

Case Study 9

The HUB

Case Study Information

The HUB

Introduction

The HUB's are innovative workspaces for social entrepreneurs, bringing together people with a shared ethos of 'making good' - delivering solutions to perceived global challenges, particularly social and environmental challenges.

The HUB started in London in 2005 and is now an international network of members and workspaces from Bristol to Sao Paulo. This case study concentrates on the London HUBs – HUB Kings Cross and HUB Islington.

The project is particularly relevant in terms of its tenancy/membership model, financing, use of refurbished historic buildings, focus on building a community of people and the cross fertilisation of skills and knowledge.

The HUB Founders started small at HUB Islington, converting a floor of a warehouse to offer flexible time-based membership for spaces to work and meet with the aim to create "the best from a professional office and events space, a friendly cafe and the comforts of home". The space includes wireless internet connection and access to meeting and event spaces, printers, scanners, phones, fax, physical and virtual storage space and admin support.

In 2006, the HUB started working with one of their members, 00:/ (a research,

strategy and architecture collective), to develop the HUB King's Cross - the world's first Social Entrepreneurs Members Club with meeting and conference space, events gallery, restaurant, bar and drop in business services and an evening programme of lectures, film, debates and music. It aims to bring together like minded individuals from corporate executives to community leaders, from policy-makers to freelance professionals all pursuing ideas and initiatives for a better world. HUB King's Cross is a refurbished Grade II listed building, one minute from Kings Cross station.

The design features include a theatrical curtain used to transform the open plan gallery space into an intimate lecture theatre or screening room, a hanging glass innovation lab with writable glass surfaces to support ideas workshops and IT/AV infrastructure to enable video/teleconferencing and bespoke space saving table furniture. With a global membership of over 3500 social entrepreneurs the building is designed to provide excellent communal working

environments and minimize energy usage within a tight budget.

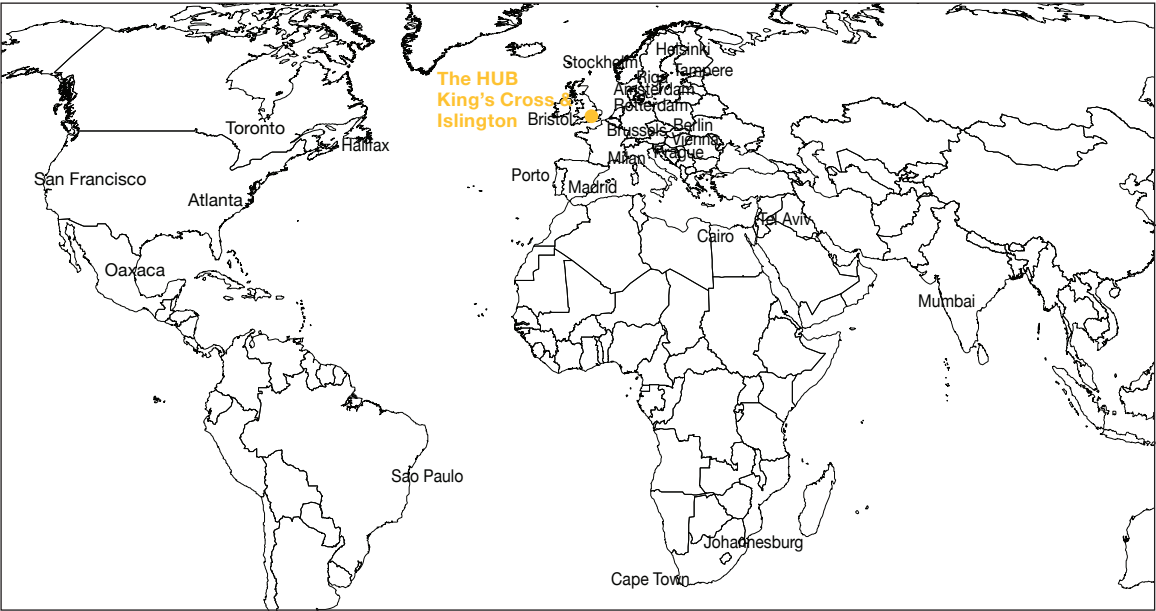
The existing building made the task of transforming it into a sustainable building challenging, but the end product combines an appropriate use of emerging green technologies such as air source heat pumps, night time pre-heating and pre-cooling systems, ethically sourced materials such as FSC wood panelling and pioneering energy saving lighting with spatial interventions designed to intensify the use of the space.

