Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery Network Visits

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Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery Network Visits

Rob Watson
Wednesday, 25 September 2013

This report is a summary of findings and observations of a series of network visits made by Mr Ian Davies of Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery and Mr Rob Watson of De Montfort University, to photographic galleries and associated arts and community projects in the UK during the summer of 2013. These network visits were enabled by Dr Thilo Boek of De Montfort University as part of the Amplified, Resilient Communities Project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

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1 Introduction

Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery is a volunteer run project based in the former Leicester lending library. The project was devised and instigated by Mr Ian Davies in 2011 when the Leicester lending library service re-housed its stock to another location in the city. This created a vacant space that was difficult to find an alternative use as the building in which it is housed is listed at Grade Two and is regarded as having architectural significance. Primarily the wooden book-bays that populate the mezzanine space cannot be removed or altered.

With the agreement of Leicester City Council’s Adult Learning Service, who maintain and manage the building, it was agreed that Mr Davies could transform this space into a series of photo-display bays that could be booked-out by members of the public to exhibit personal or professional photographic work, mounted on foam-board at a limited monthly cost.

In addition Mr Davies was also given use of a disused storage area, which was subsequently transformed into an additional display space to be used for mounting commissioned, visiting and devised exhibitions. This long gallery space is used more flexibly than the mezzanine area and has been adapted to suit different participants requirements depending on the exhibition or event.
In order to facilitate the development of the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery, Ian drew on his experience in the photographic and point-of-sale display industry, to form network links with collaborators drawn from the professional photographic communities, the printing and signage business, photographic interests groups and individuals with a strong interest in photography. Ian was able to draw on his experience as a participant in the Amplified, Resilient Communities project that had been run by Professor Sue Thomas and Dr Thilo Boek (Thilo Boeck, 2010).

Ian has been able to nurture and promote a significant network of volunteers, members and participants around the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery, primarily using Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and a Wordpress Blog site. Ian uses these social media tools extensively to encourage participation in the activities of the gallery, to advise members and supporters of the available opportunities for participation and training, to encourage awareness of events, and to promote discussion of photography and it’s related issues of participation and engagement.

Blog: http://lppg.wordpress.com/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/leicsppg
Flickr: http://www.flickr.com/groups/1695934@N24/
Twitter: https://twitter.com/LeicPhotoGall

Differentiating the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery from other established arts projects of this kind (and particularly those funded via bloc-grants), is a commitment by Ian and other volunteers to an ‘open’ and ‘democratic’ sense of participation. There is no judging system to determine the ‘worth’ or ‘quality’ of images that are displayed within the gallery, as is often found in photographic societies and clubs. Rather, the focus is on the willingness of individuals to join as a member, subscribe to use the available display space within one or more of the bays, to follow the Facebook group, and to
maintain the images displayed in the gallery in good order. Photographic exhibitions are continually on display that are produced by professional photographers, non-professional photographers, students, people participating in social action projects (i.e. people with mental health issues, affected by homelessness, alcohol addiction), and so on.

It is important to note that the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery is funded in an ad-hoc manner: firstly by being gifted the use of the space by Leicester City Council and the subsequent power and heating charges; and secondly, income is derived from the sale of membership fees, which have been offered at £5 per year, and the purchase of display areas and the mounting of the larger exhibitions. There has been no bloc or project funding used to support the gallery during this initial phase of development. Ian has been able to network entrepreneurially with local businesses and organisations to put in place improvements and infrastructure. Donations are sought from visitors and members on a regular basis. Ian Davies does not draw a salary from the gallery, and prior to the network visits there is no formal organising ‘board’ in place to support and manage the business development of the project.

The involvement of Mr Rob Watson came about during the fieldwork stage of his PhD research at De Montfort University. Rob is examining issues of sustainability in community and collaborative media. Seeking to develop an ethnographic participation case study, Rob became a regular volunteer at the gallery and has subsequently established a supportive relationship with volunteers. Rob’s previous experience in the field of community media was the development of DemonFM as an Ofcom licenced community radio station, as well as his experience teaching and researching media production and social media.

The proposal to develop and undertake a series of network visits during the summer of 2013 came from a shared observation between Ian, Rob and Thilo, that while Ian has a high-level of capability in promoting the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery within its present social networks, there is less capability and experience in promoting and developing Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery within an aspirational peer-group of regional, national and international galleries and arts projects elsewhere. This is manifested in a lack of formal business planning and support, and in the perception that bloc-grant funding might irrevocably change the nature of the gallery’s engagement with its members and its supporters.

Over five weeks during the summer of 2013 Ian Davies and Rob Watson therefore visited different photographic galleries and projects in the United Kingdom, to make contact with the teams and the individuals involved. The primary aim was to facilitate a sharing of knowledge and good practice, and to get a sense of how the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery might be further developed, win additional support and funding, while retaining its ethos of democratic participation and collaborations.

1.1 Selection Process

The candidate galleries were identified on the basis of a desktop internet survey of photographic and art galleries and projects. The main aim was to identify individual galleries or projects that are primarily photography focussed, or which incorporate a range of photographic elements in their exhibitions. In addition, it was felt important that the galleries would be able to offer accessible public viewing of displays, training events and education activities. If possible a social media networking capability was a priority, though this was not a pre-requisite. The initial aim was to focus on smaller, independent projects, and while the initial desktop search identified a number of potential candidates, further enquiries found that these projects or galleries were not trading, or were unable to correspond. Foto8 and Manchester Photographic were two groups that looked promising online, but were subsequently unable to set-up a meeting. It was agreed that two site visits per day would be the maximum that would be achievable given the distances necessitated in visiting the locations.
1.2 Format of Visits
In correspondence with each of the potential sites an email was sent to the main point of contact for the gallery, as identified on each website. On occasions this was simply an information email address that was followed up by either a further email or a phone call to the organisation to check that the correspondence had been received. The form of this correspondence was kept light and informal, giving a limited degree of information about the project. The aim was to achieve the tone of an informal network visit. This mixed approach elicited a range of responses, some immediately positive and some more cautious. The independent galleries were generally more agreeable to hosting the visits, probably because the response came directly from those at the centre of the project, whereas the more established organisations, with a number of employees and formal levels of management, were more cautious and sought conformation from different project directors. On occasion this led to some confusion in the correspondence and tracking names and roles was difficult for Ian and Rob as outsiders to those organisations. However, once explained that this was a project originating from De Montfort University and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the credibility of the enquiries was enhanced.

1.3 Interview Approach (Recorded)
As well as providing Ian Davies with the experience of networking with other gallery teams across the UK, the intention is to produce an audio podcast that illustrates the journey that Ian undertook in establishing and supporting Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery, and which can be shared with the organisations visited. It is hoped that the conversations that were engaged in as part of this process will illustrate the transformation, or otherwise, of Ian’s expectations. Rob Watson was able to record these interviews using a Zoom H4n hand-held digital recorder, with a Beyer reporter’s microphone. This is a standard audio recording approach to field interviews for radio production and reporting, and afforded some flexibility and adaptability for individual circumstances. It allowed the recordings to be intimate, to gather a sense of the acoustic environment and to be unobtrusive.

