

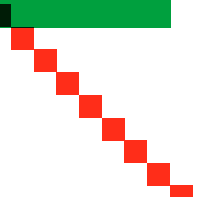
The Good Hubbing Guide



Building Indie Game Maker Collectives



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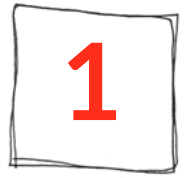
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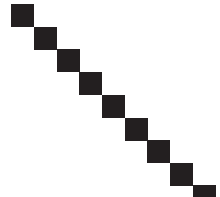
Acknowledgements

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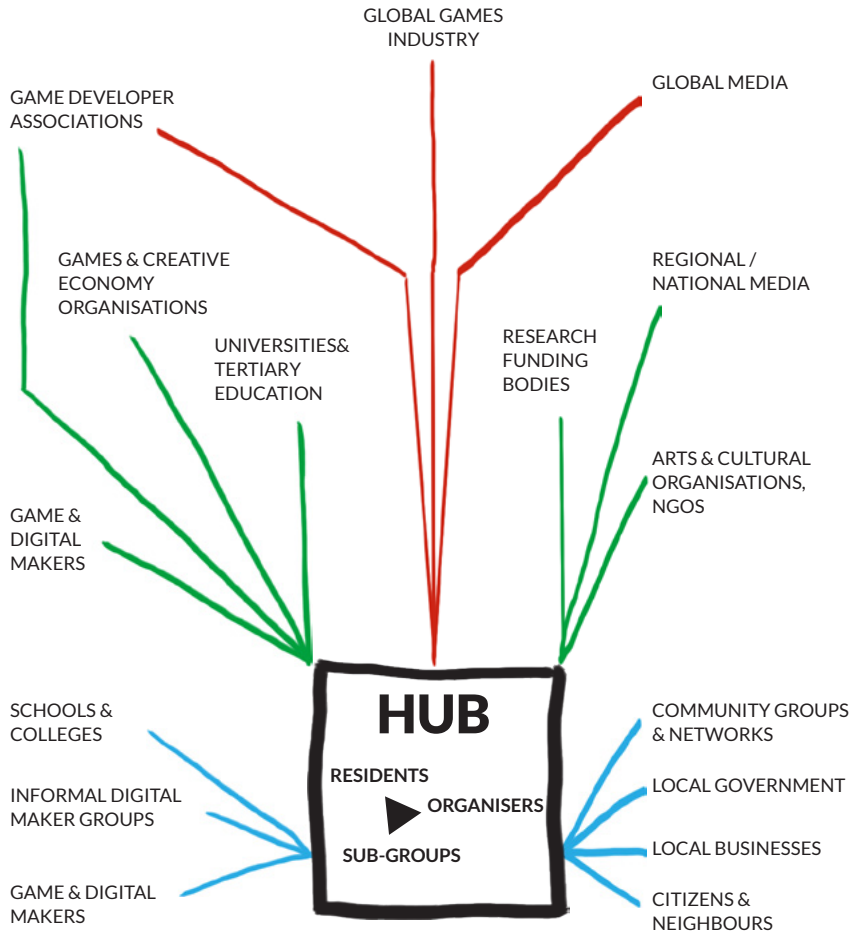
Introduction



Creative Territories in a Nutshell (and a Diagram)

This Guide comes from the activities of the Arts and Humanities Research Council Video Games Research Networking Scheme project, Creative Territories. The project looked at the recent emergence of small and independent game maker collectives. The aims were to get some bearings on these as part of the growth of indie games production and to consider how to support them as valuable components in the long term sustainability of this important breeding ground of video game creativity which is also now a significant sector of the industry in its own right.

Our scoping of the territory these recently emerging collectives of video game makers occupy is summarised in the diagram below. It shows that video game makers who come together in shared work arrangements live in interconnected and overlapping local, regional, national and global “places”. Our Guide is about how to “live long and prosper” there.



KEY

- LOCAL
- REGIONAL / NATIONAL
- GLOBAL

For the Creative Territories network business and culture are symbiotically linked—there is no economy without culture, and this is especially the case with the “experiential” products of the creative economy like video games. Taking care of economic development has to take care of culture just as much as cultural policy must always consider how it makes possible sustainable forms of work, play and self-realization for the individual members of the community. Making a commercially successful industry that will last more than a few years, and that will take root in a community, a region and a nation and become part of its identity: all this is what makes a truly valuable “creative territory”.