The HUB has been extremely successful growing rapidly, generating high visibility to social entrepreneurs, and making the movement attractive to a wider group from commercial to non-commercial backgrounds. It has expanded globally with a strong and clear set of values, developed new, innovative ways to working for entrepreneurs with many of its member's start-up businesses flourishing.

Location

Worldwide

Site Information

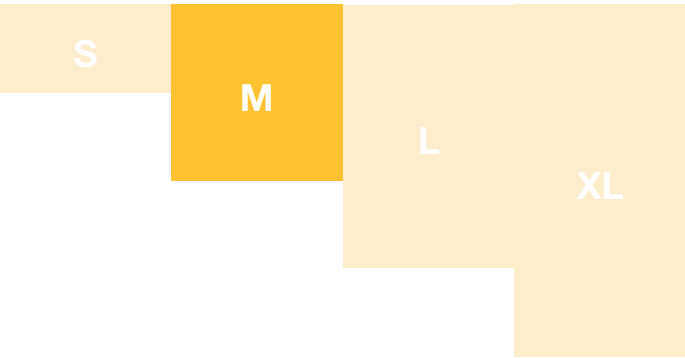


Address
HUB Islington
Candid Arts Trust
5 Torrens Street
London
EC1V 1NQ

HUB King's Cross
34b York Way
London
N1 9AB



Project Size



Area Breakdown

Each HUB has a different configuration, depending on the building the programme is inserted into.



The HUB cafe, King's Cross [Image 00:/](#)

Ethos

People and Goals

Aims

The HUB is based on clear values - social enterprise with the ambition to inspire and support imaginative and enterprising initiatives for a better world.

Community The HUB is a global community of people from every profession, background and culture working at 'new frontiers' to tackle the world's most pressing social, cultural and environmental challenges.

Supporting Good Ideas The HUB felt there was a problem in access, scale, resources and impact to support good ideas. So they created places for accessing space, resources, connections, knowledge, experience and investment.

Create places for people who change things The HUB set out to create places that borrow from the best of a member's club, an innovation agency, a serviced office and a think-tank to create a very different kind of innovation environment.

Anchoring Agent The HUB attracts new ideas, not itself a content generator rather it aggregates, facilitates and showcases new knowledge, ideas, and does this in a large part through nurturing and attracting skills and talent from elsewhere.

Openness and not too prescriptive For example, commercial and non-commercial members.

Stakeholders/Actors

The HUB Founders are a group of young social entrepreneurs with expertise in designing, delivering high-profile socially aware events, who realized that many didn't even have the luxury of being able to use a garage or bedroom to start new ideas and develop them into businesses. So the HUB was born to make a home for social entrepreneurs to enable their work, and scale up their opportunities and the impact of the 'making good' movement.

Instead of traditional tenancies, they used a time-based membership model, and this rapidly growing network has become an active stakeholder in the HUB, as Tatiana Glad, founder of Amsterdam's HUB, argues:

“HUBs are nothing without their members, who from even before a building has been found, are involved in the collaborative design of the physical and virtual community, and who go on to play a central role in the production of a HUB's open-source and peer-to-peer programming.”¹

Tatiana Glad, [HUB Amsterdam](#)

In addition, there are funding stakeholders made up of both big and small investors. The mix of traditional and micro finance makes this project of particular interest, and unusual.

This model is independent of local authority/ government investment.