1.4 Participation
As each potential participant was approached it was clearly expressed that the aim of the interviews was to record material for a podcast, and that this podcast would take a ‘conversational’ tone rather than the form of a journalistic interview. By adopting this approach it was hoped that it would be possible to elicit a relaxed and open response from the interviewee, through which guidance and experiences can be shared as potential equals. It was felt important that a ‘journalistic’ tone was avoided so that participants did not feel that they would be placed under any pressure to justify their organisations business strategy or editorial approaches, or resort to the ‘chain-of-command’ in order to provide responses. It was felt that a ‘shared’ conversation between Ian and each participant would be more effective, though in practice Rob undertook the majority of direct interviews often because of the limited time available.

1.5 Confidentiality
At all stages of the process of discussion and interview, it was explained to each participant that the recorded material could potentially be posted online as part of a publically available podcast. However, each participant was also assured that any issues discussed that were not recorded would be treated as confidential and not for public broadcast. Only one participant asked that recorded material should not be made publically available, as they did not feel empowered to speak on behalf of their employer. Each participant was given a business card that specifies the contact details of Rob Watson and the online location of the terms of reference and confidentiality criteria. The raw audio data is stored securely at both the home of the researcher and securely at the office of the researcher at De Montfort University, and is backed-up onto several archival discs.

http://robwatson.our.dmu.ac.uk/research

1.6 Right to Withdraw
At each stage of the interview process it was explained verbally that the participants have the right to withdraw from the process, and that they would be able to exercise this right up to the point of publication of the report and the podcast. Participants would be able to exercise this right by contacting the primary research by email, in writing or by telephone.
2 Emergent Issues

1. Each organisation was clear that a physical base was important for any arts or media organisation, acting as a point of contact for people from a wide range of cultural and geographic backgrounds. While a physical base is not essential, as described by London Independent Photographers, it is preferable and can help to facilitate and curate emerging social groups. Manchester Digital Labs are an effective example of this process.

2. All groups agreed that photography in general is regarded as an accessible and widely distributed activity that engages many different types of people at many different levels of capability. In this sense photography can be used to bring people together from across the social spectrum, and from across the capability and resources spectrum.

3. Digital photography has the potential to offer a lower barrier to entry, that also ties into a personal interpretive account that reaches beyond models of professionalism, social capital and embedded social expectation. Photography allows the viewer to see the world anew through the eyes of someone else, and if discussed supportively, photography can enhance social rapport and empathy.

4. Social media is well regarded as a cheap and accessible tool for engaging with potential audiences and participants. Some of the organisations are well advanced with their use of social media, while others are more hesitant to embrace its co-participant potential. As a bulletin or a message facility social media is often felt to be useful, but organisations need support as they learn to go beyond this limited role of the technology.

5. As a tool for co-production and systematic engagement there is less specific experience in establishing projects and activities that embrace the collaborative potential of social media production tools. The variable regard for the principles of the ‘open exhibition’ is a good indicator of this issue and of the likelihood that an organisation has a predominantly linear relationship with their audience, their partners and their potential participants.

6. Each organisation reported a clear demand for personal and professional development activities, and recognised photography as an effective vehicle for training and learning. Two types of models are generally employed. Some galleries and organisations have links with formal education establishments. While other galleries embrace an open-learning model that looks to encourage peer-to-peer, stealth learning and social spaces for like-minded people.

7. Of primary importance to each organisation was financial sustainability and affordability. There is a pronounced tension between the expectations of the independent galleries and the supported galleries. There is a necessary long-term financial commitment needed to ensure that buildings and resources can be maintained. The emerging expectation of entrepreneurialism and commercialism are being explored by all organisations in different ways, with the development of membership services and collaborative projects being given renewed emphasis as traditional forms of funding are challenged in an age of austerity.

8. Several organisations are clear that they seek to actively resist a sense of hierarchy and cultural competitiveness, as these are seen as inhibiting factors that might reduce the potential diversity of participants and audiences within the arts sector. Some organisations place a greater emphasis on being activist or grass-roots led, while others have a more professionalised approach that is founded on service delivery models.

9. The demise of several high-street photographic chain stores in recent years, at a time when there is significant growth in interest in digital photography, points to an unfortunate outcome of the retail model and offers an indication of the potential for community media, arts and members-run photographic organisations to build and develop a wider range of innovative services related to photography – both at a professional, a training and at a social level.
## 2.1 Development Issues Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Development Need</th>
<th>LPPG Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001 Physical base</td>
<td>Reinforces social network hosting capability</td>
<td>Good provision – increase number of operating social groups using space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002 Photography as accessible participative social activity</td>
<td>Sustainable resources &amp; facilities</td>
<td>Limited to display space only – need to increase types of practical resource provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003 Digital photography offers low-barriers to entry</td>
<td>Integration of online and offline activities</td>
<td>Limited to sample or paid courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004 Social media as a communication tool</td>
<td>Support for participants to develop etiquette and collaboration skills</td>
<td>Excellent model of early-stage networked community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005 Social media as a collaborative co-production tool</td>
<td>Support for participant to develop skills in collaborative production techniques</td>
<td>Limited to casual &amp; ad hoc working partnerships between individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006 Professional development activities</td>
<td>Support for to go beyond their present professional status</td>
<td>Limited to peer-to-peer networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007 Personal development activities</td>
<td>Support for individuals to enrich their personal &amp; social repertoires</td>
<td>Mixed model of informal and stealth personal development models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008 Economic sustainability</td>
<td>Challenging for all organisations, specifically challenging for new organisations</td>
<td>Very limited revenue model based on demand for services, training &amp; events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009 Membership model</td>
<td>Challenge to define &amp; pursue appropriate organisational model</td>
<td>Limited membership model with inconsistent expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010 Wider economic demand</td>
<td>Service gap following demise of local photographic retailers</td>
<td>Strong focus point for entry-level or semi-pro photographers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3 Summary Action Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Shared Issue</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ffotofilia</td>
<td>Small charges to develop sense of value</td>
<td>Vouchers to encourage new participants</td>
<td>Produce discount voucher book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ikon</td>
<td>Board expertise and support stops burnout</td>
<td>Develop relationship with Arts Council</td>
<td>Appoint board to look at business planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mad Labs</td>
<td>Tapping into online communities</td>
<td>Stealth learning works by making things fun</td>
<td>Start ‘book group’ type sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornerhouse</td>
<td>Support for engagement projects is restricted</td>
<td>Look at alternative funding sources</td>
<td>Devise work-based lunchtime training session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Eye</td>
<td>Responding to changed demand</td>
<td>Explore innovative courses</td>
<td>Devise an iPhonography workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ffotogallery</td>
<td>Development of services to members</td>
<td>Explore collaborations and partnerships</td>
<td>Devise and participate in joint events with other arts groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Floor Gallery</td>
<td>Time availability of founding members</td>
<td>Stick to a clear editorial line</td>
<td>Host ‘open slide’ nights &amp; invite guest speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Cloth Gallery</td>
<td>Commercial sustainability</td>
<td>Look for ways to combine art and commercial activity</td>
<td>Explore commercial business development opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Independent Photograpators</td>
<td>Membership engagement value</td>
<td>Focus on membership communication</td>
<td>Devise membership engagement strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photofusion</td>
<td>Co-operative sustainability</td>
<td>Explore different membership and co-operative organisation models</td>
<td>Investigate business development along co-operative lines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4 Observations

Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery is a ground-breaking, innovative community media project. For this project to have been conceived and established in Leicester as a participant-led, co-located social-network, is a considerable achievement. This is largely due to the vision, persistence and resilience of Ian Davies, the gallery manager, who has built this social network from the ground-up. There is now in place a supporting network of members, participants and organisation that was not in existence two years ago. This network has a strong local base, and is becoming recognised nationally, and internationally.

