similar but more localised version.

Case Study 2b: Mushroom Works was set up and is run by Nick James and provides studio spaces to 16 tenants but also runs two additional buildings (Bricks Works and Brighton Road Studios) in Gateshead and is run as a Community Interest Company (CIC) and was started with a bank loan and subsequently funding from Arts Council England and Gateshead City Council.

Case Study 3: The 36, Lime Street Studios were set up in 1983 in a derelict warehouse and now hosts over 40 creative businesses over five floors. It has been supported by the Northern Rock Foundation, Arts Council England and Newcastle City Council amongst others. It now forms the heart of what is now a cultural and creative quarter in the Ouseburn Valley, a former industrial complex, with several neighbouring studio complexes (Biscuit Factory, 36 Lime Street, Mushroomworks, Northern Print and Biscuit Tin Studios) some of which form part of an annual Open Studios event in Newcastle. In addition the Seven Stories is a local cultural visitor attraction which adds to this creative and cultural hub. It has been running as a co-operative.

Organisations such as the Museum of Making in Derby provides studio space for learning and teaching as part of the museum activities.

4. CAPACITY BUILDING and DESTINATION TOURISM

We see a key role in **capacity building** of the creative industries by supporting 1) existing creative businesses, 2) retaining and supporting creative graduates from the local HEIs (Heriot Watt and Borders College) and 3) supporting innovation and experimentation and 4) social programme of outreach work, activities and learning.

We also see a key role for the Creative Hub to add to the creative offer of cultural activities offered by Macarts and Great Tapestry Building. It would offer an additional destination for tourists visiting Galashiels and would offer locally produced creative products and services.

Finally, we see a Creative Hub as being closely linked to securing **inward investment**.

5. PROPOSAL

BORDERS CREATIVE HUB

Based on our research and evidence, we suggest that there is enough initial support to populate a Creative Borders Hub and that this will a) support existing creative businesses, b) support graduate and emerging creative businesses to be established and 3) give visibility to a sector which is generally dispersed. More importantly research and evidence from across the UK supports the importance of a creative clusters as an economic engine for regeneration and innovation.

ANCHOR TENANTS

We propose that a Creative Hub should have a few choice anchor tenants, such as the local Creative Arts Business Network (CABN), Creative Coathanger – who are in the process of setting up The Creative Business Works makerspace, Transform Arts (CIC) and Moving Images mobile cinema.

Between them they have extensive expertise as creative network providers, freelance creative practitioners, educators, researchers, creative project instigators and leaders, fund raisers and venue managers.

In addition, we envisage that these anchor tenants will attract the creative community to contribute to this ecosystem by renting both permanent and temporary studio spaces and make use of the workshop spaces to teach, rehearse and run larger scale projects.

TENANTS

In addition to some core organisations as tenants, there is a need for secure but affordable studio spaces for individual creatives (freelancers), and some flexi tenants for short terms lets.

INCUBATOR

The Creative hub should have Incubator spaces for graduates and newly established creative businesses.

WORKSHOP SPACE

The Creative hub should have workshop facilities that are accessible by creatives businesses and others for specialist production such as printing, fab lab facilities including metal and wood working and in the future other createch production spaces.

COMMUNITY SPACE

Finally, the Creative Hub should have flexible larger spaces to be able to host events, run training and make it available to the community at large.

REFERENCES

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