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Re-articulating the creative hub concept as a model for business support in the local creative economy: the case of Mare Street in Hackney

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Re-articulating the creative hub concept as a model for business support in the local creative economy: the case of Mare Street in Hackney

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Abstract:

The literature on 'creative hubs' is scarce. Although the term is currently in wide use in policy circles, its actual meaning is not always clear. Accordingly, this paper aims to clarify what is meant by the 'creative hub' through the use of ethnographic work as well as a consolidation of the available literature. The findings suggest that although different creative hubs take on a number of different physical, spatial, organisational and operational manifestations they nonetheless can be understood as having four primary characteristics: first, they provide 'creative' services to creative SMEs, including micro-businesses; second, they are aimed specifically at early stage creative SMEs and micro-businesses; third, they are facilitated by trusted individuals who retain a number of important positions and conduct a number of important activities; and fourth, they have become important to the health of the local creative economy. This paper argues that the notion of the creative hub can be understood as a putative model for providing mainly business support in a local context for specifically the creative sector.

Keywords: creative hubs, creative clusters, creative services, creative industries, SMEs, Hackney, London, Mare Street, Centre for Fashion Enterprise, Trampery London Fields

Introduction:

The term 'creative hub' is the most recently adopted term in policy circles aimed at fostering growth in the local creative economy (Evans, 2009; Foord, 2009; London Development Agency[LDA], 2003). This being said the literature on creative hubs is scarce. Although the term is being used widely, confusion about its actual meaning abounds. The term has no commonly accepted definition and has been criticised for lacking clarity as well as being 'all encompassing' (City Fringe Partnership, 2005 pp. 12). This is concerning considering that policymakers, research councils, consultants, government and many academics in the United Kingdom have been so quick to promote the effectiveness of creative hubs in catalysing growth and innovation in the local creative economy. In light of this, this paper aims to clarify the concept of the creative hub. It does so by: first, examining and subsequently consolidating the literature (and quasi-literature) that exists in order to provide a theoretical framework for understanding creative hubs; and secondly, by providing case studies of two different types of local support organisations that have become creative hubs in the Mare Street area of Hackney in London. Accordingly, this paper argues that although creative hubs can take on a number of different physical, spatial, organisational and operational manifestations, they nonetheless can be understood as having four primary characteristics: first, they provide 'creative' services to SMEs, including micro-businesses, in the creative sector; second, they are aimed specifically at early stage creative SMEs and micro-businesses; third, they are facilitated by trusted individuals who maintain, broker, and also curate relationships within and sometimes outside of the 'hub'; and fourth, they have become absolutely critical to the existence and overall sustainability of the local creative ecology. This differentiates them from other types of creative industrial agglomerations such as creative clusters, quarters, zones or districts even though they may be nested within them.

Herein lies this paper's primary contribution, namely that creative hubs can be understood with respect to what they provide, how they provide it, and their role in the local creative community as opposed to what they may look like, how they might be funded or organised, or what their spatial manifestation might be. Thus the notion of the creative hub can be understood as a putative model for providing mainly business support in a local context for specifically the creative sector.

This paper will: first, examine the origins of the hub model; second, look at the existing work on creative hubs, identifying their characteristics; third, look at the types of creative services that are provided by a typology of organisational structures that are often associated with the notion of the 'hub'; fourth, outline the site and methods used for this research; fifth, present both case studies; and sixth, provide an analysis of the research findings. This will be followed by a brief conclusion reiterating the need for more research in this area.

2.0 Defining the creative hub:

2.1 Clusters:

The rise in the importance and use of the 'hub' concept in general (including creative hubs) came at a time when other concepts aimed at understanding agglomeration economies in cities were negatively affected by the scale and impact of the digital revolution¹. Possibly the most important of these earlier concepts is Michael Porter's (1990) cluster theory.

The influence of cluster theory was an important event in the history of regional innovation policy and research in the UK, US and Europe. This is because it elevated and subsequently refined policies that were aimed at the local and/or regional level. Although focusing on regional urban agglomeration economies goes back to the time of Alfred Marshall (1920), Porter's focus on business clusters in the late 1980s and early 90s re-energised the role of localities regarding what they can potentially contribute to national economies. He defined clusters as geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, associated institutions and firms in related industries. He particularly emphasized the importance of proximity and geographic co-location. Encouraged by success stories like the ICT cluster in Silicon Valley (Saxenian, 1994), the Cambridge region (Keeble et al., 1999) or the Third Italy (Bathelt, 1998), many cities, regions and countries developed cluster policies². This primarily included recognized knowledge-based economic sectors, like biotechnology and software development, but also gave rise to the 'creative' cluster.

Creative clusters can be viewed as a sub-set of business clusters (Pratt, 2004). This being said they include more than the traditional taxonomy of suppliers, providers and similar firms in close proximity to each other (Bagwell, 2008). According to the London Development Agency (LDA) (2005) creative clusters might include a number of different actors who make up the creative economy. For instance, non-profit enterprises, cultural institutions, arts venues, local entertainment establishments and individual artists can coalesce in different combinations within creative clusters. Moreover, although they are primarily local, many have national as well as global connections³.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s the business and industrial cluster concept suffered a number of significant critiques (Markusen, 1996; Martin and Sunley, 2003; Boschma and Kloosterman, 2005; Cumbers and McKinnon, 2004; Spencer et al, 2010). These were primarily aimed at what was viewed at the time as an over emphasis on the centrality of the local within agglomeration economies, especially in an age of sped-up globalised competition. Some felt that the 'death of distance' catalysed by the digital revolution changed the nature of clusters, giving rise to new types of spatial (re)organisations (Markusen, 1996). Other critiques took aim at the very idea of the cluster. They examined whether or not actually being in one made any real difference at all - the answer being rather mixed (Baptista and Swann, 1998). Likewise, critiques were levelled at the creative cluster concept as well. Andy Pratt (2004 pp. 20) found that the concept placed too much emphasis on individual firms' preferences as opposed to important 'non-economic, situated variables'. There seems to be an overall feeling that either the creative cluster concept needed refining or that newer

¹ According to Glaeser and Gottlieb (2009) agglomeration economies are the benefits that come when firms, and people locate near one another in cities and industrial clusters.

² The existing work on business clusters is formidable. See: Porter, 1990; Baptista and Swann, 1998; Barkley et al, 1999; Glaeser, 2000; Gordon and McCann, 2000.

³ For more information on creative clusters please see: Evans, 2009; Pratt, 2000; Scott, 2000; Hutton, 2008.

concepts were needed in order to make sense of newer realities regarding creative agglomeration economies in the aftermath of the digital revolution.