There is a clear and strong sense of pride in the community of people who support and participate in the activities of the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery. This participation is creatively distinct, highly personal and socially dynamic. The Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery provides a valued social space for people from different communities and with different abilities, to come together to explore, discuss and express their interest in photography, both online and in person. Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery has a clear ambition to be a safe outlet for people, free from competitive-
ness, free from social judgement and free from overt commercialism, and to express themselves through the medium of photography.

It is important to acknowledge the contribution that Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery has received from Leicester City Council, and the many businesses and supporters that have given on-going in-kind support. However, it is perhaps more important to recognise that the gallery has been built without any bloc-grant funding or any provision of professional management support. The volunteers who have dedicated themselves to ensuring that the gallery is open to the public six days each week, have taken a considerable load upon themselves, especially in entering a field of which they had no prior experience, no professional management support, and no development funding. Ian and the members of LPPG have been able to demonstrate considerable resilience and ingenuity. The use of social media tools to promote and support the network of participants is effective and noteworthy, and many other community and arts organisations would benefit from being able to share this experience and learning how to grow and nurture a socially resilient network from scratch.

This network, however, would not survive the loss of Ian Davies from the project. Firstly because he has been instrumental in establishing the project, and secondly because Ian has the consistent vision to ensure that the gallery is a democratic space that does not separate participants into compartmentalised and instrumentalised units for the sake of funding or organisational niceties. It is possible to recognise three main types of participant in the gallery as a rule of thumb:

4.1  Connected Learners:
These are participants who are willing to enter a journey of discovery and unfolding, in which they are taking on-board new practices, experiencing new ways of looking and thinking, and are happy to be frequently or infrequently drawn into opportunities and experiences in which learning takes place. This level might align with the student or learner, but is not exclusive.

4.2  Abel Level:
These participants are seeking a social environment in order to share and discuss their work and to cultivate a network of friends, co-participants and fellow like-minded thinkers. They are willing to support other contributors as long as they are met with a reciprocated contribution in return. This level might align with the hobbyist or the amateur, but is not exclusive.

4.3  Accomplished Level:
These participants wish to develop their social presence more specifically, either commercially, editorially or artistically. They are more single-minded and have a need for more specific resources and expertise that can service them. They are prepared to offer some peer-to-peer engagement and to contribute to the induction of new participants and learners, but their main focus is in sustaining their own professional development. This level might align with the professional or pre-professional photographer, and is largely exclusive.

It is impossible to expect any single organisation to accommodate the expectations of each of these types of participant equally, and many of the organisations that had been visited have spent a considerable time and expertise working out which of these constituencies is their priority and which will enable financial sustainability. Many of the organisations visited explained that they went through several periods of change and metamorphosis before they settled on the format that they now operate around. To expect LPPG to be immune from organisational metamorphosis would be impractical. The challenge is to ensure that it happens with the least amount of pain, the most amount of engagement, and in a way that results in a sustainable organisation that can share it’s learning experience with other collaborative partners.
5 Recommendations:
In order to ensure the future success, sustainability and raised ambition of Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery, several key areas of support need to be addressed. While this will not answer the most urgent concern of all involved with the project - to secure and sustain an income for the gallery in order to pay a regular salary to the manager - these contributions will nevertheless enhance the social network and co-production capability of the gallery.

5.1 Training in Arts-Business Development
The LPPG has not followed a traditional or linear route by which a community media organisation or arts groups might usually be established. It will be necessary, therefore, to explore ways in which the management capability of the LPPG gallery can be extended as a professional arts organisation. This will involve an orientation process for both the manager and for the supporters and members, and will involve the institution of formal mechanisms of communication, terms of reference and consultation. The challenge is to use social networking, social media production and social media interaction tools effectively and consistently to support this process.

5.2 Reflection – Mentoring and Personal Development
Acting independently, and often by intuition, the LPPG’s development has been secured largely through the work of individuals. Because decisions sometimes vary in the way that they are approached and made, falling between the reactive and the strategic, there is a clear need to develop a more consistent communication and decision making process so that accountability is acknowledged to be transparent, consistent and traceable – while not limiting the freedom of individuals to do their jobs. The challenge is to construct a collaborative decision-making process that can satisfy the needs of members, participants and supporters of the gallery, that uses social media production and participation tools, and does this cost-effectively.

5.3 Peer Networking – On-going Communication
Maintaining links and networking opportunities with other galleries secures two advantages. Firstly there is a raised level of esteem as collaborative projects are developed with partners, and secondly, there is a shared learning that comes from peers working together in a collegiate manner. Securing and programming regular network visits and links with other galleries and community media and arts organisations will be a very practical tool that will help to promote and support Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery. The challenge is to develop networking opportunities and collaborative projects and partnerships using social networking, media production and social media tools effectively and consistently.
Ian Davies Reflections

Ian recalled that he had made a statement to Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery members that a recent exhibition mounted at the gallery would change the level of expectation that people have about the gallery. Ian believed that the network visits would have the same effect and will change the gallery still further by improving the level of networking with other galleries. What Ian wanted to find out was how other galleries work and how they put it all together, and what their community engagement is? Ian saw these visits as a journey of discovery. Ian found that he was surprised how some of the galleries that were visited were thinking along the same lines as Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery, in the way that they develop their contacts with participants and users of their services. On the other hand the scale of some of the galleries was also surprising. Ian believed that the East Midlands has a clear need for what is being done at LPPG and how much the peer galleries would be willing to help in moving things forward.

Ian reflected that there are funding opportunities available which would opportune to take advantage of, but in his assessment the galleries and organisations that had been able to take advantage of these opportunities had not had to do things on their own. Instead, they were able to draw on the support of other people and organisations. But it was the focus on membership that some of the galleries priorities that impressed Ian above other things. How they are able to survive and develop using membership funding and services alone was impressive. Ian described how he enjoyed the ethos of London Independent Photography, and the way that LIP pulled in people from lots of different parts of London. Ian was impressed with the way that Photofusion were always putting something in place for their members and how they could provide additional services for them.

Ian noted that funding derived from the Arts Council would remain problematic because it seemed to generate a certain type of thinking that wasn’t as clearly entrepreneurial as the independent galleries tried to be. Ian noted that he hadn’t witnessed any of the galleries doing what LPPG does and the way that it is done ‘democratically’. Ian felt that there wasn’t a clear sense of ‘this is for the people’. In some way it is difficult to break through the ethos that denies that ‘everyone can take a picture’. In Ian’s view all that people often need is the right support, but there is sometimes a ‘closed-shop’ mind-set, which is a shame because there is a lot that photography can offer by engaging with people at their level rather than in any elitist way.

Ian acknowledged that as a consequence of the visits there will have to be changes to the way that LPPG offers things to its members. Ian wants to offer more workshops and more visiting speakers, but he also wants to avoid the trap that supporters of the gallery sometimes fall into where they talk about doing things but never actually get on with them. There has to be a firming-up and plans have to be written down. Ian feels that he is too often left with too many problems to deal with, and he can’t be dictatorial about them. Ian doesn’t want to pin people down, to fill in forms and they should be able to volunteer when they want to. Ian felt that it had been very useful undertaking the network visits because he came away with something from each visit. Ian felt that he was able to leave something in return. Ian hopes to be able to create a network with other galleries so that some of the talented people in Leicester can show their work at other galleries.
7 Network Visits:

This section is a summary transcript of the issues discussed in each of the interviews.

