



Combating Inequalities through Innovative Social Practices
of and for Young People in Cities across Europe

WP7 Case Study: Innovative Practice ‘The Loft’

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City: Birmingham

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Cover page

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE/PROJECT TITLE	
THE LOFT	
City	BIRMINGHAM
Pilot type	Based on own fieldwork: This socially innovative enterprise was identified by researchers in anticipation of WP4
Type of target group	<p><i>The Loft targets young people:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aiming for ‘alternative’ ways to get ahead, with sufficient competences and/or social support; 2. Motivated to integrate into mainstream society but in need of support; 3. Young people – in the creative industries – graduating from University but unaware of pathways or lacking networks to support their career in the creative industries.
Type of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social capital; • Offering opportunities to showcase work, to build networks and to generate business; • Empowerment: developing ambition, self-belief, competences and social networks; • Other: improving employability; • Other: Building relationships with cultural, educational and other organisations. Bridging gaps between disadvantaged young people and local government (City Council). Matching/bridging between generations and the city council/young people. Brokering between the arts and the community.
Aims/objectives in brief	<p>[man, early 20s, self-employed] <i>‘If you train to be a lawyer or something similar, you can often step straight into a job. That’s not the case for designers and artists who have to find their own pathway and go freelance. And they can’t just do their work anywhere as they need somewhere they can design and draw and experiment. I felt there was a lack of support for people going on that journey so I wanted to help bridge the gap with something of a DIY gallery and workshop.’</i></p> <p>Main aims of The Loft:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase young people’s social capital; 2. Accessibility: affordable city centre work-spaces for artists and other people in the creative industries; 3. Accessibility: opportunities to network, showcase work, collaboration, work-experience with other creatives, support when bidding for commissions, obtaining commissions through support and mentoring with other members. The objectives and dreams become accessible and in reaching distance for young people; 4. Offering opportunities to showcase work, to build networks and to generate business; 5. Empowerment: developing ambition, self-belief, competences and social networks; 6. Developing networks and increasing exposure; developing networks of support and knowledge to increase employability and skills. Through developing networks and competencies, there is greater exposure of young people’s work; 7. Improving employability and self-efficiency when going it alone; 8. Building positive relationships with cultural, educational and other organisations, which may have been out of reach – or perceived to be out of reach – due to lack of networks and exposure. This also included bridging gaps between disadvantaged young people and institutions. The Loft sees itself as brokering between the arts and the community. <p>‘The Loft’ is a project aimed at aiding Birmingham’s aspiring creatives and designers. The Loft aimed to build a community of young creatives who were collectively responding to austerity measures and the lack of support for alternative career pathways from formal institutions. The Loft addressed employability and offered accessible space where young people could increase skills and competencies when wanting to be part of the creative industry. The Loft was created to address the immediate needs of young creatives in the city, which included art and design graduates who wanted jobs in the creative industry or wanted to work freelance.</p> <p>The Loft provided space, opportunity and informal (bottom-up) networks for young creatives and social entrepreneurs in Birmingham. The aim of The Loft was to open opportunities for young graduates who were finding it difficult to obtain a job after graduation and also artists struggling to gain commissions. The young creatives were aiming for ‘alternative’ ways to get ahead, but were struggling to find cheap space in the city centre to base their work and to showcase their skills / arts based practice / innovations. Creatives and social entrepreneurs were motivated for integration</p>
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	<p>into mainstream society but in need of support (financial, physical space, networks) to realise and sustain alternative / non-traditional career pathways to employment. The showcasing of young people’s creative work and events at The Loft enhanced the quality and use of the space. Shoppers and passers-by also engaged in the space to view work, to offer commissions and for the wider community to engage with events at The Loft, such as life drawing classes (see section 2.2 under ‘Recognising and responding to gaps’). The neutral space of The Loft and the flow of people in and through the space enabled a variety of communities to converge and mix.</p> <p>The Loft places a large emphasis on the idea of collaboration and sharing best practice, skills, contacts and opportunities. The Loft acting as the brokers in the process of all the projects, by combining all of the differing individual designers into one body. It is important to note that young people in The Loft were not paid by The Loft, nor were they formally ‘working for’ The Loft. The Loft was not an agency, and although the Loft enabled young people to have a collective sense of support and togetherness, individuals were using the space to pursue their own careers and goals. The collective unit meant that individual actors were also involved in running, maintaining and promoting The Loft, as well as actively working on their own careers. The Loft believed they could create a strong platform and opportunity for creatives, by working as a community to tackle and overcome barriers between the Arts and the general public in Birmingham. This was a collective effort, specifically due to shared inequalities.</p>
<p>What needs, what inequalities</p>	<p>Main Needs that The Loft addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of alternative pathways for young people not in training or employment seeking to ‘go-it-alone’ outside the formal job creation/welfare support services and survive in the labour market; • The above also includes a lack of alternative approaches (e.g. arts-based experiences) to personal development and the acquisition of social competences and skills; • The breakdown of trust between disadvantaged young people and those in authority leading to the disconnect between them and opportunities for development and sources of support (lack of signposting); • The need for support networks (creatives) to support other young people and open up new possibilities and ways of thinking about themselves and the wider world; • Creating a platform and workspace to enrich participants’ ideas and sustainability plans for the future. This included the need for mentoring and support after gaining financial assistance to enable sustainability: [man, early 20s, self-employed] <i>‘I just think when giving it [funding] out to young</i>

	<p><i>people: guide them. You've got to walk them through it and make sure you're there for them over time.'</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for communities/networks of support for young people to enable them to move outside their zones of familiarity in order to improve their chances of economic and social self-sufficiency. • Exposure and opportunity for art / creative graduates and other creatives. Established and sustained through social networks, in physical space and online. Opportunity to assist young people (in creative arts scenes) and entrepreneurs in finding funding and obtaining commissions. It was believed that the creative arts and (small scale) pop-ups are already discriminated against, resulting in the restriction of funding opportunities. The Loft addressed this inequality by proving a city centre platform to showcase work and for young creatives / social entrepreneurs to base themselves; • The gaps and struggles identified by The Loft: lack of financial and emotional support off local community, city and economy. In fact, The Loft identified wider and national issues relating to differences between the educational and career pathways of young creatives, versus young people schooled in more traditional vocations and degree pathways (maths, English, sciences, law, etc.).
<p>What (activities in brief)</p>	<p>In the six month period of the pop-up DIY space (March 2014 to August 2014),The Loft:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held 15 exhibitions; • Created workspace for 86 individuals; • Had 5,000 visitors; • Helped artists and creatives in the space achieve funding (signposting) and commissions; • Facilitated collaborative projects with/between designers, illustrators, artists and photographers. The use of the space enabled young creatives and social entrepreneurs to help each other <i>and</i> help themselves to achieve commissions / visibility / business; • Had a variety of activities hosted within the space. Activities included: artist residencies (city based projects), final year degree project (undergraduate at Birmingham City University), raising money / awareness for a charity, developing ethical brands and life drawing sessions. Other activities involved assisting and successfully hosting events, raising money for charity and community work.

<p>Who (actors)</p>	<p>The founder (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed).</p> <p>Loft members and Ambassadors.</p> <p>Workspace for 86 individuals.</p> <p><i>Funded / Supported by: Square</i> (supported The Loft pop-up with a rent-free space for 6 months).</p> <p><i>Funded by: Live Unltd</i> (http://youngunltd.org.uk/). Live Unltd supports social entrepreneurs, is ‘committed to helping young people make great ideas happen,’ and ‘Doing it For Real’ in giving young people the chance ‘to create positive social change in [their] local communities using the power of social action’ [direct quote from: http://youngunltd.org.uk/]. Funding: £3,700.</p> <p><i>Funded by: Starbucks Youth Action</i> (http://www.starbucks.co.uk/responsibility/community/youth-action). Starbucks Youth Action awards funds and supports young people (16-24) wanting to make a positive impact in their community. The programme is in its 5th year, aiming to reach over 10,000 young people in Britain. Starbucks Youth Action states that: ‘We work in partnership with leading charity <u>UK Youth</u> and <u>the National Citizenship Service</u> to help under-25 year olds bring their social action project to life. Successful applicants are awarded funding of up to £2,000 and given project management training so they learn the skills they need to ensure their project succeeds’ [direct quote from: http://www.starbucks.co.uk/responsibility/community/youth-action].</p>
<p>How (involvement of the actors, their roles)</p>	<p>The founder (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) is the driving force. But creatives working in the space were responsible for driving The Loft forward (promotion, commissions and events keeping the space active, used and visible, etc.). Other creatives using the space were co-creators and co-decision-makers. Everyone involved in The Loft contributed to its development.</p> <p>Some members of the Loft became ambassadors for the Loft, after applying and being interviewed for the position. All creatives in the space would be invited to meetings to discuss where they felt the Loft was going and which direction they felt it should go in. There were also meetings where individual members would show their work to receive feedback and advice off their peers.</p>
<p>Scope: number of the participants of practice(s)</p>	<p>The founder (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed), with workspace for 86 individuals (mixed gender and early 20s).</p>
<p>Duration (when the project/practice started)</p>	<p>The Loft launched in 2013. The Loft pop-up space was a six month initiative (March 2014 to August 2014).</p>
<p>RESOURCES</p>	
<p>Financial</p>	<p>The Loft piloted rent-free in Priory Walk (a central city centre location in Birmingham).</p>