2.2 Creative hubs in the literature:

The concept of 'hub' is not a new one. The term was originally used to identify 'hub and spoke' networks in transportation and location science in the late 1980s and early 90s (Campbell, 1994; O'Kelly and Miller, 1994; Skorin-Kapov and Skorin-Kapov, 1994). O'Kelly (1998 pp. 171) defines them as 'special nodes that are part of a network, located in such a way as to facilitate connectivity between interacting places'. Regarding its use in the study of urban agglomeration economies, the concept of the 'hub and spoke industrial district' was introduced by Markusen (1996 pp. 293) as a way to describe the spatiality of new types of industrial organisation in the wake of the digital revolution. She specifically examined the increased connectivity (and dependency) between large firms and/or organisations and smaller ones.

As far as the literature goes, the first use of the term in describing activities within the creative economy was in 2003, in a policy document commissioned by the London Development Agency (LDA, 2003). Since then, two porous and somewhat discursive articulations of the creative hub have developed – I would hesitate to call them theories. The first treats hubs as synonymous with creative clusters and focuses primarily on their geographical, organisational and spatial characteristics. The second treats them as distinct from geographical clusters and focuses on what they do internally and what particular services they provide.

Regarding the first articulation of creative hubs, it becomes apparent that much of the literature does not draw a distinction between clusters and hubs (Evers et al, 2010). This is an important distinction to make considering the aforementioned critiques levelled at cluster theory. Creative hubs have been understood as other types of industrial agglomeration that are closely aligned to the cluster concept, such as: quarters, districts, and zones. For instance: Oakley (2004, pp 68) understands creative hubs as synonymous with cultural quarters; Evans (2009) understands them as clusters of economic activity; Bagwell (2008) views them as clustered districts within the city; and the London Development Agency (2003) views them as creative zones and buildings made up of multiple creative and cultural industries. Essentially this way of articulating them focuses on their spatial characteristics, and how this affects their operational and organisational roles (whether formal or informal) within the creative economy in, primarily, cities or city regions. This way of understanding them also aligns closely with 'creative city' policy⁴. In this context it is the hub's spatial organisation (including its scale) and its location within the urban fabric that becomes the primary focus and where policy might be aimed, usually under the rubric of regeneration. An example of this is the area of Brick Lane in East London (Montgomery, 2007). According to Montgomery (2007 pp. 609) The City Fringe Partnership, established in the mid-1990s, led a number of regeneration projects throughout the East End and Whitechapel in the borough of Tower Hamlets

⁴ In this instance, Richard Florida's creative city perspective is the primary point of reference (Florida, 2010), where he states that cities become creative hubs due to their capacity to attract creative people - the creative class. Thus creative hubs at this scale have particular ingredients, but most importantly the city must have policy that is conducive to creating these creative places (Scott, 2006). Cities can then become creative hubs due to their influence in particular creative sectors (Florida, 2006). For instance, New York City is often viewed as a music, theatre and fashion hub (Currid, 2006), Los Angeles has been described as a film hub (Currid and Williams, 2009), Nashville being a music hub (Grodach et al, 2014; Lloyd, 2011), Boston and San Francisco as tech hubs (Wu, 2005) and Milan (Merlo and Polese, 2006) as a fashion hub. This way of understanding creative hubs views them as highly sector specific, and very much dependent on district level clustering, city wide branding, and policy.

in London⁵. The area is now, according to Montgomery, a self-contained creative hub. This is because the area houses over 200 creative SMEs including fashion, artists, DJs, graphic designers, architects, photography and recording studios. There are also retail spaces, restaurants and bars. Viewing hubs and specifically creative hubs in this way is a perspective very much rooted in traditional Marshallian agglomeration economics⁶ but also views them as rather informal entities that very much mirror the creative cluster.

Regarding the second articulation of creative hubs, the bulk of the work treats their spatial organisation as secondary to their infrastructural as well as their operational contribution. For instance, the Creative London policy document commissioned by the LDA (2003) described hubs as 'a general term' where the precise make up differs from place to place. In general they were understood as places that provide a space for work, participation and consumption (Ibid). The document (pp. 034) states that:

[m]ost will have a property element, but they will rarely be a single, isolated building. Within its neighbourhood, the hub may occupy one space, but its support activities will range across a variety of local institutions and networks. But importantly, they support communities of practice, not for profit and commercial, large and small, part-time and full-time activity – they are not just incubators for small businesses, but have a wider remit. Creative Hubs will form a network that will drive the growth of creative industries at the local and regional level, providing more jobs, more education and more opportunities for all Londoners.

As an example of what these places for 'work, participation and consumption' might look like, the British Council (2014a) have stated on their website that creative hubs can be a mix of types such as: a co-working and networking space, a training institution, an investment fund, an online information sharing forum, an incubator, or a talk-discussion base for those interested. As an example of this a recent article in the *Financial Times* does not differentiate between incubators, accelerators, labs and hubs where they discuss the proliferation of these organisations in London (Pickford, 2013). Along the same lines as the British Council, the European Creative Hubs Forum (2015) defines creative hubs as 'an infra-structure or venue that uses a part of its leasable or available space for networking, organisational and business development within the cultural and creative industries sectors'. In the same vein, Sedini et al (2013, pp. 109) have identified six components that they state are usually involved in the creation of creative hubs. These are: incubators, service centres for companies, virtual platforms, development agencies, co-working centres, and clusters.

Importantly, the City Fringe Partnership final report (2005 pp. 12) found that one of the weaknesses of the creative hub concept as it applied to Creative London was its lack of clarity. They found that the concept, being understood as 'all embracing', was seen as a type of threat as opposed to an opportunity by creative sector support organisations (Ibid). This is because it indicated a failure to truly grasp what it is that these organisations do. The term also has connotations of 'a single

⁵ For more on the City Fringe Partnership please see: CFP (1996; 1997); City Fringe Creative Partnership (2005).

⁶ This being said, the traditional agglomeration concept as presented by Alfred Marshall (1920), used to explain the rise of new urban-economic clusters and centres in the early 20th century, no longer applies. This is because of changes catalysed by de-industrialisation, globalisation and the digital revolution in the latter 20th and early 21st centuries (Markusen, 1996). Newer concepts and explanatory frameworks have been introduced and analysed in order to explain newer articulations of local and regional systems in a number of varying sectors and sub-sectors, including the creative economy. Concepts that have garnered a certain amount of attention include 'learning regions' (Morgan 2007), 'industrial districts' (Asheim, 2000), 'regional innovation systems', 'neo-Marshallian nodes' (Amin and Thrift 1992) and of course 'cluster theory' (Porter, 1990).

organisation and of a building (rather than perhaps a focus on activities or processes)' (CFP, 2005 pp. 12).