7.1 Fotofilia

Figure 5 David Rann & Ian Davies

David Rann
Interview Date: 31st July 2013
City: Birmingham
Audio File Log Ref: [130731-002]
Web: http://www.fotofilia.co.uk/
Email: fotofiastudio@gmail.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Fotofilia-Studio/336532551064?ref=hl
Twitter: https://twitter.com/fotofiastudio

David explained how Fotofilia had worked previously on development projects with Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Stratford College and the Midlands Arts Centre [MAC]. In the period that Fotofilia have been operating Fotofilia have built up six courses, with up to ninety students each term. This has been done by combining several different offers, such as vouchers with Groupon and Amazon local. David’s view is that while this might generate up to fifteen additional people to take part in the training courses, this is also fifteen additional people that can be included in the regular mailing lists who might take-up other courses. David explained that while some participants are likely to move on to other projects, some of these participants get stuck and make no further progress, and others will ‘stick’ and will take on a different role within Fotofilia. David described that there are two Fotofilia clubs with about seventy members.

There is a potential opportunity for Fotofilia to move to a new space in the future, with a number of arts organisations in the West Midlands coming together to develop a multipurpose resource space. David explained that having a physical space was essential to enabling the ‘tying-in’ of participants because a regular venue gives a project focus. David explained that Fotofilia makes extensive use of its blog site as a way of targeting people who may be more reluctant to use Facebook and Twitter. David does use social media extensively as he feels they are good, free tools for quick communication and for bringing people in.

David explained that the main focus of Fotofilia is to provide studio space, which is time and cost limited in the West Midlands, and having a dedicated space for hire is important. David moved into teaching with encouragement from his partner and now recognises the training element of Fotofilia
as essential to its sustainability. In the West Midlands there are few exhibition spaces that are affordable to ordinary member of the public, and he described how the Custard Factory in Birmingham offers exhibition space at £500 per week plus VAT, with what he considers to be substandard resources on offer. David described how end-of-year shows for colleges and students often take place in cafes rather than in larger gallery spaces, because galleries are often so expensive and out of reach. David’s view is that it is a good idea to combine production and learning spaces that can be offered-out to colleges or individuals. David has worked with a number of local colleges to support internships.

According to David there is a growing and sustainable demand for photography courses in Birmingham and the outlying counties. David explained that people often travel from the surrounding areas to undertake specific courses, which run on a mix of amateur (who often use the vouchers) and professionals, including people who are starting out and developing their own business. David described how the Fotofilia camera club has a higher proportion of women members, up to thirty per cent, which he described as unusual for a club. There is a mix of backgrounds, and there is a conscious effort to encourage a mix of cultural backgrounds. The key to a sense of inclusiveness is to resist competitiveness and competitions, and to ensure that sessions are not focussed on the level of equipment that individuals might posses. David challenges the club participants with a ‘Crap Camera’ challenge each year, so that participants are on a level playing field, relying on their ‘eye’ rather than their equipment. David described how Fotofilia is also embracing a multimedia strand within the clubs, as well as regularly inviting regular speakers to hosted events.

David described his ethos for developing Fotofilia as ‘to inspire’. ‘To open the blinkers a little and help people find things they wouldn’t otherwise see’. David was asked what support he would like to see developed? David’s view is that it’s not possible to depend on Arts Council and local authority funding, particularly as they often involve ‘jumping through hoops’ and ‘ticking boxes’. The funding becomes the master rather than the means to an end, David believes. Instead, it is essential to ‘value what you offer.’ According to David, people take you more seriously when you have a charge attached to an event or project, even if it is only a small charge. David explained that he believed that people feel more connected when there is a charge and that they don’t value them when they are free. If people pay for a course they will come, regardless of the weather, David explained, as long as it is made available and accessible. Doing things for free is great, but you still have to pay for the electric.
The programme range of work at Ikon includes film, photography, figurative, abstract, installations and other forms of contemporary art. The gallery is described as a 'white cube' gallery. Debbie Kermode is the Assistant Director who explained that she often speaks to people from other arts organisations when they realise that they are at a 'tipping point' and are looking for guidance as they have decisions to take about how their project or organisation might be developed in the future, either to move to a formal setting or remain informal? Debbie explained that the board of trustees at Ikon are supportive and have expertise in the areas that are needed in the running and development of Ikon. Debbie suggested that Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery was in need of professional guidance and support so that Ian Davies does not suffer from 'burn-out'. This guidance can enable the gallery to move forward by developing a better profile, developing joint collaborative projects and relationships, and by bringing resources together from the UK and beyond.

Debbie suggested that any steering group that is formed has to be useful to the gallery manager, and that while the steering group might only consist of a small number of people, they are a body that the gallery manager can lean on for support and advice. Debbie suggested that if a direct grant applications was not thought necessary at this point, then perhaps individual artists might apply for funding, who can develop a collaborative project, with funding from other sources and through self-funding. Debbie explained that the value of collaborative funding can be enormous on many levels and needs a commitment to see it develop. Debbie’s view is that expansion of an art organisation is a tricky thing to manage and asked how good the internal model is that supports the gallery, and what would expansion mean in these circumstances? Does it mean more work with specific artists? More work outside of the gallery? Does it mean international work? What does growth look like, or is it all about sustainability and avoiding instability?

Debbie’s view was that the process of development can be started by focusing on the little things that can be changed, otherwise because the gallery is effectively run by one person it will lead to burn-out
if more intensive activities are attempted. Debbie explained that Ikon is at a different scale but it faces many of the same issues. What does a forward programme for a contemporary art gallery look like in a time of austerity? According to Debbie everybody is reviewing their approach and their commitments, regardless of the scale of the organisation, we are all at a tipping point she said. In Debbie’s view the supporting board have to be professional people. Being smarter and more business-like is important in the present climate.

Debbie made the point that there is a lot of good-will in the arts world, and while Leicester is not known for its visual arts, there are a lot of people who would be supportive. The Arts Council recognises that there are more National Portfolio Organisations (NPO’s) in the West Midlands than in the East Midlands. Politically, Debbie suggested, there is a rationale to have the Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery grow and be recognised for what has been established. Debbie’s view is that hesitating over developing an application to the Arts Council is a mistake, as she would recommend embracing the relationship and the opportunity to develop as a major part of the arts ecology in the city of Leicester. Debbie suggested applying for £100,000 funding so that Leicester Peoples Photographic Gallery can do the things it should be enabled to do. Funding might not come directly through the gallery, but indirectly through individual artists and groups, who would then work with the gallery ‘shoulder to shoulder’. It is important to make the work relevant to Leicester while at the same time growing the audience of people outside of the city who come to visit it.
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Interview Date: 7th August 2013
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Hwa Young Jung is one of the original co-founders of Manchester Digital Labs (MAD Labs), and has just stepped down as a director to lead the community panel that MAD Labs operates. Hwa Young explained that founding MAD Lab involved everything from writing a business plan, to finding a building, and publicising and getting the word out. MAD Labs function is to find a space in the community for Tech-Arts and Sciences in the Digital Sector. MAD Lab has been running for four years, starting with six or seven groups. There are now over sixty groups who each meet on a monthly basis. Groups included mainly technology and geeks, software, programming language groups across different platforms, including: Ruby user group; Python, Drupal, Wordpress, Google Tools, Free Software, Linux, Raspberry Pi, Manchester Girl Geeks, 3D Printing, Hack Manchester, In-Camera Arts, DSLR Filmmakers, Lady’s Who Code, Sci-Fi Book Clubs, and more.