	<p>Funded by: The Square (gave space rent-free), Live Unltd (£3,700) and Starbucks Youth Action.</p> <p>Revenue (during the pop-up):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists were charged for using studio spaces and the space at the front of the shop (covering utility bills etc.). Artists were charged for the front gallery space. • Desk spaces are hired out - £50 a month. • Publications and public events (in The Loft and commissioned to publicise other events, such as in the MAC - Midlands Arts Centre, a cultural organisation). <p>Financial support for the continuation of The Loft is seen to be through arts based charities, such as The Arts Council or Awards for All (Big Lottery Fund) which funds community-based projects. They could not see the City Council funding this, but want them to at least provide space.</p>
<p>Personnel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The founder (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed); • Workspace for 86 individuals; • ‘Studio members’ – volunteers, ambassadors, creatives. The Loft was focused on young people and was led by young people, who were directly affected by the same inequalities. <p>There was no top-down leadership; instead young people at The Loft were co-creators and co-collaborators. People at the Loft indicated that the founder (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) was the driving force in bringing people together. Assisting the founder at the Loft include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers and ambassadors (events, looking after the front exhibition space, etc.)
<p>Other</p>	<p>The Loft piloted rent-free in Priory Walk for 6 months (March 2014 to August 2014). The Loft has social media presence:</p> <p><i>Facebook:</i> https://www.facebook.com/TheLoftBham/timeline?ref=page_internal</p> <p><i>Twitter:</i> https://twitter.com/LoftBham</p> <p>The Loft was shortlisted for the Deutsche Bank Creative Awards, as one of the top five project finalists. ‘The Loft’ has received appraisals from a number of European delegates at MADE (a charity organisation dedicated to improving the quality of environments).</p>

	<p>The Loft closed after the 6 month lease expired (August 2014). The Loft was in a city centre location / building where there are redevelopment and demolition plans. The initial negotiations for the lease by the management at The Square, was for 6 months only and, within the 6 months, The Loft was given a free lease, but had to cover costs for utilities. As The Loft is not an agency, the income generated only covered these costs. Income was generated by charging young people to use the space, put events on or exhibit. The founder expressed that although networks and connections were maintained after the closure of the space - through social media and the digital world - The Loft can only really survive with having a physical location. The Loft's philosophy in bringing creatives and artists together and addressing inequalities that they face (see section 2.2 under 'main target group' and 'the main aims of The Loft,' and 'core beliefs and values' section 3 on page 16).</p>
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Introduction

One project which has successfully crossed borders is The Loft, created by a young creative (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) based in Birmingham, United Kingdom. His aim was to transform un-used space into studios filled with a mix of artistic people and linked by a community of collaboration and support. ‘The Loft’ is a project aimed at aiding Birmingham’s aspiring creative and designers to work and exhibit in an affordable central location within the city centre. The Loft opened space for the young creatives to develop their own work with support sessions and weekly meetings where young people could show their current work / project and receive feedback from their peers. Constructive feedback from peers simulates real-life scenarios in the creative industries, such as a client meeting or a team meeting where a product or design is being developed. The Loft’s aim is to help provide creatives, designers and makers in Birmingham and the West Midlands the opportunity to transform their passion into a career pathway, be it self-employed or gaining more experience to make them more employable for a company recruiting in their specialist area. The Loft places a large emphasis on the idea of collaboration. The Loft acted as the broker in the process of all the projects. By combining all of the differing individual designers into one body (one collective unit) The Loft maintained that they can achieve more than if they were a collection of fragmented individuals / projects. For example, a collective identity underneath the banner of ‘The Loft,’ enabled young people to locate themselves in a community where their work and ambitions were supported and recognised by and through their networks (both online and through people). The Loft believed they could create a strong platform and opportunity for creatives and working with the community to tackle and overcome barriers between the Arts and the general public in Birmingham. This is through connections made with other organisations, providing sustainability, visibility and opportunity for young creatives and social entrepreneurs.

The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) spotted a gap where certain young people needed support in setting up their own practice to maintain individuality and their dreams in the arts and creative industries. The idea and subsequent development of the pop-up space was through young creatives mapping out and tackling the shared issues faced by young people wanting to be in the creative industries. Placing the needs of young people first meant that the issues they face (in social, cultural and economic contexts) could be addressed directly, and young people themselves had a central role in shaping their own future(s). This was achieved through pinpointing and counteracting manifesting inequalities within the lives of young people. The Loft prided itself with young creatives collectively working together to build a strong platform for creativity, but also closing gaps between creatives and communities, and young people and official institutions (like the city council). The Loft wanted to change perspectives and use of space, helping to change perceptions on how spaces are used by young people and the potential (economic, social, etc.) generated by the use of the space. The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) wanted to encourage the use of public space (particularly disused city centre spaces) to get people to spend time in the location to build stronger communities.

1. Evaluation methodology

The Loft was founded in 2012, but the physical pop-up space opened in 2014 after careful negotiations with the landlords and acquiring funding (Live Unltd, £3,700). The Loft is an established organisation with a track record of engagement with young people, the creative arts scenes and gaining commission. It was identified as a potentially socially innovative enterprise during the fieldwork phases of CITISPYCE in Birmingham. Elements of its approach and activities have been implemented in the Athens project to test the possibilities for transfer from one context to another and the requirements for success. This evaluation, therefore, is largely qualitative but draws on evidence of The Loft’ work and seeks to understand what makes its work different from other start-up spaces (it was first of its kind in Birmingham) and why it is considered to be innovative and more effective in its

approach to tackling some young people's inequalities. The Loft itself had a well-developed system for project evaluation: there were weekly meetings with all members and ambassadors to discuss the direction of The Loft, and there were meetings where members would show and discuss their work with other Loft members. Here, young people would receive feedback and suggestions, which could help with showcasing their work, commissions and starting collaborative projects with other creatives. As a result, there was informal mentoring, but also mentoring from creatives beyond the space too via contacts and networking.

The main methods of evaluation used by Aston have been the following:

Field Observation: observing The Loft space and events.

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with the founder of the organisation and several young people who had become involved with The Loft. An interview was conducted with the founder during WP2 and further **telephone interviews** were conducted with Loft mentors and ambassadors during WP7.

A **telephone interview** was also conducted with the Next Generation and Young People's Producer at the MAC (Midlands Arts Centre - a cultural organisation), which is another organisation who gave commissions to some of the Loft members.

Monitoring of The Lofts' online presence (website, twitter and Facebook feeds). Its online presence is integral to The Lofts approach to engaging and working with young people and is thus an important source of information concerning the overall design of its business model. It is, however, important to note that the members of the Loft feel that the Loft needs to be located in a physical space, as the online context defeats the purpose of setting up The Loft (as a place where you work, socialise, network, connect, etc.), the needs that it addresses, the target group and The Loft' philosophy.

The interviews with beneficiaries and actors were loosely structured in order to give the respondents freedom to express themselves without being over-influenced by the interviewer. The interview with the founder, however, was more structured as it was felt to be important to understand his motivation for the creation of The Loft and his perceptions of the needs which he believed he could meet. The telephone interviews began in a structured way, with key questions to clarify points raised during previous interviews on The Loft, but it soon became clear that it was more valuable to use a more flexible approach to questioning as participants described and expressed their involvement with The Loft. We were particularly interested in activities which involved the development of competences which relate to employability and enterprise. We were also interested in what needs the young people felt were addressed by The Loft.

2. Project/Practice Design

2.1 Social Issue(s) addressed

Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK with a population of over 1 million, of which an estimated 16% are aged between 15 and 24 (BCC 2013), thus making it one of the youngest cities for its size in Europe. It is also a super diverse city with both long established minority ethnic communities and, in recent years, growing numbers of newly arrived migrants (often in small groups or as individuals) from more than 180 countries. In addition to its characteristics of a super diverse and youthful population, Birmingham is one of the UK's most deprived cities, ranking as the 9th most deprived out of the 354 authorities in England based on the UK Index of Multiple Deprivation. The performance of the local economy, swingeing cuts in public sector spending with its disproportionate affect on Birmingham City Council (NB It has already experienced cuts of a third of its budget compared to the 12% average across all UK local authorities) and very high unemployment are the backdrop to the way young people of all backgrounds experience their lives in Birmingham. Cuts in

welfare, housing, educational support and tighter regulations, relating to claiming unemployment benefits plus zero hours or part-time contracts, have created a climate of uncertainty amongst many young people.

In 2012, it is estimated that nearly a quarter of 15 – 24 year olds were unemployed and in June 2013, the seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rate was 19.8%, compared to 11.1% for the UK as a whole. Many of these young people were – and still are - concentrated in areas of high deprivation close to the city centre. There are also, however, pockets of high youth unemployment in the outer suburbs where traditional manufacturing had declined or disappeared in previous recessions and there are few opportunities for employment for anyone in the area, particularly for young people with low skills and social competences. In our research for WP3, we heard accounts from a range of stakeholders about services for young people being reduced and becoming fragmented as a result of government spending cuts, realignments of power and introduction of new policies targeting young people's employability as opposed to social welfare per se. All this at the time of greatest need for support of both vulnerable young people with poor social competences and educational attainment and those with higher level skills and competences. Furthermore, research in Birmingham with young people has revealed a lack of connection between those living in deprived parts of the city with other areas of the city and particularly the city centre (Birmingham Social Inclusion Process, 2013). Young people also complained of the negative images portrayed about them by and within statutory organisations and the media leading to a lack of trust and a distancing of them from those in authority.