Recently, scholars have focused more on these activities and processes rather than the physical infrastructural make up of creative hubs. Evers et al (2010), in their work on knowledge hubs⁷ and knowledge clusters suggest that it is the hub's capabilities regarding the exchange, transfer and facilitation of knowledge that is their primary focus. Specifically they state that knowledge hubs fulfil three major functions: to generate knowledge, to transfer knowledge to sites of application, and to transmit knowledge to other people through education and training (pp. 683). They define knowledge hubs as 'local innovation systems, [that are also] nodes in networks of knowledge production and sharing' (Ibid). They are predominantly characterized by high internal and external networking and knowledge sharing capabilities where they also act as meeting points of communities of knowledge and interest (Ibid).

Similarly, Bas van Heur (2009) states that creative hubs tend to be administered by borough (or municipal) level and publicly funded economic development agencies who work together with a variety of private actors and whose primary focus is to offer services and facilities for cultural entrepreneurs. Thus activities within hubs are focused on primarily providing cultural entrepreneurs (usually in the form of SMEs) in the creative sector a number of creative services that they may not have had access to if they were merely part of a cluster or on their own. Similarly, the European Creative Hubs Forum (2015) has outlined a number of activities that they believe a creative hub should engage in such as: business support, networking, research, communication, and talent support.

In view of these two articulations of the creative hub, it can be suggested that newer articulations of creative hubs view them as a combination of physical / virtual spaces that provide and facilitate important business support activities and processes like networking, research opportunities, collaborations and the like. Importantly, these activities and processes can be understood as 'creative services' that allow for the exchange of knowledge and the opportunity for growth and development as well as sustainability. This is especially important in a notoriously precarious economic sector (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Banks and Deuze, 2009).

2.3 Creative hubs and creative services:

Through the work examined above it seems that creative hubs provide important creative services that support specifically SMEs and micro-businesses in the creative sector. There is a trajectory of work that defines creative services as organisations who provide 'creativity' as a business-to-business transaction to sectors outside of the creative and cultural industries – this is usually in the form of design (Hill and Johnson, 2003; Hutton, 2000). This paper views the notion of creative services a little differently; namely, as services that are provided to specifically creative sector SMEs in order to assist with their growth and development as well as to help sustain them. Creative hubs, I argue, become important nodes for creative SMEs partly because they provide these services, but also because they provide the spaces and places for these services to exist and coalesce around. Regarding what they look like, creative hubs can take on a number of manifestations, or

⁷ Knowledge hubs are hubs that encompass activity within what we know as the knowledge economy. They have also been referred to as innovation hubs. They include hubs in a wide range of sectors including the creative economy.

combination of manifestations, such as: co-working spaces, business incubators, training institutions, service centres for businesses, and online forums (British Council, 2014a; 2014b). Regarding their spatial distribution within cities, they can be nested within creative clusters, districts, quarters or zones (Evers et al, 2010); or they can be remote and removed.

Through an examination and subsequent consolidation of the types of services that are provided to creative SMEs by these types of hubs it becomes apparent that they can be divided in to two groups. The first can be called 'hard' services and mainly revolve around the infrastructure that exists within the hub. Services like: desks for rent, online services, studio space, labs, meeting rooms, machinery and incubator units can all be viewed as hard services since they are made physically available in different types of hubs. Predominantly 'soft' services are the formal and / or informal, non-tangible benefits that these spaces provide such as: informal and formal networking opportunities, knowledge exchange, business support, collaborative opportunities, transactional relationships, and being a part of specific communities of interest. Another important component is that the hub charges for these services thereby creating an internal economy within the physical space that it occupies. Thus according to the literature creative hubs are physically manifest in a number of ways and provide a number of services to creative sector SMEs. Currently, there is no exhaustive list that describes and defines the many physical manifestations of creative hubs with that of the services that they provide. **Table 1** (below) consolidates the available literature and web material referenced in this paper in order to provide this information. Important to note, this is by no means an exhaustive list.

Table 1. Types of creative hub and creative services for creative sector SMEs.

Creative Hub (physical and/or virtual manifestations of)	Definition	Creative Services (Hard)	Creative Services (Soft)
Co-working space	Co-working spaces provide a combination of workplace and supporting facilities with easy in-out contractual conditions (GLA, 2014). It is aimed at users who require short term access to workstations and supporting facilities such as meeting rooms (Ibid). Many co-working spaces have a manager.	Space for rent (desks or labs) Meeting rooms Virtual /online services Studios	Informal networking Curation Community of interest Transactional relationships Knowledge exchange Business support
Training institution	This can be a college or university or course or programme. Training institutions in the creative sector primarily use apprenticeship-type learning. Fashion colleges with studio provision are a prime example of this type of hub.	Studio space Labs Virtual /online services	Knowledge exchange Collaborative opportunities Networking Business support
Incubator	A distinguishing feature of an incubator is the provision of business support (GLA, 2014). Businesses leasing space in an incubator are chosen through a competitive application process and do so to access business support facilities which may be provided by the incubator management or their partners (Ibid). This support is provided in return for a share in profit or minor equity stake in the business (Ibid).	Studio space Incubator units Virtual /online services	Business support Collaborative opportunities Knowledge exchange Consultation Networking Mentoring
Service centres for companies	According to Sedini et al (2013) these are public or private structures supporting the technological innovation and the know-how transfer at a local level, through training courses, consulting services, marketing, etc.	Labs Virtual /online services	Consultation Business support Knowledge exchange
Online information sharing forum/ Virtual platform	As a hub this is a relatively newer type. So far virtual hubs provide for forum-based support and online communities.	Virtual /online services Online support	Consultation Business support Networking Collaborative opportunities

3.0 Site and Methods:

Open-ended interviews were conducted with 35 individuals who were businesses, incubator managers and designer-makers who used or managed the creative services that were available at both case study locations. These interviews lasted from 25 minutes to over an hour. Web material and secondary data was used to articulate the organisations' public facing profiles. This research also drew on information that was documented and filmed for the purposes of this research⁸. The films documented presentations by, as well as question and answer sessions with, the case study organisation's founders and directors. The presentations were given in February 2014.