Manchester has a thriving digital scene, Hwa Young explained, but it needed a physical space. Once the initial groups were established they provided an example to the other potential groups wanting to use space in the building, showing that it could be done in a non-techie, non-geeky kind of way. At the start Mad Lab worked with the Manchester Library Service to start a book club. This hit the age group of 25 – 35 year old males that don’t generally access civic libraries, but which proved useful in establishing a relationship. The Libraries provided the books, which the participants could keep. There have then followed a speculative science-fiction writers project and a number of graphic-novel groups. Hwa Young described the space as a nice space for people to experiment without being afraid of failing or having the pressure to succeed, so people have the opportunity to go crazy and wild.

The ethos of Mad Labs is about lowering the barrier to learning, according to Hwa Young. It is more important to have fun and to be curious about the world, and to have no pre-established expectations. By providing a space that enables participants to be inquisitive and to lower the barriers, new ideas can be experimented with and new things can be discussed. Hwa Young emphasised that meet-
In the beginning there was a need to curate some of the groups, but once people saw the opportunities it was a watershed and the number of groups have now grown to the point where there are now between sixty and seventy groups. Hwa Young believes that in participating in these groups people get new skills that can lead to better employment. On the social side they have made new friends, they are more confident and they have even started to lead groups, undertake public speaking, and so on. These more intangible, softer-skills are hard to measure but very valuable.

At the moment Mad Labs seeks to create an environment of ‘stealth learning’, where you learn something but you don’t realise that you have because it is fun. Mad Labs puts on whacky courses, like game jamming, taxidermy and robot building, so that participants have fun and learn in the process. They bring expert scientists in from Manchester’s universities. Mad Labs is also heavily invested in the under eighteens programme, supporting kids who want to get into programming. There is also support for people who find it difficult to enter a technical workplace, such as unemployed people, women and some older people. Mad Labs seeks, according to Hwa Young, to make technology a more inclusive arena.

Hwa Young recognises that there is a clear demand for the work that they undertake, and that they are always trying to broaden the scope of people who come to the events and groups. Mad Labs recently held an aural-history afternoon tea. The youngest participant was in their twenties and the oldest in their seventies, where they shared their stories of living in Manchester and provided a generational bridge. The aim is to continually widen the scope of Mad Labs while also providing professional training support. The level of peer-to-peer learning is growing, particularly in the user groups. Hwa Young explained that seeing people grow and develop, especially the kids, seeing their confidence develop is heart-warming.
Marisa Draper is the Engagement Officer for Cornerhouse. Marisa explained that Cornerhouse has a range of community engagement groups specifically targeting fourteen to nineteen year old groups. These look at visual arts, including photography and digital filmmaking. Cornerhouse will be moving to a new building, ‘Home’, with the merger of Cornerhouse and the Manchester Library Theatre, so some of the provision of the organisation is in a state of flux as they work out what kind of ‘engagement offer’ they might have. It is likely, Marisa explained, that the young people’s target group will be expanded to twenty-five. At present it stops at eighteen, then goes on to adult projects, including courses on the origins of photography, practical talent-based courses, and professional career development courses.

In looking at how things might change at Cornerhouse, there will be an increased involvement of work with communities where the engagement teams will go out into some of the target communities in the ten boroughs of greater Manchester. The aim is to make the public feel that they are part of the programme and to give young people and communities a platform to showcase their talent. There is the potential to get involved with the main Cornerhouse programme without getting sidetracked. According to Marisa, these groups help the Cornerhouse team to stay relevant and at the cutting-edge and encourage risk-taking. This, however, comes with a lot of extra work and a lot of additional time has to be put in. People have to feel that they have been given an opportunity that they might not otherwise have, so it is important to get out and meet people where they are.
Cornerhouse has the capability to work with freelancers because they are funded by the Arts Council and the local authorities of Greater Manchester. They don’t charge for the community and young peoples courses that they offer. This is about giving opportunities Marisa explained. That funding allows for the payment of specialist training, and without that funding it becomes unsustainable. By going out and engaging a demand is created that then has to be met. Without the funding it becomes difficult to meet that demand. There have been consistent cuts in funding over the last five years, but the team of staff at the Cornerhouse are multi-skilled and can ‘make it fit’. The cinema, Marisa explained, the book publishing and the café, all generate income. The café is a great advantage because it brings in profits. There are also lots of trusts and foundations that can be applied to for small amounts of funding that might help to support specific projects. With funding it has to be spent on specific items that often don’t include equipment or sundries.

Cornerhouse has outgrown its present building and the cinema needs to be upgraded if it is to continue to succeed. The demand is growing and the engagement is helping with creating the demand from the audience. There is a need to do practical courses in which people learn how to use the web properly, or to use Photoshop properly, or filmmaking. Everyone is a freelance practitioner, explained Marisa, who wants appropriate skills, so Cornerhouse taps into that need. The audience is increasingly driving what is devised, but the practicalities in learning how to use these tools, such as Photoshop, is quite demanding. So there is a tension between affordability and the cost of production. While the specific courses aimed at young people and communities are free, courses offered to a general audience are set at an appropriate charge in the same way that cinema has a charge. The funding is to engage with young people and communities to enhance their skills and level of participation. But for the general audience there has to be boundaries about how it is paid for. If the training is to further someone’s career then it should be looked at in a very different way.
7.5 Open Eye

Figure 9 Ceri-Jayne Griffith & Jill Carruthers

Jill Carruthers & Ceri-Jayne Griffith
Interview Date: 8th August 2013
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The Open Eye gallery was established in 1977 and moved around Liverpool city centre at various locations before settling at the Pier Head in 2009. Originally set up as a member’s organisation, running workshops, darkrooms and studios, it was an early example of peer-to-peer learning community. Jill Carruthers, Exhibition Co-ordinator, explained how the mission of the Open Eye is now to help up-and-coming photographers, and presenting work of local, national and international artists, established or not. The focus is primarily on lens-based work, which includes photography but also includes time based and multimedia forms - championing creative photography that is relevant to everyone. Jill explained that many arts organisations have a remit to support upcoming artists, so the aim for Open Eye is to find artists who are different and who stand out and make people sit-up and take notice. Looking for something new that fits within the remit of a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) is a challenge according to Jill, especially when faced with specific funding requirements.

Jill explained that demand for photography seems high in Liverpool because many more people have got a camera, either on their phone or a digital camera, and so many people are taking notice that they have the potential to use these cameras creatively. This is driving an interest in courses, such as iphography, which is not being met commercially, especially with the closure of the dedicated photographic supplies retailers. There is a challenge, therefore, explained Jill, to help people to understand their cameras more effectively. There isn’t a darkroom in Liverpool anymore, the closest is Manchester, so the demand has shifted markedly to digital production techniques. Jill explained that her experience curating photographic exhibitions and festivals in Derby is very different from her experience in Liverpool, which does not have a dedicated degree level photography course. There is, though, potential for people to come and participate at the Open Eye gallery. From the operational side it is becoming more important to offer accessible courses that aren’t expensive and which supplement the exhibitions and the events that the gallery offers. Because photography allows people to see the world differently, it is something that can be enjoyed and is accessible.
There is a challenge, Jill identified, to work with college and university courses so that students are aware of how galleries operate and so that galleries have a chance to see how galleries work. Volunteering at a gallery is an enriching experience, according to Ceri, that allows people to participate in the life of the gallery and to express themselves in a satisfactory way that is unique to them, and which demonstrates the boundary between commercial and non-commercial galleries. Open Eye has not yet run an open exhibition. There is the possibility of running an exhibition — salon style — but there is a lot of work that needs to be done when dealing with so many different people, as funding is limited, so it is harder to support people.