Amongst the many inequalities that young people are facing, in this context, there are two predominant themes:

- **Structural causes:** high levels of unemployment and the lack of employment and training opportunities; poor levels structural support for creative/arts-based practices/initiatives; cutbacks in social welfare support;
- **Individual causes:** Lack of social and emotional competences; lack of self-confidence and self-belief; not knowing where opportunities are; lack of positive personal support structures arising from family, community or peer networks; distrust and distance from those with power.

The main issues targeted by The Loft are (see also 2.2 'Main aims of The Loft'):

1. **Support** for young people who are aiming for **'alternative' ways to get ahead**, with sufficient competences and/or social support;
2. **Motivated to integrate** into mainstream society **but in need of support**, guidance and recognition to build self-esteem;
3. Young people – in the creative industries – graduating from University but **unaware of pathways or lacking networks** to support their career in the creative industries.

2.2. Project goals and plans

Context:

'The Loft' pop-up was a space where creative young people could showcase, promote and exhibit their work (at the front of the space). The Loft was located in a disused space in The Square Shopping Centre within the city centre, where creatives could use the space to showcase their work and connect with other creatives and members of the general public. The Loft provided workspace for 86 young people and held over 15 exhibitions, reflecting its commitment in opening space to inspire young

creatives to do it for themselves and together as a collective. The space also provided workspace for 86 individuals, meaning that artists and creatives had a central location in the city centre where they could work. The Loft provided support and space for the aspirational, creative and emotional needs of young people, particularly supporting young people in the creative industries. The Loft offered creative people, artists and designers a place to work and showcase their creativity beyond their bedroom and coffee shops. The Loft became a co-working creative, flexible and affordable workspace for fashion designers, illustrators, writers and poets. The Loft targeted young people who were aiming for 'alternative' ways to get ahead. Young people targeted needed to develop sufficient competences and/or social support. Thus, young people targeted by The Loft were motivated in integrating into mainstream society but in need of support and needed to develop networks.

The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) identified that young creatives needed a space where they could meet likeminded others to network and have opportunities to collaborate or obtain work. Apart from meeting in coffee shops and individuals creating work in their bedroom, there was no (affordable) space for them to meet other creatives or to base their work. They wanted to be in the city centre. He identified that young creatives wanted to base themselves in the city centre as they felt more opportunities would arise there. The Loft enabled young creatives to network across the city and spreading awareness of (attainable) opportunities for young creatives in the city centre. The Loft opened space for signposting creatives / entrepreneurs to other creatives / entrepreneurs who had applied for funding before and could offer advice as to how to write a proposal, etc. The Loft was a pop-up arts space in The Square Shopping Centre in the city centre, where creatives could use the space to showcase their work and connect with other creatives and members of the general public (emphasising community cohesion). The Loft provided workspace for 86 young people and held over 15 exhibitions, reflecting its commitment in opening space to inspire young creatives to do it for themselves and together as a collective.

The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) expressed that: *'I come from an Architecture background, so I'm interested in the use and re-purpose of spaces. I found that when artists come out of University they are independent and can't just go straight into work, so I wanted to create a space to support and incubate young creatives, where they can develop and be supported by like-minded people. This wasn't happening affordably in Birmingham, there weren't affordable spaces, whereas in The Loft space they could get exposure. Also, Birmingham city centre is very commercial and doesn't show the true heart of the city. When I was at University I didn't know about the creative scene in Digbeth so I wanted to create something totally different in the city centre as there aren't many independent creative spaces.'*

The Loft's main target group are those who are:

1. Graduates (university or college level), recent graduates (university level), or have some experience / interest in the creative arts scenes (graphic designers, fashion designers, illustrators, artists, etc.).
2. In need of affordable space (including facilities such as daylight, a washbasin and free Wi-Fi) to suit their job needs and for exposure for their creative pursuits.
3. Highly skilled but do not have networks or experience in showcasing their work or successfully obtaining commissions to sustain an independent living.

Main aims of The Loft:

1. To **increase** young people's **social capital**;
2. **Accessibility**: affordable city centre work-spaces for artists and other people in the creative industries;

3. **Accessibility:** opportunities to network, showcase work, collaboration, work-experience with other creatives, support when bidding for commissions, obtaining commissions through support and mentoring with other members. The objectives and dreams become accessible and in reaching distance for young people;
4. **Offering opportunities** to showcase work, to build networks and to generate business;
5. **Empowerment:** developing ambition, self-belief, competences and social networks;
6. **Developing networks and increasing exposure;** developing networks of support and knowledge to increase employability and skills. Through developing networks and competencies, there is greater exposure of young people's work;
7. **Improving employability** and self-efficiency when going it alone;
8. **Building positive relationships** with cultural, educational and other organisations, which may have been out of reach – or perceived to be out of reach – due to lack of **networks and exposure**. This also included bridging gaps between disadvantaged young people and institutions. The Loft sees itself as brokering between the arts and the community.

Recognising and responding to gaps:

The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) saw a gap in present services, where young people – outside more traditional employment and training pathways (i.e. outside the formal job creation/welfare support services) – were seeking to ‘go-it-alone’ and survive in the labour market. The lack of support (from official services, etc.) for alternative employment pathways meant that there was a lack of alternative support or approaches (e.g. arts-based experiences) to assist young people in personal development and the acquisition of social competences and skills. The Loft sought to rectify this. Creating a platform and workspace to enriching participants’ ideas and sustainability plans, meant that young people’s talents were developed through interacting with other creatives. Opportunities for employment or commissions were also opened up through connections and visibility within The Loft space to external people, groups, NGOs and other cultural institutions (like the MAC). Evidence of opportunities arising from The Loft include:

1. Artist residencies (the space facilitating a city based project of the people in Birmingham);
2. A two-week pop-up vintage shop (a final year degree project by an undergraduate at BCU) which raised money (nearly £1000) for charity;
3. The development of an ethical brand;
4. Funding obtained by some artists / creatives through their involvement at The Loft;
5. Artists hosting sell-out life drawing sessions;
6. Giving opportunities and a platform: (e.g.) the founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) expressed that a: *‘[male, early 20s, self-employed] did an exhibit at The Loft. ‘He got huge hype and exposure and a partner Church in Australia paid from him to go out and show them how to build and exhibition. Also a community has been built. For example, I helped [woman, early 20s, self-employed] set up links to fund her first collection. These links are still maintained over Facebook but a physical space is still necessary. We can’t grow without that physical space.’*

Philosophy, core beliefs and values:

See previous section.

‘The Loft’ is a project aimed at aiding Birmingham’s aspiring creatives and designers. The Loft aimed to build a community of young creatives who were collectively responding to austerity measures and the lack of support for alternative career pathways from formal institutions. The Loft addressed employability and offered accessible space where young people could increase skills and competencies when wanting to be part of the creative industry. The Loft was created to address the immediate needs of young creatives in the city, which included art and design graduates who wanted jobs in the creative industry or wanted to work freelance.

Mentoring and support was a key component that The Loft wanted to address, particularly in relation to supporting young creatives after they manage to gain financial assistance. Networks of support and opportunity for and by young people open up new possibilities. Developing connections and trust between other young people, but also, those in authority, means that the ‘real’ creative ‘fabric’ of Birmingham is given more visibility. For young people, formal institutions (like the city council) are perceived to be disinterested in their creative pursuits, resulting in young people having to explore other pathways (for funding etc.) to sustain their pursuits and aspirations. It was believed that the creative arts and (small scale) pop-ups are already discriminated against, resulting in the restriction of funding opportunities. The Loft engaged in building trust between disadvantaged young people / young people wanting to be part of the creatives and those in authority. There was a need to find communities/networks to support young people to enable them to move outside their zones of familiarity in order to improve their chances of economic and social self-sufficiency. This is enabled through exposure and opportunity for art / creative graduates through sharing a communal space with other creatives.

The above sections connect with two of the three dominant themes expressed in WP3:

1. *Bridging social and physical distances* – between young people and institutions (like the City Council), between artists and community, and between other creatives / social entrepreneurs. Enabling young graduates and creatives to work in the city centre (beyond the neighbourhood) and develop contacts / skills / employability.
2. Developing new forms of togetherness – a collective enterprise sustained by and for young people.

What The Loft has achieved:

1. Stimulating and enabling entrepreneurship; self-sufficiency, co-creation; “communing”;
2. Empowerment: developing ambition, self-belief, competences and social networks;
3. Bridging gaps: between disadvantaged young people and Local government (City Council)
4. Other: improving employability. This is via exposure, mentoring, support, sharing knowledge (including calls for proposals, pitches and funding opportunities) and team-working skills. Examples of The Loft improving employability include: wanting to specialise through further education (MA – postgraduate course), and commissions and funding obtained via external companies from seeing work at The Loft.

Other: Building relationships with cultural and other organisations, building relationships between young people and institutions/older generations, bridging the gap between the arts and the local community.

2.3 Competences and resources required

The personnel involved at The Loft are working on individual projects, but they may collaborate with others at the Loft, and they may also help with promoting events, looking after the front of the shop / exhibition space, and online presence. The personnel involved at The Loft have a range of skills and most have graduated with degrees, but do not necessarily a great deal of experience in the types of event which they may be called on to design, organise, promote and run. They may not have the experience of exhibiting work, having networks or have experience in writing a pitch for a client / commission beyond the university context. Some members may have experience or they know someone who can mentor others, e.g. through the processes of pitching or are aware of calls for proposals. Skills and knowledge are shared, creating an environment of support which tries to benefit all members. There is peer-to-peer learning, but professional contacts and networks are also used (such as the MAC – a cultural organisation - commissioning work) to open opportunities that they would not have had if not being involved with The Loft. The young people are motivated to learn from others and actively improve their professional practice and add to their skills-base. Very little is specified regarding competencies, but most of the young people have had experience or (higher) qualifications in the arts or creative programmes. Having a degree is not necessary, but creative skills in the broad areas of art and creative industry were needed to fit the context of what The Loft represented. There is a stress on the young participants' interests and readiness to engage with others.

Other resources that are required include: affordable space to work (in the city centre), the immediacy of the space, the rent including utilities, good lighting (important for illustration, art, etc.), running water and sinks (for washing equipment / brushes, etc.), social media presence and skills in event management (creating flyers, managing events, circulating opportunities, commissions and events). Individuals at The Loft earned income through being commissioned to run projects e.g. workshops, creating promotional material for events at the MAC (a cultural organisation), etc.

2.4 Degree of organization

The practice was conceived as an 'on the ground' approach in terms of project design and initial implementation as it was responding to a gap in support for individual young people seeking to become self-sufficient through the deployment of their creative skills. It operates, therefore, mainly at the micro level focusing both on young people in Birmingham with creative skills and ambitions to become freelancers in its cultural sector. The Loft targets young people who are disadvantaged by the educational degree or creative pathway they have chosen. The Loft also operates at the meso level as it liaises with a range of institutional, educational, private and not-for-profit stakeholders engaging young people who want to develop their career in the creative industries, but have no experience or contacts beyond their university degree or educational background.

The Loft is primarily aimed at developing skills (exhibition and curation, events management, pitching, networking) and giving exposure and opportunity to recent graduate artists, particularly those who are finding it difficult to enter the labour market when seeking to use their creative skills and interests as an alternative pathway to employment. The Loft is a space that enables like-minded creatives to work in the same space, away from their bedrooms or coffee shops, giving them a sense of purpose and place in the city, but also giving them a change to flourish in a supportive environment. The immediacy of space, accessibility (in the city centre and affordable), being youth-led and the independent factor makes The Loft appeal to young people who may feel they are not experienced enough to fit the requirements for a permanent ('steady') job in the creative industry, feel they have little exposure to ensure a livelihood being a freelancer, or not confident enough to approach organisations and companies to pitch an idea or respond to a call for pitches. The Loft, therefore, is a project aimed at aiding Birmingham's aspiring creative and designers. The Loft aimed to build a community of young creatives who were collectively responding to austerity measures and the lack of support for alternative career pathways (addressing employability and increasing skills and competencies of young people in or wanting to be part of the creative industries). The Loft was

created to address the immediate needs of young creatives in the city, which included art and design graduates who wanted jobs in the creative industry. Please refer to the seven points on page 9/10 and the six points on page ten (section 2.2) to further explain the organisation and the impact of working at The Loft for the young people.

2.5 The logic of intervention

Please refer to the above sections.

2.6 Transfer adaptations

The Loft has the potential for transferability because it directly addresses inequalities creatives face when finding space and sustainable income to maintain their alternative career pathway (non-traditional). The Loft is one of Clitispyce's projects which has successfully crossed borders. The founders aim for The Loft appealed to the team in Elefsina, Greece, particularly as The Loft transformed un-used space in the city centre in Birmingham into studios filled with a mix of artistic people and linked by a community of collaboration and support. In turn, The Loft inspired the team in Elefsina to bring the idea to Greece. With the help of the founder of The Loft, they developed the 'Shelter of Ideas' which is now seeking to fill gaps left by cuts, helping young people find their feet and joining forces with Local Authorities in Elefsina's bid for European Capital of Culture. 'Shelter of Ideas' team stated that *'some of the reasons we set up the 'Shelter of Ideas' were the fact that Elefsina has a cultural legacy from Ancient times. Also in modern times there was a flow of people from different cultural backgrounds who came to Elefsina to seek employment. As a result we imagined a place where young people with different background and different culture will join together to discuss, work and create. Another important factor was that this idea is innovative within our region. There are not any other youth centres nearby especially for young artists. The only similar existing facility is a municipal cultural centre but due to the economic crisis it is not working at its full capacity. A lot of activities have been discontinued because of the lack of funds.'* Much like The Loft, the 'Shelter of Ideas' not only bridged / filled gaps, but enabled young people to direct their own employment pathway without having to rely on the job centre, which did not help them anyway in pursuing a career in the creative industry. The Loft offered a space where young people / creatives could be inspired and not lose their individuality in their pursuit of a career reflecting their passions. The flexibility of The Loft and its ability to create a working space to respond to the economic crisis, which enabled young people to create their own employment opportunities. A success factor for this transferability is that the premise of The Loft and, indeed, the Shelter of Ideas, is being youth led. Young people create and own The Loft / the Shelter of Ideas. The space being made for young people, by young people makes young people feel that they belong in the space and that it is owned by them. Created by and for young people, increases the appeal for young people to engage and participate in the space, making it their own.

3. Organisational context of implementation

History:

The Loft was founded by a graduate architect (man, early 20s, self-employed) from Birmingham City University (graduating year: 2012). He was interested in the use and re-purpose of spaces and felt that there was a need for affordable space to support young creatives to develop after graduating from University. He identified that when artists come out of University, they can find it very difficult to become freelance, to get exposure, to find affordable space to be with likeminded people and to work

in city centre space, and to develop networks. The Loft framed itself as being an independent creative space where artists could get support and exposure, but also the space showcased the *'true heart of the city.'* The founder of The Loft stated that: *When I was at University I didn't know about the creative scene in Digbeth so I wanted to create something totally different in the city centre as there aren't many independent creative spaces.'* The concept of The Loft was first of its kind in Birmingham. It was important for The Loft to connect creatives and artists with one-another, and make more creatives and artists aware of opportunities in the city. Networking and sharing opportunities / calls for commissions were facilitated through: emails, face-to-face discussions, people dropping into The Loft space, and The Loft member and ambassadors going to external events. The Loft is a project aimed at aiding Birmingham's aspiring creative and designers. The Loft aimed to build a community of young creatives who were collectively responding to austerity measures and the lack of support for alternative career pathways. Thus, The Loft addressed employability, through increasing skills and competencies of young people in or wanting to be part of the creative industries. The Loft was created to address the immediate needs of young creatives in the city, which included art and design graduates who wanted jobs in the creative industry or wanted to be freelance, but did not know how to realise this and needed support / guidance.

The Loft provided space, opportunity and informal (bottom-up) networks for young creatives and social entrepreneurs in Birmingham. The aim of The Loft was to open opportunities for young graduates who were finding it difficult to obtain a job after graduation and also artists struggling to gain commissions. The young creatives were aiming for 'alternative' ways to get ahead, but were struggling to find cheap space in the city centre to base their work and to showcase their skills / arts based practice / innovations. Creatives and social entrepreneurs were motivated for integration into mainstream society but in need of support (financial, physical space, networks) to realise and sustain alternative / non-traditional career pathways to employment. The showcasing of young people's creative work and events at The Loft enhanced the quality and use of the space. Shoppers and passers-by also engaged in the space to view work, to offer commissions and for the wider community to engage with events at The Loft, such as life drawing classes (see section 2.2 under 'Recognising and responding to gaps'). The neutral space of The Loft and the flow of people in and through the space enabled a variety of communities to converge and mix.

The Loft places a large emphasis on the idea of collaboration and sharing best practice, skills, contacts and opportunities. The Loft acting as the brokers in the process of all the projects, by combining all of the differing individual designers into one body. It is important to note that young people in The Loft were not paid by The Loft, nor were they formally 'working for' The Loft. The Loft was not an agency, and although the Loft enabled young people to have a collective sense of support and togetherness, individuals were using the space to pursue their own careers and goals. The collective unit meant that individual actors were also involved in running, maintaining and promoting The Loft, as well as actively working on their own careers. The Loft believed they could create a strong platform and opportunity for creatives, by working as a community to tackle and overcome barriers between the Arts and the general public in Birmingham. This was a collective effort, specifically due to shared inequalities. The Loft places a large emphasis on the idea of collaboration and sharing best practice, skills, contacts and opportunities. The Loft acting as the brokers in the process of all the projects, by combining all of the differing individual designers into one body. The collective unit meant that individual actors were also involved in running, maintaining and promoting The Loft. The Loft believed they could create a strong platform and opportunity for creatives through working with the community to tackle and overcome barriers between the Arts and the general public in Birmingham.

The Loft's main target group are mainly graduates (graphic designers, fashion designers, illustrators, artists, etc.) who – after graduating – want to continue their careers in the creative arts scenes and industry. The Loft identified that young graduates were in need of affordable space (including facilities such as daylight, a washbasin and free Wi-Fi to suit their job needs). Although the graduates were highly skilled and educated, they did not possess extensive networks, their work had no real

exposure beyond the university, they had little experience in showcasing their work in varied settings, and they were not fully prepared successfully obtaining commissions to sustain a living.

Philosophy, core beliefs and values behind The Loft:

‘The Loft’ is a project aimed at aiding Birmingham’s aspiring creative and designers. The Loft aimed to build a community of young creatives who were collectively responding to austerity measures and the lack of support for alternative career pathways (addressing employability and increasing skills and competencies of young people in or wanting to be part of the creative industries). The Loft was created to address the immediate needs of young creatives in the city, which included art and design graduates who wanted jobs in the creative industry or wanted to be freelance.

The founder [architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed] stated that: *‘if you train to be a lawyer or something similar, you can often step straight into a job. That’s not the case for designers and artists who have to find their own pathway and go freelance. And they can’t just do their work anywhere as they need somewhere they can design and draw and experiment. I felt there was a lack of support for people going on that journey so I wanted to help bridge the gap with something of a DIY gallery and workshop.’*

The Loft provided space, opportunity and informal (bottom-up) networks for young creatives and social entrepreneurs in Birmingham. The aim of The Loft was to open opportunities for young graduates who were finding it difficult to obtain a job after graduation and also artists struggling to gain commissions. The young creatives were aiming for ‘alternative’ ways to get ahead, but were struggling to find cheap space in the city centre to base their work and showcase their skills / arts based practice / innovations. Creatives and social entrepreneurs were motivated for integration into mainstream society but in need of support (financial, physical space, networks) to realise and sustain alternative / non-traditional career pathways to employment. The showcasing of young people’s creative work and events at The Loft enhanced the quality and use of the space. Shoppers and passers-by also engaged in the space to view work and to offer commissions. The neutral space of The Loft and the flow of people in and through the space enabled a variety of communities to converge and mix. The Loft places a large emphasis on the idea of collaboration and sharing best practice, skills, contacts and opportunities. The collective unit meant that individual actors were also involved in running, maintaining and promoting The Loft. The Loft believed they could create a strong platform and opportunity for creatives through working with the community to tackle and overcome barriers between the Arts and the general public in Birmingham.

The core beliefs and values behind The Loft included the need to increase young people’s social capital, to develop their experience in the creative art scenes and creative industries, and to increase their awareness of opportunities. The Loft believed in accessibility and immediacy of space for young creatives who wanted to work in a collaborative and creative working environment with likeminded others. The Loft had 86 spaces for individuals to work and individuals were charged £50 a month (included electricity, free Wi-Fi, running water and good light), which is a fraction of the cost of spaces at other locations where individuals would be charged roughly £300 a month (not including utilities, etc.).

The core beliefs and values also include:

- **Accessible Spaces:** affordable city centre work-spaces for artists and other people in the creative industries;
- **Accessible Opportunities:** opportunities to network, showcase work, collaboration, work-experience with other creatives, support when bidding for commissions, obtaining commissions through support and mentoring with other members;

- **Exposure:** to showcase work, to build networks and to generate business;
- **Empowerment:** developing ambition, self-belief, competences and social networks;
- **Improving Employability:** developing skills, knowledge, networks and exposure for self-efficiency when going it alone;
- **Building Positive Relationships:** with cultural, educational and other organisations, which may have been out of reach – or perceived to be out of reach – due to lack of networks and exposure;
- To **increase** young people’s **social capital**;
- **Developing networks and increasing exposure;** developing networks of support and knowledge to increase employability and skills. Through developing networks and competencies, there is greater exposure of young people’s work.

It was believed that the creative arts and (small scale) pop-ups are already discriminated against, resulting in the restriction of funding opportunities. The Loft addressed this inequality by providing a city centre platform to showcase work and for young creatives / social entrepreneurs to base themselves. The need for support networks (creatives) to support other young people and open up new possibilities and ways of thinking about themselves and the wider world. Creating a platform and workspace to enrich participants’ ideas and sustainability plans. This included the need for mentoring and support after gaining financial assistance to enable sustainability: (male, early 20s, self-employed) *‘I just think when giving it [funding] out to young people: guide them. You’ve got to walk them through it and make sure you’re there for them over time.’* The need for communities/networks of support for young people to enable them to move outside their zones of familiarity in order to improve their chances of economic and social self-sufficiency. The Loft provided space for opportunity to assist young people (in creative arts scenes) and entrepreneurs in finding funding and obtaining commissions. The gaps and struggles identified by The Loft: lack of financial and emotional support off local community, city and economy. In fact, The Loft identified wider and national issues relating to differences between the educational and career pathways of young creatives, versus young people schooled in more traditional vocations and degree pathways (maths, English, sciences, law, etc.). The Loft identified that there is a lack of alternative pathways for young people not in training or employment seeking to ‘go-it-alone’ outside the formal job creation/welfare support services and survive in the labour market. The Loft, therefore, produced space and support to tackle the issue of the lack of alternative approaches (e.g. arts-based experiences) to personal development and the acquisition of social competences and skills;

Organisation: How The Loft is constituted and structured?

The Loft piloted **rent-free** in Priory Walk (a central city centre location in Birmingham).

Funded by: The Square (gave space rent-free), Live Unltd (£3,700) and Starbucks Youth Action.

Revenue (during the pop-up):

- Artists charged for using studio spaces and the space at the front of the shop (covering utility bills etc.). Artists charged for the front space.
- Desk spaces are hired out - £50 a month (covered utilities).
- Publications and public events (in The Loft and commissioned to publicise other events, such as in the MAC, a cultural organisation).

Financial support for the continuation of The Loft is seen to be through arts based charities, such as The Arts Council or Awards for All (Big Lottery Fund) which funds community-based projects. They could not see the City Council funding this, but want them to at least provide space.

The founder (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) is the driving force. But creatives working in the space were responsible for driving The Loft forward (promotion, commissions, events keeping the space active, used and visible, etc.). Other creatives using the space were co-creators and co-decision-makers. Everyone involved in The Loft contributed to its development. Some members of the Loft became ambassadors for the Loft. All creatives in the space would be invited to meetings to discuss where they felt the Loft was going and which direction they felt it should go in. There were also meetings where individual members would show their work to receive feedback and advice off their peers. The Loft collective involved all actors using the space and enabled them to feel wanted and valued. This motivated individuals, brought them self-confidence, increased trust in sharing ideas and increased confidence in applying for opportunities / freelance work. Highlighted here, is engagement and empowerment, which provided a step to continue with (and enhance) other activities and practices within The Loft (such as learning, mentoring and feedback for pitch preparations, etc.

4. Project implementation and outputs

4.1 Targeting of the programme

Main Focus When Setting up the Programme: Right location, affordable space, maximum exposure for creatives (city centre location)

Target Group: The targeting of the programme has been mentioned in the above section. For some of the young people, getting involved with The Loft was through word of mouth, meeting the founder of The Loft at other events or spaces, through friends mentioning the space, and through a website advertising arts jobs. One participant stated that they found out about The Loft through a friend who had been working with the founder of The Loft during a temping job at a retail shop. They said that they then looked online to read more details about The Loft, this were interested and were actively seeking out spaces. Another participant stated that they responded to a job advert online (for an ambassador position) for The Loft and was interviewed for the position.

Advertising and Promotion - The Loft and Loft Events: online, social media, word of mouth, through friends, flyers (for events).

Accessibility: immediacy of space, affordability of renting a space, identifying as a creative / artist, opportunity for exposure and career/skill development. All members and ambassadors at The Loft were responsible for the space, the direction of The Loft and utilising the space.

Actors: The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) is the driving force. But creatives working in the space were responsible for driving The Loft forward (promotion, commissions, events keeping the space active, used and visible, etc.). Other creatives using the space were co-creators and co-decision-makers. Everyone involved in The Loft contributed to its development. Some members of the Loft became ambassadors for the Loft. All creatives in the space would be invited to meetings to discuss where they felt the Loft was going and which direction they felt it should go in. There were also meetings where individual members would show their work to receive feedback and advice from their peers.

- Founder (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed)

- Loft members and Ambassadors
- Supported by Square (supported The Loft pop-up with a rent-free space for 6 months)
- Funded by Live Unltd (supports social entrepreneurs): £3,700
- Funded by Starbucks Youth Action (funds and supports young people wanting to make a positive impact in their community).

4.2 Addressing needs

Needs Addressed by The Loft:

For many of the young creatives working at The Loft, they felt that after University they did not know how move forward with what they wanted to do. They expressed that spaces elsewhere in Birmingham (such as in the Jewellery Quarter) was too expensive, thus out of reach for them as they did not have the finances available and felt that the money was equivalent to renting a flat. Some spaces in the city centre charged up to and over £300 a month and this did not include utilities, such as a clean working space, running water / a sink, good light (or even natural light), plug sockets (close by) and free Wi-Fi.

Monitoring Success Factors:

As stated above, the actors working in the space were responsible for driving The Loft forward (promotion, commissions, events keeping the space active, used and visible, etc.). Other creatives using the space were co-creators and co-decision-makers. Everyone involved in The Loft contributed to its development. Some members of the Loft became ambassadors for the Loft. All creatives in the space would be invited to meetings to discuss where they felt the Loft was going and which direction they felt it should go in. There were also meetings where individual members would show their work to receive feedback and advice off their peers. Being with other creatives, sharing ideas, suggesting improvements for best practice (on an individual level and for the direction of The Loft too) meant that constant and immediate feedback and monitoring enabled actors to develop and obtain opportunity. Feedback from peers indicated support on an individual level, with actors expressing that The Loft had a positive impact on their professional career. Examples of success factors, outputs and opportunities include:

1. Artist residencies (the space facilitating a city based project of the people in Birmingham);
2. A two-week pop-up vintage shop (a final year degree project by an undergraduate at BCU) which raised money (nearly £1000) for charity;
3. The development of an ethical brand;
4. Funding obtained by some artists / creatives through their involvement at The Loft;
5. Artists hosting sell-out life drawing sessions.