Accomodation

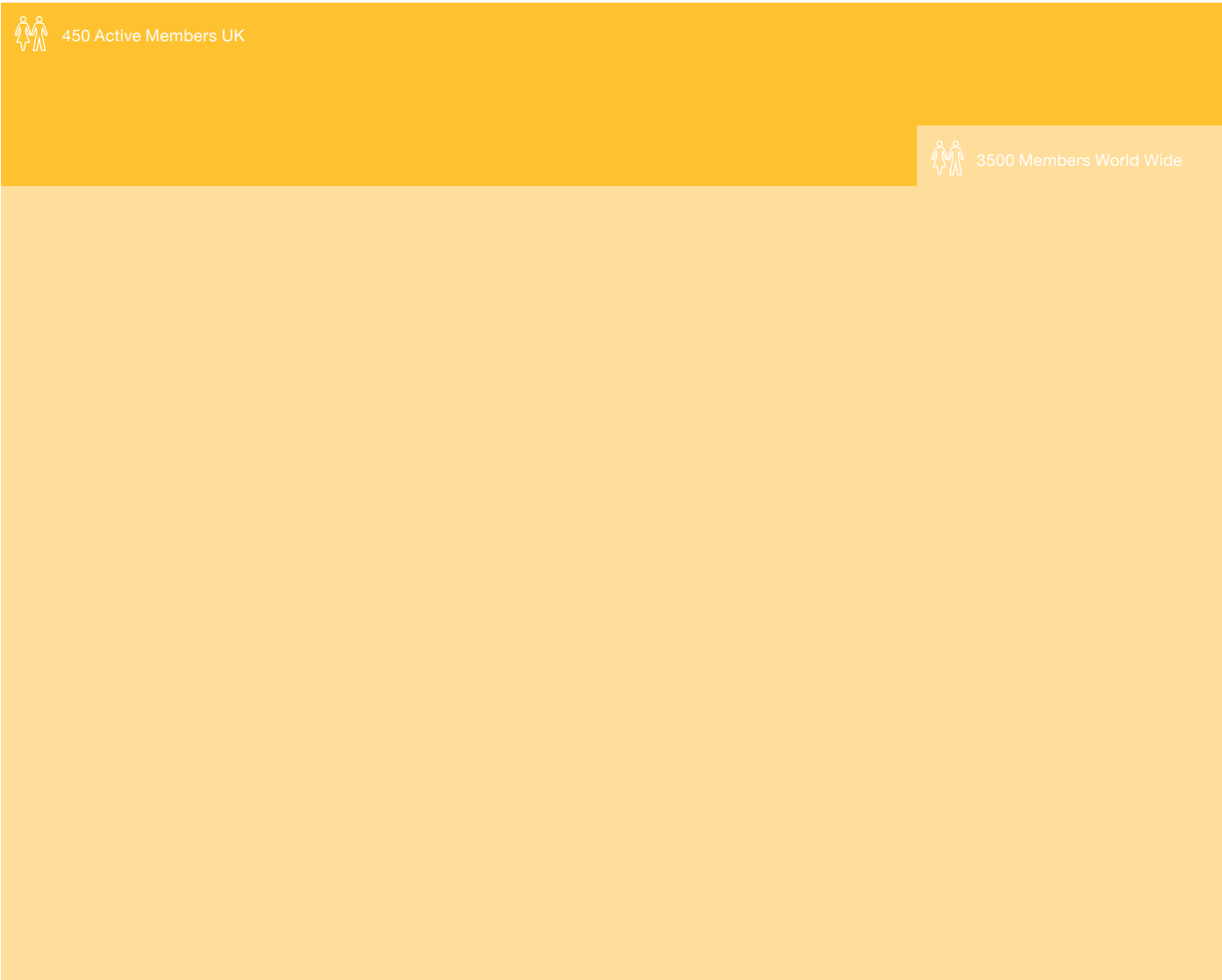
Occupany and Tenancy

Schedule of Accomodation

Rent per sq/ft Hotdesking, with members purchasing minutes instead of dedicated desks, means that space is used more intensively and rarely underutilised, unlike most workspaces where up to 40 per cent of desks may be vacant at any one time.

This intensification also means that the HUB creates financial returns per square foot at almost two and half times the rate of other workspace providers (e.g. the HUB Islington has an average revenue of £90-109 sq/ft as opposed to £40 sq/ft for others in the field).

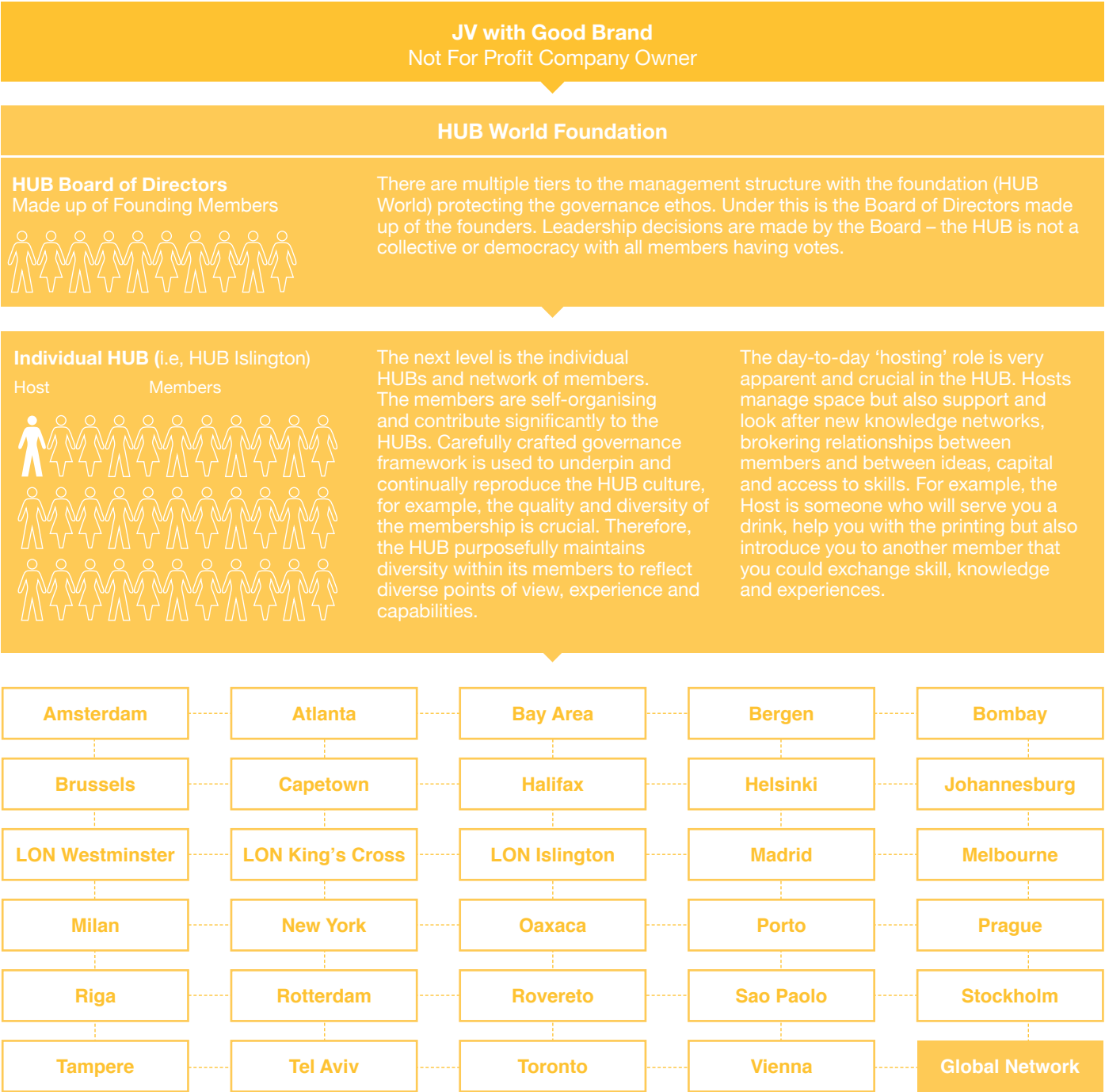
Tenants



Management

The HUB's Organisation

Overview



Management

Additional Notes

Management Model

Governing the relationship with the members is crucial to the success of the HUB, there are social protocols based on tolerance and sharing, for example, crowd sourced member's library, open source space management, and investment in active Hosting roles.

The tenancy model is very innovative at the HUB as unlike many workspace competitors, the HUB sells time rather than desk space to members. There is a range of membership options depending on people's needs from monthly pay-as-you-go desk space to unlimited use of the space and facilities. The facilities include meeting rooms, colour printing, scanning, file sharing, file backup, mailing address, fax and postal services, storage, PA support, a walk around landline phone and a resource library.

Most members purchase between 3000-6000 minutes a month, or buy HUB unlimited access. There is an opportunity to purchase no time but have access to events and the global membership network.

This method of tenancy is more accessible to the diverse vary of members needs. For people starting their businesses there is considerably less commitment and financial outlay. It has attracted a very diverse set of members, from climate campaigners and ethical fashion entrepreneurs to planning and development finance consultants.

Peer-to-peer working is crucial at the HUB: these small ventures share a common need for a high degree of interaction. The utilisation of hot-desking and virtual membership (the HUB Collective) is critical to generating the quality of diversity and offers the daily opportunities for peer-to-peer exchanges. Other members are contactable via the ICT platform (HUB Plus) for knowledge sharing and collaboration that combines social networking functions with an open-source space management system. There are opportunities to share skills through time banks and in-kind contributions. Hosts play an active role in connecting people and members are featured on the website and in the workspaces to aspire others.

Refurbishment Model

The first HUB refurbishment used the skills of the Founders, for example, one is an architect and designed the bespoke tables which epitomise the collective, innovative working ethos of the HUB.

The process has been phased with the initial stand alone HUB, and as the model has become increasing successful it has grown.

HUB King's Cross – Initial Capital cost approximately £450,000.

The HUB employs consultants and architects. For example, OO:/ were lead designers and strategists on the HUB King's Cross helping to evolve a vision for the HUB, and support the development of an appropriate business plan. In addition, OO:/ are currently working as consultants to the HUB in developing the global network of smart franchise HUBs.

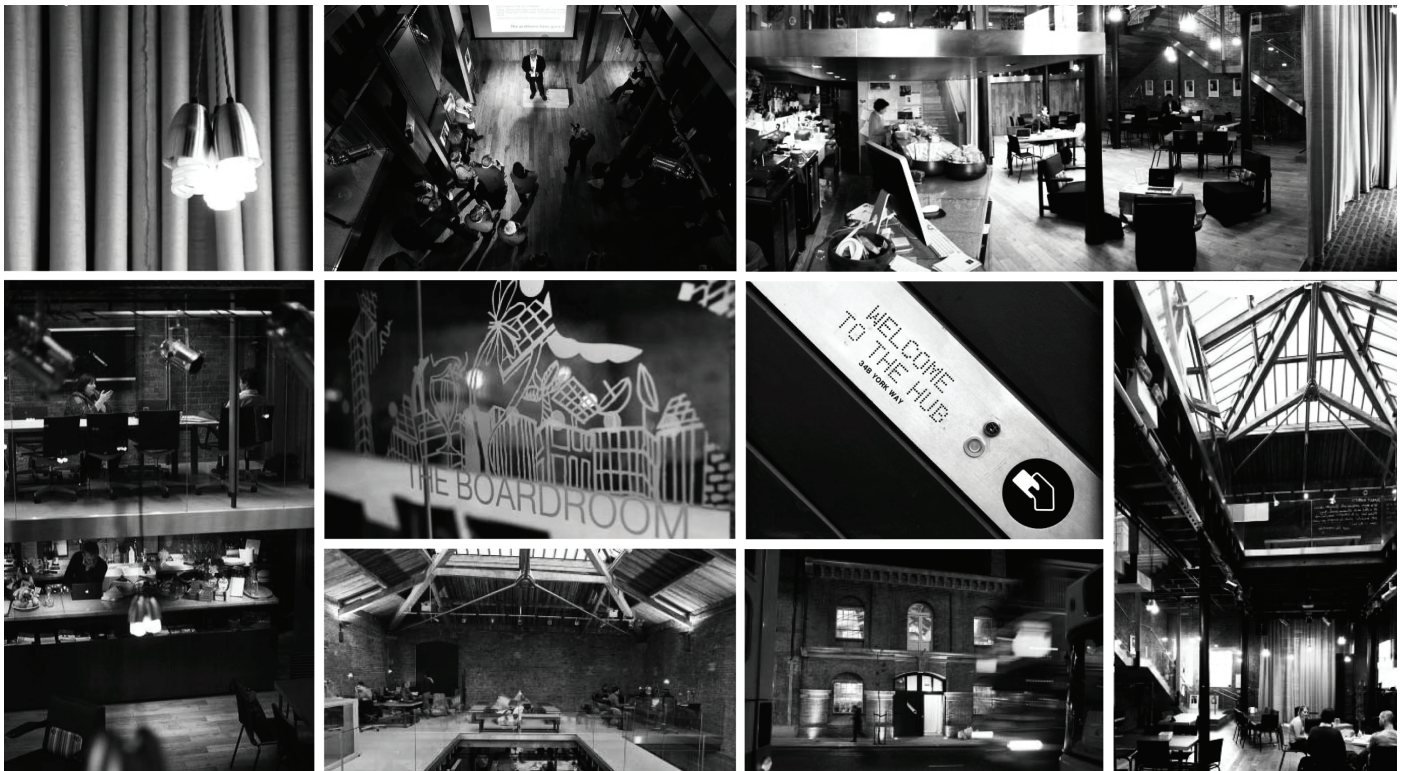
All the HUBs are configured around a series of basic principles and learn from each other, such as based around open-plan office spaces and use physical and social design to encourage certain behaviours such as collection and sharing.

Other funding streams include a combination of loans, grants, investment and philanthropy including innovative micro-finance approach.

The breakdown of funding strams works out at about 1/3 private investment – personal and companies, 1/3 conventional loans and 1/3 micro bonds.



The HUB, work space **Image** Sarah Hollingworth



The HUB, misc. **Image** Sarah Hollingworth

Ongoing Issues

Difficulties, Disputes and Failures

Conception and Operations

Not necessary a problem, but continuously investment has been needed in to the Hub Community – takes time and people to invest knowledge and support to sustain the community. Hosts play a key role (see below).

It could be seen as issue that the successful members and companies grow and leave, while less successful stay; however, there is constantly an intake of new members, people becoming members even where they do not need the workspace, with many lasting connections with businesses even as they 'grow out' of the HUB space itself.

The global online network has not taken off as well as the local established networks.

The innovative nature of the project and multiple stakeholders meant that the procurement of HUB King's Cross was difficult as the brief was constantly evolving, even into the construction. Lucky there was a flexible contractor with vested interest in its success.

Other Notes

Events As well as space, events are a crucial part of the HUBs model, they range from high-profile HUB Lectures, Thought Dinners and inter-disciplinary Innovation Labs to open-source Hub Lunches that foster peer-based learning and collaboration amongst our membership.

Intensification Intensification has been crucial in terms of both the HUB business model and in fostering exchange of ideas by intensifying opportunities for face to face interaction and connection. For example, spaces have been designed to optimise flexibility and adaptability, while affording members autonomy and privacy at the same time.

At the HUB King's Cross there are changes of use through the day, from a breakfast bar, to a vibrant flexible hot-desking work space which incorporates a cafe and state of the art meeting rooms to an evening venue for lectures, debates and dinners. These constant adaptations happen within one venue, which is differentiated with mezzanines and voids to allow a range of activities to take place at once, whilst maintaining the connection between different parts of the space.

Tools The HUB has developed practical tools to support this way of working (sharing software). Some of these are virtual, like the ICT platform (HUB Plus) and others physical, such as bespoke furniture that allow people to either have an element

of privacy or work collectively with others, and writable surfaces that enable members to leave notes from workshops in the meeting rooms creating a continuous visible record of how others are thinking and working.

Other Voices

Neil Tierney and Luke Nicholson founded ONZO after meeting at the HUB Islington. Their start up company, producing devices that give consumers access to information which allows them to understand and manage their energy use, has since received a £7 million order from Scottish and Southern Energy, and have significantly grown to over 50 people and left the HUB space. As Nicholson puts it,

“...the path of any young business owes so much to the input of people you find yourself sitting next to, and at the HUB we sit next to amazing people. Before too long, people start to see what they would be capable of doing working together. Then they do it.”²

Luke Nicholson, **HUB founder**

“São Paulo is an enormous city with many ideas. It is already a hub of sorts. But it didn’t have a place where these ideas could congregate. Civil society, cultural thinkers and others: Basically they don’t cross paths. So we can create the connections, like the host at a party... The idea is also to create a platform that will transcend countries. If a company in Johannesburg wants to expand to Brazil, it will now have personal connections.”³

Pablo Handl, **HUB São Paulo**

References

1

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<http://www.kosmosjournal.org/kjo/backissue/f2008/the-HUB.shtml> accessed 21 June 2008.

2

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3

Kennett, L., Thinking Allowed, *ODE*, March 2008.

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Mixed Programme

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