Beacon funding from Liverpool City Council and the Arts Council is limited, and this has to cover running costs, wages, and such. Jill explained that there is always a need to be looking out for further funding, especially when trying to set-up new projects. In running the exhibitions it is often necessary to make-do-and-mend, as all arts organisations around the UK are experiencing pressure on their budgets. Open Eye is exploring ways to adapt by collaborating with other organisations in the city. Borrowing frames and technology from partners like FACT. It’s about collaboration and working in partnership with similar organisations with similar aims. The networks between different arts organisations are growing and there is an increased level of support between them.

Jill described how there is an increased need to keep pushing through the boundaries of what can be shown in a gallery. It doesn’t just have to be a picture on the wall. A lot of organisations across the country are starting to think outside of the box more, and the demand will always be there for creative thinking. People are starting to notice that their photo albums often never leave their laptop or iPhone, and that they aren’t getting the satisfaction of leafing through an album and writing the labels. But people adapt. The iphonography workshops are proof of that. Jill’s view is that Open Eye is able to adapt to this demand, and while the future is a challenge the gallery itself will remain.
Emma Thomas is an education officer based at the Turner House Gallery in Penarth, she explained how she works on education projects and gallery engagement at Ffotogalley, which was originally set-up for as a photographer’s resource in the 1970s, but which now goes beyond this and seeks to showcase international as well as Welsh work. Emma described how it is important to provide a platform for international work for Welsh audiences to see. Culturally galleries are important when they focus on contemporary work, according to Emma, because there is a need to promote emerging artists, setting precedents for what can be achieved.

Ffotogallery runs events that are designed to draw in different audiences, such as families who might use the free workshops, and talks that maintain a link with the public. Its important that people can feel comfortable about coming into galleries that can often feel off-putting sometimes. Its also important to provide a space that is free from the commercial aspect of art, and to get a sense that art does not only take place in the gallery, but that some of the most exciting work takes place in the public realm, or on the internet. Art isn’t just within the walls. There will always be a place for photography in the gallery, regardless of how the public come by the images. People can recognise good art when they see it. A photograph can make you think about the world, and doesn’t have to necessarily take place in the gallery. Diffusion is the Cardiff international photography festival, and was about photography in the digital age. Every aspect of our lives, according to Emma, is lived through digital technology and its now just an aspect of our culture.
Liz Edgar is head of education at Ffotogallery, based in Chapter in Cardiff, she described how Ffotogallery exhibits, publishes and runs public programmes of mainstream education with accredited courses and education. Ffotogallery also runs large-scale social projects through Wales, and is a national agency for Wales in lens-based media. The aim is to represent all aspects of the visual arts and to develop strategies for the rural excluded, audiences spread over large geographic areas, and how to work with partner organisations. Lisa described how Ffotogallery started in 1978 at a time when photography’s association with fine art wasn’t established. It felt good, explained Lisa, for Wales to have its own exhibition space to bring international artists to Wales and to allow the founding photographic group to show their own work. The group was attached to the Newport School of Photography under David Hearn.

Photography has always been popular, according to Liz. There has been an appetite as it is a democratic medium. There is a long history of photography in Wales, with a lot of documentation of the landscape and the industrial heartlands. There is a lot of material that captures the imagination. Ffotogallery started as a small gallery in Cardiff city centre, and was considered to be progressive in its outlook as so many people wanted to participate. Liz described that photography lends itself to a large amateur side of the form. Ffotogallery opened a set of community darkrooms as a members organisation with a democratic organisation and members shows. Lisa describes how as the membership grew there was a need for expanded premises, working with the Chapter arts centre, an arts education base was set-up in Cardiff. A grant from the Bearing Foundation helped to develop the education programme that gave revenue funding which allowed for a regular education programme to be put in place. In recent times the National Museum of Wales has provided the Turner House gallery in Penarth, where Ffotogallery support the exhibitions and overheads, but the gallery is gifted rent-free. Ffotogallery is therefore still faced with a degree of transience and the use of multiple sites and with a large internet presence, working with partner organisations like the Dylan Thomas festival. Ffotogallery has a presence, according to Lisa, that is greater than its physical presence.

The digital shift has changed the level of involvement with the exhibition programme. Less workshops doing printing and framing. Digital became the standard so more is now outsourced. A lot of the technical expertise of photography is considered to be redundant. Darkroom capacity has been reduced with the shift to digital darkrooms. There has, though, been a resurgence of interest in darkroom techniques, so there is relief that they were not closed. Now only the black and white darkrooms are used as there was no longer a justification to keep on the colour darkrooms. Lisa explained that she is no longer confident about predicting the future but is happy to follow the demands of the user groups. Ffotogallery has a relatively high level of earned income when compared to fine arts organisations, as photography can be commodified. People want training and expertise and services. Liz believes that all galleries have to become entrepreneurial, but there is a need not to over-commodify this delivery. The courses deliver a lot of revenue, that is returned to the development work. There is no space to be complacent about funding and there is always an urgent need not to take any funding opportunity that comes along, then finding out that they have bitten-off more than can be chewed. Being careful not to spread the organisation too thinly.

Membership of Ffotogallery has declined in recent years. There used to be two big incentives: the members exhibition and the use of the production facilities. As digital photography expands people need to use less of the darkroom facilities. Student involvement has grown. With three to four hundred students each year a sign of a shifting base that needs to be redefined. There is a need to identify who this constituency is and what the relationships are and how they are being serviced. The board of Ffotogallery is still made up of members, who are looking at ways to develop the membership model and have a push to redefine what it means to be a member and make it work again. The next two to three years are mapped out for Ffotogallery in terms of ambition, with a capital spending programme to be seen through, the resolution of some brand confusion and the next international festival to be organised and programmed, as well as working with partners.
7.7 Third Floor Gallery

![Bartosz Nowicki & Ian Davies](image)

**Bartosz Nowicki**
Interview Date: 14th August 2013
City: Cardiff
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The founders of the Third Floor gallery wanted to do something different by bringing world-class photography to Cardiff. Bartosz Nowicki, one of the primary organisers of the gallery, explains that when the gallery was started there was an exhibition every month/six weeks, with two floors of exhibitions space to service. This meant an opening every three weeks. Each of the people behind the gallery has a full-time job, so they contribute to the development of the gallery in their spare time, while also pursuing their photographic interest. Eventually it was decided to have longer exhibitions and to lose one of the floors of gallery space. With time they have changed to survive, explained Bartosz. When they started they didn’t pay for printing, but now they print more of the work that they exhibit. Photographers now send files to the gallery that are printed on-site. The printer was a gift from David Hearn at Newport, but the cost of the printing materials have to be met locally.

The idea for the Third Floor gallery came about because there was no photographic gallery that liked by the founders. The gallery in Penarth showed different types of work, so it was felt to be good to have a gallery space for alternative types of work. This was a somewhat selfish impulse at the beginning, but by investing more than £1000 each to secure the venue space and attracting the first photographer, they manage to secure a mention in the Sunday Times. Bartosz described this as a state of mind: go for the big fish and go from there. This has since progressed, but he is unsure if it was a radical act or an act of desperation. For the first three or four exhibitions the photographers brought their
work in to the gallery, but working internationally it needed a different approach. Make your mind-up on what you want to do with the gallery, which will give you a future path.

