

Overview

Nottingham's Lace Market and surrounding parts of the City are home to a complex ecology in which creative enterprises, institutional actors and cultural consumption co-exist with varying degrees of interdependence and symbiosis. This was first described by [Jim Shorthose](#) in a series of research papers on the Lace Market some ten years ago. More recently Nottingham's creative sector was examined by the [Organza project](#) funded under the EU's Interreg programme.



The Lace Market lies at the heart of Nottingham's newly designated [Creative Quarter](#), a public policy construct which seems intentionally ambiguous, sometimes firmly delineated as a discrete district on the urban map (see below) and at other times as a metaphor for creative enterprise across the entire City.

In this sense the Lace Market can also be understood in terms of [psychogeography](#), forming a place of belonging and interaction in which the creative sector across the whole City can be defined as more than the sum of its parts.

As a physical location the streets and building of the Lace Market have long served as a locus for experimentation and incubation. The steady decline of the clothing, knitwear and lace industries was seriously detrimental to the local economy and parts of the labour market, but opened up low rent spaces in former factory buildings for artists and creative entrepreneurs. Yet while this spatial agglomeration of small workspaces helps to establish the Lace Market as a place of creative enterprise, this would mean little without the physical spaces and network dynamics that bring people together, stimulating innovation and building relationships. Central to this is the Lace Market's City-wide function as a place of creative consumption and congregation based on niche retail, culture, food and drink.



The [Broadway Cinema](#), long established as the anchor for the Lace Market's creative sector, combines many of these facets, a triple helix of enterprise incubation, cultural consumption and (through its café/bar) networking. In its immediate vicinity an increasingly diverse

range of cafés, bars, restaurants and clubs have emerged, further adding to the Lace Market's importance as a destination for citizens and visitors as well as entrepreneurs.

It is the growing presence of institutional actors in the Lace Market, and as drivers of the wider Creative Quarter movement, that has been the most striking development of recent years. The acquisition of the iconic Adams Building by [New College Nottingham](#) in the late 1990s led to the relocation of its arts, design, digital, media and other courses, bringing a large student population to the Lace Market by day as well as by night.



In 2009 [Antenna](#) opened as a digital media hub in the City Council's former fashion industry resource centre building. Antenna provides workspace units, virtual tenancy, specialist services, training and meeting spaces for the digital media sector, but it also instigates and supports a series of collaborative innovations within the Creative Quarter's wider network.

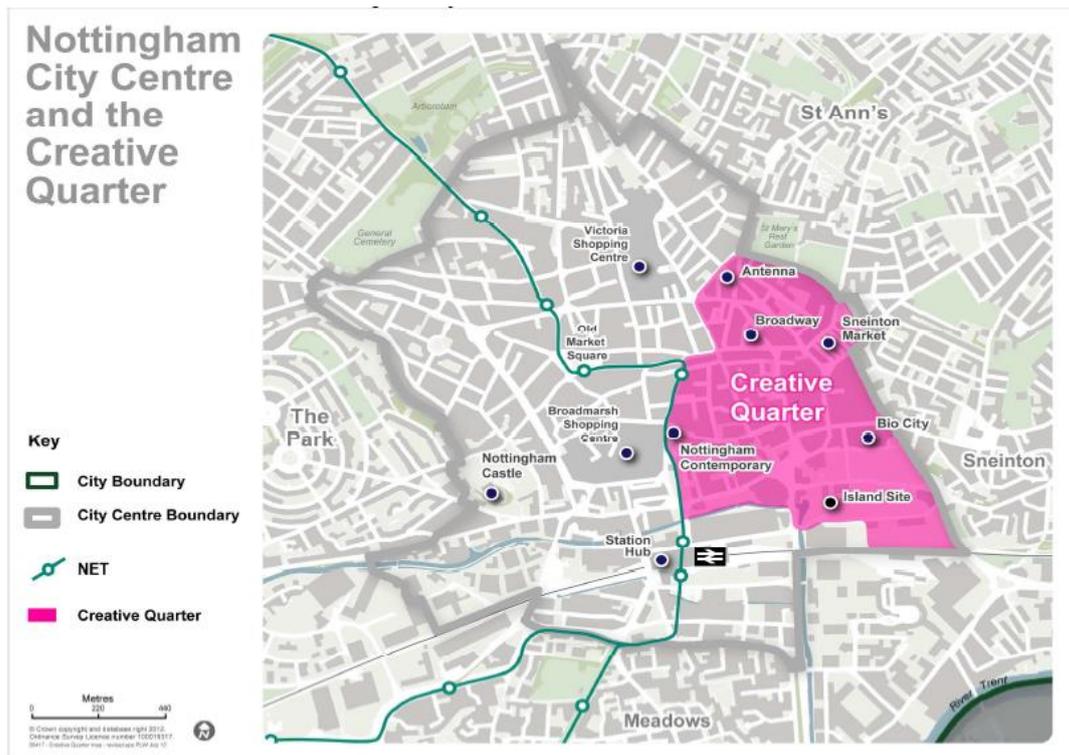


The 2009 opening of [Nottingham Contemporary](#), one of the largest contemporary arts centres in the UK outside London, is the latest focal point for the creative community.

Although not located in the Lace Market, [Nottingham Trent University's](#) engagement in the creative sector has been long-term and significant. Large number students study art, design and media in the University's City Centre campus, representing an important future asset if they can be retained in Nottingham after graduation. Nottingham Trent's [Hive](#) initiative has helped more than 250 graduates to start businesses during the last ten years, more than 40 per cent of whom could be classified within the creative industries sector. Programmes such as [Future Factory](#) enable the University to provide other forms of specialist support, typically funded from sources such as the ERDF and often involving collaboration with other local partners including the [University of Nottingham](#) and the [New Art Exchange](#).

Beyond the formal institutions, a series of informal spaces have emerged in ways which generate significant levels of social capital. For example the [Howie-Smith Project](#) is a social enterprise spin-off from a PhD project, and focuses on the reuse of empty buildings to provide support communities for artists and creative entrepreneurs, most notably [The Corner](#) in the Lace Market. Online, [Creative Nottingham](#) promotes and markets creative businesses in the City.





Job creation provides only part of the intervention logic for the Creative Quarter initiative; most creative enterprises are small and will remain so, despite notable exceptions. However the existence of a strong creative milieu involving both production and consumption raises the profile of the City. It reinforces Nottingham’s identity and capacity as a locus of innovation, leading to potentially wider impacts on local economic development.

Collaborative advantage?

Superimposed on this institutional map are a number of different, if sometimes overlapping business clusters. To date there has been no systematic analysis of the creative industries sector in Nottingham, and research is [arguably](#) a pressing need for the future development of the Creative Quarter strategy. However it is clear that these enterprise clusters have only a loose geographical relationship with the shaded area shown on the above map. This reinforces the argument that the Creative Quarter is important as a City-wide focal point for entrepreneurial interaction and collective identity.

The term “cluster” implies more than just a geographical agglomeration of enterprises in the same sector. Rather it suggests that businesses enjoy *collaborative advantage* through, for example, shared services and resources, targeted public policy and business support initiatives, focused learning opportunities, knowledge sharing, collective marketing and the potential for joint ventures.

Collaborative advantage in the Creative Quarter is both informal (through personal and business networks and relationships) and formal through institutionally-driven and funded initiatives. This reflected in each of the main clusters:



Artists have several hubs and collectives in and near the City Centre including [Backlit](#), the [Canning Circus Creative Hub](#), [Hopkinsons](#) and [Tether](#). Members of these clusters are typically independent producers or 2 – 3 person partnerships, but the hubs and collectives provide a context for artistic collaboration, shared resources and joint marketing. [Hopkinsons](#) also provides a shared retailing outlet on the edge of the City Centre for art and antiques. Locally-based online communities such as [Bees Make Honey](#) are an increasingly important forum for shared learning and collaboration.

Craft producers are widely distributed across the City though with focal points in Sherwood (3km North of the City Centre) and other suburban locations as well as the [Lace Market](#). Once again these are predominantly one or two person businesses though there is a growing trend towards collective marketing. Examples include [Craft in the City](#) and Creative Quarter [Pop-up Shops](#) in empty retail premises. [Cobden Chambers](#) is planned as an ambitious initiative including studios and workspaces with shared services, together with a collective “department store” for local creative producers.

Digital media companies are clustered in the Creative Quarter, including workspace provision in [Antenna](#) and [Broadway](#). Within this cluster there is a strong **videogame** sector focused on Antenna. This includes [GameCity](#), a spin-off from Nottingham Trent University which delivers major research and inclusion projects such as the annual GameCity festival. **Film** is focused both on Antenna and Broadway, with both institutions providing start-up support and opportunities for collaborative working between existing businesses, often in partnership. Informal networks and relationships within the film sector are strong and well-established, producing film-makers such as [Shane Meadows](#).



Broadway has also expanded into the wider creative sector with its [Near Now](#) initiative, a “producing, commissioning and artist development programme, working closely with artists and designers to produce and present playful projects that explore technology in everyday life.”

Less well documented, the Creative Quarter contains a diverse cluster of **business-to-business** enterprises including advertising agencies, designers, marketing organisations, professional services and web developers.

Initial research for the CI-Net project suggests strong sub-networks within this creative cluster including evidence of intertrading and regular client referrals. Other creative sub-clusters include **architecture**.

Journeys into Entrepreneurship

There is no typical motivation or journey that leads an individual to creative industry entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial biographies, like individual lives, are diverse and unique. However we can say that many are relatively young, many have graduated in relevant disciplines from further or higher education whether in Nottingham or further afield, and those who succeed in creating relatively successful enterprises often do not follow a linear route from the outset in pursuit of a clearly defined product or business model. From our interviews with established entrepreneurs, many recognise the important role that peer support from other enterprises played in helping them learn the fundamental principles of running a business.

A rather weary commentary on one of the [online community websites](#) suggests that:

“... hundreds of brilliant little brains are employed in day or night jobs, pulling pints, making sandwiches, smiling ever more radiantly as they ask if sir or madam has a loyalty card. And then they crawl back to some little den of doubts & genius. They make music, they juxtapose, they write, they paint, they craft, they edit. Maybe they show it to their friends. Maybe it goes on the internet. Maybe some fat cat rips off their idea without them knowing. On bad days they go home and waste away in boredom...”



This is a highly recognisable Lace Market story, with its bars serving as sources of income for neophyte entrepreneurs as well as networking hubs. Their journey is by no means guaranteed to succeed however long they persist. However iconic success stories such as [Paul Smith](#) and, more recently, [Craig Chettle's](#) Confetti Group (responsible for Antenna and several digital media businesses) continue to inspire.

Business start-up advisors recognise that a key part of their role is to discourage those without the aptitude, skills or business model from embarking on entrepreneurship. It is not for everyone, however seductive the vision of creating a world-beating creative enterprise.

More structured approaches into entrepreneurship include Nottingham Trent University's [Hive](#) which offers managed workspace as well as practical business development support, and which has achieved a remarkable 85% three year business survival rate leading to the creation of 350 jobs.

The City Council's [Generation Y](#) initiative helps entrepreneurs aged under 35 to set up successful new businesses by providing specialist support to help them build their ventures. Nottingham's two Universities are taking part in the programme, together with the two largest colleges, Central College and New College Nottingham.

[NBV](#) (Nottingham Business Venture), a long-established business support service, is collaborating with the [New Art Exchange](#) to offer City residents the [Creative Futures](#) programme for start-up enterprises in the sector. NBV already claims credit for several creative entrepreneur [success stories](#). Broadway's [Projector](#) initiative is specifically targeted at digital and creative start-ups.



Less formally, several networking and learning initiatives use bars and social spaces such as Antenna to deliver soft learning to creative entrepreneurs. At [Thirsty Thursdays](#) for example “more than 2,000 participants with drive and ambition have enhanced their knowledge. They have learned about everything from marketing to finances, received expert support and gained up-to-date information on the business topics of the day.”

Help for established businesses to develop and grow is reflected in a varied range of initiatives, perhaps overly-complicated by their dependence on opportunistic funding opportunities (for a summary go to the Creative Quarter [Business Support](#) page). Notable are Nottingham Trent University’s [Future Factory](#) and the [Working with You](#) programmes which, although generic, can provide bespoke support to creative businesses.

Access to loans, investment capital and specialist support appears only to play a part for certain types of creative business (for example in digital media) and then only when they are well established. Many creative entrepreneurs distrust financial institutions (and may in turn be distrusted by those institutions), building their businesses in the early stages through sweat equity subsidised by part-time employment. However effective support is available through mentoring, signposting and soft loans (see the [Business Support](#) page) once businesses reach an appropriate stage in their development.

Conceptualising the Creative Quarter

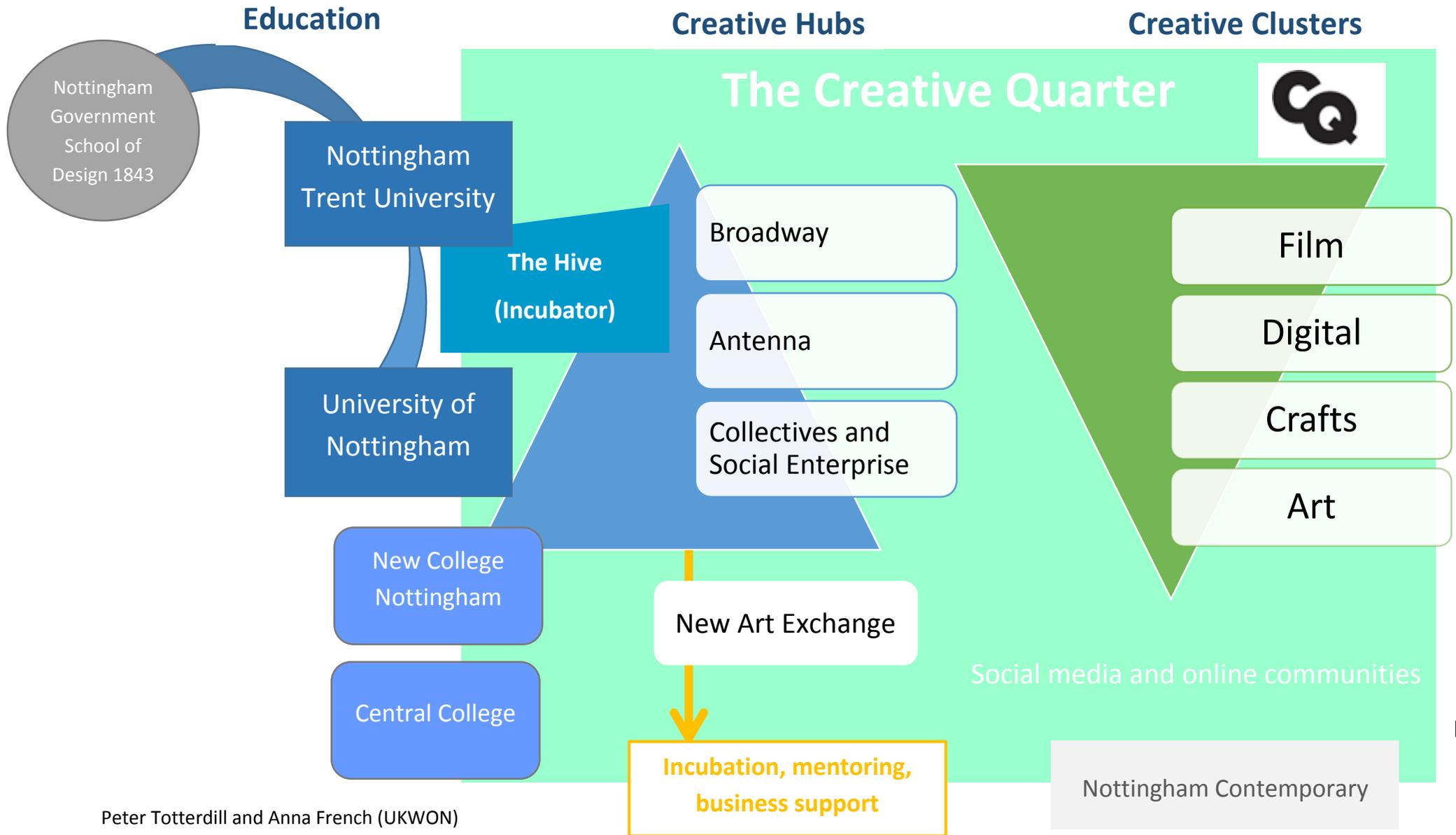
Nottingham’s creative sector is based on a complex ecology of both enterprises and institutional actors which, for lack of research, is not fully understood. Nonetheless there is ample evidence on which to base the proposition that creative businesses enjoy potential *collaborative advantage* in that they gain access to formal, targeted business development and learning opportunities combined with peer networking and co-operation. The structure of this ecology is illustrated in the figure¹ on the following page. In summary, the ecology of the Lace Market and Cultural Quarter is multi-layered:

Collaborative infrastructure describes the co-operative partnerships between the key institutional actors including the City Council, Universities, Colleges, Antenna and Broadway. A fluid set of partnerships between these actors has been successful in securing the EU Structural Funds and other resources required to deliver a succession of programmes for new and established businesses including training, mentoring and network building. This infrastructure can be characterised as having *organisational density*, the requisite variety of institutional actors able to meet the variable needs of a diverse creative sector.

Enterprise **clusters** overlap and interact with the institutional infrastructure to varying degrees but are relatively autonomous and possess their own dynamics. Relations between enterprises in (and sometimes between) these clusters can be based on high levels of mutual reciprocity and are typically based on friendship patterns and affinity networks (one web developer said that his business network works well because “we all like the same music”). Antenna and Broadway (as well as many of the local bars) act as an important physical locus for building and maintaining these network interactions, while the recent Creative Quarter initiative should be able to play a key role in strengthening their range and quality.

¹ With thanks to Dr Jeremy Hague, Nottingham Trent University.

The Conceptual Map



Tentative Conclusions for CI-Net

CI-Net aims to create innovative approaches and learning resources to support new and existing entrepreneurs in the creative industry sector. We are at an early stage in the project but our initial analysis of the Lace Market and Creative Quarter leads us to the following propositions:

- The starting point must be with the entire institutional and enterprise ecology as a resource for entrepreneurial learning and business development rather than focusing on individual entrepreneurs and organisations.
- Establishing long-term, trust-based relationships between the key institutional actors appears to be a pre-requisite for the delivery of effective and sustainable support for creative industry entrepreneurs.
- The early stages of entrepreneurship will typically involve a period of experimentation and, in many cases, failure. This can be reduced by support initiatives such as the Hive and Creative Futures, but it will also involve advice to some potential entrepreneurs not to proceed.
- Formal, taught learning about entrepreneurship appears to have little role to play in creative industry clusters but mentoring, other forms of activity-based learning and (critically) peer support are critical and can be further strengthened. ***There is scope for continuing innovation in forms of delivery which combine online resources with learning in informal spaces.***