We found that

- Creativity is a socially enabled and commonly held cultural asset
- **New** tools and new markets mean that indie games can work at a micro business level developing new producers and new talent
- Whilst the games industry is a global marketplace its production is always local
- Micro game businesses benefit from co-location and collaboration opportunities to give them shared know-how and to enhance their profiles

- Hubs and their networks can provide innovation test beds that ameliorate the boom and bust cycle of the AAA games industry
- Creative businesses will thrive and become sustainable when they are embedded in their regional economies
- Greater diversity produces better innovation
- Diversity requires active inclusion practices
- The value of hubs and their networks increases sharply when independent mentors and producers are attached to start-ups
- Different regions will produce different kinds of hubs in terms of the local community of practice they are part of, the kinds of games they produce, the kinds of talent they develop and processes they use

Recommendations

For Hubs and Their Members

- Be open to new people and new talent: hubs need a regular refresh of the beneficiaries
- Operate as a hub for the surrounding community of game and creative makers via events, social media and collaboration with other groups
- Develop an inclusion practice not just a policy

- Hubs should work with their regional schools, colleges and universities to maintain their talent flow and help transform perceptions of games as creative career
- Create open and accessible opportunities for 'non members' in the local community to engage and exchange



For Those Supporting Games and Creative Economy

- Recognise the resilience-building hubs can do for fledgling game businesses and include it in your plans for strategic support
- Use the critical mass of the hub for staging and promoting events, initiatives, and for consulting the grassroots of the industry
- Volunteer run hubs will do even more for their members and local game maker networks with some staff support for manager, mentor, marketing and funding search roles
- For School, Colleges and Universities: Explore opportunities for fruitful exchanges, teaching visits, placements and research with the hub (remembering they are not Microsoft but several independent creative producers busy growing viable businesses)



Context

“The way we see it, the indie movement in the UK is thriving, and what that is creating is a scene of innovation”.

So said Derek De Filippo of Kuju Entertainment upon the launch in mid-2014 of their Kuju Startups support fund on the Seedrs crowdfunding platform. Kuju’s savvy initiative to connect to this scene includes partnering up with some of the emerging indie developer groups like the Bristol Games Hub to help push out Kuju Startups and to gather and advise promising prospects.

This little story illustrates two of the three main things about independent games development in the UK right now that motivated the development of *The Good Hubbing Guide*:

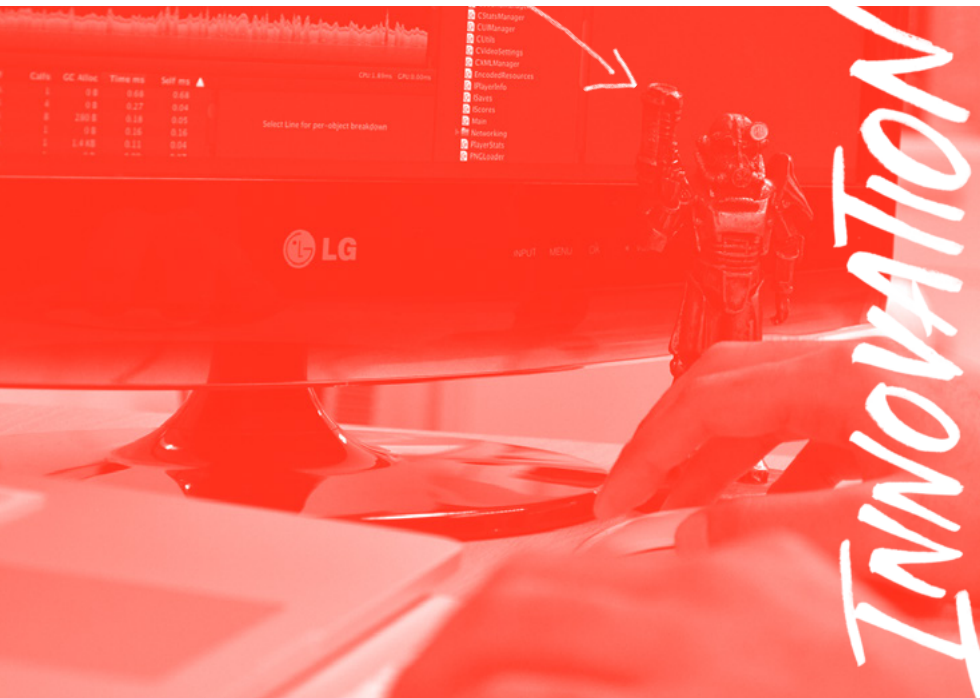
1. That indie game development has indeed become a significant component of the videogame industry here (as elsewhere) for a number of reasons—economic, technological, and cultural. The global financial crisis

hit the established console-based industry at about the same time that the smartphone and tablet devices were opening up new platforms for less AAA-looking games and gamified apps. Steam, game bundling and other distribution models also filled the void with cheaper and different kinds of games. Cross-platform game packages (above all Unity) and user communities bridged the gap between expensive proprietary engines and indie production toolsets. Culturally, the maturing and expansion of the range of games (and game players) started to break down formerly stiff barriers to legitimacy for games as a form of expression, experimentation and serious cultural contribution. Indiegade co-founder Celia Pearce says we are at a “watershed moment” for the industry and cites the 2014 IGDA Developer Satisfaction Survey result that a game high 48% of respondents identified themselves as independent.

2. That collaborations between indie game makers (developers but also writers, graphic artists and audio producers) have emerged that offer important community and enterprise support such as the relay between aspiring indie, established developer and investment funding in the story above. The Bristol Games Hub is representative

of new shapings of collaboration between indie makers. It shares some elements of the university enterprise incubators and the creative industry hotdesk providers (typically local government or regionally funded initiatives) but it is different also. Its gene pool is at least half full of the indie game “community of practice” that Orlando Guevara Villalobos described in 2011—organised around “the practice of game development and the passion unleashed by the nature of the tasks entailed in it” and powered by socials, game jams and meetups at industry conventions and other events. The BGH and other similar co-locations have moved on toward more elaborate crystallisations of the community of practice toward a “community of production” that bring new possibilities as well as new challenges.





3. So what is the third thing we are interested in? It is about how the first two fit together, and how they could or should. *The Good Hubbing Guide* gathers the collective efforts, wit and wisdom (yes, we are wizards) of a network of researchers, game makers and creative sector people who looked into the window of opportunity created at this “watershed moment” for indie games to identify how to make this a sustainable transformation of the business and culture of videogames.

The Network

Creative Territories is an Arts and Humanities Research Council Video Games Research Networking Scheme project that ran from 2014 into 2015. Patrick Crogan of the Digital Cultures Research Centre was the principal investigator with co-investigator Helen Kennedy of the University of Brighton. The project partners were the Bristol Games Hub (with co-directors Tomas and Debbie Rawlings as our best friends there) and the Center for the Study of Digital Games and Play at Utrecht University (represented by Professor Joost Raessens and Stefan Werning). Bios for all the members of the network can be found on our project website here. And the Creative Territories site will continue to be the venue for further reflections and discussion papers about the project.

The Good Hubbing Guide is based on the project's workshops and other activities and synthesises the best bits of our discussions, debates, disagreements, dinners, derives, and other dalliances. We ran three major events and some extra activities and meetings. A lunch with the residents of the Bristol Games Hub was followed by a half-day event in April 2014 before the first international workshop in May at the Hub. After some time digesting all of that and exploring some

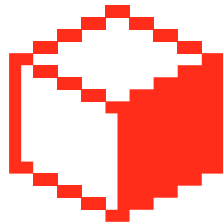
of the new connections made we reconvened in Utrecht in August as part of Utrecht University's graduate summer school in games and play research, and met at the Dutch Game Garden for a tour and some discussions with Garden residents (should they be called gnomes?). In November we held a network meeting and a symposium for invited graduate researchers (supported by our project's bursary fund), developers and creative organisations which brought over our Dutch members as well as indie game developer and Indiecade co-founder Celia Pearce (Northeastern University) and games educationalist and activist Jen Jenson (York University and the "Feminists in Games" project).

We looked at a lot of different collectives and collaborations between game makers and other interests, but our major case studies were the Bristol Games Hub, the Dutch Game Garden (JP van Seventer) and the Leamington Spa Arch Creatives (Alex Darby). These three ventures provide different instances of these new kinds of collaborations with different funding arrangements and orientations to developer, state, community and educational constituencies, but each are working at formalising this model of a community of production in a sustainable way.

The Good Hubbing Guide is organised into ideas and approaches about:

In-house: what and how co-location of indie game makers works in practice in the hubs we looked at and what we can learn from that. This section also includes some ideas about “house rules” that the hub should collectively put together and put into practice. This is an (economic as much as ethical) argument for codes of conduct and guidelines for inclusion and diversity (and for what kind of behaviour belongs in the doghouse).

Front of house: what kinds of relationships to the non-game community the game making hub should cultivate that work best to grow a strong creative territory.




2

In-house



Three Benefits of Colocation

In our workshops we spent a lot of time looking at the benefits and the possibilities of bringing game makers together physically, how this works and can work better. The key gains in working in a shared space with other independent game makers are similar to those identified by other creative and specialist makers for example in the Fablab movement (recently NESTA has published some excellent data about the growth of these kinds of spaces across the UK). These gains revolve around three main areas:



The emergence of a milieu that provides moral support, a social network and professional development.

The importance of linking the collective to the wider community of game makers and fellow travellers

The attainment of a critical mass that opens up access for the individual game makers to a range of commercial, creative sector and community networks of people and organisations interested in what they are doing.

Milieu

Even though they are working on different projects, co-location leads to the sharing of expertise amongst residents. Dan Ashton's summary of a workshop about this at the Bristol Games Hub identified both specialist and more generic knowledge sharing going on. A graphic artist can get some advice from a programmer, or some technical fix can be shared between programmers. Sometimes, as in the case of Turbo Island Games at the BGH, new partnerships and new projects can arise from a fertile milieu. But as Mathijs de Vaan, David Stark and Balasz Vedres point out in examining collaboration in game making, it is a “messy process” and this has to be respected—people speaking in different tongues can sometimes find themselves in spaces of “non comprehension” but from this “creoles” can emerge that liven up the creative process.

Also more general advice about business arrangements, marketing or crowdfunding can circulate across informal conversations. Alex Darby, co-founder of the Arch Creatives at Leamington Spa emphasises the value of a “collaborative, open, sharing and supportive” model he dubs “hippy Hollywood”.



Because adaptation is vital in the changing landscape of the games business, tiny companies have to be especially good at it and community support is key for them.

What should the collectives do to organise this milieu? It's about what network member Jon Dovey calls "curating humans". Easy to say but less easy to achieve. Let's start with some material necessities and work upwards:

Cost of Deskspace

Flexible commitment is the key quality for enabling independent and micro game teams to join a co-located community. The Arch Creatives are supported by local council and have the means to offer maximum flexibility to prospective hub residents: 3 hours hotdesking for free, pay as you go for longer stays, and a discount for paying monthly in advance. The Bristol Games Hub has no ongoing external support but still offers very flexible rental terms to residents, with monthly rentals at a flat fee per desk (includes wifi, coffee, cleaning, everything). The Dutch Game Garden is funded by grants from the local and national Dutch Governments and from the European Commission. It offers subsidised space rental on an annual basis.





Community

Interruptability

This is an idea the Bristol Games Hub borrowed from the Pervasive Media Studio in Bristol's Watershed media arts organisation (where the Hub's co-founders 'lived' for a time). Residents work at the Hub on the understanding that it's okay for them to go and ask someone else there a question or find out what they are up to, and it's okay for others to 'interrupt' them as well. Making this explicit is a way of encouraging people to use their time in the shared space productively for both their own projects and the general wellbeing of the collective. It is an example of a way in which an ethos of the exchange of ideas, expertise and social support for the common good can be shaped by a (semi) formal rule or guideline (more on guidelines and codes of practice later). In practice it seems to work pretty well (at both the Bristol Games Hub and the Pervasive Media Studio)—people respect the licence it gives them (you don't see people walking up to residents in the middle of a skype call for example) and of course you are allowed to renegotiate the interruption if you are in the middle of something that demands all your attention.



Support and Mentoring

The best funded of our main case studies, the Dutch Game Garden, has a more formal, funded support and mentoring process, with dedicated staff employed to arrange mentor relationships and provide specific support when needed by residents. Development Director JP van Seventer explains that the Garden is set up to provide “intervention” in resident projects when the team asks for it, on aspects ranging from funding sources, skills and personnel requirements, contract negotiations, to marketing and promotion. In addition to this the DGG is able to organise classes, matchmaking and promotional events in its space in the heart of Utrecht. For example they have these brilliant demo consoles that look like game arcade machines:



Both the Arch Creatives and Bristol Games Hub people on the project visited Utrecht and saw the tremendous value in being able to offer such support through dedicated and experienced staff. The BGH residents thought a go to person on project funding possibilities and the ins and outs of applying to agencies like research bodies with creative economy money, the BBC or the Wellcome Trust would be really valuable.



But the volunteer energy in a well setup hub can bear lots of fruit as well. At the Bristol Games Hub a Unity developers group, a marketing group, a board game group and a women makers group, the Her Games collective (an initiative launched by two participants in the XX Game Jam) have grown out of this energy.



House Rules

The game maker collectives Creative Territories examined came together from the bottom-up in one way or another. A big part of their unique character and potential comes from this peer-to-peer collaboration amongst indies. Any group starts to form structures and routines of practice and an everyday culture over time. These often start out as an automatic copy and paste of ways of doing things that are familiar to them.

The Creative Territories project spent a fair amount of time considering the potential of these indie hubs to nudge existing game-making culture in a different direction. Like every production culture there are things about the game industry that could be improved. The elephant in the room for game production while Creative Territories was running was the ugly #gamergate “controversy” which saw a repetition and intensification of vicious and vexatious anonymous social media harassment, dirty tricks and the like

directed chiefly against women (including some of our network) brave enough to say something about the position of women as game characters or as game producers in the mainstream industry. Celia Pearce saw in this a sign that the transformation of game making and game culture were really getting to the noisy but nasty misogynistic minority desperate to hold onto some male adolescent “gamer” identity. Jen Jenson reads it as a continuation of a very long tradition (all the way back to Homer’s *Odyssey*) of a public effort to exclude women’s voices from contributing to public discussion and public culture. And more recently it continues the strident and systematic campaigns to maintain IT and digital production spaces as homo-social and patriarchal refuge from a troubling world where women’s knowledge and opinions matter.

To date there has been very little public condemnation of these practices from senior games industry representatives. This timid, calculated or indifferent reticence makes them part of the problem. There is

some indication that developers at least are fed up with the toxic elements of game culture judging by the debates at the last Game Developers Conference meetup in 2015 and the Independent Game Developer Association's production of an Online Harassment Resource for affected devs.

Jen Jenson argues it's not enough to hope this will go away in time, however, and that hiring a woman or two will do the trick. Both top-down and bottom-up dimensions have to be addressed, from government policy and resourcing down to local level initiatives—the problem and its history are as big and as old as society. But at the level of game maker communities of production it is important to do what you can to grow a different pipeline of production of game makers.

Moreover, Jenson points out this makes huge economic sense as well because difference drives innovation, something echoed by UKIE's president Jo Twist in a talk at the Westminster Media Forum seminar on the UK



video games industry in October 2014.

One thing to do is to have an Inclusion policy or a code of conduct that addresses inclusion. Both the Arch Creatives and the Bristol Games Hub are working on these with their residents. This is not just about women, but about all kinds of “different folks” not seen in numbers in the game maker space—ethnic difference, disabilities, age can all lead to exclusion from the industry as it is too often understood and replicated.

A policy or a code is about principles and about behaviours. It is only as good as the people who take it seriously. So some things that belong in “the doghouse”—like implicitly exclusionary behaviour (sexist jokes, comments), abusive social media messaging, discriminatory comments or gestures in the shared space and so forth should be sent to the sinbin by the collective. And planning events like game jams and demo nights also need to take care not to automatically import elements that encourage macho

behaviours or make it impossible for people with care responsibilities to participate. For example, in 2011 the XX Game Jam put aside some funding to support childcare costs. Although none of the participants took it up this offer it very clearly signalled that the organisers had really considered their demographic and the challenges they may face in participating in intensive game networking activities such as the popular gamejam format.



The Wider Community

Groups always have porous borders. All of our hubs spend a good deal of time on building traffic flow between residents and indie game makers living and working around them. They are the future and former residents—and over time the hub's community of production is very much the combination of co-located and “distant” members. Of course distance is a relative thing, and any individual brings with them a network of collaborators, friends and mentors, some of whom might be a long, long away geographically. But any particular collective coming together in a particular place will have a tangle of roots and branches in the ground nearby.

Social media are the royal road today for generating and maintaining this traffic flow. [@ArchCreatives](#) has 500+ followers. The Bristol Games Hub has about 35 residents, 550+ on its Facebook group and 900+ on [@bristolgameshub](#). They also email out a monthly newsletter to around 440 subscribers. Besides sharing information and news about hub members, opportunities for funding, training or activities going on amongst the wider network, the idea is to bring non-

residents into the hub from time to time. The BGH holds a regular “Anti-social” meetup which combines a presentation or game demo/testing with some socialising. Sometimes they pair this up with the Bristol Video Games Social group, another collective entity in the local area enthusiastic about games playing and making. Getting “newbies” to the hub for the first time is key to making it a “real place” where “real people” are. It makes potential residents of makers who might have thought their way was destined to be a long and lonely one. It grows the social glue and enriches the hub’s gene pool from the community of practice in and around the hub.

In 2014 Arch Creatives hosted the first Sony PlayStation Open Day outside London providing a conduit for around twenty indie studios across the Midlands to interface directly with Sony—something which is otherwise very difficult for them to arrange. The Dutch Game Garden and the Bristol Games Hub also make their space available for the boardgame maker communities that are different but often have overlaps with video game makers. Other fellow travellers who live in your neighbourhood are an important part of the productive ecosystem you inhabit. Stefan Werning showed that local sharing and face to face exchange remain important dimensions of co-production even in the global online digital era:

Despite digital communications and asset pipelines, geographical proximity still plays an important role

(Nordcliffe and Rendance, 2003)



Sharing



Brian McDonald looked at different kinds of game and digital maker collectives in Scotland for Creative Territories and analysed their different arrangements and metabolisms (see next page).

Fostering exchange and collaboration is a constitutive feature of all of these, and in game maker groups game jams and “hack” events are a principal activity that characterises the indie game maker ethos.

A proper history of game jams should be written some day, but it is clear that, like video games themselves, they come out of a “hacker” tradition of software makers who found ways to break out of their day jobs working on research projects in the military-industrial complex and explore other possibilities for computation. It is also clear they are about coming together to work on something together in close quarters. They represent a vital cultural activity for the community of practice that surrounds and seeds a hub’s community of production.

Activities and Events

Game Jams/Hack events

- Global Game Jam
- Y Not Jam
- Abertay Games Lab - Jump Jam
- Jam Today
- Culture Hack Scotland
- Open Glasgow

Competitions

- Dare to be Digital

Tech & Training

- IGDA Scotland – Rift Share
- Glasgow School of Art – Microsoft Porting Days



Critical Mass

All of our game collectives also host several activities for “bigger” organisations that are important to indie game makers. This is the other main kind of value a co-located game collective offers: the powerup achieved by grouping together into a larger entity. A collective can become an entity with a proper name that demands to be recognised. Since its formation in 2014 the Arch Creatives in Leamington Spa has hosted sessions by UKIE about the changes to Taxation credits affecting games production funding in the UK, and Creative England/UKIE events about marketing and promoting games. Likewise with the Bristol Games Hub, who also have hosted sessions giving community access to such organisations as UK Indies, SWmobile, and the Bristol Green Capital Digital Challenge.

Most of the games made by teams at Arch Creatives have been funded by companies that are using current UK government Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme provisions to make investments into games. Providing access to investors and business development for this sort of thing is an important part of the role of hubs. Alex Darby says this can have an effect wider than the immediately local level too.

Through links between Arch Creatives directors, BAFTA and UKIE other game projects can receive support for funding that is partly a result of this critical mass effect.

The Dutch Game Garden have the most developed network of access points to university, commercial and government development agencies interested in game producers. With their staff support they are able to co-organise events like the Summer Game Dev:



Summary

Game hubs can bring 3 main benefits to the indie game makers who live in and around them:

Sharing Expertise: a “community of production” can form out of a collective of practitioners who can exchange and grow knowledge together for their individual and mutual growth.

Spontaneous Encounters: Like discovering the book you really need to read on the shelf next to the one you were looking for, new ideas, new solutions, new collaborations become possible.

Critical Mass: access to agencies and groups who are interested in what you do and have the means to do something about it.

3

Front of House



BRISTOL GAMES HUB

The space to create games and play

Supporting the games industry in the South West

- Affordable office space for games developers
- Access to expertise and talented professionals
- Regular meetups, socials and training sessions



Grounding Creativity

We've been talking about how a game maker collective builds a situated community of production out of a wider community of practice that consists of people at a distance from ground zero. The research on creative "precincts", "zones", "clusters", "corridors" and so on is interested in this "how?" question and it was a big part of our Creative Territories discussions as the preceding shows. More recently NESTA has been examining how creative work is distributed across all kinds of businesses beyond those identified as the "creative industries". This work is important

for many reasons, not the least of which is that it indicates that equating creative production with too narrow a focus on media making, advertising and software design businesses is missing a lot of creativity out there in the economy (almost half according to NESTA's data analysis).

The economic point that NESTA has made has resonances with a central concern of Creative Territories: that creative work such as making games needs to be understood as intrinsically cultural and social in both origin and motivation,

and that this understanding needs to flow through to the analysis and shaping of creative production by policy, resourcing and infrastructure investment. If economic analysis can start to recognise creativity as a pan-industry phenomenon that plays an important role in all kinds of enterprises, we would argue that this is because creativity is a collectively enabled, social and cultural power or potential. No economy exists without culture, without society, without the interests, passions, hopes and beliefs of people that emerge and develop in a two-way dynamic between individual and collective.

It is difficult to understand or define creativity in any practical and meaningful way without noticing its social and cultural specificity, and its emergence from a history of its entwinement in economic, political and technological dynamics. For the Creative Territories project this means that any effort to grow a sustainable community of creative makers has to touch base with this interconnectedness.

And it also has to include the neighbours. Now this is tricky, partly because economy and creativity have tended to be joined up in thinking influenced by ideas like Richard Florida's "creative class" which in many ways is the opposite of this idea of creativity. For Florida it is all about how to attract a

special group of talented individuals to come together and boost economic activity in the new post-industrial era where ideas and experiences are the new valuable commodities. This became an influential strategy for urban regeneration policy in the noughties rollout of “creative industry” initiatives.

If creativity grows out of a social and cultural matrix this means it has a quite specific history and makeup. And the major problem with its recent history is the way creativity has tended to float free of its situatedness in general parlance and in economic and urban design buzz like Florida’s. Philosopher and media activist Bernard Stiegler argues that digital creativity has to get back in touch with this history and get its feet on the ground. Too much talk of immaterial products, virtual communities and free-floating creative minds living in “the cloud”. Of course this talk reflects the economic trends toward dispersed globalised manufacturing of commodities and the opening up of huge global markets by international media and marketing strategies.

The way digital devices and communications link up distant people and markets is certainly important, and even vital for creativity in the emerging digital age. Big mainstream

developers and publishers have been spreading their production pipelines all over the place, and there are some indie game ventures (such as Spry Fox) that are more or less completely distributed, virtual entities. But often the local and regional territories inhabited by digital making have tended to be overlooked as eyes have refocussed on the prize of national economic performance in a globalised industry.

The “economy” is nothing if not global today in its industrial, resourcing and distribution dimensions, but the global economy is nothing on its own—because (to repeat) economy is nothing on its own. The globalisation of production by big business is one of the biggest factors affecting the health and sustainability of local economies and local cultures, and this is why Creative Territories emphasizes the need to embed the creative makers locally as key to the sustainability of the collective.

Exchange



Creative Relations

So in practical terms what is included in this social and cultural dimension of creativity? Individuals and collectives. Every individual whose work produces something we would call creative does something specific with existing practices, tools, and understandings of making that are collectively shared and transmitted. The unique, the special is always a RE-production in this sense. The other side of this creative relation is that those existing practices, tools and understandings evolve in time precisely because of the more influential things individuals do in their creative RE-producing. And so the dynamic goes.

How and where are existing practices, tools and understandings?

In Local Government

These bodies are used to dealing with official type organisations and Creative Territories found it was a struggle (but not impossible) to get them to our meetings. All of our hubs have relations with local government and the Dutch Game Garden and the Arch Creatives are supported in different ways by them. Because the thinking here is often

economic and not really cultural and social, however, the local authorities are not seeing the community dimensions of fostering sustainable local businesses. Creative Territories believes that the sustainability in the long term of those local businesses is dependent on their becoming part of their communities, and local government could and should be a valuable partner in fostering those sustainable roots.

In Educational Institutions

Most game makers have been trained at university in coding, graphics, sound, business, and so on. But they have also gone to school. This is one area that has received increasing attention in creative economy thinking lately, such as in

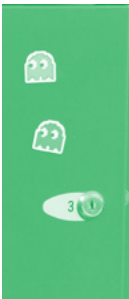
- the influential Brighton Fuse report which is about how tertiary education needs an overhaul to grow creative work
- in NESTA Next Gen propositions concerning the need to reshape school curricula to improve IT skills development and get coding back on the curriculum
- and in UKIE's pilot efforts to strengthen links between computer and creative parts of the education provision in the UK (see UKIE's Digital Schoolhouse campaign).



This is all good (or mostly; at least, it is the topic for another day). *The Good Hubbing Guide's* focus is on game maker collectives that are different both to schools and to the usual incubators and hotdesking spaces. Consequently they have a different potential than what is envisaged in these reports and projects.

Tomas Rawlings from the Bristol Games Hub recounts that since appearing on the local radar the BGH has had a steady stream of requests from local schools for student placements, and for Hub resident visits, lessons and demos at schools. Too many to respond to all of them, in fact, and placements are usually too time and energy consuming for the smaller firms and for the volunteer management team to take on. It has caused them to think collectively about formulating an education policy for the Hub because as a group they care about the education of kids and about how it relates to their industry.

This is a very practical and direct instance of the challenge and the potential of engaging with the local, cultural dimension of your creative endeavour. What can a collective of indie game makers contribute to the education of the next generation? What can they share of their own experiences



and passion for digital creativity? What can they learn from interaction with kids, and with the evolving curricula, pedagogy and school communities? How can this work effectively, including financially, for busy game makers?

Creative Territories doesn't have any specific answers or recommendations to offer at this stage (we are working on it), but we believe that this is not a peripheral concern if you are thinking about how best to plan or support the development of viable and valuable game maker collectives.

Creative makers represent an important potential for the digital cultural and economic future and putting them in touch with the next gen through educational contexts is a fundamental step to take to grow this potential.

In Local Community Networks and Organisations

Locality is the social version of being at home: almost invisibly it provides a whole toolkit with which to organise your everyday activity and navigate in the world (see Shaun Moores' lovely talk from the [Conditions of Mediation](#) event that talks about this). Local groups are important manifestations of this toolkit and offer a set of "opposite numbers" for our localised game maker groups. The Bristol Games Hub is situated in the Stokes Croft area of Bristol, a formerly rundown area close to the city centre that is

experiencing something of a revival that would be familiar to other cities around the post-industrial world. The Arch Creatives has a similar location in Leamington Spa. The Hub has working relations with the Hamilton House organisation across the road which comprises a range of local community groups and houses a host of activities and services delivered peer to peer.




At our first Creative Territories meeting in Bristol at the Bristol Games Hub we heard from Chris from the People's Republic of Stokes Croft, a well known and influential local collective that has been working hard in the Stokes Croft area for many years to improve the life of its residents through community art and craft productions, reviving neglected public spaces, supporting resident activism and negotiating with local authorities on a range of issues. Chris was interested in the way that game makers are building little virtual worlds and how this might speak to the real world and the real territory of Stokes Croft. The PRSC believe in the need for local engagement in redevelopment and local property ownership to support and sustain local growth and community regeneration beyond the classic property speculation and exploitation of gentrifying neighbourhoods. Dialogues like these are important because the “creative economy” and “creative class” ideas tend to skip over the

local dimension (and the local inhabitants), and the game makers we have had in our network do feel part of and care about where they live and work.



Neighbourhub

At the Utrecht meetup of Creative Territories Helen Kennedy and Debbie Rawlings put the question to workshop participants of how to build a game hub effectively in a local area. The participants produced this brilliant presentation: Building the Neighbourhub. In terms of practical advice, the group recommended a kind of “design cycle” for planning, opening a hub, then contacting and consulting with local groups, which then fed a new cycle of planning and modifying the hub’s operations. They also had some ideas for the hub’s day-to-day running including:

-  Having some study space
-  An open door/access policy (for e.g. once a week)
-  Promoting social inclusion through “interconnections” with other kinds of local groups through events.

Some of these ideas are already in practice at various kinds of digital creative collectives – Bristol’s Pervasive Media Studio has a weekly open afternoon on Fridays that is kicked off by the regular Friday Lunchtime talk open to all.

Staging events aimed at the local community or that invite them in are also valuable. The Arch Creatives ran a Game-a-thon in their Leamington Spa home to support the gamer charity SpecialEffect's work on disability.

Finally, some of the new tools for making games like Twine or PuzzleScript also make the inclusion of non gametech-trained people in game making events possible and there are possibilities here for community engagement. These don't teach any coding, but they are good at generating game design ideas and opening up dialogues about what games are and can do. And who they can be for—as developer/academic Brian McDonald said we should be making games for people like his mum because she is in a demographic that has the time to play them.



Of course all of this takes time and energy to organise. If you are a peer to peer community of developers busy building your livelihoods you might not have the excess volunteer capacity to reach out to your nongamer surroundings as often as you might like. This is an important thing to acknowledge, but it is also the challenge of opening up a specialist community in a local one filled with different and diverse people and interests. Ultimately every group and community lives or dies on how well it maintains that traffic across its borders, to replace group members as they move on, to adapt to new circumstances and to evolve and “stay alive”. As Helen Kennedy put it “Like likes like” and while this helps to preserve a group’s identity over time, it can also stifle and suffocate a community if it is not encountering the unlike and playing some new games with them.

Helen Kennedy

@ludologista

bridging the gulf to encourage participation from those that are unlike us - coz like likes like.. @Ludic_Junk #creativeterritories HARD

4:37 PM - 10 Nov 2014

3 RETWEETS 1 FAVORITE



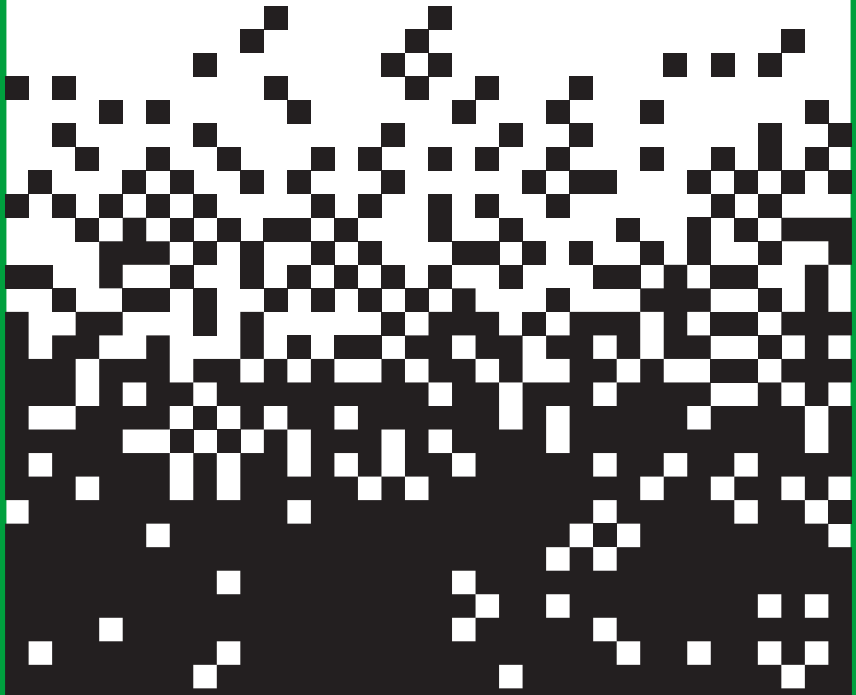
Summary

Along with the digital creative economy in general, it is important to approach the creativity of indie game making as a cultural and social process as much as an economic one based on individual talent. For indie game collectives this means the local neighbourhood is not just a wherever location where you can plug in your kit and connect to the cloud. A good game hub will look to build ties with:

Educational institutions in their locality: working out ways to share some experience of game making with the next gen, and to get something from the students and the schools in return.

Community and social groups: Events, open days and negotiated access, contributions to locally organised activities. This is about becoming known and valued locally, and embedding the community of production in a socially diverse ecology that is good for its longer term survival.

Local government: These are representatives of the local people; hubs should explore productive relationships with the community support as well as economic divisions of local governments.



4

Conclusion



The Bristol Games Hub had its first birthday about the time of our November 2014 workshop. Co-founder Tomas Rawlings reported on the Hub's first year and advised that the Hub had grown in interesting and not always expected ways. The anniversary became an opportunity to ponder the question: what are we?

This is good. Groups grow and change and so reflection about purpose, identity and priorities is an essential part of their longer term viability. The three game maker collectives that were participants in the Creative Territories project are all "live" experiments at different stages and in different local and cultural contexts. The Arch Creatives are tallying up releases from hub residents and are getting involved in activities with both the game community of practice and the wider community around Leamington Spa. The Dutch Game Garden are on the move to a new venue opening up new possibilities for activities to support their resident startups.

The Creative Territories research network tried to identify how these hubs work as new kinds of game maker collaboration in the "scene of innovation" represented by the rise of indie games over the last few years. Our goal was to identify the most valuable and productive ways they have or could co-locate for the longer term benefit of the indie game

sector as well as for the wider cultures and communities they are part of. Games are already a big part of our everyday lives and indie game production has an important part to play economically and socially in our digital future. Establishing creative territories of game making would be playing that part well and for the long run.



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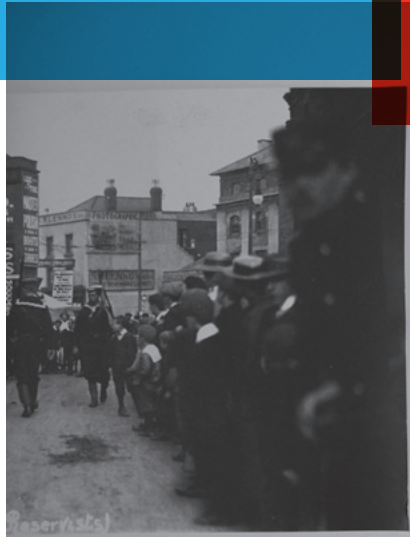
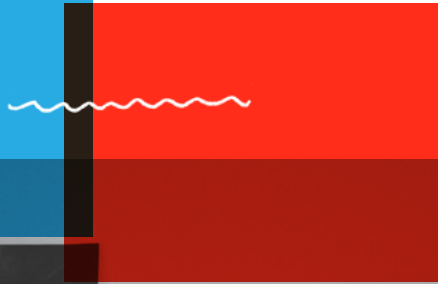
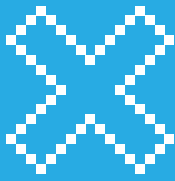
BRISTOL GAMES HUB
The space to create games and play



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STOKE'S CROFT

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