Everyone can take a great photograph with a phone, but the ethos at Third Floor is different, explained Bartosz. There is an acknowledgement that some photographers have stronger ideas than others and that difference can be seen between a ‘snapper’ and a dedicated photographer. The gallery hosts a regular series of slide shows, like an open mic-night, but an open-slide night, where it doesn’t matter what the level of competence is. This is where the level of engagement is discussed and explored. When a good photographer is identified it is a struggle to move them forward because time is so constrained. Third Floor tries to remain open to everyone, and if the gallery team feel that the images are good enough they will be exhibited, but this doesn’t happen often. There is a strong base of students in Cardiff. Third Floor tries to create communities around openings to encourage people to talk and interact. There is a high level of interest that is sustaining the gallery because people report that they like to spend time chatting about photography with like-minded people in a social environment.

The team supporting Third Floor is very international. Cardiff is home to plenty of volunteers, but there is no specific thought put into where the volunteers originate. The independence of the gallery is most important. Showing the work that the organising team want to show, that they believe is powerful enough to engage with the public in a visual or emotional way that might prompt memories or thoughts. Third Floor wants people to engage with the work they show. They try to bring photographers to the openings, so visitors can ask questions. Each person is respected for the experience of what they see at both an emotional and an intellectual level. When people come to the Third Floor gallery they feel that they will be stimulated. We want to show photographs people will love. Its on many levels, explains Bartosz. Commercialisation isn’t something that Third Floor considers. ‘We show the work we love, as long as we agree as a group’. It depends on every photograph, every photographer, every image.
7.8 White Cloth Gallery

Kirstin Black
Interview Date: 22\textsuperscript{nd} August 2013
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Kirstin’s role is marketing, PR, getting involved with exhibitions, promoting exhibitions and events, and generally promoting the White Cloth gallery to Leeds and beyond. The ethos of White Cloth is to be inclusive. Gallery one and two are for international work, and are supplemented with a café that is used to promote emerging artists. Over the last year, since the gallery first opened, students have exhibited in the café space, which they wouldn’t normally have the opportunity to do in a ‘prestigious’ contemporary gallery. The atmosphere overall is relaxed, Kirstin explained, and if visitors don’t have a specific interest in photography or film, they can come and have a coffee and see the space.

It is nice to be able to give back to people who wouldn’t dream of being able to use the space. There is a perception that galleries are stuffy and elitists, and out of reach. White Cloth is a platform for people to promote themselves in Leeds. Leeds is fantastically diverse with a lot of art going on. The galleries in Leeds work well together. There is no rivalry. The more going on in Leeds, the more it puts art in Leeds on the map in general, and in the country. It is about bringing art to the north, and not just the kind of international art that you would find in London. ‘We are passionate about that’ Kirstin pointed out.

There are lots of people who think that they are photographers now, with the increase in the use of digital cameras. White Cloth gets lots of emails from people who want to exhibit work, but there is a fine line between what the gallery will show and that it won’t. Digital photography has broadened how people think about photography and art. People used to think that art was formal and photography was never seen as serious art. Digital photography and social media have broadened people’s view of photography as art. White Cloth regards itself as an inclusive space that hopes people will come in and take an interest. White Cloth is also an events space and that offers the gallery out because there is a demand for people to hold events in interesting spaces. People who book the gallery, Kirstin explained, have the added extra of seeing art on the wall which provokes conversation with their friends, their family, if it is a wedding. This is not elitist. This is not a high-platform where you have to be wealthy to have an art collection. It is a lot more accessible.
White Cloth is backed by a private investor who funds the gallery. On a day-to-day basis the gallery has to make money through the bar and by events alone. By footfall alone there is not enough to support the gallery, in the way that the Tate or the V&A get visitors. But by having events, which many in the art world would frown upon, arguing that White Cloth is ‘selling its soul to the devil’, the gallery is reaching a much wider audience that might never come and see this kind of art. People recognise the accessibility and value it. Recently White Cloth ran a Duffy exhibition of David Bowie images in association with the V&A, which was massive, with lots of international visitors. Having the art on the wall backs-up people coming here for an event.

Social media is the way forward to promote the gallery cheaply and widely, through the use of Facebook, Twitter and Linkedin. In Leeds there are lots of groups on social media. Culture Vultures is an important group in Leeds. Widely respected and used as a platform for the promotion of the arts. There is a good support network of people promoting each other and the city. White Cloth has been lucky with the press, but it is the quality of the work that the gallery has brought, and the fact that it is in Leeds, means that people don’t have to go to London. Putting Leeds on the map.
Tiffany Jones is the editor of Flip magazine, which has been published for twenty-five years, and in its present format for four years. The magazine comprises sixty-eight pages. It is sold in galleries in London, and it is known as a street level magazine for both pros and amateurs in photography. The magazine is part of the London Independent Photography (LIP) network that has six hundred members. The ethos of LIP is to promote various approaches to photography that investigate personal ideas through photography. The magazine doesn’t cover commercial work, but rather work that is more personal in nature. The magazine is regarded as a collaborative activity that is run by the people involved. Photographers like to be involved and people like to see a variety of work that other photographers are producing. A lot of photographers aspire to be published in the magazine, as there is a lot of good work to show. The magazine often carries an interview with a well-known photographer and people value being sat alongside these well-known and successful people.

London Independent Photography runs satellite groups all over London who meet together once per month, to discuss and get feedback from other members who are trying to improve their work and advance their skills. According to Tiffany there is an underlying community involvement with people trying to improve their work. There is a lot of feedback that goes around and members get to know what each other is doing and how they get about with their projects. There are a number of collaborations going on with certain groups who are focussing on particular projects, say geographic and locality-based projects in London, as well as archive projects. The magazine try’s to profile that work.

Tiffany explained that photography can be an isolating craft or hobby, so LIP and Flip magazine brings people together to get out and talk about photography, and to focus on their photography as a form of personal expression. There is an emphasis on investigating the city that they live in, and to share
that work so people can see it and discuss it. There a dialogue created in the magazine, and people writing about the process of being photographers and what drives them. Beyond what people get through participation, they also get friendships and that’s the most important thing. Its building relationships with people who you can trust to give you feedback on your very personal work, to grow personally, to share and to help other people grow. These are the underlying reasons and motivations why people want to participate.

Hugh Lock is the Chairman for London Independent Photography, and he describes how there are a lot of people with talent and skills in London. Hugh’s job is to help find the right people to do the functions, such as who runs the magazine or the exhibitions. Hugh also explained that he undertakes the traditional things a chair does around governance and dealing with members issues, and providing a vision and bringing in new thoughts and ideas, as well as acting as a contact point for people with different concerns and ideas. Hugh explained that LIP was set-up over a decade ago, at a time when photography was beginning to be taken seriously. There where the large galleries, but there wasn’t a congregating social space for people to make contact, at a peer-to-peer level about their photography and to share ideas and thoughts with. It was more your traditional top-down structural model. So the people who created the LIP did so to help people develop a space to establish those relationships, to develop a format for workshops and exhibitions, and then the magazine.