4.3 Empowerment, engagement and choice

Taking Part in Decision Making: The young people involved in The Loft are directly and actively involved with decision making about the direction of The Loft (see section above). Although the

activities and practices are part of the outcomes and success factors of working at The Loft, many of the practices and activities are collaborative or individual.

Empowerment: young people expressed that their involvement at The Loft had an impact on their confidence. The main themes that emerged in the interviews included:

- Young people feeling that their work is being recognised;
- Feeling comfortable and at ease in the space;
- Feeling confident in approaching other creatives, businesses and opportunities (for funding / commissions);
- Self-belief increased through peer support and being with likeminded others;
- Going to events with other creatives from The Loft, made it easier to interact with other people;
- Positive attitude fostered in having faith in your work and going forward with confidence;
- Lifelong friendships established – feeling connected with others and feeling connected with the industry.

Using opportunities:

The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) expressed that a: *‘[male, early 20s, self-employed] did an exhibit at The Loft. ‘He got huge hype and exposure and a partner Church in Australia paid from him to go out and show them how to build and exhibition. Also a community has been built. For example, I helped [woman, early 20s, self-employed] set up links to fund her first collection. These links are still maintained over Facebook but a physical space is still necessary. We can’t grow without that physical space.’*

There have been a **range of opportunities** generated and actively used by young people involved in The Loft (as ambassadors and members). The meetings they had to ‘critique’ each other’s work helped in developing ideas, connections and projects. Elements of co-creation are evident here, as well as a sense of belonging and identification with a group of like-minded others. Members and ambassadors from The Loft were responsible for looking after the studio space, promotional work and marketing events at The Loft, and assisting with other artists with their projects or events. Direct and active involvement with The Loft, therefore, enabled young people to use these opportunities to develop their portfolio, develop their skills and knowledge base, and develop experience (real world experience) beyond having a degree. Supporting and spreading awareness of their individual work was also a key priority, which was supported by all members and ambassadors at The Loft. Young people use the opportunities to choose and engage themselves (see evidence below). The above and below evidence how young people themselves can take an active part in decision making about the activities/practices in The Loft (i.e.: the direction of The Loft and giving feedback to others. Also, the openness, flexibility and support of The Loft mean that individual artists and creatives can go their own way. The Loft was not seen as a formal ‘collective,’ as members also felt that their work had an individual quality and they were not fixed or moulded by a formal set of beliefs. Examples of the **range of opportunities** generated and actively used by young people involved in The Loft include:

1. ***Developing an ethical brand [woman, early 20s, self-employed]:*** through a funding partner that the founder of The Loft knew, information about a funding opportunity was forwarded to her. She had been discussing an idea with the founder of The Loft about wanting to develop an ethical brand. He had been made aware of an opportunity for funding a project that socially

motivated, and her idea connected with this (environmental). The immediacy of the opportunity was evident in the creative being asked to submit an application straight away, on the day she was made aware of the opportunity. After she submitted the application, she was asked to pitch her idea the next day. From the pitch, she was awarded the funding.

2. ***Direction and further education [woman, early 20s, self-employed]:*** after working at The Loft, one ambassador noted that she wanted to go back into Higher Education to do an MA to specialise and progress in the direction she felt her career was going.
3. ***Life drawing classes [men, early 20s, self-employed]:*** actors using the space at The Loft to organise, manage, and implement life drawing sessions. The sessions invited people from outside The Loft to participate, which resulted in further promotion for the space for other creatives and artists. All life drawing classes sold out, demonstrating success in promoting the event and also addressing a need for such an event for creatives and artists. The space is accessible, independent and youth-led, making it appealing for like-minded people. The success of the life drawing classes led to the organisers obtaining exposure and collaboration / commission with the MAC (cultural organisation – external and engaged with young people).
4. ***Poster and event promotion for the MAC (cultural organisation – external and engaged with young people) [man, early 20s, self-employed]:*** commissions given by the MAC are promoted through various ways, such as through informal conversations, discussions with artists and open call outs. The commission was designing a poster (promotion) for a cinema event.
5. ***Posters and event promotion for The Loft [men, early 20s, self-employed]:*** members of The Loft had the opportunity to design promotional material for a range of events. This material was also disseminated on social media pages (Facebook and Twitter, etc.) to advertise the event(s) within the space.
6. ***Building a community of creatives:*** Two creatives in the space (female and man in early 20s, self-employed) did a residency at The Loft and collaborated on a digital art installation.

4.4 Stakeholders involved

Addressed in sections above, particularly ‘Actors’ in section 4.1 and section 4.3

4.5 Competences and resources involved

See above sections

4.6 Process evaluation criteria

Barriers to and drivers for implementation:

One main barrier to implementation is funding, particularly as the founder of The Loft identified that arts based projects are already discriminated against when trying to obtain funding. Another barrier connected with funding is the availability of (affordable) space in the city centre to set the initiative up, to sustain it and to be affordable for other young people to get involved. Setting the initiative up was difficult, particularly as the city council was seen as difficult, hard to contact and uninterested in the project. Funding and support was sourced elsewhere, by Live Unltd (£3,700) and Starbucks Youth

Action. The Centre manager of The Square (where The Loft was based) let The Loft use the space and liaised with the landlords on The Loft's behalf. The space was given to The Loft rent for 6 months, but they had to cover utility costs. The Loft has managed to overcome some of the public funding barriers largely through the support of charities and companies seeing the need for the project to be implemented in a physical form. Other solutions to financial and personnel barriers have involved collaboration with larger-scale organisations. This has also helped in the promotion and marketing of activities e.g. the relationships with the MAC.

Limitations of innovativeness: The innovativeness is, however, limited due to the 6 month lease expiring (August 2014). The Loft was in a city centre location / building where there are redevelopment and demolition plans. The initial negotiations for the lease by the management at The Square, was for 6 months only and, within the 6 months, The Loft was given a free lease, but had to cover costs for utilities. As The Loft is not an agency, the income generated only covered these costs. Income was generated by charging young people to use the space, put events on or exhibit. The founder expressed that although networks and connections were maintained after the closure of the space - through social media and the digital world - The Loft can only really survive with having a physical location. The Loft's philosophy in bringing creatives and artists together and addressing inequalities that they face (see section 2.2 under 'main target group' and 'the main aims of The Loft,' and 'core beliefs and values' section 3 on page 16).

Other barriers: needing a clear plan, connecting with external companies / NGOs who believe in the value of the project, having access to a bank account.

4.7 Innovativeness

Innovativeness: The main focus of The Loft is improving employment for graduates want a career in the creative industry (for a company or freelance). For further description of the logic of innovations, see above sections. The innovation at The Loft is providing affordable, accessible and immediate space for young creatives to work together to improve employability and experience. The key stakeholders have been identified in section 4.1 (see 'Actors') and the levels of engagement of actors are identified in section 4.3. The innovative solutions have been developed form an individual strategy, but has been developed and sustained by networks, friendship and the individual strategies of the young people using The Loft. The target group at The Loft had ambition and ability, but lacked networks, space to do work (beyond their home), and money.

The Loft directly addressed the key needs (see previous sections) of young creatives graduating from University and finding it difficult to establish themselves as freelancers in the creative industries. The success of The Loft is down to the young people themselves, as they are actively responding to their own needs by being involved in The Loft and actively driving each other to respond to opportunities and events to improve employability and enhance their skills. The participants felt that University did not provide them with networks to connect with to develop their dreams after they graduated, nowhere they taught how to design a pitch for a client. These real world expectations from clients and the need for industry experience was a crucial factor that The Loft addressed in its implementation and through the events and happenings in the space. Success is dependent on what the individual person does with the opportunities they have access to. The Loft bridges gaps, but the individual needs to still work towards achieving commissions and actively wanting to develop their skills and experience. Continued support would mean city council's and private landlords to give pop-ups, like The Loft, disused or developing spaces rent-free until they can be self-sufficient.

Innovativeness from this youth-led and independent pop-up, connects to various success factors (see below).

- Empowering;

- Communing;
- Engagement;
- Enriching skills;
- Social capital (employability);
- Sociability;
- Providing a working space and resources (peer support, electricity, affordable space, utilities etc.) where young people can actively and collectively generate / obtain opportunities.

Limitations of innovativeness: The innovativeness is, however, limited due to the 6 month lease expiring (August 2014). The Loft was in a city centre location / building where there are redevelopment and demolition plans. The initial negotiations for the lease by the management at The Square, was for 6 months only and, within the 6 months, The Loft was given a free lease, but had to cover costs for utilities. As The Loft is not an agency, the income generated only covered these costs. Income was generated by charging young people to use the space, put events on or exhibit. The founder expressed that although networks and connections were maintained after the closure of the space - through social media and the digital world - The Loft can only really survive with having a physical location. The Loft's philosophy in bringing creatives and artists together and addressing inequalities that they face (see section 2.2 under 'main target group' and 'the main aims of The Loft,' and 'core beliefs and values' section 3 on page 16).

4.8 Success factors and conditions, critical implementation barriers

The main changes in the implementation of the project are detailed in the sections above and the overview table on pages 1 to 6. The overall-philosophy can be found in the overview table on pages 1 to 6 and sections 2.2 (under Philosophy, core beliefs and values) and 3 (under Philosophy, core beliefs and values behind The Loft). The Loft has been transferred to Athens, thus has transferability to other locations and contexts with young people sharing the same or having similar needs. At the time of the pop-up shop, there were no other similar youth-led and informal spaces like The Loft. Its success has seen a growth of similar spaces with similar philosophies in the city centre.

Critical success factors: the actors/practitioners consider there to be a combination of critical success factors. These include immediacy, accessibility, quality and affordability of the space, but also being with likeminded others, feeling more confident in 'doing it alone,' and developing networks to sustain their dreams in the creative industry.

1. ***Success factor (Loft member and ambassador):*** An illustrator (male, early 20s, graduate and self-employed) at The Loft expressed that the working environment was a positive factor in the success of The Loft. The sense of community, being able to 'dip' into other projects and be part of collaborative projects with likeminded people was empowering and exciting. He said that there was no hierarchy at The Loft; instead the people involved were all working together and supportive of any project. The people he met at The Loft are people he still speaks to, even after the pop-up closed down. He felt that his work was recognised and he was also recognised – when at other events – as being part of The Loft. Although he stressed that this may seem a collective identity, they were all still working on separate projects but were committed to sustaining The Loft as a space and idea. He stressed that client work is still 'off your own back,' as The Loft is not an agency. The impact The Loft has had on him as a person includes confidence building and feeling that he can approach (potential) clients.

2. **Success factor (Loft member and ambassador):** A fashion designer (female, early 20s, graduate and self-employed) discussed that the success factors of The Loft, for her, were collective support, the immediacy of opportunities, and establishing lifelong friends established. She identified that The Loft provided important space where one major need is addressed. This need is graduates not knowing how to go forward with their degree and turning it into a career. She expressed The Loft fostered an attitude of having faith in your dreams and just going for opportunities. Being at The Loft helped her realise this, but also helped her to clearly see where she wanted to go: back into Higher Education to specialise (MA level).
3. **Success factor (Loft member and ambassador):** A illustrator (male, early 20s, graduate and self-employed) expressed that The Loft was accessible with good transport links and felt that if The Loft was not there, he would have been working alone at home. Both he and a friend heard about The Loft through the founder of The Loft, and the space appealed to them as it was affordable than other spaces they had viewed in Birmingham city centre. He expressed that The Loft was aimed more at young people, so was more appealing for him. Up to the time of The Loft, he had no paid commissions, but through being involved at The Loft and having other people sharing experiences with him, he successfully obtained a commission. The young creative said that University did not teach him about business or getting commissions, so it was important for him to be involved at The Loft, as older people in the arts scene shared experiences with him. The advice he received, from networks and connections through being involved at The Loft, was face-to-face and with people who had already had experience in the arts beyond University.
4. **Success factor (Client from the MAC):** The next generation and young people's producer (male, employed) stated that there are a lot of issues and problems for young graduates (arts and creative based degree pathways) in accessing programmes beyond their degree. The Loft is an example of an initiative that needs to be supported and fostered by policy makers. He maintained that The Loft and young creatives are a crucial part of the city infrastructure. The important factors that drive the success of The Loft are: the immediacy of the location, exposure, access, being youth-led and independent. He expressed that the independent factor drives the focus of The Loft: being youth orientated. The fact that The Loft is not part of or within an institution / organisation is important, as it can be easy for an institution to lose sight of young people and their needs when they are not central in driving an initiative forward.

Implementation of success factors: See sections above on mentoring and feedback discussions, but also the overview table on pages 1 to 6. The immediacy, accessibility, quality and affordability of the space and also networking from The Loft were seen to be key factors that facilitated success.

5. Project results/outcomes

The impact on inequalities and the goals (that have been accomplished by the project) have been established in the previous sections and section 6. The evidence about the positive impacts/success can be found in the success stories shared by young people and the founder (see previous sections). Despite the success of The Loft, there are some limitations identified through the experiences of young people at The Loft, which are explored later in this section. The Loft has addressed the immediate needs of young people at the specific period of time that The Loft ran as a physical space. This was also transferred to Athens too, showing the transferability of the initiative and how it can be adapted to the immediate needs of young people across Europe. The young people (see previous / above sections) have discussed the positive impact of being involved in The Loft on their careers and their skills development. The short period of time The Loft was in its physical form at The Square,

indicates positive long-term effects (*empowerment, communing, social capital, employability*) of being involved at The Loft. As The Loft was not an agent, it was the young person's responsibility to utilise the opportunity and affordability of the space to develop themselves. Without the space, the drive of The Loft and the positive collegial support off people in The Loft, the young people involved would be in the same position they found themselves in when they first graduated.

The Loft directly addressed the key needs (see previous sections) of young creatives graduating from University and finding it difficult to establish themselves as freelancers in the creative industries. The success of The Loft is down to the young people themselves, as they are actively responding to their own needs by being involved in The Loft and actively driving each other to respond to opportunities and events to improve employability and enhance their skills. The participants felt that university did not provide them with networks to connect with to develop their dreams after they graduated, nowhere they taught how to design a pitch for a client. These real world expectations from clients and the need for industry experience was a crucial factor that The Loft addressed in its implementation, and through the events and happenings in the space. Success is dependent on what the individual person does with the opportunities they have access to. The Loft bridges gaps, but the individual needs to still work towards achieving commissions and actively wanting to develop their skills and experience. Continued support would mean city council and private landlords to give pop-ups, like The Loft, disused or developing spaces rent-free until they can be self-sufficient as (sustainable) funding is hard to obtain for arts-based initiatives.

The actors/practitioners consider there to be a combination of critical success factors. These include **immediacy, accessibility, quality and affordability** of the space, but also being with likeminded others, feeling more confident in 'going it alone,' and developing networks to sustain their dreams in the creative industry. The important factors that drive the success of The Loft are: **the immediacy of the location, exposure, access, being youth-led and independent**. The independent factor drives the focus of The Loft and due to The Loft being entirely youth orientated. The fact that The Loft is not part of or within an institution / organisation is important, as it can be easy for an institution to lose sight of young people and their needs when they are not central in driving an initiative forward. The previous section have highlighted that there are a lot of issues and problems for young graduates (arts and creative based degree pathways) in accessing programmes, jobs and studios beyond their degree. The Loft is an example of an initiative that needs to be supported and fostered by policy makers, particularly as The Loft and young creatives are a crucial part of the city infrastructure.

The participants in the interviews all indicated that The Loft's **working environment** was a positive factor in its success as they were involved and working in an encouraging space with like-minded others who were in similar situations. This **enabled young people to identify with one another** and to share a space where they could **continue their creative endeavours** through various **support systems** and **access to opportunities**. The support systems in place included meetings where young creatives using the space could receive feedback from their peers on their current work. The **sense of community**, being able to 'dip' into other projects and be part of collaborative projects with likeminded people was **empowering** and exciting for young people at The Loft. Young people felt that the space was **led by young people** and fostered an environment that encouraged them to continue their pathway to alternative employment. Young people also made friends, highlighting important affective qualities that empower young people to recognise the value in their work / themselves, but also that they can actively choose their own way to employment and will be encouraged and supported by peers. Young people involved in The Loft were – to various degrees - all working together and **supportive** of the projects happening in the space, such as helping to advertise events, looking after the front exhibition space and giving feedback to work. Young people felt their **work and dreams were recognised** and respected, on a professional level, and this enabled them to gain more confidence in approach potential clients and submitting funding applications. The Loft fostered an attitude of having faith in your dreams and just going for opportunities.

The **immediacy of space** and the **immediacy of opportunities** meant that more young people, who were artists or creatives, were attracted to the space. The Loft provided important space where one

major need is addressed. This need is graduates not knowing how to go forward with their degree and turning it into a career. The affordability of space appealed to young people working in The Loft space, and enabled creatives to work in a city centre location, instead of at home. Through being involved at The Loft and having other people sharing experiences, many young people at The Loft successfully obtained commissions, expanded their experience and gained skills in event organisation, promotion and pitching. Older people in the arts scene shared experiences with young creatives at The Loft, which meant that the advice attained (from networks and connections) fulfilled their needs that were not addressed at university (e.g. management, business plan for an arts-based company, freelancing and commission organisation). The Loft was **accessible** with good transport links and face-to-face encounters with likeminded others, meant young people felt connected to the city and felt that their dreams could be realised through an **alternative pathway to employment**. This alternative pathway to employment was something that young people designed and obtained for themselves, specifically due to lack of support from institutions and job centres for young people in the creative scenes / industries.

The core beliefs and values behind The Loft included the need to increase young people's social capital, to develop their experience in the creative art scenes and creative industries, and to increase their awareness of opportunities. The Loft believed in accessibility and immediacy of space for young creatives who wanted to work in a collaborative and creative working environment with likeminded others. The Loft had 86 spaces for individuals to work and individuals were charged £50 a month (included electricity, free Wi-Fi, running water and good light), which is a fraction of the cost of spaces at other locations where individuals would be charged roughly £300 a month (not including utilities, etc.). The core beliefs and values of The Loft were generated through focusing on **increasing** young people's **social capital**. The needs of young graduates in the creative arts scenes and industries were directly and immediately addressed by the physical space opened by The Loft, but also through young people actively engaging in activities and events through working at The Loft.