The Mare Street area, stretching from the junction with King Edward's Rd and Westgate St and northwards toward the London College of Fashion, is a part of the borough of Hackney in London that has developed into a buzzing enclave of creative economic activity (see Figure 1). The area has organically evolved into a small fashion district. It should not be confused with the 'Hackney Fashion Hub' near Hackney Central Station which is further north on Mare Street and which is primarily a

⁸ The films are available for viewing at: http://youtu.be/uV2Leeth_aY

regeneration project⁹. This paper will provide case studies of two types of local support organisations that have become important creative hubs and that are located on Mare Street; namely, the Trampery London Fields and the Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE). Importantly, although these two organisations may not formally view themselves as ‘creative hubs’, their activities including the services that they provide have become essential to the local creative ecology in this part of London. This encapsulates the very essence of the hub model as described by Markusen (1996) earlier, and thereby identifies them as such¹⁰.

The Trampery London Fields is located within a small cluster of other types of similar organisations on the south end of Mare Street. Directly next door to it is SPACE studios who provide studio space for fine and visual artists and who have been offering this type of service to artists since the late 1960s¹¹. Across the road is another organisation called Netil House that houses over 100 businesses within its building where it also provides primarily studio space. The CFE, the second case study, is not located in the exact same vicinity as the Trampery. It is located about a 5 minute walk north on Mare Street but maintains an important connection to the creative community in the area, especially in regards to fashion designers.

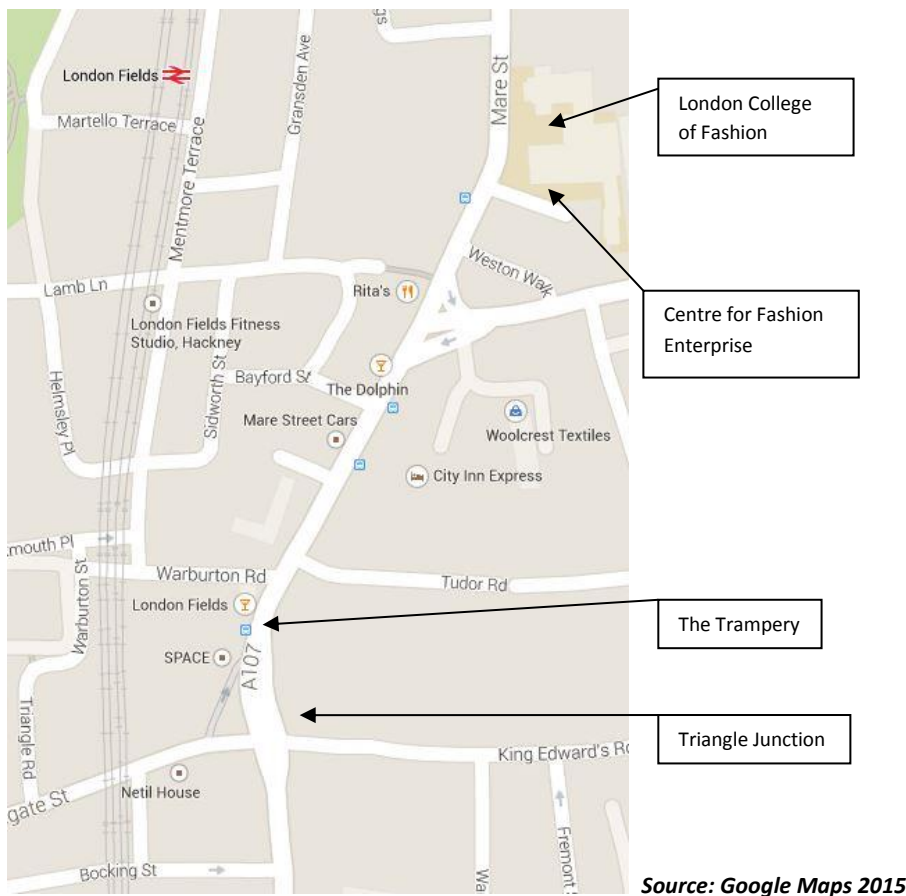
These two case studies are organisationally and operationally very different. One formally identifies itself as a social enterprise that offers shared working space and studio space (The Trampery) and the other formally identifies itself as a fashion incubator (CFE). Their aims however are the same; to assist SMEs and micro-businesses in their growth and development. Importantly, each case provides a number of different types of formal and informal, hard and soft creative services that provide SMEs including micro-businesses with support. Because of this, these organisations have emerged as vital nodes in the new and continually evolving networks of the creative ecology in this part of London; hence why they have become creative hubs.

⁹ The Hackney Fashion Hub is a major regeneration project on the edge of Hackney Central town centre that is quickly becoming contentious and divisive (Young, 2013). The 75,000 sq ft Bicester Village-style Hub will house a mix of top brands and emerging local designers. The Burberry outlet is already there. Developers have already started converting disused railway arches in Morning Lane and will build two buildings of five and eight floors to create the East End fashion district. For more information see: <http://hackneyfashionhub.co.uk/>

¹⁰ This brings up an important issue, that of formal versus informal creative hubs. Where formal creative hubs may in fact use the terms ‘creative hub’ to describe themselves, informal ones would probably not. This is partly because the speed at which the creative economy moves transcends the need for terminology. But also because it takes time to become a creative hub. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this particular paper.

¹¹ According to its website, SPACE was established by artists in 1968 and runs 18 artist studio buildings across 7 London boroughs, providing affordable creative workspace plus support programmes, such as exhibitions, artists residencies and training opportunities, to enable sustainability in the arts. For more information see: <http://www.spacestudios.org.uk/about/>

Figure 1: Mare Street, London Fields.



4.0 Case Study One:

4.1 The Trampery:

When asked where the idea for the Trampery came from, founder Charles Armstrong, in an interview with *The Guardian*, said:

There was a sudden stampede around 2008 when anyone who's anyone with a software idea wanted to come here...[b]ut they had a big problem finding anywhere to lease, especially anywhere funky, and that's where the idea for the Trampery came from (Neate, 2013).

According to the same article, the idea also came from visiting similar 'bohemian' working environments in San Francisco whose main purpose is to provide services to young entrepreneurs whose businesses have grown but who cannot - or will not - rent office space. The Trampery, as an organisation, started in 2009 in Shoreditch, London. It is a social enterprise that supports its growth by earning revenue. All profit is reinvested into the organisation in order to provide better support

and services for its members. It operates four sites in east central London: Old Street, Beviden Street, Hackney Wick and London Fields.

According to its website, the focus, facilities and aesthetic of each site are tuned to the particularities of the local creative community (Neate, 2013). For instance the Trampery in Old Street is geared towards start-ups in the tech sector; the Hackney Wick site focuses on work that spans technology and the arts; the Beviden Street site in Shoreditch focuses on web start-ups, designers, software engineers and consultancies; and the London Fields site focuses on the fashion sector as well as fine artists and technology. In this way the Trampery plays to the strengths of the creative community that already, organically, exists in a particular local area. This is a significant characteristic of the Trampery. Rather than initiating top down policy to develop these types of places in areas that may not be suited to them, which is usually the case (Jayne, 2005), here the predominance of economic activities and history of the local area are at the heart of the services that it provides. If done properly, this enshrines the importance of these places to the local creative economy thereby turning them into hubs. Each site is located within a building that houses a community of diverse technology and creative enterprises, ensuring a mix of shared workspaces, studio provision and other types of creative services. They also house small businesses from other sectors that are closely tied to the core creative sector including: consulting, policy, social enterprises, and publishing.

4.2 The Trampery London Fields:

The Trampery London Fields is located on Mare Street in Hackney in what is known as the Mare Street Triangle¹². It provides a number of predominantly hard creative services such as: a managed co-working space, studio space, equipment-for-hire services for start-up and emerging businesses, storage facilities, concierge services, networking rooms and events. The London Fields building is an old, 1960s style, office block that is four storeys high (see Figure 2). The ground floor is the primary co-working space and the rest of the floors are primarily studios for emerging or recently established fashion designers.

¹² The reason behind this name lies in the design of the junction which is essentially a triangle, see Figure 1.

Figure 2: The Trampery London Fields (left) and SPACE Studios (right).



Photo by T.E. Virani, February 2015.

4.3 Studio 13:

The ground floor, known as Studio 13, is the primary co-working workspace for small businesses. It is an open-plan space with flexible desks for designers, freelancers and other small businesses. Studio 13 is home to approximately 21 businesses that span a number of sectors. There are games developers, clothing and accessories labels, a young architectural practice, a digital user experience and design consultancy, a digital reading experience, a holiday resort management company, an advertising and branding company, and a company that produces photographs for real estate agencies. It is also physically connected to a café and has a meeting room that can be hired by its members. It sometimes runs business support seminars and other types of events, but this is not a core activity.

Many of the businesses in Studio 13 are at an early stage in their development where they may not benefit from being based at home or in a pure office environment. These businesses gain something from being part of a co-working environment. According to an architect that runs his business out of Studio 13:

I've been running my business for three years now and for the first six months worked out of my home. I realised that it wasn't going to work. Once the novelty of working from home wore off, productivity declined so much that it was getting ridiculous. I was doing about an hour of work a day (Interview, 2015).

Working from home can be a barrier to growth, especially at the early stages where businesses are at their most vulnerable. Many businesses in the co-working space at the Trampery feel that being around other businesses, as well as sharing their space with like-minded individuals, benefits their growth. They actively seek out a sense of community in this respect, and the co-working space

facilitates this. According to one business owner who runs a research and development business out of Studio 13:

I knew that I didn't want to work from home because I was doing that for over a year. I knew I wanted to be in a shared environment (Interview, 2015).

According to a software developer:

It was important to us to go to a place that wasn't as comfortable as working in [our CEO's] bedroom. For me it feels better to be in a shared office because I get a lot of work done, whereas working from home I don't really (Interview, 2015).

Being in a shared environment with other young businesses brings them out of the bedroom and places them in a nurturing and supportive environment. It also provides the added benefit of being plugged into a network of other businesses that work in slightly different fields but maybe at the same stage. This type of environment can facilitate trust between the businesses which can lead to future collaborations or even the promise of more business and the building of transactional relationships. For instance, a games developer secured business from an architect who needed to have 3D imaging conducted on a piece of work where the games developer obliged. Similarly, a fashion design consultant gained another client that happened to be sitting one desk away. These types of business transactions are common, and they become more and more prominent in these types of environments due to the sense of trust that emerges from being part of a co-working community. Importantly, this sense of trust becomes fast tracked when businesses are not only the same size but when they are at the same stage of development. Interestingly, being in the exact same sector might hinder community development due to competition. These aspects are all factored into the equation through curation. According to founder Charles Armstrong (Feb 2014):

If you get the peer-to-peer dynamics correct, then 90% of what of what any businesses needs to know is already there in the community...that knowledge is there in this amniotic community.

It ends up being no surprise then that curating and managing the peer-to-peer dynamics of Studio 13 becomes critical – this is primarily done informally by the businesses but also by the hub manager which will be discussed in section 4.5. The approach at the Trampery London Fields co-working space is different. Where other co-working spaces may have more formal arrangements, or no arrangement at all, here informality and nurturing a sense of community are central to how Studio 13 is received by its occupants. Fostering this type of more informal environment becomes conducive to the sharing of ideas in a way that builds trust between the businesses and strengthens the community. Thus rather than being overprotective, businesses in this environment are tacitly, and sometimes explicitly, encouraged to share their ideas and experiences. Studio 13 is also connected to a café which also helps in promoting the type of 'funky' environment that everyone in the building seems to be at home with.

4.4 Studio space:

The first, second and third floors of the London Fields building are primarily studios that are occupied by fashion designers. The first, floor contains a 'fashion lab' which is a collaboration

between the Designer-Manufacturer Innovation Support Centre (DISC)¹³ and Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE). The fashion lab is equipped with a selection of professional machines, such as industrial sewing and overlock machines, fusing press, ironing stations and pattern cutting tables, and a skilled technician that is available to offer technical support. These are available for a fee and are not free to use for members. The purpose of the fashion lab is to support early-stage fashion manufacturers and designers with their business, products and services as well as to provide expert guidance in the fields of finance, legal, manufacturing and marketing through their connection with DISC and the CFE. The first floor is also home to two studios occupied by relatively established menswear and womenswear designers. The second and third floors contain mainly studios for newly established as well as up-and-coming and established designers. The first, second and third floors contain studios for up to 16 designers. According to one designer on the first floor:

[t]he studio space at the Trampery is amazing. I mean it may sound stupid to you but we don't have to look after heating, lighting, health and safety and you know when you got fashion week and might be working with like 140 people, it's a dream to be here (Interview, 2015).

An important and appealing aspect of these studios is that they are essentially managed by the London Fields in-house hub manager, which alleviates the pressure of having to deal with everyday things. The studios can be accessed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and there are no time restrictions for when the designers can enter or leave which is essential in the run up to important fashion-based events like London Fashion Week¹⁴. The Trampery also provides a concierge service that takes care of the incoming and outgoing mail. The mail is an essential service that mainly materials needed by the designers when putting together their showcases.

As any fashion designer will say, studio provision is absolutely vital to the fashion design sector in the city of London. Moreover, healthy studio provision is vital. This means that studios that do not have running water or that have unreliable electricity or other structural problems actually does the sector a disservice. This is why the Trampery's studios have become essential to designers in the area. As one designer stated, 'good studios mean good designers'.

4.5 The hub manager:

Hub managers are critical to the success of these types of organisations. They are the primary curators, intermediaries, brokers and knowledge agents. Curation here begins at an early stage, where the Trampery's owner and manager review applications from businesses wishing to locate to either Studio 13 or the other floors. This process enables them to decide on which people and what types of businesses they think would benefit the community. This process is done with the existing community in mind, and thus thinking through the consequences of adding another business or

¹³ DISC is a public-private partnership that gets funding from a number of bodies including the European Regional Development Fund and Hackney Council in order to provide businesses access to a team of highly skilled industry experts. Their specialist experience covers the manufacturing industry incorporating factory production, global sourcing, jewellery production and sustainable manufacturing. See here for more information: <http://www.fashion-manufacturing.com/about/>

¹⁴ LFW is the primary showcasing event for designer/makers in the UK. LFW usually takes place twice a year and is held over six days. In 2011, it featured 37 presentations and 68 catwalk shows (Mayor of London, 2013). More than 200 accessory designers took part in LFW, as well as a whole host of both British and international fashion designers. According to the BFC (2014), it is one of the highest profile fashion events in the world and one of the 'big four' international catwalk influencers. It is organised by the BFC and funded by a number of sponsors (including principal sponsor Vodafone). It is estimated that orders of over £100m are placed during LFW each season. Over 5,000 visitors attend including buyers, TV and radio, journalists and photographers. Media coverage equals or exceeds most major news and international sporting events. All of this being said, 2015 may be the last year that LFW is held.

another designer to the existing roster of members and the existing community is of primary importance. Once this decision is made and once a business or a designer is brought into the fold it becomes the hub manager's job to facilitate their needs as well as introduce them to the community.

The hub managers must also manage the day to day running of the building which includes everything from infrastructure maintenance to making sure deliveries are collected and sent out at the right time. A designer housed on the first floor stated that:

[hub manager] is amazing at what she does. She is the glue that keeps the machine running (Interview, 2015).

They must also make sure that any informal rules are being respected. Rules like being mindful of noise levels, sharing shelf space and sometimes printers, and being cordial are all important and conducive to a happy community of members. The managers also try and broker relationships whenever they can. Because they have intimate knowledge of the businesses in the building they know where interventions might be needed and where collaborations might bear fruit. Equally, if one business needs a service that another one can provide then the hub manager would most likely be the one to have brokered that relationship. They arrange informal events like Christmas drinks or Friday night get-togethers as well as seminars and talks. They manage the hub's website and are also the go to people for any questions and/or problems including complaints, feedback and press inquiries. All of this on top of the job of dealing with inquiries about the space for hire and the organisational operations associated with running events at the Trampery London Fields.

4.6 Summary:

The Trampery London Fields offers businesses and designers a number of mainly hard and some soft creative services that enable their development and growth. It caters to two types of SMEs; early stage businesses in the creative (and other peripherally aligned) sector(s) housed in Studio 13 and fashion designers housed in studios on the upper floors. By providing a co-working office space on the ground floor, which is connected to a café and close to other informal networking spaces, it offers businesses that are at an early stage in their development a chance to be part of a community of businesses that share similar interests. This is beneficial in a number of ways. It allows for: informal networking opportunities, the sharing of ideas and experiences, and the development of transactional relationships. It also plugs the Trampery businesses into the local creative community.

By providing managed studio spaces, as well as facilities for designers, it has ensured its central position for fashion designers from the local area – and elsewhere. It provides facilities like machinery and other services to designers with the help of technical support staff. This is all primarily facilitated by the hub manager whose job it is to ensure that everyone at the Trampery have all the things they need to continue doing what they do.

5.0 Case Study Two:

5.1: Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE):

The Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE) is primarily a business incubator that helps London based high-end fashion businesses. It is organised and operated in a completely different manner than the Trampery. It is more reliant on public funding and public private partnerships than the Trampery which is fundamentally a business. As an incubator, its aim is to use targeted interventions as a means to help high end fashion designers grow their businesses. It is much more formally led than the Trampery in the sense that it has active programmes. It is therefore more targeted; however, as far as incubators might go the intervention is slightly less formal and usually tailored to the designers. The CFE provides primarily soft services such as: business support and/or advice; opportunities for competitions, investment and schemes; funding; and mentoring. It does offer some hard services such as incubator units and/or studio space, but this is more of an exception than the rule. By way of multi-level programmes, it provides expert guidance in the fields of primarily finance, legal, manufacturing, marketing and digitisation.

The CFE are located on Mare Street and housed within the London College of Fashion (University of the Arts, London) building (see Figure 1). The building is close to the Mare Street Triangle. It has a management structure that includes a head director and then a number of incubator managers as well as consultants who specialise in different parts of the fashion industry. For instance, there are experts in the field of attracting investment, copyright, digital branding as well as sourcing materials and manufacturing. As an incubator, it provides its services to fashion designers through, primarily, mentoring; mentors provide the designers with the know-how to navigate the increasingly precarious market forces that inundate the fashion industry – especially in London. It is primarily publicly funded, but also partakes in public – private partnerships. Its relationship with designers is usually transactional where a fee is paid to the CFE for the services that they provide.

5.2: CFE delivery model:

The CFE draws on a number of industry specialists most of whom are also incubator managers and who subsequently become mentors as well. These experts deliver tailored support to designers to include coaching on strategic business planning and brand development, and operational issues such as range planning, production, legal, IP, costings and finance. This is delivered through a number of programmes that are offered. These programmes are tailored to a specific need and a specific stage of growth. Of these programmes, by far its most significant investment is in its one year New Fashion Pioneer Programme and its follow-on two year New Venture Programme.

5.3 New Fashion Pioneer:

New Fashion Pioneers was established in 2007 and is aimed at high-end designer businesses that have usually been trading for two or three seasons and have achieved annual sales of between £10-50k. It runs for 6 months and is tailored to each business, consisting of regular face-to-face sessions with members of the CFE team, as well as occasional expert workshops. Content would normally include a diagnostic review of the business, cash-flow advice and finance, business planning, discussion regarding commercial opportunities, sales preparation, legal issues, brand building, networks, range planning, order book and market review and business sustainability.

5.4 *New Fashion Venture*

This programme is targeted at designer businesses that have typically been established for four seasons or more. They usually have at least one full time member of staff, with back up from freelancers and interns. The programme extends across two years/four seasons. A full business review takes place every season with the CFE team to ascertain progress and plan ahead. Coaching and business growth advice is provided by the team and a studio space may be available. The programme is bespoke to every business. An indicative business support programme could include: business mentoring, advice on cash flow management, sales analysis and international development, advice on brand development and marketing strategies, support on e-commerce and social media marketing strategies, advice on production issues and costing strategies, identifying, and advice on, consultancy, sponsorship and licensing opportunities, advice on potential sources of funding, assistance with brokering relationships with UK and international sales agents, and advice on catwalk versus presentation and exhibition. This programme delivers a highly focused and multi-levelled intervention that aims to change the ways that designers treat their business.

5.5 *CFE Team: Incubator managers / mentors:*

Most of the interventions that take place are delivered through the CFE team and through mentoring. The team is primarily made up of incubator managers (IMs) that are also consultants and have been in the industry for well over 15 years. The IMs also become mentors to each designer business that enters the New Fashion Venture programme. The CFE has a family feel to it. As hinted at earlier, although the organisational and operational elements are much more formalised than the Trampery, the delivery of interventions is conducted through the establishment of relationships and trust. When asked how important that relationship was, one designer stated:

Really important, just in terms of the support system and business guidance, [IM] is an angel. They are constantly helping me out and I am fortunate to have that brain at my disposal. I can call her no matter what, and she always calls me back and ready to help out.

Many IMs have close relationships with their designers. The process of parcelling out knowledge to designers is tailored to each individual designer therefore these managers have to learn how to work with them. This is at the core of what the CFE does. Every designer is different and poses different challenges. It is personalised and not prescriptive or coercive. As one IM put it:

[t]he designers have to make the connections themselves when it comes to the importance of a business plan, or doing costings (Interview, 2014).

As another IM put it:

[t]here's a mixture because they're not all the same, they're individuals. People get things at different points but it tends to be that the most movement happens around when the need is there. So another example, you'll have a conversation with a designer going ok so lets have a look at your cash flow, and they've never done cash flow, so we've got a sum in here 5000 pounds for shoes, so what do you think? Can you afford them? And they'll say no, and then they're like I can't do this show without these shoes, I can't do it. They can't afford them and they might get into debt, and it's going to be a painful experience for them. I mean

we don't own their businesses so we can't tell them what to do. You have to make them make that connection. Two seasons after spending a lot of money on shoes that designer is having a conversation with me going yeah I got these shoes at 500 quid; it's amazing, I can't believe I spent so much money on shoes before. And that's when you realise that you've made a connection (Interview, 2014).

The IMs constantly change the ways in which they deliver their interventions. This being said, the transfer of industry specific knowledge is the bottom line and the IMs do it in a way that helps the designers understand the importance of treating their business as a business. This is not done in a class room type of way, as stated earlier it is tailored to the designer. As another IM said:

One of the hardest things to do is making designers understand that they are a business and that they must run this as a business. The designers go through a phase of resistance, usually during the pioneer programme, and then finally concede, understanding that they are indeed a business and therefore need the support being offered by the CFE. Grand ideas are streamlined and brought back down to earth.

Negotiating the very tricky terrain of creativity versus business is another important phase in the growth of designers at the CFE. When asked whether there was a conflict between the business side and the creative side one designer said:

Always man, there are many times when I'm dying to explore an idea but it's not really a sensible or commercially viable one. But yet I insist. There has been a butting of heads. [IM] did say once oh that's beautiful but stop wasting your time on that particular show piece. You should concentrate on skirts. There was that moment in time.

This paves the way for realistic ambitions and makes the development of a stable business plan much easier to attain. This evolution is contingent on the level of trust between the IMs and the designers. If this trust is not developed it can lead to conflicts since the interventions aimed at the designers are highly personal. Essentially what the IMs are trying to do is alter the business behaviour of their fashion designers.

There is no design specific or creative knowledge being exchanged or transferred at the CFE, it is all business related. For instance, the IMs place a large emphasis on business plans that are aimed at acquiring funding. This is because tapping into this funding is essential when dealing with the large gaps in income flow in-between seasons. There are also obvious IP and copyright issues that are at the fore of the international element of fashion marketing. So the IMs are juggling their knowledge and experience and using it to provide designers with the best possible advice according to them.

The IMs also open up their private networks to their designers. In fact this could be seen as one of the most essential benefits of being connected to the CFE. Where a manager might excel, say in manufacturing or sourcing investment, the designer who may need help in this area can receive assistance from that particular IM.

5.6 Summary:

The CFE is organised in a more formal way than the Tramperry, and as an organisation it is much more organised around the delivery of industry specific knowledge. This is embedded into the

delivery process which is much more explicit, targeted and tailored than at the Trampery. The ways in which this knowledge is delivered is bespoke and highly personal. This is because the CFE is based around the services provided to their designers through the conduit of highly knowledgeable incubator managers who try to establish trusting relationships with their designers. It is they who are the primary points of contact between the businesses and the sector. Thus the CFE is much less reliant on physical location and much more reliant on the connections between designers, IMs and the sector in London. This being said, studio space is always an issue for designers, and although the CFE does provide this service, it is not guaranteed. The CFE maintains relationships with other organisations, like the Trampery, which is an added bonus when it comes to inquiring about studio space for their designers, and which also strengthens the local community of fashion designers. This being said, designers are connected to the CFE but many have studio space in different parts of London, not necessarily on Mare Street. It focuses more on resituating the designers from an early stage business to one that is aware of and takes advantage of the opportunities made available to them at multiple levels in the sector – from local to global.

6.0 Consolidating the case studies:

As the case studies have shown, local business support organisations in this sector can vary with regards to what they provide. Although quite different organisationally, The Trampery and the CFE both cater to creative businesses in London, and especially in Hackney. Both organisations do four things that this paper argues is central to being a creative hub: first, they provide hard and soft creative services in order to help businesses grow; secondly, they cater to specifically SMEs and especially micro-businesses that are at a specific stage in their development in the creative sector; third, they are facilitated by trusted individuals who mentor, sustain, broker, as well as curate relationships within and sometimes outside of the hub; and fourth, as a result of these services both organisations play a vital role within the local creative ecology and/or community.

6.1 Creative services:

Regarding the provision of services, The Trampery London Fields offers small businesses and designers a number of primarily hard creative services. These include: desk space, meeting rooms, studio space, equipment for hire at the fashion lab, 24/7 access to the building, security, space for events. Regarding these services studio space is by far the most sought after and most important. Studio space is the bread and butter of the fashion industry. Without them there can be no foundation that seeds young designers. Thus affordable, managed and well maintained studios that have 24/7 access and full time security plus running water and reliable electricity is critical. Moreover, the Trampery has gone further by providing the fashion lab. The lab consolidates and centralizes fashion designer activity and brings them into a shared work space, where expensive equipment can be hired. They also benefit from being able to share the work space with each other.

The CFE, on the other hand, is quite different. It does not have a co-working space. It is organised around the delivery of industry specific knowledge to specifically high end designers. The ways in which knowledge is delivered is tailored and highly personal and based on the relationship between designers and the IMs. Through their relationship with the CFE, designers are able to tap into vast amounts of knowledge regarding how to grow and sustain their businesses. The CFE draws on

industry specialists most of whom are also IMs and who become mentors as well. The services include coaching on strategic business planning and brand development, and operational issues such as range planning, production, manufacturing, legal, IP, costings and finance. This is delivered through a number of programmes that are offered. These programmes are tailored to a specific need and a specific stage of growth.

6.2 Early stage creative businesses:

Both organisations cater to specifically SMEs and especially micro-businesses that are at an early stage in their development. For instance, at Studio 13 many businesses are small enough, logistically, that they can be managed out of a bedroom. This being said many of them need to leave the bedroom stage in order to grow, but are not quite ready to move into an office environment. The co-working space offers these businesses an in-between place where they can continue to grow their businesses but at an affordable rate whilst taking advantage of the benefits that come from being co-located. The Trampery, as a rule, does not allow large established businesses to use their services.

The CFE helps high end designers that are at an early, but growing, stage in their careers. Through the Pioneer and subsequent Venture programmes their main aim is to instil the knowledge that they feel is necessary to not only grow these fashion businesses but allow them to stay afloat. The fashion sector is notoriously precarious within even the creative industries, thus the provision of these types of services in the shape of business incubation is vital, and much needed (Virani and Banks, 2014).

6.3 Managers:

In both cases, face-to-face interactions with hub managers are critical. In the CFE's case it is absolutely essential, whereas in the Trampery's case it is much more about making sure that all of the materials that are needed exist and that the infrastructure is working properly. This being said, hub managers also occupy curatorial roles. In the Trampery's case the hub manager must make sure that everything is running smoothly in both the co-working space and in the studios. In the co-working space a sense of community is vital to the running of services, thus it becomes important that businesses who are allowed into the space are able to complement each other in a number of ways. If there are synergies, or foreseeable synergies that might allow for collaborations, then the hub manager must curate and broker appropriately. In the studios, the hub manager must make sure that all the designers respect each other when they are using the machinery or during castings. Ensuring mutual respect is easier if a sense of community can be curated and maintained.

Incubator managers also play a curatorial role in the CFE Team. They must curate with their designers in a number of ways. They must be able to control what is being spent on materials, what showcases to enter, which manufacturers might be appropriate for a certain designer, where these designers go to show case their clothes or jewellery, and whether or not certain castings and materials are appropriate. Curation is at the heart of the work that both of these types of hub managers do.

6.4 Local creative community:

When it comes to the local creative community, both organisations play a vital role. As becomes apparent the creative community in this part of Hackney revolves around mainly fashion. The

fashion community benefits from being located at this end of Mare Street due to: the number of studios in the area provided by the Trampery but also by Netil House and SPACE; and the fashion lab that is in the Trampery building. Studio space is essential, as stated earlier, and the fashion lab allows access to machinery for affordable rates. Many of the designers in the area are also very familiar with the CFE; many have been through the Pioneer programme and are actively on the Venture Programme. It is through them that relevant information about very important fashion activities is processed and parcelled out. For instance, the CFE also works with DISC to provide information to designers about where best to conduct their manufacturing; where to source their materials, and what materials might be needed and at what cost. The CFE also parcel out important knowledge about how to ride the storm that is the fashion sector's in-between season's stages, where funds can dry up quickly. All of this and more are the reasons why many designers actively look for studio space in, or just to relocate to, this area.

7.0 Conclusion:

This paper aims to clarify the 'creative hub' concept through the use of ethnographic work as well as a consolidation of the available literature. By comparing and consolidating the CFE and the Trampery it becomes obvious that these creative hubs take on a number of different physical, spatial, organisational and operational manifestations. They nonetheless can be understood as having four primary characteristics: first, they provide both hard and soft creative services to SMEs, including micro-businesses; second, they are aimed specifically at early stage creative SMEs and micro-businesses; third, they are facilitated by trusted managers who retain a number of important roles such as managers, curators and network builders; and fourth, they have become critical to the existence of the local creative economy because they provide the tools necessary to sustain a business. Thus the creative hub can be understood as a putative model for providing mainly business support in a local context for the creative sector.

This is an important notion to engage with because it differentiates the hub concept from other concepts such as clusters and / or districts. Where clusters are usually understood due to their spatial organisation, hubs are framed here in regards to what they provide and how they provide it. This is an especially important point when discussing the creative and cultural industries. In an increasingly precarious, and some might say impossible, environment many creative sector SMEs fail. This is especially true for the fashion sector and some of the local challenges that exist. Local challenges are intrinsically interrelated, as well as linked to the wider economic conditions of cities (Virani and Banks, 2014). For example in London, issues such as rising rents, limited studio availability and high costs of maintenance, and lack of organizational support infrastructure are all significant. The lack of basic affordable housing in central locations, and the high costs of living generally, contribute to the difficulties of establishing small businesses at the prime locales of the fashion industry. This one challenge alone, and of which there are many that plague creative SMEs, indicates the need for local business support organisations that have the potential to become hubs as the Trampery and the CFE have been able to do. This is because they provide the necessary support tailored to the local creative economy.

Of course this being said, the successful delivery of these services is very much contingent on the relationships that exist between primarily hub managers and hub members. This also differentiates creative hubs quite markedly from other types of creative urban agglomeration economies.

Thus it can be suggested that newer articulations of creative hubs, including the work in this paper, view them as a combination of physical / virtual spaces that provide and facilitate important business support activities and processes through the conduit of trusted hub managers and subsequent hub facilities. Importantly, these should be understood as a process of support that continues to morph and adapt to the continually changing conditions of the creative economy.

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