Hugh explains that LIP has stuck to the core areas of creating the space where people can come and meet other photographers of all different disciplines and skills, to learn from them, to share ideas, without the intense pressure that comes from competition. According to Hugh a lot of the people who come out of the Camera Club environment find that refreshing. If you go to one of our satellite group meetings there will be a theme, it will be discussed, but there will be no prize at the end of it. It’s in the LIP constitution that they don’t have competitions. There is an ethos of inclusion and collaboration that takes the form of specific projects that involve a number of photographers who work on the same projects. LIP had a large project for the Olympics called ‘Hidden Villages’ where people photographed London as it is in what people often call its different villages. That was a large collaboration project that culminated in an exhibition at Goldsmiths College, which went on for more than a year.

Digital photography and smartphones have not yet changed the way that the LIP satellite groups work, but it is beginning to happen, said Hugh. There are people coming to photography because they have done some on their smart phone. LIP’s focus tends to be on the content rather than the technology. Hugh describes how they ask why you have taken it, what’s in it, rather than questions about technique. In some of our groups they actually discourage any discussion of technology. We are much more interested in hearing people talk about what it means to them, explains Hugh. Why did I take this? Why does it matter? But LIP is seeing increased numbers of people using the technology, so it will have an impact. LIP is also increasingly thinking about video. A lot of photographers are expanding their practice to thing about video. LIP doesn’t have a format to deal with video yet, but there is some demand for it. There are a number of challenges for the future, but because of the way LIP operates in its channels, and with digital photography becoming important, there are going to be some ‘pushbacks’. With video photographers asking how far they can go down the digital route and still be included in LIP. While no one is an absolute purist, Hugh describes, there are people who feel that their work only works in that particular way.

LIP now ask for digital submissions for the exhibitions, previously it was all print-based. With video the challenge is to think about how LIP incorporates video into its exhibitions that use a small and intensive space? How is video brought into the satellite groups? There are questions about things that happen on screen and things that happen on paper, explained Hugh. This will be an issue that will be quite interesting. Keeping younger people with fresh ideas coming trough, and appealing to students who are a growing body is another set of challenges. LIP is looking at the idea of holding a big conference which will help to develop these issues further.

Tiffany explained that the web is a very good way to highlight video, though this might be contentious with some members, after twenty-five years of experience with still images. The website is due for some re-imagination, as there is constant change of what people are looking for on the web in terms
of tablets and viewing. It can get complex. LIP is volunteer driven and time is limited. LIP won’t be breaking boundaries or barriers, but will be able to run features and highlight what people are doing.

Hugh pointed out that LIP has a membership fee system, around six hundred paid members at £24 each per year. This gets pushed-up each year, but it’s not a large barrier and has given a steady set of funds. LIP manage the funds carefully and work with what they have. If LIP does invest in things, such as the exhibition, which they hire space for, then members are charged to enter the exhibition. The satellite groups have to have their own self-funding mechanism, as LIP don’t sponsor or support the groups. They have to find their own way in the world. As it comes to social media LIP wants to diversify and grow its membership, and perhaps talk with members about sponsorship. This will be a big debate, in the same way as video. LIP has had a long time where they have claimed their independence, according to Hugh, and they are beholden to nobody for money. In the future there may be the demand for something large that they want to do, which would be too big a risk if they didn’t raise money in a different way. The membership fee is established and allows them to do most of what they want to do without financial risk. This has been built-up over time.

Tiffany described how a lot of members of LIP are lifetime members. It takes hold of you and it’s hard to just walk away, she explained, since you’ve invested all this time into projects that are for the good of the group. There is always a time when other people need to step-up. Tiffany describes how she spends time encouraging people to participate. The group is what you make it, explains Tiffany. Lots of people think it will go on without them doing their thing. Submitting images for the exhibition and for the magazine, how can you be too busy to submit your own portfolio? Encouraging people to participate more in order to gain more out of it for themselves, as well as getting the benefit of giving for the whole.

In summing up Hugh suggested that LIP is changing. Interesting things are happening that will be driven strongly by the membership. It’s very much a membership organisation. The committee is very aware that it can’t be a small dictatorship or a cabinet that decides policies. The members will always get involved. LIP are hoping to see some specialists groups that are more thematic rather than just geographic, but there is room to move into more socially organised thematic group. LIP will always remain a strongly driven members organisation.
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Julia Martin is the Director of Photofusion which was started as a co-op in the early 1980s, and first got funding from the GLC. This was subsequently taken up by Greater London Arts. Photofusion is now an Arts Council funded organisation. Previously based in Wandsworth, until moving to Brixton in 1991, which is very lively and buzzing place, according to Julia, with great transport links. There are still three or four of the original members on the board. Photofusion is a co-op, a non-profit, limited by guarantee. There is a charitable arm, Photofusion Educational Trust, who’s remit is to be a centre for all photographers and young people out in the community who would get involved with photography through outreach programmes. Offering professional and personal development, access to darkrooms, digital facilities, digital studios and photographic studios. Photofusion has a picture library and agency, which is where the co-op started, as well as a gallery. The aim is to provide resources that photographer’s need and that the market shows demand for.

Photofusion works on a mixed economy of funding from the Arts Council, which according to Julia isn’t huge. The rest comes from self-generated sources. From the start Photofusion wanted to avoid dependence on the Arts Council, with an independent stream of income. Money from trusts and foundations for outreach work with young people in the community supplements the main grants. The ethos of Photofusion is to provide excellent service facilities, advice and services for members, a place for critical debate and seminars. Members focus on the website where the activities are listed. There are four hundred active members who use Photofusion, providing professional development.
from the youngest to the most successful photographers. Photofusion stays within the market, explains Julia, thus providing what is needed and not relying on grants. At the beginning the vast majority of income came from the darkrooms, both colour and black and white. But this has now changed. Money is generated from other sources. There is a chance for more varied programmes of talks from seminars and workshops that are put on, including iPhonography, Polaroid and digital pinhole combinations.

The challenge of young people earning a living from photography is significant, and energy and thought has to be given about how to meet all these challenges, Julia explained. They are the same challenges that Photofusion has to meet in order to provide the advice and support members feel is necessary. The challenge is to offer members something that they feel part of, and from which they can take a lead. One of the most successful things is the peer-crits and the member’s forums. Julia describes that when students leave college they often don’t have access to on-going support, and when they are in college this support is often not very good anyway. Members are supportive and helpful with each other. Some European Social Funding is being used to help freelance photographers to open up new markets. Thus working on a programme from commercial to fine art, all different aspects of photography that members need. The support team send out regular questions and members are vocal about the things they need, and covers the complete range of photography.

Julia explained that most arts organisations are going to find it really difficult with the cuts coming from the Arts Council. Photography is difficult to sustain. There isn’t the level of commercial work that there used to be. There are a lot of self-motivated projects going on, but it can’t be seen to be easy to maintain organisations like Photofusion if there isn’t funding. There’s no way to get the amount of money to sustain the buildings and staffing. Cutbacks can only go so far before there is no point in carrying on. Crowdfunding only raises small amounts of money and won’t solve the problems of organisations like Photofusion. They are great for raising small amounts of money. Only the large organisations will be able to achieve patronage and sponsorship from commercial bodies. Smaller organisations won’t give them kudos and they are being cut-back anyway. Loads of innovation in photography but there’s not a lot of money coming from it. There is some really interesting work from photographers in their twenties and thirties who are meeting the challenges and with positive support and training they have been able to pick-up grants and funding for their work. The UK festivals are showing there is no shortage of creativity and innovation, but talk to any photographer, even successful ones, and they are finding it hard to make a living. There is loads of creativity. It is easier to do things now, which is great.
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9  References: