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Case Study 1: South Square Centre: A Network of Creatives

Introduction

As the business is grounded in supporting creatives in industry, it was important to gain insight into how other businesses are doing this. Mainly, Plein Sight should support a network comprising of both established artists and the public as to incorporate creativity back into society. For this, South Square is the perfect precedent to study for this, having grassroots beginnings as a series of cottages renovate by art students in the 1970s. Through an empirical study, the aim is to define ways South Square Centre has developed a network as a creative business. (South Square Centre, 2025)

Experience (Strengths)

As of writing this case study, a month has passed since working at South Square 1 day a week. Within this time much was revealed within their operational hours about how they've built a network within their cottage walls.

As a grassroots arts centre, several artists have taken up residency in the studios. These artists have formed a community amongst themselves and take part in various discussions and events. In the summer, a social event will be happening to which takes place in the garden. The Thornton knitting group 'Knit and Natter' assemble every Wednesday in the gallery space to make knitted crafts while socialising. The designated community room facilitates many other social activities. Wednesdays alone sees a weekly collective of art students constructively critiquing each other's work and the evening welcomes a yoga group into the space.

A common thread throughout South Square's ability to create a network is in the physical bounds of the centre, being used to serve the community on top of showcasing their work. Thus, the locations that help form our connections with each other are integral to creating human networks within a business.

Public facing (Weaknesses)

With all the strengths that lie within South Square as a venue, this has several limitations with how they operate. South Square consists of a small group of 4-5 people running the gallery. The studios residents run autonomously to the centre, along with the connecting bar and café. Due to the wide spread of facilities, the actual face of South Square is blurred:

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people may have a drink the bar without ever stepping foot inside the gallery. South Square maintains its identity as an arts organisation by working closely or adjacent with the two public spaces. For example, café displays the work of collaborating artists on rotation and designs food and drinks around their work. Additionally, from the outside in, the Garden is open to all and welcomes people to enjoy the valleys of the viaduct in the back yard. Through this, South Square becomes a 'sanctuary' that proudly encourages connection and community.

Connections (Opportunities)

As is standard for the arts industry, South square makes many connections with the local community, organisations and even internationally. The upcoming event in the summer, Thornton art trail, will turn the local area and viaduct into a pathway incorporating arts and crafts. This is in collaboration with local secondary school, Beckfoot Thornton, to produce art and creative works on the trail. One way that South Square develops collaborations such as these is through their board members consisting of others in the local arts sector. Through connectivity, South Square develops working relationships within its local community, to then offer creative opportunities to the local area.

Queries (Threats)

Within the arts sector, the success of an organisation is reliant on people. Both on people interacting with the programme and on the people who make the event. Deciding on ticketing for child centred events is an example where both parties of people were pivotal on a decision. Prior to finalising, events and workshops for children were free entry, however, this yielded low turn outs. South Square's action was to implement a different ticketing pricing option. I also took to asking the Bradford 2025 team and after conferring with each other, we decided on charging an affordable rate, to retain value and avoid implications of these being optional once booked. Through communication between each other and organisations, creative businesses can maintain a feasible ticketing model.

Conclusion

South Square has maintained a strong network of creatives since its opening as an arts centre in 1982. From its use of location and traditional cottage architecture, collaboration with the local community, and communication with other organisations, South Square was and is built on the connections between creatives. This multifaceted look into the working day at South Square has allowed me to deduce 3 key criteria that will ensure the feasibility

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of Plein Sight: The business must use a constant location effectively to serve the community; Allow the business's values and work trickle into every day public spaces, such as cafes, restaurant, and offices; and communicate with creatives in the area and work with them.

Case Study 2: Socially Engaging practices

Introduction

Part of the Plein Sight programme is to incorporate the community within the brand. This will manifest in an installation, incorporating socially engaged practices to produce something designed by and for the inhabitants. Based in the EPFL (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne) research university in Lausanne, Switzerland, ALICE (Atelier de la Conception de l'Espace), aims to pave a way for society to collaborate while improving quality of life. (EPFL, 2023)

HOUSE 2 - COUNTER CITY, is the second iteration of the HOUSE projects initiated by ALICE and one that has shown substantial evidence on its impact within the community. Through this study, socially engaged practices will be revealed as feasible within the programme and values of Plein Sight.

Strengths

One of the major strengths of House 2 was that it was engaging the wider community rather than solely the university campus which is what HOUSE 1 was focused on. This allowed ALICE to practise their study on a wider audience, which furthers their research into community cooperation to develop and learn.

Another strength can be found with their collaboration with Zurich University of Arts who have organised programmed events in conjunction with the venue. Having a guaranteed audience to test the event will provide insight in how we interact with the project under different contexts, such as music, theatre and exhibitions.

Weaknesses

While the project succeeds as a research project, some oversights emerge retrospectively, such as the reliance on prescribed programmes that wouldn't happen organically. This skews the results as the activities are predicted, which doesn't directly show how the public naturally behave.

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The second neglected aspect is with the people working on the projects. The project is still worked on by students, limiting the intentions of the structure to educational purposes. How would a market vendor design the space? Would younger working people interact in the project differently? The project is focused on the pragmatic method of developing community but also aims to spark debate. This makes this weakness a constructive flaw.

Opportunities

Due to the intentions of the project, opportunities of further community development and progression are already evidenced through HOUSE 2 - Replay. (ALICE, 2017) Led by a group of 20 students they inherited HOUSE 2's philosophy and reproduced it in a different location. While the same network, the legacy of the past has continued under a different party, revealing a desire for projects like these to be more frequent.

Threats

As is typical of community projects, the major threat is depending on willing participants. With the additional context of this being a construction project, the risk of accident would be detrimental to its reception. However, the absence of such from any documentation suggests that through rigorous planning and collaborative expertise, they have circumvented this. (ALICE, 2016) Plein Sight must adopt these same practices: A detailed roadmap and clear drawn plans with risk assessments.

Conclusion

From this analysis, there are two ways of looking at HOUSE 2: As a research project, they were successful in their practice, in producing a temporary structure that has and will engage its local community to work and learn collaboratively. Alternatively, the project provides an ideal preview of how a community lead structure could work to reconfigure how society interacts with each other. In both cases, each one informs how Plein Sight can evolve its practical and activist elements.

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