Needs of young people were directly addressed through the establishment of The Loft, which provided accessible space and assessable opportunities. This enabled young people to develop networks and increase exposure for their work in a city centre location and in other spaces where creative events were happening (building positive relationships). These factors improved young people's employability (see above sections, but specifically section 4.8 for evidence) and empowered them to pave a sustainable pathway into alternative employment. For information on the implementation of success factors, please see sections previous sections on mentoring and feedback discussions, but also the overview table on pages 1 to 6. The immediacy, accessibility, quality and affordability of the space and also networking from The Loft were seen to be key factors that facilitated success.

Positive effects:

Positive effects include: **empowerment, communing, social capital, employability**, supported by NGOs and young people themselves.

- The **multiplicity of roles** for young people at The Loft meant that young people were **actively engaged** in driving the success of The Loft, whilst working on their own projects. This indicates that young people in the space were actively helping each other **overcome barriers and issues** that they faced after graduating from university.
- The Loft is an example of a pop-up that enables the **central role of young people in directing their own futures** and successfully **improving their employability**.
- The Loft demonstrates how young people can **transform disused spaces** within city centres, and make these spaces into **productive working environments** where young people directly try to overcome the inequalities they face when wanting to be part of the **labour market**.

- Informal networks and connections have enabled young people to become **more employable**, which is **cost effective** for city councils with shrinking budgets. Populating empty spaces owned by the city council with initiatives like The Loft, would generate income, enable young people to be engaged in **alternative pathways to employment**, and to make sure that spaces are not damaged by vandals or squatters. As a result of this, young people would also be viewed differently, instead of being seen as a burden or an issue.
- The success factor of spaces like The Loft is an **ongoing process**, with actors directly linked to a venture's success or failure. **Success is about clear goals, aims and targeting the right group of young people**. The initiative will not suit all young people, but it engages with a section of young people whose needs are important to directly address. The space is made by young people, for young people making it appealing and making it a space where young people can engage on their own terms.
- The success factors of The Loft are through **young people themselves making opportunities happen** and **actively using the space** and connecting with opportunities when they happen. The young people make opportunities happen too, by their involvement in promoting The Loft and their own work, but also the **exposure** they gain in networking and engaging in the space. The Loft is not an agency, so young people are given the responsibility to make a success of their ventures and use the space as a platform to grow from. This responsibility gives young people a sense of ownership, self-value, respect and importance, allowing them to continually work towards goals that they see as attainable.

Reflections on the limitations:

The individual: success is dependent on what the individual person does with the opportunities they have access to. The Loft bridges gaps, but the individual needs to still work towards achieving commissions and actively wanting to develop their skills and experience.

Temporality of space: The funder of The Loft [male, early 20s, self-employed] expressed that: '*we can't grow without that physical space.*' The founder and members have all expressed that The Loft needs physical space. After The Loft closed, the young people still stayed in contact and networked online. The members and ambassadors stated that The Loft needs to be more than just online, as the physical location and connections through events, is what made The Loft successful and gave them the opportunity to develop their own practice. Sustainable space is, therefore, precarious. This was a point of frustration for young people wanting to get into and established within the creative industries. The city council and other businesses have spaces that are disused or in the process of redevelopment, so populating these empty spaces with initiatives like The Loft, would generate income, enable young people to be engaged in alternative pathways to employment, and to make sure that spaces are not damaged by vandals or squatters.

Funding and sustainable support: arts based practices and innovations find it difficult to obtain mainstream and official institutional support. It is felt that arts based initiatives and projects are discriminated against and that the city council ignores the value in investing in initiatives like The Loft. Akin to the temporality of space, financial support is often short term and via charities. Sustainable support is, therefore, precarious. This was a point of frustration for young people wanting to get into and established within the creative industries.

Limitations of innovativeness: The innovativeness is, however, limited due to the 6 month lease expiring (August 2014). The Loft was in a city centre location / building where there are redevelopment and demolition plans. The initial negotiations for the lease by the management at The Square, was for 6 months only and, within the 6 months, The Loft was given a free lease, but had to cover costs for utilities. As The Loft is not an agency, the income generated only covered these costs.

Income was generated by charging young people to use the space, put events on or exhibit. The founder expressed that although networks and connections were maintained after the closure of the space - through social media and the digital world - The Loft can only really survive with having a physical location. The Loft's philosophy in bringing creatives and artists together and addressing inequalities that they face (see section 2.2 under 'main target group' and 'the main aims of The Loft,' and 'core beliefs and values' section 3 on page 16).

Other barriers: needing a clear plan, connecting with external companies / NGOs who believe in the value of the project, having access to a bank account.

6. Final reflections

Its core values/principles clearly appeal to young people (creatives and artists) as do its styles of communication and working together. The values or core principles are not context dependant but could be transferable in conjunction with a style of working which places young people and young people's needs at the centre of all they do. Being independent, youth-led and fostering collaboration allows young people to shape their futures for themselves. The Loft opens up assessable space, but young people need to be motivated to want to network, develop skills and build experience. Without The Loft, opportunities and connection would not be easily accessible.

Amongst the many inequalities that young people are facing, in this context, there are two predominant themes:

1. *Structural causes:* high levels of unemployment and the lack of employment and training opportunities; poor levels structural support for creative/arts-based practices/initiatives; cutbacks in social welfare support;
2. *Individual causes:* Lack of social and emotional competences; lack of self-confidence and self-belief; not knowing where opportunities are; lack of positive personal support structures arising from family, community or peer networks; distrust and distance from those with power.

The main issues which are targeted by The Loft are (see also 2.2 'Main aims of The Loft'):

1. Support for young people who are aiming for 'alternative' ways to get ahead, with sufficient competences and/or social support;
2. Motivated to integrate into mainstream society but in need of support, guidance and self-esteem;
3. Young people – in the creative industries – graduating from University but unaware of pathways or lacking networks to support their career in the creative industries.

The main aims of The Loft were achieved, as evidenced in all of the lections above. The Loft and individuals within drove a bottom-up youth-led initiative that tackled the inequalities the young creatives and artists were facing when graduating out of university. The founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) identified that young creatives needed a space where they could meet likeminded others to network and have opportunities to collaborate or obtain work. He saw a gap in present (official) services, where young people – outside more traditional employment and training pathways (i.e. outside the formal job creation/welfare support services) – were seeking to 'go-it-alone' outside and survive in the labour market. The lack of support (from official services, etc.) for alterative employment pathways meant that there was a lack of alternative approaches (e.g. arts-based experiences) to assist young people in personal development and the acquisition of social

competences and skills. The Loft sought to rectify this by directly responding to the needs of young creatives in the city. Creating a platform and workspace to enriching participants' ideas and sustainability plans, meant that young people's talents were developed through interacting with other creatives. Opportunities for employment or commissions were also opened up through connections and visibility within The Loft space. Examples of opportunities can be found section 4.8 and also below:

1. Artist residencies (the space facilitating a city based project of the people in Birmingham);
2. A two-week pop-up vintage shop (a final year degree project by an undergraduate at BCU) which raised money (nearly £1000) for charity;
3. The development of an ethical brand;
4. Funding obtained by some artists / creatives through their involvement at The Loft;
5. Artists hosting sell-out life drawing sessions;
6. Giving opportunities and a platform: (e.g.) the founder of The Loft (architect graduate – man, early 20s, self-employed) expressed that a: *'[male, early 20s, self-employed] did an exhibit at The Loft. 'He got huge hype and exposure and a partner Church in Australia paid from him to go out and show them how to build and exhibition. Also a community has been built. For example, I helped [woman, early 20s, self-employed] set up links to fund her first collection. These links are still maintained over Facebook but a physical space is still necessary. We can't grow without that physical space.'*

The Loft, therefore, **increased** young people's **social capital**. The Loft offered and provided **accessible** space, as evidenced by providing affordable city centre work-spaces for artists and other people in the creative industries. The Loft also **enabled young people to access** realistic opportunities to network. This was established through hard work and commitment via showcasing work, collaboration, work-experience with other creatives, support when bidding for commissions, obtaining commissions through support and mentoring with other members. Young people participating and working at The Loft had a space where they could directly use as an **opportunity** to showcase work, for exposure, to build networks and to generate business, leading young people to obtain independence and commission-based work to sustain their career / business needs. Importantly, the ethos and philosophy of The Loft generated a positive working environment, where young people felt **empowered**. Many young creatives expressed that The Loft enabled them to have space, share ideas and connect to networks. These attributes enabled young people to develop ambition, self-belief, competences and further social **networks**. The young people at The Loft **established a collaborative atmosphere**, where positive relationships were built. All of these factors **helped to improve employability** and self-efficiency when going it alone.

The Loft bridges gaps, but the individual needs to still work towards achieving commissions and actively wanting to develop their skills and experience. As expressed in section 4.7: the success of The Loft is down to the young people themselves, as they are actively responding to their own needs by being involved in The Loft and actively driving each other to respond to opportunities and events to improve employability and enhance their skills. The participants felt that University did not provide them with networks to connect with to develop their dreams after they graduated, nowhere they taught how to design a pitch for a client. These real world expectations from clients and the need for industry experience was a crucial factor that The Loft addressed in its implementation and through the events and happenings in the space. Success is dependent on what the individual person does with the opportunities they have access to. The Loft bridges gaps, but the individual needs to still work towards achieving commissions and actively wanting to develop their skills and experience.