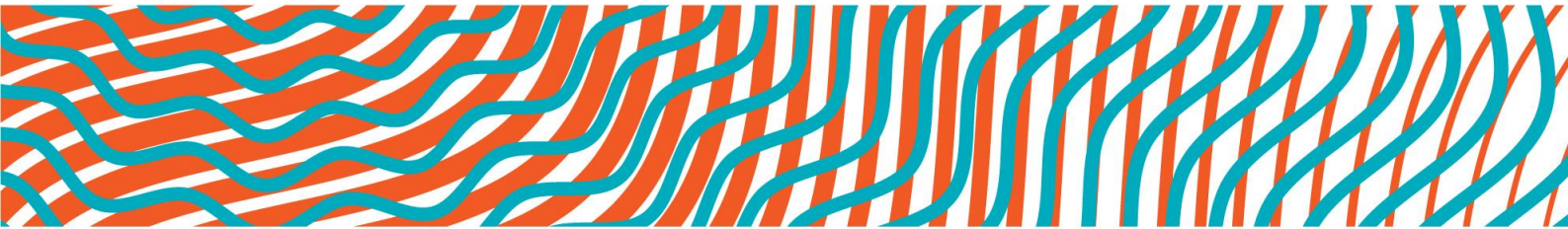


transformative social innovation theory



WP4 | CASE STUDY Report: Impact Hub

April 2015

Theme [ssh.2013.3.2-1] [Social Innovation- Empowering People, changing societies]

Project Full Title: "Transformative Social Innovation Theory project"

Grant Agreement n. 613169



This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 613169

About TRANSIT:

TRANSIT is an international research project that aims to develop a theory of Transformative Social Innovation that is useful to both research and practice. It is co-funded by the European Commission and runs for four years, from 2014 until 2017. The TRANSIT consortium consists of 12 partners across Europe and Latin America. For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/>.

Suggested citation:

Wittmayer, J.M., Avelino, F., Afonso, R. (eds.) (2015) WP4 CASE STUDY Report: Impact Hub. TRANSIT: EU SSH.2013.3.2-1 Grant agreement no: 613169

Acknowledgements:

This report would not have been possible without the continued support of our work by the Impact Hub teams and members in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and São Paulo. Special thanks to Tatiana Glad and her team in Amsterdam, Amelie Veenstra and her team in Rotterdam and Henrique Bussacos and his team in São Paulo for their time and support during the research period. We also would like to thank all the members who gave us insights into the 'Hub Experience' during our participant observation at the different locations. And last but not least we would like to thank the people who gave us an 'outside view' and granted us insights into how it is to work with the Impact Hub.

Date: April 2015

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Foreword: the TRANSIT Research Project

TRANSIT (TRANSformative Social Innovation Theory) is an ambitious research project that will develop a theory of transformative social innovation which is about empowerment and change in society. It is co-funded by the European Union under the Seventh Framework Programme and runs for four years, from January 2014 until December 2017. TRANSIT aims to involve and encourage feedback from social entrepreneurs and innovators, policy makers and academics to develop a theory with practical relevance. The theory has three pillars: It will be based on, and grounded in, insights from other theories such as transition theory, social movement theory and institutional theory. Secondly, it will be based on in-depth empirical research, and finally it will be tested through cross-comparative research. The research project studies whether and how social innovation can bring about societal transformation and empowerment.

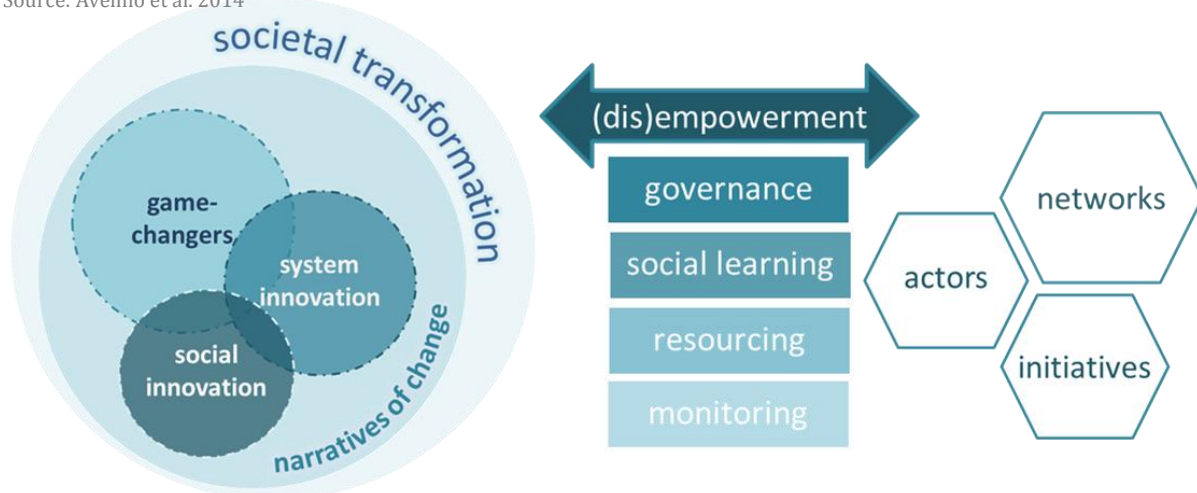
As part of the first phase of the in-depth empirical work, TRANSIT-researchers have studied 12 selected transnational networks and 2-3 local cases for each network (see table on next page for an overview). This document reports on the case-study of the transnational **Impact Hub network** and on three local cases: **Impact Hub Amsterdam**, **Impact Hub Rotterdam** and **Impact Hub São Paulo**.

This case-study report was guided by four empirical research questions based upon a preliminary conceptual framework of the TRANSIT-project (see Figure 0-1¹). The four questions concern:

1. the overall development of the local cases and the transnational network(ing);
2. how they relate to different types of change and innovation (incl. social innovation, system innovation, game-changers, narratives of change and societal transformation);
3. how actors are empowered or disempowered in and by the local cases and the transnational network(ing), including topics such as governance, learning, resourcing and monitoring;
4. what are other relevant emergent issues with regard to understanding the dynamics of transformative social innovation.

Figure 0-1: Preliminary conceptual framework for TRANSIT project

Source: Avelino et al. 2014



¹ For more information about this preliminary conceptual framework and underlying working definitions, see Avelino et al. 2014: <http://bit.ly/1J6OCGb>

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	Transnational Networks under study in TRANSIT project	Research-institute	Local Case 1	Local Case 2
1	The Impact Hub: Global network of social entrepreneurs	DRIFT	The Netherlands Drift	Brazil UFRJ
2	Ashoka: Network for financial support to social entrepreneurs	ESSRG	Hungary ESSRG	Germany UM
3	Time Banks: Networks facilitating reciprocal service exchange	UM	United Kingdom UM	Spain UDC
4	Credit Unions: Different types of credit cooperatives	UDC	United Kingdom UEA	Spain UDC
5	RIPESS: Network for the promotion of social solidarity economy	ULB	Romania UDC	Belgium ULB
6	FABLABS: Digital fabrication workshops open to local communities	SPRU	United Kingdom SPRU	Argentina UNQ
7	Hackerspace: User driven digital fabrication workshops	SPRU	United Kingdom SPRU	Argentina UNQ
8	Living Knowledge Network: Network of science shops and other community-based research entities	AAU	Denmark AAU	Romania AAU
9	DESIS-network: Network for design for social innovation and sustainability	UFRJ	Italy UFRJ	Brazil UFRJ
10	Global Ecovillage Network: Network of eco-villages and other intentional communities	BOKU	Portugal Drift	Germany BOKU
11	Transition Towns: Grassroot communities working on 'local resilience'	UEA	United Kingdom UEA	Hungary ESSRG
12	INFORSE: International network of sustainable energy NGOs	AAU	Denmark AAU	Belgium ULB

Table 1. Overview of Transnational Networks under Study in Phase 1 of the TRANSIT research project

Position of this Report in the TRANSIT project:

This basic case-study report is part of the 1st empirical phase of TRANSIT, and will be used as:

- Input for a cross-comparative analysis of all 12 networks and 24 local cases, resulting in a TRANSIT-deliverable that is published on the TRANSIT-website
- Basis for a short summary of each network and local case, which is published on the TRANSIT-website
- Possibly, a final version of the case-study report, published on the TRANSIT-website
- Basis for a essays/ blogs/ policy briefs to be published via the TRANSIT website
- Basis for academic papers to be submitted and published in scientific journals

More information on the TRANSIT-project:

www.transitsocialinnovation.eu

www.facebook.com/transitsocialinnovation

Twitter: @TransitSI

1 Introduction to the Impact Hub

This report focuses on the Impact Hub, a global network of social entrepreneurs which provides innovative co-creation places around the world to its members who are 'working on ideas for a radically better world'. The Impact Hub has been studied as an exemplary social network that facilitates social innovation and entrepreneurial activity (Carrera & Granelli 2009, Casson & Della Giusta 2007). It has also been used as empirical material in research on how strategic niche management (SNM) can be applied to inform social innovation and social entrepreneurship (Witkamp et al. 2011). As such, it seems perfectly apt to inform the building of a theory on transformative social innovation, which is the overall aim of the TRANSIT project.

TRANSIT (TRANSformative Social Innovation Theory)

The TRANSIT (TRANSformative Social Innovation Theory) project aims to develop a theory of transformative social innovation which is about empowerment and change in society. Part of this research is empirical research in twelve networks that were considered “*pertinent examples of networks that facilitate transformative social innovations across Europe and Latin America (and beyond), and that engage with the transformative discourses and game-changing developments under study*” (Transit Description of Work 2013: 10). The Impact Hub is one of these networks. The Impact Hub network provides TRANSIT with a set of transnational examples of how social entrepreneurs operate beyond and at the intersections between the state, the third sector and the market, to create social innovations that contribute to various forms of change and innovation.

Impact Hub

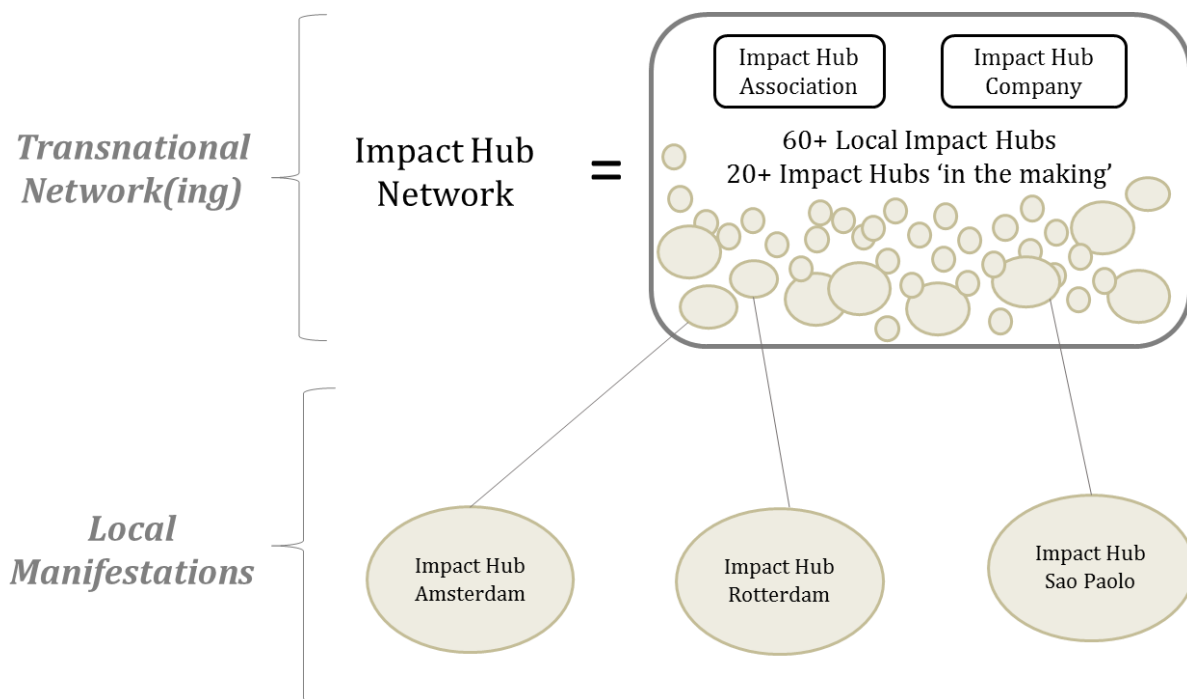
The Impact Hub is a global network of social entrepreneurs that combines elements from co-working spaces, innovation labs and business incubators. There are currently over 70 Impact Hubs spread across 5 continents, which are all members of a global Impact Hub Association. The latter owns a limited company, Impact Hub GmbH, which provides the individual Impact Hubs with a number of services and overlooks the licence agreements. The local Impact Hubs share certain basic characteristics. All of them have individual members, in total some 9.000+ members, who are mostly social entrepreneurs ‘working on ideas for a radically better world’. They are offered services by ‘their’ Impact Hub, such as the provision of a co-working space, access to an entrepreneurial community network and a programming of events and trainings. According to their global website, Impact Hubs:

“set out to create spaces that borrow from the best – a prototyping lab, a start-up incubator, an inspiring office, a learning space and a think tank – to create a unique ecosystem for social innovation. Spaces with all the tools and trimmings needed to grow and develop new ventures for sustainable impact by providing access to the right experience, knowledge, networks, finance and markets. But above all, spaces for meaningful encounters, exchange and inspiration, full of diverse people doing amazing things.”(Impact Hub website, 2015).

Empirical research

At the level of the transitional network(ing), we researched the global Impact Hub Network, which consists of a global network governance structure (including an Impact Hub Association and an Impact Hub Company), 70+ local Impact Hubs across the world, as well as 20+ local Impact Hubs ‘in the making’. We took local Impact Hubs as ‘local manifestations’ of the network. This report comprises the study of three local manifestations, namely: Impact Hub Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Impact Hub Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and Impact Hub São Paulo (Brazil). The choice for these is outlined in chapter 2. The transnational network(ing) was researched in terms of the activities of and interactions between the Impact Hub Association, the Impact Hub Company, and the local Impact Hubs. For an overview, see Figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1: Overview of the Impact Hub cases



Results

The empirical research was conducted along methodological guidelines (see Søgaaard Jørgensen et al. 2014) which were based on a conceptual framework for TRANSIT research questions (see Foreword introduction on the TRANSIT Research Project). The questions concern the overall development of the local manifestations and transnational network(ing), their relation to and engagement with innovation and change, the (dis)empowerment of actors involved in the local manifestations / transnational network(ing) and other relevant emergent issues with regard to understanding the dynamics of transformative social innovation. This case study report gives in-depth descriptive answers to these questions with regard to the Impact Hub.

These insights will inform the next iteration of the development of a transformative social innovation theory. Our main focus in this report is on rich and thick empirical description and a first analysis of the case material along TRANSIT’s preliminary conceptual framework.

Structure of the report

This introduction is followed by section 2 on methodological considerations, including our choices of research methods and our research relations in the field. Sections 3 to 6 report our findings on the transnational network(ing) (section 3), the Impact Hub Amsterdam (section 4), the Impact Hub Rotterdam (section 5) and the Impact Hub São Paulo (section 6). Within these sections we outline the developments of the global and local manifestations, their relation to innovation and change, their relation to (dis)empowerment as well as specific issues which are considered important in researching this specific manifestation. In a final section (section 7), we synthesise our insights along the same categories.

2 Methodology

Authors: Julia Wittmayer, Flor Avelino, Rita Afonso

Our original intention was to research two local manifestations, in line with the TRANSIT research design: one in the Netherlands and one in Brazil.

In Brazil, a first orientation phase took place between April and May 2014 during which we held some informal skype meetings and read some initial literature. We chose to focus on São Paulo, because they were one of the first² Impact Hubs in the world and the first in Brazil. The co-founders have very good connections with the Impact Hub Association and were involved in the initial phase of the first Impact Hub meetings in London. Due to their experience, they helped all the other Impact Hubs in Brazil in the initial phases. The research on the Impact Hub in São Paulo was carried out by one researcher in two units of Impact Hub São Paulo, one in Bela Cintra and another in Vila Madalena.

In the Netherlands, the two Impact Hubs in Amsterdam and Rotterdam had initially started off together under the umbrella of the Impact Hub Netherlands association (see intermezzo, between chapter 3 and 4). Based on this, the initial unit of analysis was to be “Impact Hubs in the Netherlands”, including both Impact Hub Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In an orientation phase for the research, in March and April 2014, we had several mail exchanges, as well as calls with the owner of the Impact Hub Rotterdam and the founder of the Impact Hub Amsterdam. While aiming for a common approach for both Impact Hubs, it quickly became clear that they had different institutional set ups and priorities. This was a first hint, and soon after having started our research, we noticed that both Impact Hub’s differ considerably and could both give us insights in their own right regarding the overall four research questions. As such, we decided to take each of them as a separate unit of analysis, acknowledging them as inherently different local manifestations of the Impact Hub network.

This meant that the time budget allocated for the research of a local manifestation had to be spread across two local case studies. We could address this through employing a research assistant, who supported us in research administrative tasks, and through shifting some of the time budget that was available for the study of the transnational network, to the study of these two local manifestations.

2.1 Researcher relations to the case

2.1.1 Proximity – distance

The researchers in the Netherlands already knew the Impact Hub. Flor Avelino was herself a long-time (passive) member of the Impact Hub in Rotterdam. As such, both the founder of the Impact Hub Amsterdam and the owner of the Impact Hub in Rotterdam knew Flor and also the research institute (DRIFT) that is coordinating the TRANSIT-project and responsible for leading the Impact Hub case-study. Julia Wittmayer had heard about the Impact Hub from a number of colleagues who were members of the Impact Hub Rotterdam.

² There is some disagreement/ unclarity regarding the precise order of Impact Hubs, and which one was the 2nd, 3rd or 4th, depending on which starting date is counted (legal entity, purchase of building, public opening, etc.).

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Throughout the extensive research process of about nine months (May 2014 – January 2015), during which we engaged in regular participant observation, we also came to understand the world from the point of view of actors involved in the Impact Hub. While this is desirable, as this knowledge allows us to describe and analyse the initiative in relation to transformative social innovation, it should not prevent us “*to ask counterintuitive questions, to approach issues from the ‘outside,’ and to question pet explanations*” (Greenwood and Levin 2007: 120). These practices are part of a scientific practice, by others referred to as an attitude of doubt and procedural systematicity (Yanow 2006) which help to uncover unexpected and counterintuitive explanations and unravel commonly accepted assumptions. Working as a research team but each focusing on one of the cases (at times supported by a research assistant) helped us to reflect together and keep each other sharp and critical in terms of our observations and analysis (cf. Wittmayer et al. 2014). Also the practice of keeping field notes and engaging in critical reflection while doing so, did support us in the iterative process of approaching and withdrawing from ‘the field’. During and after the TRANSIT research engagement, both the researchers and the two Dutch Impact Hubs have been exploring opportunities for future collaborations.

The researchers in Brazil had not heard of the Impact Hub initiative until the beginning of the project. We sought to establish the first contact through virtual meetings with the co-founder of the Impact Hub Belo Horizonte, the co-founder and assessor of communication of São Paulo. These meetings were difficult to arrange with the contacts being busy, not responding to emails, or just not turning up on skype. Once we had scheduled a visit to their office in São Paulo to make the interviews, the reception was quite friendly. All members showed enormous willingness in participation and clarification of issues raised by the researcher.

2.1.2 Reciprocity and mutual benefits

The Dutch Impact Hubs were approached in the beginning with an introduction mail in which we outlined what TRANSIT is and asked whether and under which conditions we could do research at and on their Impact Hubs. Together with this mail we sent a short flyer giving more background information on the TRANSIT project including an adapted list taken from the methodological guidelines (Søgaard Jørgensen et al. 2014: 21-22) of what we could offer them in return (see Annex 4). From earlier contacts it was clear, that both Dutch Impact Hubs wanted to enter a more long-term relation with the researchers and their institute. As we understood that the membership fees are an important part of the business model of the Impact Hub, we proposed them that we could pay a total of 500 Euros from our fieldwork budgets for allowing us to use their facilities and being physically present about eighteen times.

The Impact Hub Amsterdam agreed to this model, meaning that we paid 250 Euros for being able to use the virtual and physical facilities of the Impact Hub Amsterdam. This was formally agreed in a “Partner Connect Membership agreement” between the Partnership Lead of the Impact Hub and researcher Flor Avelino from DRIFT. Due to our limited resources, the fee for such partner connect membership was reduced from the standard fee of €480 to €250 ex. VAT per year. The agreement stated that we would receive the usual benefits of being a ‘partner connect member’, and furthermore, that “*As part of this discounted rate we agree on some joint ambitions in support of the TRANSIT research project*” (Partner Connect Membership agreement, Impact Hub Amsterdam-DRIFT, May 2014). Indeed, throughout the case-study research, collaborations were explored and developed, which resulted in the co-creation of a course for professionals on social innovation and transitions as a partnership between DRIFT, the Transition Academy and the Impact Hub Amsterdam.

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The Impact Hub Rotterdam indicated that it preferred to approach the added value of our research engagement without the use of membership fees. The owner invited us to come and work from the Impact Hub Rotterdam as often as we liked. In return we agreed that we would give a lunch lecture on TRANSIT for the members (which turned out to be a breakfast lecture on June 5th, 2014), have a personal meeting with her and a presentation for the members/interviewees to discuss the research results and share the report (in preparation as we are writing), sharing opportunities for networking and discussions with other social innovation initiatives, researchers and policy makers and acknowledging IH Rotterdam as a research and learning partner in relevant communication channels of the TRANSIT project. In addition, she outlined that she would appreciate critical reflection as well as our use of the Impact Hub as a location at which to organize events from our research institute. During the research period, several events were held at the Impact Hub Rotterdam, namely a Book workshop on “Governing Urban Sustainability Transitions”, the TRANSIT Advisory Board meeting, as well as one day of the Masterclass Social Innovation led by DRIFT and the Erasmus Academy. This type of cooperation was also facilitated by the geographical proximity of research institute DRIFT and the Impact Hub Rotterdam, being located in the same city.

In São Paulo, interviewees received an overview list of potential benefits of cooperating with this research, as outlined in the TRANSIT methodological guidelines (Søgaard Jørgensen et al. 2014). They were very interested in the results of the TRANSIT project and after the interviews they received information about the TRANSIT website, social media accounts, and the list of other networks studied. The interviewees in both Rotterdam and Amsterdam also received this information about TRANSIT and were assured to be kept updated with regard to the developments of the research.

2.1.3 Social innovation actors as research subjects or objects

In light of the long-term relationship between the researchers and the Dutch Impact Hubs, the TRANSIT research was only one of a number of possibilities for collaboration. In the framework of the TRANSIT project, there was limited room for an ‘action-research’ oriented approach which would give more room to Impact Hub actors and their questions.

As outlined in the methodological guidelines (Søgaard Jørgensen et al. 2014: 22): “*This aspect relates to social innovation actors’ participation in the research process as research subject and/or research object: As research subject in the case study, actors within the social innovation initiative might be active in the research process (e.g. counterchecking writings, interpretations, conclusions, research questions, ideas and needs for the web-based resource hub). Such an active role demands interest and available time of actors of the initiative/network – which might not always be given.*” Despite busy schedules, nearly all actors we approached were very willing to be interviewed. There was for example, one member in Rotterdam who withdrew from a scheduled interview after having seen the interview questions. He indicated that he has phased out his engagement at the Impact Hub Rotterdam and “*finds it difficult to find the energy for the talk*” (PO). Still, he was prepared to answer some questions via the mail. In the case of Amsterdam, it was indicated that people were very busy, and that there was a limit to the amount of members of the core-team that we could interview. As such, we interviewed only 2 members of the core-team in the Impact Amsterdam. In the end, this also seemed to benefit the research, as it enabled us to spend more time on interviewing members, advisory board members, and a policy-maker. In terms of active engagement, we sent a draft version of this case study report to all interviewees of our global network, Amsterdam and Rotterdam cases to ask for their consent in the way we refer to them and their quotes as well as any additional feedback (see section 2.2.2. on interviews). Within one week we received written feedback and consent by the majority of the interviewees mainly concerning their own citations.

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The TRANSIT researchers in Brazil live in the state of Rio de Janeiro, while the studied local manifestation is located in another state, São Paulo. This physical distance has influenced the research approach. Communication by e-mail was slow to be answered and sometimes it was necessary to connect by phone to get an answer three or four days after having sent a mail. But personal interviews went quite smoothly. All participants were extremely collaborative and offered their time without problems (even when we realized they were busy). Proof of this is that it was not necessary, for example, to shorten the interviews. Some of the documents in our bibliography were made available by them. In Brazil, the Impact Hub actors did not read a draft version of this report – due to the timing in the summer holidays. The researcher will be in contact with all IH São Paulo actors with a version of the final report. During the report drafting process some emails were exchanged only to raise more specific information or questions.

2.1.4 Normativity: Transparency and diversity in data sources

In order to counter normativity, which also comes with proximity, the Dutch research team has worked as a research team and kept field notes of the participant observations (see section 2.1.1). With regard to diversity, we searched for interviewees from within the Impact Hub as well as external actors (such as municipality, or advisory board members). Within the Impact Hubs we also looked for diversity in terms of levels of engagement, ranging from staff members (founders, team-members, hosts) and active members, to those who had been closely involved in the past but had phased out or lowered their engagement after a while.

In Brazil, the contacts made before personal visits were relatively distant, with delays in responses by email and quick or hasty skype meetings and lack of time of the contacted actors. However, after we met the actors personally, we got a very positive impression of the Impact Hub and how it impacts on the personal lives of its members. Normativity was countered by looking for critical narratives to know and understand the unfavourable points of the Impact Hub. We held two interviews in Rio de Janeiro with people that were having a quite critical view on the Impact Hub. One of those, had led the process of establishing an Impact Hub in Rio de Janeiro for two years, following the founding steps required. He gave up in the end, because of the differences between the philosophy of the Impact Hub and his own perspective (i.e. time investment in financial projections and the understanding of what a network is).

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Overall methodology

The research on the Impact Hub was designed in accordance with the methodological guidelines (Søgaard Jørgensen et al. 2014). As such the research was guided by the four empirical research questions outlined in these guidelines, and the underlying conceptual framework (see Foreword on page 06). In each of the local manifestations, we used a mix of the proposed research methods, namely interviews, participant observation and document review (see next sections for more specific information). At the level of the transnational network, we also relied on interviews (personal and/or by skype), document review and participant observation.

In reporting back on our research, we used a TRANSIT case-study report template which was made available in October 2014. We did keep all the (sub)sections and headings of this template and aimed to fill it in coherently. As different researchers were writing up the research on the local manifestations and the global network, there is some variety in terms of where and how issues were discussed and interpreted.

2.2.2 Interviews

As outlined above, the four overall research questions outlined in the methodological guidelines were translated into an interview guide for semi-structured interviews (see Annex 5). This interview guide was used in conducting interviews in all three local manifestations and regarding the transnational network. Overall, the interviews differed slightly due to the different role, position and background of the interviewees in relation to the Impact Hub. The difference can be found in terms of the overall time spend on the interview, the amount of time spent on each of the four main questions, as well as the character and degree of spontaneous open questions that arose during the interview. No main research questions were added or omitted in the overall sample, while individual interviews might have had specific foci and not include all the sub-questions of the four main research questions. Some questions or themes that came up during one interview or participant observation session were followed up on in other research activities.

Most interviews consisted of 1-2 hour semi-structured interview sessions, and were conducted by either one researcher, two researchers or one researcher and a research assistant. Some were more closely structured by the interview guide and others were more loosely conversational. Interviewees were selected based on their role in and their relation with the Impact Hubs, as well as in response to referrals from interviewees. Interviewees included (potential) founders, managers, core-team members and employees, hosts and current and former members of Impact Hubs, as well as external advisory board members and municipal officers. See Table 2-1 for an overview of the amount of interviews, see Annex 2 for a more detailed list of interviewees (positions, dates, duration of interview). The interviews were held in either English, Dutch or Portuguese. For the report, the researchers translated direct quotes into English.

All interviews were recorded with consent by the interviewees and typed out in interview summaries which were partly literally transcribed. These summaries included direct quotes and were used as a basis for coding. During the interviews, the interviewees were told that the interview data would be treated confidentially and that they would be quoted anonymously in the case study report, or, if they would be quoted by name, researchers would first ask permission to do so. After having written a first full version of this report, we checked with every interviewee how they would like to be referred to (full name or anonymously), how we could use their direct quotes and whether there is anything they would like to share after having read the report.

Table 2-1: Overview of interviewees (see more information in annex 2)

	Interview period	# of interviews	Interview hours	Type of interviewees
Transnational Network	04/2014 – 12/2014	8	About 9 hours	1 Impact Hub company, 2 Impact Hub Association, 3 'Impact Hub makers', 2 members who visited several Hubs
IH Amsterdam	06/2014 – 12/2014	10	About 10 hours	2 with core team, 4 members, 2 advisory board members, 2 external
IH Rotterdam	04/2014 – 10/2014	10	About 13 hours	1 owner, 1 founder and ex-director, 1 Hub manager, 1 external, 6 members (and hosts)
IH São Paulo	09/2014 – 10/2014	8	About 10:30 hours	1 co-founder of Belo Horizonte IH (skype); 1 person who had aimed to open an IH in Rio de Janeiro; 2 co-founders of IH São Paulo, 1 employee of IH São Paulo and 3 members

2.2.3 Participant observation

The Impact Hub is an environment that lends itself perfectly for participant observation, as it allows the researcher to blend in the setting by sitting behind a laptop working or by taking part in specific events. In the Dutch cases, the researchers were doing participant observation regularly throughout the period from May 2014 to January 2015. As the Impact Hub São Paulo was not reachable within a day travel, the researcher spend two full weeks at the Impact Hubs, one in August 2014 and one in September 2014. See for an overview of the participant observation activities Table 2-2 (summary) or annex 3 for a more detailed overview.

Participant observation at the transnational network(ing) level was not so much about observing the Association's General Assembly or the management meetings of the global Impact Hub Company (which did not occur, due to time and budget constraints). Rather, the participant observation was focused on observing the international networking 'at work', for instance (1) through the online Impact Hub Net platform (members only), (2) at the local Impact Hub Amsterdam (where there is much international networking occurring), or (3) at a Social Innovation conference and meetings (where several Impact Hubs across Europe were represented).

Besides being a case-study for the TRANSIT research project, Impact Hubs are also involved as either partners and/or a case-studies in other EU research projects on social innovation, such as the BENISI incubation project on 'Scaling Social Innovation' or the SI-DRIVE research project, which is a 'sister-project' of TRANSIT (i.e. funded under the same call and topic under the EU 7th Framework Programme). As such, Flor Avelino and Julia Wittmayer, did not only encounter Impact Hubs as case-study researchers, but also as being the scientific coordinators of the TRANSIT research project. Most probably, this has given us additional insights into the transnational networking activities and presence of various Impact Hubs, which we would not have had if we would not have been the scientific coordinators of TRANSIT project (e.g. our participation at the SI-DRIVE kick-off and the Social Innovation Live Conference – see Annex 3 – where we met several representative of Impact Hubs across Europe).

Regarding participant observation, it is also important to mention that one of our researchers, Flor Avelino, has been involved as a connection member of the Impact Hub Rotterdam between 2008 and 2013, which included numerous visits to the Impact Hub Rotterdam. Moreover, she was also involved in a volunteer project between 2009 and 2013, which held its monthly meetings at the Impact Hub Amsterdam. Even though none of these 'participant observations' were formally part of this case-study report, they have influenced the overall impression of the Impact Hub global networking as well as the local manifestations in the Netherlands.

The participant observation also included numerous informal conversations. Throughout, we always introduced ourselves as researchers working on a European research project looking into transformative social innovation of which the Impact Hub was one case study. For most of our participant observations, we took field notes either manually or digitally, distinguishing between more factual observations as well as our interpretations of what we were seeing and the accompanying emotions. Insights from the field notes were either coded or used as an important source for this report.

In total, participant observations took place on 46 occasions. 31 of these involved mainly working on our usual tasks at the Impact Hubs in Amsterdam (8 occasions), Rotterdam (14 occasions), and São Paulo (9 days) while observing interactions and engaging in spontaneous conversations. During these days, we also took part in coffee corner encounters and shared lunches, which gave ample opportunity for informal talk, as did the welcome by different hosts. These were important to get

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insights into the actual working practices and social and professional interactions of and between members (both at a local and international level), as well as conversing with members on specific questions related to the main questions or conversing more informally, whereby additional emergent insights were gathered.

15 occasions involved participating in special events organized at the Impact Hubs, including an introduction to the Hub (“What’s Hub”), lectures and workshops and one global virtual Impact Hub event (“Impact On Air”). These events were interesting for gaining insights into the different kind of events taking place at Impact Hubs and the amount of people participating in them (and in which way they participated). In São Paulo, participant observation was carried out at an event called Hub School Festival, which takes place twice a year for three weeks each and includes lectures and workshops.

Table 2-2: Overview of participant observations (PO’s) conducted at each of the sites

	PO period	# of PO’s	Hours of PO	Type of PO occasions
IH Amsterdam	May – November 2014	13	+/- 140 hours	Co-working at Impact Hub Amsterdam (from one to three researchers/research assistants), attending various events
IH Rotterdam	June 2014 – January 2015	20	+/- 114 hours	Co-working at Impact Hub Rotterdam (from one to three researchers/research assistants), attending various events
IH São Paulo	Weeks of 25.8. – 29.8.2014 and 1.9. – 4.9.2014	12	52 hours	Working at the IH Bela Cintra and Vila Madalena Attending The Hub School Festival, The Hub Experience (regular workshop for creating business impact)

2.2.4 Document reviews

A third research activity was the review of internal and external documentation, on- and offline. For document reviews, we mainly relied on websites, popular publications and social media channels to analyse how the Impact Hub presents itself to the outside world and/or how popular media presents the Impact Hub. An overview of primary and secondary sources is given in Annex 1 (section 8.2.).

Most academic papers, which are part of our list of academic references and secondary sources (see Annex 1, section 8.1) are about social entrepreneurships, social innovation, co-working or collaborative working, as well as creativity and urban development. Some references have also been included regarding the conceptualisations underlying this report.

3 Analysis of the Impact Hub Network

Authors: Flor Avelino, Keighley McFarland

3.1 Transnational Network(ing): the Impact Hub Network

Impact Hub is a community network of social entrepreneurs, combining elements from co-working spaces, innovation labs and business incubators. The network consists of multiple local Impact Hubs across the globe. Local Impact Hubs differ, but they also share certain basic characteristics, e.g. each Impact Hub has individual members. These members, mostly social entrepreneurs, are offered services by ‘their’ Impact Hub, including the provision of a co-working space, access to an entrepreneurial community network and programming of events and trainings. Impact Hubs are founded, organised and facilitated by so-called ‘Hub-makers’, ‘Hub-hosts’ and their core teams (see 3.3.1). On the global website, Impact Hub presents itself as follows:

“What is Impact Hub? We believe a better world evolves through the combined accomplishments of creative, committed, and compassionate individuals focused on a common purpose. An innovation lab. A business Incubator. A social enterprise community centre. Impact Hub offers you a unique ecosystem of resources, inspiration, and collaboration opportunities to grow the positive impact of your work. Joining our diverse community of members and collaborators will inspire, connect, and enable you to develop your best work every step of the way” (Impact Hub website 2015).

Today, there are over 70 Impact Hubs spread across 5 continents (see world map in Figure 3-1 below). The website furthermore reports that there are a total of 9.000+ members, and 20 new Impact Hubs ‘in the making’.

Figure 3-1: World Map Impact Hubs. Source: Impact Hub Website 2015

Source: Impact Hub Website



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The first Impact Hub was co-founded in London 2005, by ETTY Flanagan, Jonathan Robinson, Katy Marks and Mark Hodges. This was followed by the foundation of other Impact Hubs in e.g. São Paulo, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Johannesburg, Bristol and Berlin in the following years (2007-2009), after which local sites started replicating across the world.

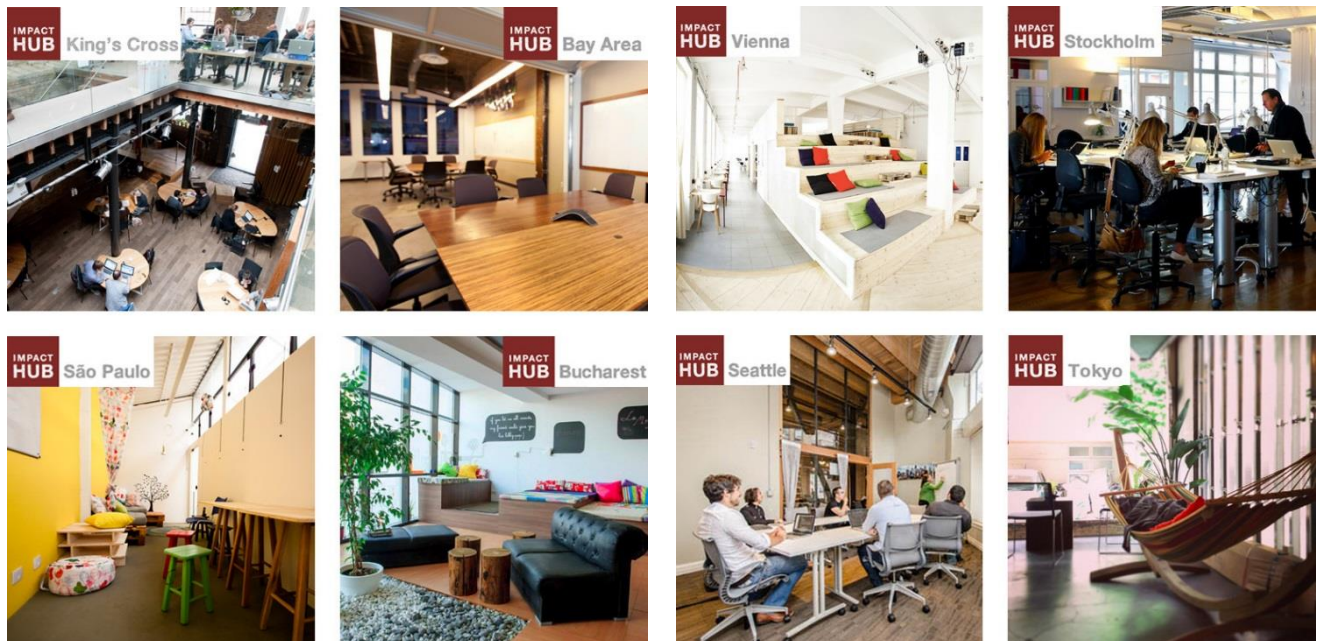
“From Amsterdam to Johannesburg, Singapore to San Francisco, we are a rapidly expanding, diverse global network (...). What began as a single Hub in London in 2005 has evolved into a global network of people taking action towards a single purpose: impact. Step into any one of our Impact Hubs around the world and experience a unique combination of people, spaces and programs that inspire and empower people to realize enterprising ideas for sustainable impact. Although each local Impact Hub has their own unique community, Impact Makers from around the world come together on a global scale to share stories, aspirations, and accomplishments that celebrate our collective impact.” (Impact Hub website 2015).

The ‘networking’ between Impact Hubs occurs at two levels: (a) between core-teams of different Impact Hubs, and (b) between individual members (i.e. social entrepreneurs/enterprises). For both levels, networking occurs through six main mechanisms:

1. Sharing brand and (basic) concepts (see e.g. Figure 3-2 below)
2. Sharing aims, stories, experiences, tools (e.g. via online Impact Hub-net)
3. Cooperating in projects, conferences, meetings, workshops etc.
4. Visiting (members/core teams at) other Impact Hubs
5. Global governance structure and meetings (see sections 3.1.2. and 3.3.1.1.)
6. Co-developing network through working groups, strategy teams, clusters and committees

Figure 3-2: Example of how Impact Hub logo is applied on websites

Source: Impact Hub website, 2015



3.1.1 Background of the Impact Hub

Impact Hub has been inspired by several concepts, ranging from prototyping labs and start-up incubators to inspiring offices, learning spaces and think tanks (*Impact Hub website, 2015*). The founder of Impact Hub Amsterdam, reports that the idea originated in a specific project in Johannesburg South Africa:

“The original story comes from there, around the time of the World Summit for Sustainable Development, where a number of local people came together to collaborate in clearing out a hill from its waste, reclaim it as a community space, to be able to support each other to create their own solutions. Four young change makers from London hosted a side event to the Summit to invite people into a collaboration experience at SoMoHo (Soweto Mountain of Hope). I’d say the core purpose really started there. And then the big question arose: can this be done in the middle of London? Then a number of people started there again, collaborating, creating on their own terms a physical space that was very much representative of the values and learnings from Soweto. It was intended to be a space where we could invite people into a different type of experience. I think that has continued as a joint purpose of creating these physical and social spaces where you can invite people into living things differently” (interviewee 2).

Another Impact Hub founder (*interviewee 16*), links the background of the network to the *Pioneers of Change* network, a “global learning network”, founded in 1999, which supports “practitioners in their mid-20s to mid-30s” and “fosters understanding, capacities and relationships needed by younger practitioners committed to stepping forward and creating the change they want to see in the world” (*Pioneers of Change website 2015*). Another, related, background lies in AIESEC, an non-profit student organisation that was founded in 1948 “as an initiative to bridge cultural differences between different nations that failed catastrophically in World War II”, and which aims to “create a positive impact on future society”, with a focus on developing the “the leadership potential” of young people: “We enable through our experiences future leaders by finding out what their strengths, dreams and goals are in life and empower them to fulfil their humankind potential”. (*AIESEC website 2015*). Some (not all) of the first *Impact Hub* founders also had been members of the *Pioneers of Change* and AIESEC networks:

“We still all know each other. (...) When I came there [Pioneers of Change] for the first time, I thought ‘You all understand me, I do not need to argue about what I believe in, I do not need to explain, don’t need to hear ‘yes, but’ all the time, or ‘how are you going to realise that, how are you going to earn a living with that?’ (...) It was really like coming home.” (Interviewee 16).

The discourses that are used to describe *Pioneers of Change* and *AIESEC* (as illustrated in quotes above), resonate much with the discourses used to describe the aims of the Impact Hub, on websites, in interviews, and in informal conversations. There is a strong focus on enabling young people with ideals and ambitions to contribute to solving global issues.

3.1.2 Development of the Impact Hub

Originally, the network was called ‘The Hub’ and local settings were referred to as ‘Hubs’. The network was rebranded ‘Impact Hub’ in 2013 (as will be elaborated later on). The other main development that we observe since 2005, is that the network has considerably grown: from 1 to over 70 (Impact) Hubs in less than 10 years. As formulated on the website, “the idea has been spreading like wildfire and resulted in the emergence of a global movement (...) from London to Melbourne, Johannesburg to São Paulo, San Francisco to Singapore, the community is rapidly growing in a way that is globally connected and locally embedded” (*Impact Hub website 2015*).

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Unsurprisingly, this growth was accompanied by several other processes, including reorganisation, conflicts and professionalization, in particular regarding the global network. Company units were founded and dissolved, association structures were negotiated, finally resulting in the current set-up. The development of the global Impact Hub network from 2005 to 2014 is elaborately described in an article - titled "How the Hub Found Its Centre" - which was published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* in winter 2014, authored by Michel Bachman, one of the board directors of the Impact Hub association (Bachman 2014).

"After a period of crisis and transition, Impact Hub has emerged as a global structure that is partly a movement, partly a business, and partly a network. Along the way, its leaders—a group of people devoted to social innovation—had to master the art of organizational innovation" (ibid).

At one of the first global Hub meetings in 2007 when 30+ aspiring Hub-makers from all over the world met at the Hub in London, the network was built. While the original purpose of the meeting was "merely to share lessons related to the hosting practice (...), [...] most attendees had come to learn how they could replicate the entire Hub model" (ibid). So far, the network was based on a "just do it" (ibid) attitude and an "entrepreneurial energy" (ibid) in setting up Hubs in ways that were considered appropriate by their founders. However, there seemed to be a need for more guidance and sharing of best practices and working models, which were not available yet:

"It felt like we were grounding a global community with its first manifestation in London. So it didn't surprise us when we got visitors from all around the world seeking to do something similar. What surprised us was the volume. Initially, we were flattered by the huge amount of interest. But practically, it became a bit of a nightmare." (Jonathan Robinson, quoted in Bachman 2014). "It was frustrating, because everyone had questions about the global model and we had no answers. (...) But there was no way back at that point" (Glauser, quoted in Bachman 2014).

In 2008, an interim board was set up to map out and explore the possibilities for a global governance structure and financial model. While doing this, they faced a dilemma: "Do we foster a movement of Hub-like spaces? Or do we franchise?" (Jonathan Robinson, quoted by Bachman 2014). A decision was made to try out a social franchise model, with joining fees for new Hubs and regular contributions by all Hubs to a global entity. Jonathan Robinson founded the "Hub World", a limited company with headquarters in London, which aimed to offer central services to local Hubs, including "technology support, knowledge codification and quality control" (ibid). What followed was a year of turmoil, including a cash-flow crisis, contestations over non-profit versus for-profit organizational structures, questions on how much to invest in the core, lacking speed of delivery and tension over ownership. The fact that the network 'survived' this difficult period is explained in terms of the power of a distributed network:

"If you ask me, the organization should have folded at that time. I have no practical understanding of why it didn't, except for the power of a distributed network: Even if you take out some of the major nodes, it still manages to keep on working because of all the interconnected relationships. What you got was one of the most complex ecosystems that I've ever seen anywhere. And I'm still amazed that we managed to keep it all together." (Brad Krauskopf, founder of Hub Melbourne, as quoted in Bachman 2014).

The network continued to grow, with a dozen Hubs set up and running by the end of 2009, and several others in development. In the meantime, however, conflicts and disagreements also continued. The formal franchise contract had only been signed by a few founders, and "especially those based in emerging economies—were trying to negotiate special terms for their franchises" (ibid).

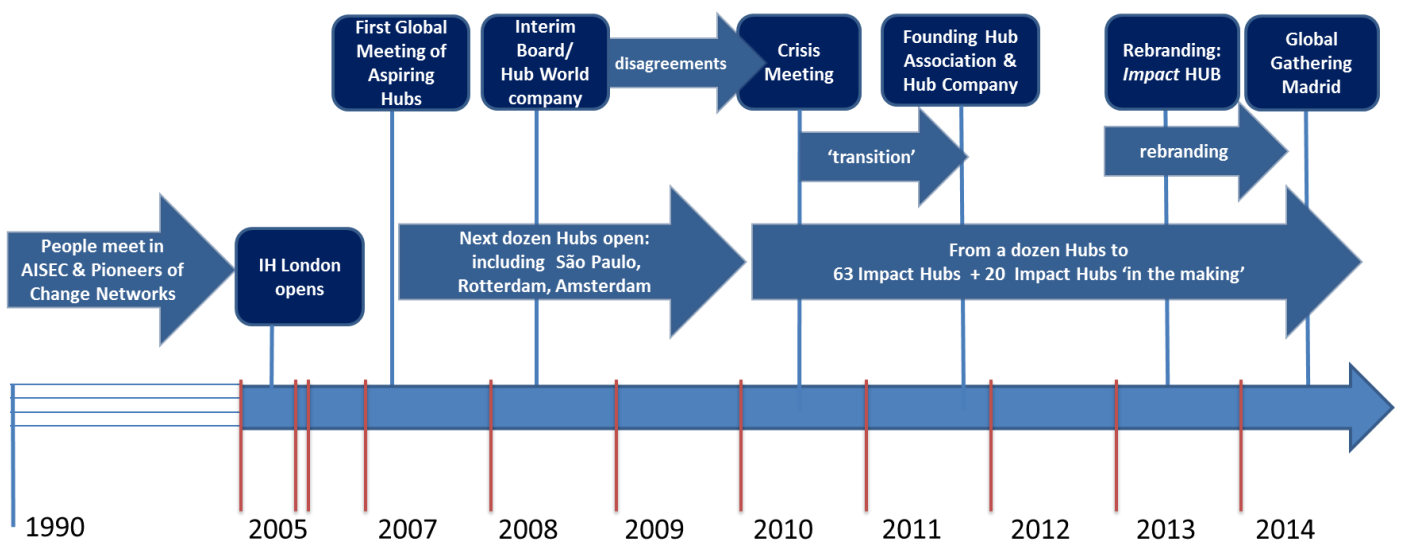
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Pooja Warier, a cofounder of Hub Bombay, commented that “*The conversation shifted from being part of a movement to a kind of bargaining (...) It felt like we were lost between the economics of being a movement, a business, and a network*” (Bachman 2014).

In 2010, it was recognised that it was necessary to rebuild trust, and a ‘crisis meeting’ was held near Amsterdam to answer the question of “*how would [the Hub] navigate the tension between serving a movement, building a business, and sustaining a network?*” (ibid). A working group was formed to study different possible organisational forms and to propose an alternative structure, and subsequently a ‘transition council’ was set in place to work out the new model (interviewee 17). This resulted in the creation of a global Hub association in 2011, of which all Hubs became members, “*marking the beginning of the globally, co-owned Hub network, an important milestone in Hub Global history*” (ibid). A limited company “Hub GmbH” was founded which was owned by the association and had a mandate “*to facilitate collaboration across the Hub network, to provide local support, and to grant licenses to new Hub sites*” (Bachman 2014). Furthermore, a Sister Hub structure was introduced in which new initiatives would be coupled to recognised Hub sites, as well as other “peer-based structures” (ibid). All this is very close to the governance structure of the global Impact Hub as it is today (section 3.1.1.1). The shift to the new global structure between 2010 and 2011 is referred to as ‘the transition’ (ibid, interview 17, interview 27).

In 2013, the Hub network was rebranded as the ‘Impact Hub’ in order to emphasise the common network aim of “*catalysing impact*” (Bachman 2014, interview 4, 5). In 2014, a global gathering was held in Madrid to discuss how the different local Impact Hubs could cooperate more systematically (interviewee 17). The search for more (systemic) impact and ‘scaling’ is mentioned as one of the main topics today (interviewee 2, 17). We will discuss this further in section 3.2 on how the Impact Hub relates to change and (system) innovation.

Figure 3-3. Time Line of the Development of the Impact Hub Network.



3.1.3 The Rise of Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation

The development of the Impact Hub is intimately intertwined with the rise of a ‘social entrepreneurship’ practice and discourse, a “*quite new field, with lot of small players*” (interviewee 2). While the exact definition of ‘social entrepreneurship’ is subject to debate and different disciplinary interpretations (e.g. development studies vs. organization theory), it can generally be characterised as an activity that integrates economic and social value creation (Mair and Martí 2006). It uses business skills and knowledge to create an enterprise that is commercially viable while also accomplishing a social purpose and contributing to innovation and societal transformation (Alvord et al 2004, 262). In contrast to the notion of a ‘social enterprise’, the notion of ‘social entrepreneurship’ is focused more on the individual level, i.e. ‘social entrepreneurs’ (Birch & Whittam 2008 441). The defining characteristic of a social entrepreneurship is not whether or not it makes profit, but rather that there is “an explicit aim to benefit the community” and that “the material interest of capital investors is subject to limits” (EMES 2011).

At the beginning, the ‘incubation’ element of the Impact Hub – i.e. the ambition to help entrepreneurs start up and grow their business – was also a reaction to the mainstream incubation offer that was very tied up with the investment sector and mostly focused on technological innovation. Nowadays the general discourse on incubation has become more connected to start-ups and entrepreneurial spirit in general, including services and ‘social innovation’. This, however, was not yet commonly spread when the Impact Hub started, and the explicit attention for social innovation was one of the distinguishing features of the Impact Hub network (interviewee 2). Regardless of exact causal relations, one can argue that the rise of the social entrepreneurship discourses is intertwined with the discourse on social innovation, and that both have ‘co-evolved’ with the development of the Impact Hub network, mutually enabling and strengthening one another (see 3.2.5).

The attention for social entrepreneurship is also one of the things that distinguishes the Impact Hub from other co-working spaces. For the Impact Hub, providing for social entrepreneurs is really seen as their “*core business*” (interviewee 9), while many other co-working spaces are less specifically focused on this target group. Moreover, the Impact Hub is often emphasised to be much more than a working space: “*It’s much more than just a work space for social entrepreneurs: it’s really a place for contact, working, deepening and developing your business*” (ibid). In an interview, we asked one of the individual Impact Hub members, who had spent time at several Impact Hubs, what the word ‘social entrepreneur’ meant to him/her:

“For me, it’s really broad. As long as you have an entrepreneurial approach (...) I think you can be an entrepreneurial person and still have an NGO. Then you may not necessarily fall under the header of being a social entrepreneur, but you are an entrepreneurial person” (Interviewee 27).

It is furthermore argued that the Impact Hub does not only aim to bring together social entrepreneurs, but more generally diverse players who are *socially entrepreneurial*, because “*If you want systemic change you need diverse players of the system to come together, which is a basic starting point of our Hubs*” (interviewee 1).

This broad understanding of ‘being entrepreneurial’ and of ‘social entrepreneurship’, seems to be widely spread. Despite of different understandings of the word ‘social entrepreneur’, there are some essential features, the most important one being that (1) making money is not the main goal, but that (2) it is still o.k. to want to make money. Or in other words, that making money and idealism do not contradict one another. This is a reoccurring theme across all Impact Hubs, as will be further discussed in section 3.3.3 on resources, in the local case-studies (chapters 4, 5 and 6), and in the comparative analysis (chapter 7).

Text box 1. (The Art of) Hosting

The concept of 'hosting' is a central aspect that differentiates Impact Hub from other networks and co-working spaces. The term comes from "The Art of Hosting" which is a leadership strategy based on facilitation or moderation to "[harness] the collective wisdom and self-organizing capacity of groups of any size" through "conversational processes" (Art of Hosting website 2015). It combines conversational and meeting methods with facilitation or moderation practices.

Underlying the Art of Hosting is the aim of "*hosting and harvesting [i.e. obtaining results from] Conversations that Matter.*" The Art of Hosting philosophy explicitly links the method to creation and pursuit of larger goals and values, systemic change, and innovation (ibid.) The network of people trained in the Art of Hosting was cited by several interviewees as important for the Impact Hub, and the Art of Hosting vocabulary is commonly found in the language used by the Impact Hub and its members.

Impact Hubs across the globe integrate the practice of hosting in different ways. Most Impact Hubs have a designated Host role. This role may be carried out by a single person who is paid or trades part-time work as a host for membership benefits, or it may be shared among several people who are responsible for different shifts or activities. Host roles combine both physical and social maintenance of the Impact Hub space. Activities vary depending on the local Impact Hub and can include:

- greeting newcomers
- introducing members with overlap potential
- organizing events
- facilitating efficient meetings
- ensuring food and coffee are available
- administrative and logistical tasks for ensuring the physical space operates smoothly

A Host is often described as the "*connector*" or "*catalyser*" for an Impact Hub (Impact Hub Salt Lake 2015; Video by Esther Maagdenberg 2011). Hosts proactively network among Impact Hub members to bring together members who may have overlaps or who may profit from exchanging with each other to create "*valuable relationships*" (interviewee 27). Hosts are also responsible for creating a friendly, sociable atmosphere during which coincidental or spontaneous networking interactions can take place, as well as fostering a generally pleasant work environment so that members "*feel welcomed*" (interviewee 5) and enjoy working in the space (Video by Esther Maagdenberg 2011). Hosts indicate anticipating members' needs and leading or facilitating conversations to help them define and meet their needs as a key part of their role (ibid.), as well as facilitating learning processes (interviewee 27).

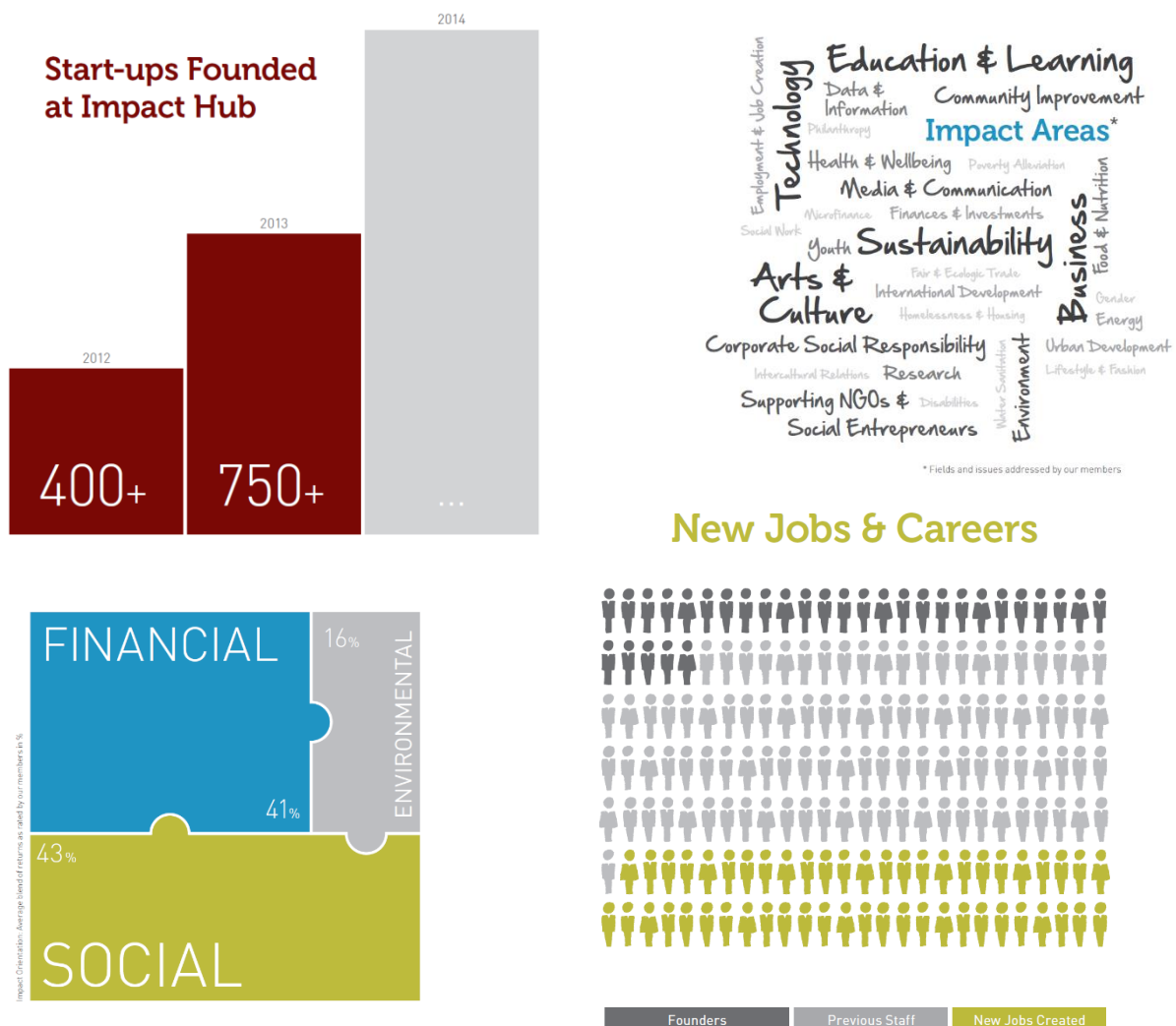
3.2 'Innovation' and 'Change' in/by the Impact Hub Network

"Impact Hubs are where change goes to work", is one of the main slogans of the network (Impact Hub website 2015). The Impact Hub has an explicit and distinct 'theory of change', which is focused on social entrepreneurship as a driver of societal change and improvement. It strives to create an 'ecosystem' that is an enabling environment for social entrepreneurs, by creating physical and virtual spaces for community relations, (informal) meetings and encounters. As the name *Impact Hub* indicates, there is an explicit aim to have societal impact. This goal is manifested at all levels: the global network organisation, the individual local Impact Hub sites, as well as in the projects and enterprises of most of the individual members (see also chapters 4-6).

On its website, the Impact Hub includes an Impact Hub report, which summarises its impact on society in 2014 since 2012 (Impact Hub, 2015) (see Figure 3-4 below). This report includes infographics showing - amongst others - how many start-ups have been founded at Impact Hub (see below), the "impact orientation" in terms of financial, social and environmental returns and the "impact areas" in terms of "the fields and issues addressed by the members" (see below). It is also reported that a total 3.500 new full-time jobs have been created and that "44% of all member organisations have created at least one new paid position in 2013" (ibid.).

Figure 3-4: Some Infographics on the Impact on Society by Impact Hub

Source: Impact Hub Report over 2014, published on the website in 2015

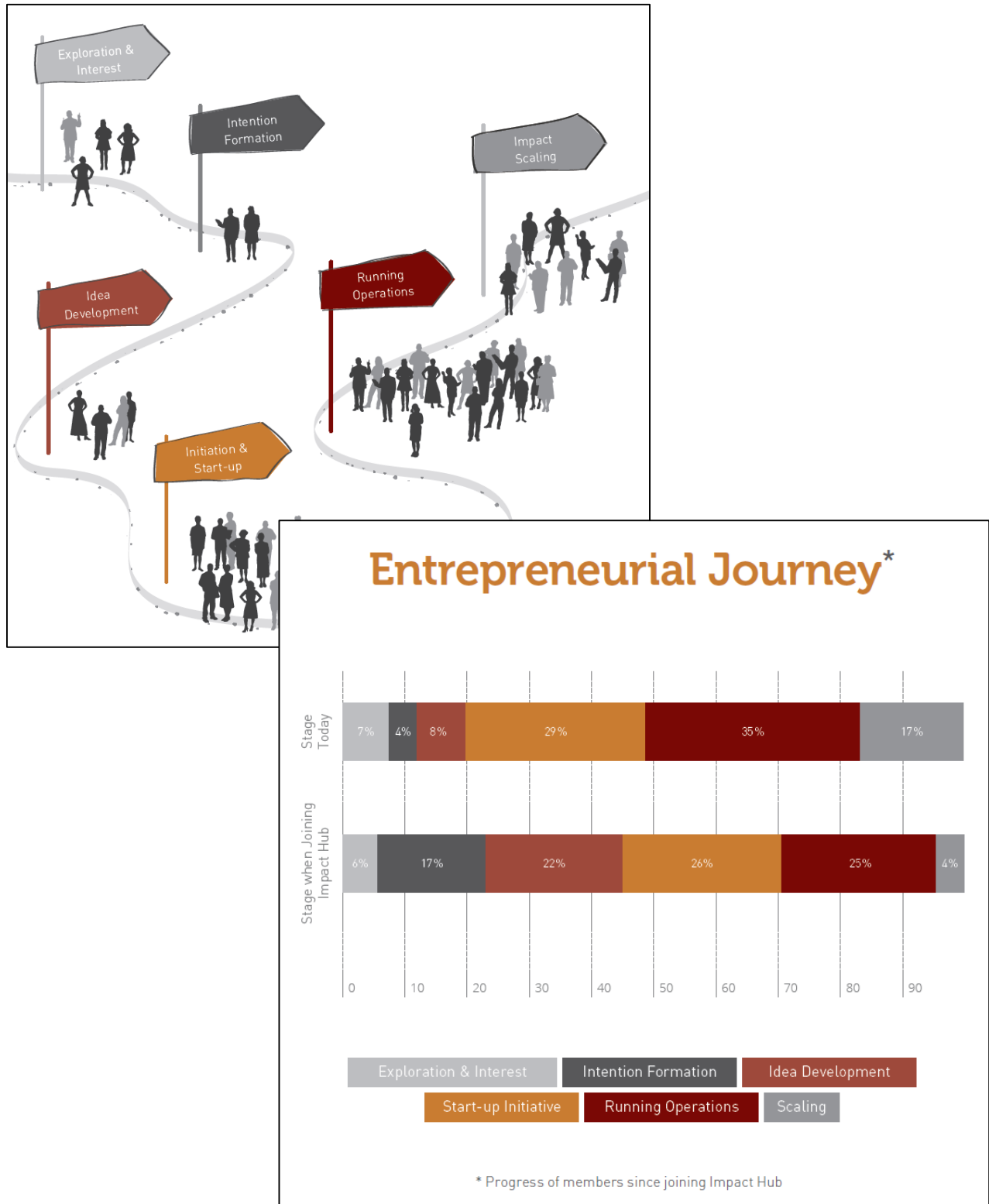


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The report also includes an infographic that displays a schematic overview of the “*entrepreneurial journey*” (Impact Hub, 2015) outlining six different stages of that journey and giving an impression of where Impact Hub members progress through those stages (see Figure 3-5 below).

Figure 3-5: Entrepreneurial Journey Impact Hub

Source: Impact Hub Report over 2014, published on the website in 2015



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It is important to note, that the theory of change of the Impact Hub network has shifted over the past few years, both at the global and local levels. At the global level, this shift is described as follows:

“We were just reviewing our theory of change (...) Our older theory of change says that there are many people who have great ideas for the world, but there is no place for them to meet each other (...) and we are basically a solution to that issue: if you are a person who has a great idea for the world, you can come in our spaces and we can work with you, we can support you, and enable you to achieve your potential. (...) We are slightly now shifting not very far away from that focus. (...) Because right now we’re saying that, if we want to achieve larger societal change, these individuals are not enough, (...) they bring forward great innovations, some of them really significant, but for society to change, other players need to collaborate in these things, and it needs to be more systemic rather than just individual in itself. (...) Our new theory of change [is] that ecosystem change is more effective than individual change alone. And that by being the facilitator and a host of ecosystem building around certain social issues, we will get more progress around those social issues than just through individual innovations. But individual innovations remain essential in this. It’s not that we’re discarding those, it’s that we’re upping the game, in a way, so we can see bigger progress around our deliverables related to social change.” (interview 8).

Given the Impact Hubs’ shifting theory of change, it is challenging to capture its relation with change and innovation at a particular moment in time.

3.2.1 Relation with social innovation

The Impact Hub explicitly states that it aims to “create a unique ecosystem for social innovation” (Impact Hub website 2015). If we take a TRANSIT perspective on social innovation, as referring to (new combinations of) new social practices, relations, ideas, services and or products, we can observe how the Impact Hub aims for such social innovations at different levels, ranging from “innovation by the way we design and engage with our communities” to “innovation that’s more directive, focused on specific solutions and helping those grow to full potential” (interviewee 8). We distinguish four ways in which the Impact Hub relates to social innovation:

1. Social innovations by the Impact Hub as a concept (e.g. innovative practices in co-working)
2. Social innovations in/at the Impact Hubs, by the members (e.g. new services)
3. The global network structure as a social ‘governance’ innovation
4. Social innovation as an explicit notion/discourse used by the Impact Hub network

First, there are the social innovations that are manifested in the Impact Hub approach. Examples include innovative ideas and practices regarding the co-working spaces (e.g. members pay the rent of working space according to the frequency of use instead of per square meters), and the role of the Impact Hub ‘hosts’ in relation to ‘members’. The very concept of a ‘host’ and its function at the Impact Hub (see Text box 1, section 3.1) can be considered a social innovation, in terms of it being a new social role/relations in the work place.

“The way we host our communities, the way we design them, the way we engage with them, is an innovation process, because it allows for a high diversity of players, which we call unlikely allies: people or institutions that would normally not think of each other as a partner or as a collaborator. It allows for these unlikely allies to come in a neutral space and to start to actually listening to each other, which many times generates a lot of wonderful new ideas and new collaborations, because they find the common ground in our spaces. So that’s one level of innovation that we are producing”. (Interviewee 8).

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Second, there are the (social) innovations that the individual members are working on and/or aiming for, ranging from technological innovations to new business models, sharing economy concepts and various service innovations (see examples in chapters 4, 5, 6). The Impact Hub focuses on incubating selected ideas and on bringing innovators together:

“[We] identify innovations that hold potential for society through different selection processes (...) [We] go through intense incubation process with those that are preselected to help them develop their idea into a significant impactful initiative (...). These types of innovations are (...) actual solutions to social issues, via for- or non-profit or project model bringing forward new piece of technology, service, product.” (Interviewee 8).

“It is less about creating the innovations, but more about bringing innovators together, who could be official members or not, but they are all part of an ecosystem to reach out and connect innovators across the ‘systems of interest’ (...) We don’t do it as well as we could, because things are progressing at a faster rate than we can keep up with, but we try to do our small part in that.” (Interviewee 2).

Third, some see the global network (governance) structure as a social innovation, in the sense that it offers an alternative for how organisations can ‘go global’, shifting “*from a franchise model to a highly distributed, decentralized but functioning global organisation model*” (interviewee 8):

“The global entity is fully owned by local entities, an upside down organization. We have a hosting body globally that helps connect different local hubs and drive global strategy, but the global entity is owned by, and responds to, local hubs. They are the highest decision-making forum in the network. So the power remains at the edge and not in centre, which is what makes it innovative.” (Interviewee 8).

Last but not least, the Impact Hub relates to social innovation at a discursive level, in the sense that the notion of ‘social innovation’ a central and explicit role in the discourse of the Impact Hub, from the very beginning (see sections 3.1.3. and 3.2.5.). Interestingly, the global network Association is even legally registered under the name of “*Impact Hub Association – Verein zur Förderung Sozialer Innovationen*” (German for ‘Association for Fostering Social Innovation’) (Impact Hub Compendium 2014).

3.2.2 Relation with system innovation

The relation of Impact Hub to system innovation is ambivalent. At first glance, it seems that the focus on social entrepreneurship demonstrates particular attention to the activities of individual human beings and projects, start-ups and grassroots innovation, rather than large-system innovation solutions (see local examples in chapters 4, 5, 6). On the other hand, there is a very strong ambition to contribute to wider systemic change, as manifested in the strong emphasis on ‘impact’. Especially in the past years, Impact Hub has shifted its focus on increasing a more systemic, collective impact. The network(ing) is seen as a crucial part of this collective impact. Some argue that the network is “*still scratching the potential of the network as a platform for up/downloading programs for impact worldwide.*” (Interviewee 17).

“Our journey to impact has only just begun. In order to further advance our impact efforts, we are currently taking a closer look at our Theory of Change, over the course of the next months we will continue to build our internal practices and further advance our close collaborations with and learning from leading sector partners.” (Impact Hub website 2015).

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It is argued that there has already been a shift from individual enterprises to wider 'eco-systems' for entrepreneurial change, both at the local and the global level:

"[We have] locally managed to shift from the focus on individuals and their enterprises to a focus on building ecosystems that help entrepreneurs succeed. (...) This shift has happened in the last 4 years, locally. (...) Now we have a critical mass of local hubs that function within that spirit and approach, meaning that they are globally now starting to incorporate and thinking of selves as hosting different local ecosystems for entrepreneurial change, which will create a different type of organizing at the global level (...). This is not yet a global achievement, but it is a significant local achievement and it is growing and will influence the global agenda". (Interviewee 8).

On the one hand, one could connect the concept of 'eco-systems' for innovation with the concept of 'system innovation'. On the other hand, one can see 'eco-systems' for innovation more in terms of *innovation systems*, i.e. systems in which innovations are more likely to emerge, but which do not necessarily lead to system innovation (i.e. change at the level of wider societal system). At the Impact Hub, so far, the focus seems to be more on creating an 'eco-system' in which innovation can emerge, than on guiding specific system innovations with a clear substantive, normative or political direction or vision. When asked about system innovation at the level of social domains/sectors, one of the representatives of the global Impact Hub network indicated that such 'verticals' (e.g. vertical boundaries between domains/sectors) are not the focus:

"On any of the verticals, e.g. energy, we don't have a massive depth around that. We create initiatives that can influence dialogue and maybe challenge some of the usual solutions, but we don't go in depth with those verticals. Our commitment is to keep a broad perspective on those issues and not go in depth on any of them. It is not our main focus". (Interviewee 8)

The argument here is that the Impact Hub does not focus on sector boundaries and its specialised content, but rather on underlying issues (more on this in section 4.2.4. on societal transformation). We also asked how the global network considers the impact of local Impact Hubs on the respective urban systems. The urban influence is constructed in terms of *"levelling up of power and connectivity across fragmented solutions [across] the city ecosystem"* and *"reinventing public space"* (Interviewee 8). Some Impact Hubs are also moving out of their own co-working spaces *"into public space and host conversation and innovation that happens there, reviving communities and social spaces"* (*ibid*). Again, it seems that the focus there is on connecting innovation across the city, rather than aiming for a specific vision or direction for the city as a whole. Having said that, those who participate in the *"global conversations and at the last gatherings"*, feel that *"there is thematic-based focus and programming"*, and that *"much of the topic-based content is contextualised within local Impact Hubs and their constituencies"* (Interviewee 2).

3.2.3 Relation with game-changers

Given the idealistic drivers behind the very background and creation of the Impact Hub (see section 3.1), it is not surprising that there seems to be a high level of awareness regarding societal trends and global developments, including 'game-changers' i.e. macro-trends that are perceived to change the rules of 'the game'. This is not entirely a matter of mere idealism, as there is also a sense that the world is already changing (whether we like it or not), and that we need new ways of working with and within that: *"Another world is happening and you're invited to take part in it"* (Impact Hub website 2015). So it is not only a matter of the Impact Hub changing the world, but also that the Impact Hub enables people to better play into a changing world.

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Which game-changers and global problems the Impact Hub is tackling or dealing with exactly, seems less obvious or explicit. This may have to do with its spread across the world, implying cultural, political and therefore thematic diversity and different priorities in terms of societal challenges. There are, however, a few game-changers that seem particularly relevant across the Impact Hub network.

The first concerns the processes of internationalisation, globalisation and transnationalisation. When considering the background of the Impact Hub, there is a strong basis in international networks focused on global issues (e.g. AIESEC, *Pioneers of Change* – see section 3.1.2.). When asked to compare the Impact Hub to other similar organisations, one interviewee characterised the Impact Hub as a less bureaucratic, less politicised version of the United Nations, sharing its goal of affecting change in the world through the representation of diverse cultures. The Impact Hub is “*more efficient with our resources*” and comes “*from a much more grassroots perspectives*” than the United Nations, but “*we share an idealism, from some people, to change the world at that [global] scale, to have diverse people working together for change, and [to realise] that this is a long term project*” (Interviewee 2). Indeed, the societal challenges addressed by the UN – such as poverty or resource depletion – are also recurring topics at the Impact Hub, the main difference being that these issues are tackled through social entrepreneurial solutions (e.g. products, services, concepts) rather than governmental policies or regulations.

Regarding the global economic crisis, there is a sense that – on the one hand – the Impact Hub has not been affected by it in a negative sense, and that – on the other hand – the crisis has had a positive effect in terms of attracting more people to the Impact Hub:

“On the back of the economic crisis, we have got an increase of uptake, in our communities. Because more people see that, actually, there is no reliance we can really have on big institutions. Going entrepreneurial and coming up with organisations that fulfil your life’s needs, but also your purpose needs, is maybe a better alternative. So we got a big, big traction on the back of the economic crisis, because the economic crisis was not just a financial crisis, it was also an institutional crisis and a purpose crisis. And on the back of this institutional and purpose crisis we got a lot of people coming to us and saying, ‘Enough, I really want to do something, and I want to be proactive around it’. And not just individuals, even institutions themselves. (...) We have an increasing number of corporates, for example, who are seeking for being more purpose driven, being more value driven, taking a more ethical role in society, and more meaningfully so than before, when it was primarily a CSR marketing exercise.” (Interviewee 8).

When discussing the economic crisis or the general idea of ‘game-changers’ in interviews, it was often related to a more general sense of existing systems ‘going down’, and new movements emerging based on more bottom-up and decentralised approaches: “*When the old system goes down this creates energy and takes people to this new movement*” (interviewee 17):

Q: What do you believe are the most important ‘game-changers’ of our times? A: “The first thing that came to mind is: globally and distributed initiatives where people get empowered to drive change and organize around change on their own. See all the social media platforms, see these initiatives like the Hub, which are about giving the power to the community and just facilitating what’s happening there. So this whole bottom up, people getting back the power in their hands and also starting to show up more responsibly around solutions rather than defaulting to institutions and then basically playing the blame game or the help game with them. (...) I think that’s the big power. The more we give power and facilitate solutions from the bottom, the better.” (Interviewee 8).

3.2.4 Relation with societal transformation

From the perspective of the TRANSIT project, societal transformation is the result of a co-evolutionary interaction between different types and levels of change and innovation (social innovation, system innovation, narrative of change and game-changers). It is quite challenging to assess or 'measure' how and to what extent the Impact Hub is contributing to such specific co-evolutionary interaction. We can however, comment on how and to what extent the Impact Hub has a vision and strategy to enable societal transformation.

Earlier, in section 3.2.2 on system innovation, we discussed how the Impact Hub does not primarily focus on vertical system boundaries along sectors/domains (energy, water, health etc.). Rather, the Impact Hub aims to focus on the underlying 'connections' and 'root causes' of systemic problems, including the creation of new relations:

“At the bottom of how we approach a social issue or system, there are some ways of how we work together as humans that are holding us back from change. This could be around economic model, governance model, around fragmentation of different layers of society. That is where we play: at the root cause rather than a specific topic. (...) It is about the quality of relationship and the way we operate with each other. People in our communities very much associate identity with work that happens and not just work. It is something around being part of a certain type of society, which attracts people here. Not just pure service relationship or nice products and services. That’s nice, but people come in for something bigger. The way of being together is why people come to our Hubs. We pride ourselves in building another kind of society.” (Interviewee 8)

3.2.5 Relation with narratives of change

The overall discourse of the Impact Hub network has a clear focus on social entrepreneurship, innovation and change. Furthermore, there are a number of very 'typical', recognisable metaphors that feature in Impact Hub discourses, including e.g. '(The Art of) Hosting', 'incubation' and 'ecosystem'. There are also a set of core values - trust, collaboration and courage – which feature on several communications on and by Impact Hubs across the world and which are defined as follows:

- **Trust.** *We trust each other to do what we say we do. We may have different approaches but share an underlying positive intention and set of values.*
- **Collaboration.** *We hold collaboration at the core of solving the issues of our time. We welcome diversity and partner with like-minded organisations to make a meaningful difference.*
- **Courage.** *We have the courage to walk the path less travelled. We honour the past and pioneer new solutions”. (Impact Hub Compendium, 2014)*

It seems that the Impact Hub is quite conscious about its use of language and images, and that it explicitly aims to create new narratives and a 'new culture', both 'culture' in a broad sense as how societies are constructed, as well as culture in the sense of the culture and arts sector:

“How we are as societies, how we organize as societies, some call it governance but it is more than that, it is also culture. In our communities, we have a strong mind-set and intentionality around that. The culture we build is important to us: the interweaving of arts and culture with actual social change is seen in almost every Hub”. (Interviewee 8)

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The websites of the global network and individual Hubs, as well as the local co-working spaces, displays an exceptional attention for design, visualisation, images and word choices. This is also reflected in the fact that many of the Impact Hub members across the world are active in arts and culture, design and media. It seems that Hub-makers and others use this knowledge and expertise to not only communicate at the rational level, but also to create a ‘full-round experience’. This “*Hub Experience*” is communicated as consisting of an “*inspiring space*”, a “*vibrant community*” and “*meaningful content*” (Figure 3-6), which are described as the ‘key value propositions’. The combination of these three elements is described as “*the magic of the Impact Hub*” and as something that is being “*connected by the Hub Hosting Practice*” (Impact Hub Compendium 2014).

Figure 3-6: Impact Hub Experience

Source: Impact Hub Report over 2014, published on the website in 2015



“The magic of the Impact Hub is where three elements connect. You work in a nurturing physical space, equipped with the tools you need, so you can focus on what matters. You connect locally and globally with diverse individuals that share your intention to make a difference. From everyday interactions to eye opening events, you get the inspiration and knowledge needed to take your idea to action and Impact”. (Impact Hub Compendium, 2014).

Obviously, discourses by and about the Impact Hub change over the years, either intentionally or unintentionally. Before the ‘transition’ of the global structure and accompanying rebranding, the Hub network used the concept of ‘radical change’ and ‘for a radically better world’. During/ after the ‘transition’, it was found that the word ‘radical’ was an issue for some Impact Hubs, particularly in Eastern Europe, and was taken out. The network did however, try to capture the essence of the notion of ‘radical change’, which is one of the explanations for the rebranding of the Impact Hub (Interviewee 17).

Besides the strong relation between the Impact Hub and the discourses on ‘social innovation’ and ‘social entrepreneurship’ (see section 3.1.3), there are also other discourses and narratives of change that the Impact Hub seems to have a strong resonance with. These include the discourses on sharing economy, social impact economy, social return on investment, and several others.

3.3 (Dis)Empowerment in/by the Impact Hub

This section is about the question of how people are empowered in and/or disempowered by the transnational Impact Hub network(ing). We understand empowerment in terms of people gaining a sense of impact, meaning, competence and choice (Thomas & Velthouse 1999). Before we can answer that question, we need to first clarify who we are talking about – what kind of people are involved in the Impact Hub network in the first place?

As indicated in section 3.1., the website mentions over 70 Impact Hubs spread across 5 continents, including a total of 9.000 members, and several new Impact Hubs ‘in the making’. The Impact Hub report over 2014 also reports a total of 500.000+ guests, 2.000.000 beneficiaries and ‘global reach’ of 50.000.000 (Impact Hub report, 2015). These numbers are obviously not set in stone, as correspondents all mention different numbers. According to one interviewee (interviewee 8), there are 7.500 people around the globe that are “*engaged on a day to day basis*”, of which 50% are “*social entrepreneurs driving their own initiative in either a business or a not-for-profit model*”, and on a “*lighter basis*” there are over 100.000 people involved (e.g. in events, programmes, partnerships, advisory board). Another interviewee (interviewee 2) indicated that there are about 450 “*Hub-makers*” around the world including founders, but also other core-team members involved in organising, managing and running the local sites. Besides the Hub-makers, there are of course also the ‘Hub-hosts’, which are sometimes members, and sometimes paid staff.

Regarding the ‘type’ of people involved in the Impact Hub, either at the global level or in the local sites, there seems to be a predominant representation of young (20-40), highly-educated, idealistic and ‘entrepreneurial’ individuals. The majority of Impact Hubs is clearly situated in the ‘Global North’ (in whatever definition of it). However, there is also a global spread of local sites, including Impact Hubs in Kuala Lumpur, Seoul, Johannesburg, Dubai, Brazil and Mexico. Moreover, the network is “*innovating the on boarding process by creating a peer-to-peer cohort*”, and there are programmes that are focused on the Global South such as the Africa Seed program (interviewee 2).

Empowerment and Disempowerment

There is a clear focus on empowerment in the Impact Hub, as manifested in its attention for ‘enabling’ social entrepreneurs. At the level of transnational networking, this empowerment especially lies in providing people with a ‘global connection’. This empowering dimension of the transnational network can be characterised in several dimension, which apply both to Impact Hub teams who are facilitating local sites, as well as to the local members:

1. A sense of being locally active while also being **globally connected** and working towards a **common purpose**, which increases one’s sense of impact and meaning
2. A sense of **community and strength** in a group of like-minded people across the world, even if social entrepreneurs feel as being ‘on their own’ in their local/national context
3. **Geographically extending** one’s network and action radius, in terms of contacts and places in different parts of the world
4. **Extending one’s knowledge and learning base**, in terms of an increased pool of people with different sets of competences, knowledge, experiences, solutions, etc.
5. **Legitimacy and visibility** through a common brand and network, which may help to profile one’s own enterprise
6. The identity of **being a social entrepreneur, combining idealism and business**, gaining impact and meaning at the same time
7. And all this in combination with a **sense of freedom and independence** as a self-employed entrepreneur, not working for a larger company/network

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In sum, these mechanisms seem to provide the necessary ingredients for individual people gaining a sense of meaning, impact, competence and choice. The quotes of Impact Hub leaders and members, both global and local, illustrate these different dimensions of empowerment.

“I think a huge achievement is being able to connect all these social innovators on a global level and also creating that base of awareness and the understanding that it’s not actually a trend, it’s not something happening now that is going to blow over, it’s an actual change. (...) One of the taglines is ‘another world is not just possible, it’s already happening’. And it is actually making it visible, that it’s not just a statement, it is already happening. There’s people who are living this change and by making it not just an isolated place here in the city, we show that it’s happening all over the world. (...) We have a common purpose. All the hubs all over the world, we’re working towards the same goals and we have similar roles in all the teams around the world. (...) Instead of just having 10 colleagues here who are working towards the same purpose, you have a 100 all over the world.” (Interviewee 4).

“It’s so so powerful if you get together and align on exploring business opportunities for impact globally. I have a background working in big companies as well as local NGO’s and also struggled to find my tribe in a way. (...) Last week we were together designing how to create global businesses with tremendous local impact, and we can do it together. That is really strong for me and that makes me excited about exploring and expanding this network.” (Interviewee 17).

“The first main source of empowerment is that they [members] feel seen. All this hosting practice that we have in Impact Hub (...). We pay very much attention to everybody feeling seen, dignified, and understood in the community via this hosting practice. (Interviewee 8).

Moreover, it is emphasised that the global Impact Hub network and its organisations primarily aims to empower the individual members, rather than empowering the institutional level:

“The spirit of our network is about individual freedom of action and people collaborating in the free world rather than any kind of organizational coercion like traditional large corporations.” (Interviewee 29)

“If you look at our activities, most of our activities are driven by members (...) Empowerment doesn’t come through instruction, it comes through immersing them in a setting that is empowering for them. It’s putting them on the stage and it’s dignifying their value and their skills and their solutions for the larger community. (...) We play a big credibility and visibility role for our communities, which is a very empowering role we take. As a platform, of course we can aggregate more credibility and visibility than one individual entrepreneur or a small start-up. But the way we create visibility is via members. So we have a stronger brand, we are much easier to appear in important publications or important forums for discussion. But if you look at the way our discourse works in this thing, in these places, we primarily put our member stories first. So we use our credibility to drive credibility to them, and drive empowerment to them rather than just getting stuck at our institutional level. (...) We very rarely speak about the Hub, we primarily speak about our member stories, and what’s happening at the Hub, which is quite empowering. It’s also one of the key needs that people come for in our communities, in fact.” (Interviewee 8).

Besides the acknowledgement of the empowering dimensions of the network, it is important to also consider its (potential) disempowering effects. At the level of the global Impact Hub network, a disempowering dimension seems to primarily lie in the search for appropriate governance structures. The development of the global governance structures (see section 3.1.2), points to a

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number of struggles and tensions that are likely to have had disempowering impacts on the individuals involved. There have been mechanisms of exclusion in the first set-up of the franchise (for instance for local Hubs from developing countries that could not afford the fees). Moreover, just like in most governance structures, there have been (and still are) moments of forcing compliance upon disagreeing local Hubs (thus decreasing the 'sense of choice' for the people involved). Last but not least, there are inherent tensions between the Impact Hub network and the institutional context of governments and the business market. Such tension with the institutional mainstream can function as an empowering driver for people from the Impact Hub network to create an alternative, but it can also lead to considerable power struggles, frustrations and disempowerment (see more in section 3.3.1.2 on external governance and the Impact Hub's relation with e.g. governments).

3.3.1 Governance

There is an expectation that the exponential growth of the Impact Hub in the past decade will continue, both in terms of replication of more local Hub sites, as well as the extension of the membership base. This seems to be one of the main governance challenges: how to accommodate that growth, while maintaining one's purpose and identity?

3.3.1.1 Internal governance

The global Impact Hub network is organised according to the following structure. First, there is the global Impact Hub Association, which is legally represented by the Association board, and legally defined as: *"a charitable association (...) created to manage interests and coordinate activities of Local Impact Hubs and further develop the global Impact Hub Network in alignment with and through ownership of Impact Hub Company"* (Impact Hub Compendium 2014). Decisions are taken in the general assembly, at which all local Impact Hubs have a voice: one Hub, one vote. Next to the association, there is the Impact Hub GmbH, which – like the association - is based in Austria (hence "GmbH" meaning "Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung", German for "company with limited liability"). The Impact Hub GmbH, referred to as Impact Hub Company here, is defined as *"a charitable company (...) held in sole ownership by Impact Hub Association (...) created to serve as lean management unit to particularly support the growth, expansion and performance of Local Impact Hubs and Impact Hub Initiatives and to strengthen the global Impact Hub Network"* (ibid). In an interview, the Impact Hub Company was described as a *"non-profit implementation arm, looking after day-to-day functioning"*, which *"makes sure things get done"* and that *"vital functions are running"* (interviewee 2). The Impact Hub Company reports to the Board, whose function it is to represent and look after the interests of the network and liaise with the Company. The latter has a team of managers and coordinators with different full-time and part-time schemes (see Text box 2) and is reported to work with the governance philosophy of "Holacracy" (interviews 2, 8 – see Text box 3).

One of the key concepts of the Impact Hub network, is that the Impact Hubs are *"organised around a sense of shared ownership of the Impact Hub network and trademark. We don't legally co-own the Association but the Association owns the Company a 100%, so we co-own our activities"* (interviewee 2). Examples of activities that are shared, include voting on mandates, governance mechanisms and shared network budgets, and the process of all Impact Hubs reviewing the feasibility studies of, and voting on, newly proposed Impact Hubs. Moreover, the network also has regular reviews of its own organisation; *"currently there is an internal strategy process around 'Impact Hub 3.0' looking at what new aspects of the network want to be co-developed"* (ibid).

Then of course there are the Local Impact Hubs, which are legal unities in their own right (differing depending on local context) which are *"operating local Impact Hubs as spaces. Local Impact Hubs are*

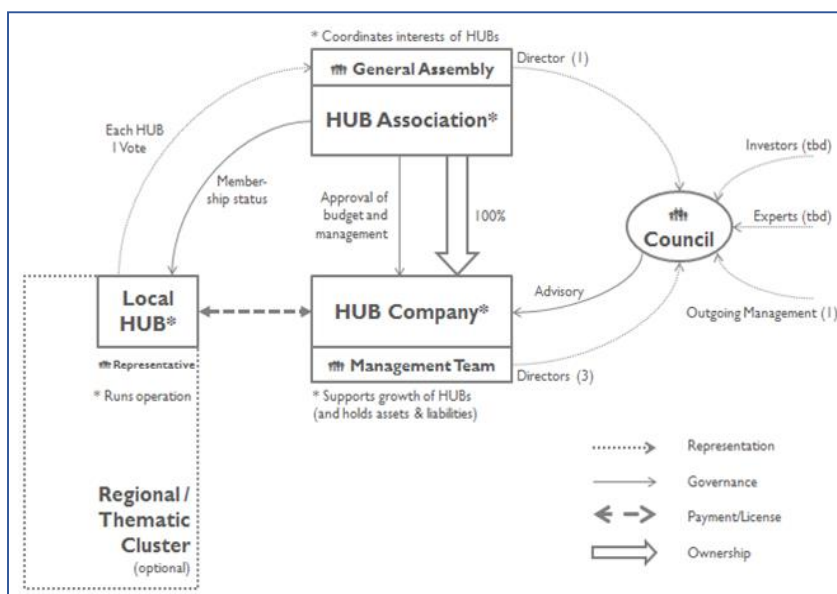
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Members of Impact Hub Association and hold a Local License Agreement” (ibid). The Company has contracts with local Impact Hubs, which pay a fee for certain basis services, such as using the brand and having access to the online Impact Hub Net. Impact Hubs ‘in the making’ are legally referred to as ‘Impact Hub Initiatives’: “legal entities currently starting up but not yet operating local Impact Hubs. Impact Hub Initiatives are Members of Impact Hub Association and have accepted the terms of a Local License Agreement” (ibid). In between the global structures and the local entities, there are various clusters and working groups. The Association, Company, Local Impact Hubs and Initiatives are collectively referred to as the “Impact Hub Network”. Figure 3-6 below provides an overview of its overall structure. On the website, the distinction between the company and the association are not made very explicit; rather, it presents its (global) ‘team’ as consisting of both the managing team of the Impact Hub Company as well as the members of the Board³ (see Text box 2).

Text box 2: Functions on the Impact Hub ‘Global Team’ (Website Impact Hub 2014)

‘Team’ [= Managing Team Impact Hub Company]:	‘Board’ [= Board of the Impact Hub Association]:
Global Managing Director #1, #2	Board Director #1, #2
Global Communications Coordinator	Chairman of the Board
Global Partnerships Manager	Co - Chairman of the Board
Global Technology Coordinator	
Global Impact Coordinator	
Global Managing Director #2	
Global Technology Support #1, #2	
Managing Director	
Africa Lead	
Global Communications Support	
Global Finance Coordinator	
Global Growth Coordinator	

Figure 3-7: Overview of Impact Hub network structure. Source: Impact Hub Compendium, 2014



³ End 2014/Beginning 2015, the structure of the Board of the Impact Hub Association changed.

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The relatively new governance structure of the global Impact Hub network is considered to be a 'decentralised', 'distributed' and 'bottom-up' structure, in which every Impact Hub "is accountable for the whole" (Bachman 2014). Finding a governance structure that pleases hundreds of Impact Hub founders and Impact Hub Makers across the globe, is obviously a very challenging task. Amongst the interviewees, there seems to be an overall understanding and appreciation of the complexity and delicacy of the governance challenge:

"It is hard to keep all these 'crazy' entrepreneurs aligned. (...) We want to avoid franchise but [we are] still replicating programs that work from one place to another. [It's a matter of] finding the right balance. Being together as a network, growing as we've done and keeping the relationships, trust and making sure the values are still based on making the network happen, I think that's great. We need to find out now how to create this new infrastructure, in terms of protocols that work for 100-200 Hubs envisioned for the future. We are very relationship-based in terms of how people develop trust. We want to keep that and build on that and scale while avoiding misalignment. (...) We are being co-owners and as such take biggest decisions together. We are balancing this with becoming a bureaucratic system: finding ideal balance between participation and agility. As entrepreneurs, we don't want something that is too much participatory, thus taking too long for quick decisions to be taken. But if it's something we don't build together, it won't happen anyway if people feel strongly about it. When you're searching for it, it's not something that's ready and done. We're constantly evolving. The main point is always how to balance these two. Make sure [that] the people taking decisions are actually qualified for that. Need some kind of technocrats, people with expertise to make decision. We're exploring the latest prototype, and the next board will take that forward: Liquid Democracy." (Interviewee 17).

"There has definitely had to be some uncoupling, of understanding the different roles between the Hub Association board and the Hub Company. (...) There has often been projections onto the Hub Company of being sort of a headquarters when it wasn't intended to be set up that way. It isn't. But I think some people come into the network with a strong institutional culture background, just a different paradigm of organizing, which then [gets] projected onto this network." (Interviewee 2).

"There are times when we make decisions as a network and then you have the question of what to do if you don't get a consensus on a decision. For instance when the branding changes, when 90% of the HUB voted for the change. What will the 10% do? Do they accept the will of the 90% and get on with that, or leave, or do they hold out? (...) What do you do with the ones who don't want to leave but don't want to change? When it's something as fundamental as your branding? Those kind of issues are very real for us. And being on the board I deal with that all the time now." (Interview 29).

"My personal view is that structure don't make things work, people do. (...) Structures aren't any as good as the people who run them. Any structure can be abused." (Interviewee 29).

It is considered "impossible to get a 100% agreement on big decisions", and often it is necessary to "try first, rather than ask permission" (interviewee 17). Unsurprisingly, non-compliance has also become an issue:

"That has been my main challenge in last years: when recognizing that something is [should] not be part of the network, but still having this family feeling of not being able to punish a brother or sister. We are evolving the idea of protocols for incentives and sanctions for behaviours that should be in our network. The whole rebranding transitioning things was also

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about this: people just don't agree, even though it has been voted and approved. So [then] people should comply. So how can you go after them to comply?" (Interviewee 17)

In conclusion, it seems that the governance structures at the level of the international network are challenging, and given a lot of thought and consideration. Interestingly, it is argued by one of the members of the global team that this is not the case at the level of the local Impact Hubs. The argument was that (most of) the local Impact Hubs are doing great on all fronts, except for governance: *"It's only a few Hubs that are really developing governance systems that create strong empowerment for their communities"* (interviewee 8).

Text box 3: Holacracy

Holacracy is a management strategy that rearranges organisational structure, governing, and operations to serve "organisational purpose". It features specific structures and processes to "integrate the collective wisdom of people throughout the company, while aligning the organization with its broader purpose and a more organic way of operating" (Robertson 2009, 1). The philosophy integrates vocabulary from both management and ecology, such as systems thinking, evolution, dynamism, innovation, agility, and ego (ibid).

Holacracy emphasizes "organisational purpose" as the driving factor for operations and decision-making. A template for organisational structure transforms traditional business hierarchies into "circles," replacing traditional hierarchical levels. Governance processes utilize representatives from interacting circles to ensure all members are represented without requiring cumbersome consensus decision-making. Traditional titles are reconceptualised in the action-based terms "roles, accountabilities, and authorities," with a focus on accomplishing tasks.

For example, instead of designating an employee Project Manager, an employee performs the Project Management Role for a designated task. A series of efficiency-focused meetings at different hierarchical and operational levels are introduced to connect operations and accountability with tasks, goals and purpose. A new board structure gives not only shareholders a voice in determining organisational purpose and pathways, but also integrates representatives of different "contexts" such as broader circles within the organisation or external sectors or concerns relevant to the organisation. Holacracy emphasizes a shift in language, changing for example "debating opinions" to "integrating perspectives", or "problems" to "Tensions".

Holacracy's purpose is to *"invit[e] people to serve something larger than themselves, larger even than the collective, for the sake of evolution's further unfolding... to liberate the organization to become a direct expression of evolution in action, creativity unleashed, free from the shackles of serving human ego"* (Ibid:7). In this way, it connects with the drive expressed by many involved in the Impact Hub or in social entrepreneurship generally.

Criticisms of holacracy target potential inefficiencies and confusion arising from the transition from titles to fluid roles, which are defined by tasks (Wasserman 2014, The Economist 2014). However, supporters point out that hierarchy is still a fundamental part of holacracy (Forbes Online 2014). This again raises criticism from other approaches to decision-making, such as "Sociocracy", supporters of which argue that Holacracy has taken the basic principles of Sociocracy and turned them into a Holacracy method to be appropriated in a commercial and hierarchical contexts.

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3.3.1.2 External Governance

The Impact Hub's connection to the outside world is consistently referred to in terms of 'partnerships' and 'collaboration'. On the website, businesses, individuals and organisations are invited to collaborate as follows:

"Around the world Impact Hubs partner with a variety of like-minded organizations to mutually support each other to build sustainable solutions for the world. Thanks to our physical presence and locally-embedded collaborative communities, our partners access a unique source of social innovation, a global enabling platform to run issue-focused programs, and an inspiring environment to learn and increase their social impact. We challenge you to use the power of your business to drive meaningful social change. We welcome new alliances with businesses, individuals and organizations looking to increase their reach contribution to the social impact economy" (Impact Hub website, 2015).

Several sources indicate that there seems to be an increasing interest from organisations – business, NGOs as well as governments – for cooperating with Impact Hub, both at the local and international level (Interviews 2, 8, 17). In the area of business, there is an increasing interest from "impact investors" as well as "corporates" who are looking at the growing sector of social entrepreneurship (interviewee 8). Generally speaking, these larger organisations look at the Impact Hub, either to find promising innovations to invest in, and/or to have the Impact Hub helps them make their own organisations more innovative (ibid). Obviously, the cooperation with such larger organisations poses quite a challenge, given the fundamentally different organisational structures. Particularly the cooperation with governments is considered challenging, and it is even argued that the Impact Hub should 'stay away from it':

"We are very sensitive of this power dynamic element. (...) The biggest pressure we got is primarily from the government, (...) because they (...) generally tend to take over things rather than co-create at the partnership level. Also because they can invest significant amount of money, the power dynamic can very easily be curved. So if we allow a significant flow of money from the government without making sure we have the right relationship, it would skew the overall dynamic of our community. So honestly, that's why we are rather staying away for now. Because also the level of business we can develop for now is not yet big enough to be able to play with the level of resource that they can invest. So then the risk we perceive there is that their capital would take over the power dynamic. (...) We would like it, of course, [if] they see us as a relevant solution to their issues, but if we can't play at an equal game, we are afraid that the power dynamic will significantly change. (...) So that's been the hardest struggle. (...) Second in line would be with corporates, mainly because corporates are great at growing and scaling things, but not so great at enabling starting innovation. So in fact they are great at stifling innovation. At the beginning, at least. They are great at scaling but not great at in giving birth to new ideas. So we have to be careful around not having them influence too much this early stage innovative approaches. And only get them later when these guys are strong enough to be able to have a proper relationship with the corporates, rather than just be taken over by them. (...) Those are the two [government and business]. But so far, we've managed well. The downside of that struggle is that both corporates and governments sit on really important resources and really important data, really important ideas. It's quite slowing down, the way we work with them to create that connection, because we need to make sure the power dynamic doesn't get quickly squeezed in their favour." (Interviewee 8).

"On the local level: [external] people tend to see us generally as positive, but don't know what to do about it. [I am] having a meeting with the municipality after this. They love it, they think it can work in many ways, but the way we work doesn't fit in the way they work. So they have

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these calls for open projects, and we don't fit in any. (...) We're developing something that is sometimes too new so it doesn't really fit in the current structures. In businesses we have something similar but a bit more agile: businesses also want to partner and do something together and we are trying to find how we can package this 'something'. So the intrapreneurship program is one. [We] did a partnership with a business school in Brazil and developed this program and its happening also in IH Zurich and some other Hubs are interested in exploring this: how can we actually form the support for intrapreneurs to make considerable change through their companies? On the global level: we are too young globally. (...). There are some specific partnership, for instance the WWF supports us on tracking impact. We're only just scratching the potential of global partnerships. We had the BENISI program in Europe, so that's already happening and relates to the EU. We are working on more of this. But it's the same challenges as local Hubs. We don't fit, so how can we design something that makes sense for both parts? It is more an adaptation issue than a power issue." (Interviewee 8).

"In the end of the day I do believe that free enterprises, social enterprises, provide a more efficient use of scarce resources. Rather than expecting the state to sort everything out, which in my experiences, it is not very good at, or indeed the voluntary sector, which relies on a large organizations and large funds, and therefore again dependent on the corporate sector or the state. [In the Impact Hub network] there are so many talented people with great ideas that are trying to scale, that if even just a few of our members succeed in scaling their ideas, we can make a real contribution to a better world." (Interviewee 29).

3.3.2 Social learning

Learning seems to be the main method through which the Impact Hub (aims to) empower people. There is a very strong focus on (social) learning in the Impact Hub, both in terms of sharing experiences as well as continuously adapting approaches and structures. Such learning happens through various different channels:

1. 'Inner-source' sharing of questions and experience on the Hub-net (= members only)
2. Public online sharing of stories and experiences on the global and local websites
3. Extensive programming: workshops, trainings, courses, events, etc.
4. Informal encounters at the local Hub sites (coffee corner, lunch, etc.)
5. Match-making (by hosts/ Hub-makers) of individuals who can learn from one another

The existence of a global network, is reported as facilitating and accelerating the learning processes, as it increases the pool and the availability of knowledge and experiences. Also, it is argued that the whole set up of the Impact Hub, as well as the particular way in which the global structure governance has been developed, aims categorically at learning.

"Instead of just having 10 colleagues here who are working towards the same purpose, you have 100 colleagues all over the world who you can then share knowledge and share ideas with. So knowledge actually happens much quicker because you're exchanging knowledge of all these different contexts and settings. And we collaborate quite closely through the virtual platform, but we also physically come together twice a year. (...) That's really interesting because we try to learn from each other's best practices, and that's continued on a daily base by having online community practices." (Interviewee 4).

"We have a governance structure that's quite empowering for the edges, for the local. We have very strong learning systems between us via these communities of practice and ongoing

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meetings and ongoing platforms where we share learning. (...) I think we are really good at learning" (interviewee 8).

There is also a culture of sharing failures. Several sources report that at the international level, there has been the organisation of "Fuck Up Nights" to exchange failures: *"It's really great, they do it on a global level and I think it's amazing because by saying things you become more at ease and see 'oh, wow, I can actually learn from my failure and let's share it'."* (Interviewee 4).

3.3.3 Resources

The global Impact Hub Company financially relies on project/program based partnerships as well as local Impact Hubs paying parts of their revenue and a fee for using the brand, the global Hub-net, and technological support.

"In the new structure, as in the earlier structure, member Hubs would pay a joining fee and an ongoing revenue share. Significantly, however, both the joining fee and the revenue share would be about two-thirds less than they had been under the Hub World model. In addition, the joining fee would be adjusted to the projected revenue of each Hub". (Bachman 2014).

The business models of local Impact Hubs differ across the globe, but important commonalities are: membership fees, renting out spaces, training, education and consultancy (see chapters 4, 5, 6 for specific examples of revenues, membership fees, etc.). This 'business model' of local Impact Hubs, as well as their relation to the global Company and Association, are legally captured in a number of 'agreements':

- **"Global License Agreement"** outlines the terms for Impact Hub Association to grant to Impact Hub Company an exclusive, worldwide, royalty bearing license for certain intellectual property rights and know-how owned and controlled by Impact Hub Association with the right for Impact Hub Company to grant sublicenses to Local Impact Hubs. See Appendix 10.3 "Global License Agreement".
- **"Local License Agreement"** outlines the terms for Impact Hub Company with the consent of Impact Hub Association to (i) grant Local Impact Hubs access to and participation in the Impact Hub Network, (ii) give Locals Impact Hub a sublicense under certain IP necessary and/or useful for the conduct of the Impact Hub Business as well as to (iii) provide to Local Impact Hub certain services. See Appendix 10.3 "Local License Agreement".
- **"Impact Hub Business"** is defined as (i) offering of memberships and (ii) rental of meeting, workshop and event space, and thereby marks the basis for the monthly payment of Local Impact Hubs to Impact Hub Company with regards to the Local License Agreement.
- **"Impact Hub Tech Agreements"** outline the terms for Impact Hub Company to provide IT services required to support and sustain: the global operating platform ("Impact Hubops") and the global website and local microsities ("Impact Hubweb") to Local Impact Hubs. See Appendix 10.4 "Impact Hub Tech Contracts". (Impact Hub Compendium 2014).

Third, the Impact Hub has quite a specific philosophy about money and other resources. First, there is the underlying philosophy of social entrepreneurship, which is based on the concept of combining profit-making with societal goals. This combination blurs the boundaries between for-profit and non-profit (also referred to as 'not-for-profit'), and comes with a set of alternative business models, such as crowd-funding, impact funds and cooperatives. It seems that several Impact Hubs across the world organize specific events to increase the literacy of their members regarding (innovative) business models.

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Something that the Impact Hub would like to develop further, are dedicated match-making activities between its members/social entrepreneurs and interested social investors. This is also something that some of the local members (see chapters 4, 5, 6 on local Impact Hubs) would like to see more of. As such, it seems that when it comes to resourcing in terms of funding, the role of the network and the Impact Hubs could be further strengthened: *“Resourcing, again, quite important for us. We are strengthening that. I think, we have more of an intention rather than a reality around it, but we are getting better and better at it.”* (Interviewee 8).

Last but not least, it is important to note, that at all Impact Hubs, there seems to be an inherent basic sharing of resources, starting with the office space, including all accompanying material things such as a coffee machine, printer, meeting rooms and office supplies. But there is also an explicit sharing of more intangible resources, such as knowledge, information, competences and experiences. The general idea is that members of an Impact Hub share such resources with each other in an informal fashion, without formal monetary transactions (e.g. billing someone for 1 hour advice), because there is a basic level of trust and collaboration. Many of the mechanisms and practices that are currently being promoted by complementary currencies, bartering systems, and other sharing economy concepts, are informally happening at the Impact Hub.

3.3.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are mostly focused on (1) keeping track of the development of the network, (2) evaluating the needs of local Impact Hubs and members, and (3) ‘measuring impact’, something that is discussed much at the moment (related to the wish to have more ‘systemic impact’ – see also section 3.2.). There is a global membership survey format, which can be adapted to local Impact Hubs. Several Impact Hubs have created their own Impact Reports. It seems that the ‘accountability culture’ within the Impact Hub is mostly peer-driven:

“In evaluation we are very peer driven, so even our general performance assessments for different entities in our network is a peer driven model, it’s not imposed by a centralized unit, it’s a peer-review accountability process. (...) It’s very much in this peer-accountability, more like creating an ethical dome for our communities that drives that accountability rather than centralized systems of power.” (Interviewee 8).

The earlier mentioned Infographic report on the Impact Hub website includes an overview of how members feel *“inspired”, “connected”* and *“enabled”*, as well as a *“value of membership”* in terms of *“how member perceive their experience”*, including: *“62% wish to be directly supported by Impact Hub in their future activities”,* and *“81% would highly recommend Impact Hub”* (Impact Hub Infographic 2014). The data and information communicated on the Infographic is stated to be *“based on a global membership survey, conducted between December 2012 and January 2013. The final sample contains a total of 670 respondents from 14 Impact Hubs after elimination of double counts, reductions based on local response rates and corrections of individual outliers”* (ibid). Furthermore, it is stated that *“results have been independently analysed and compiled by Vienna University of Economics and Business in cooperation with Impact Hub GmbH”* (ibid). This demonstrates an example of how the Impact Hub cooperates with research institutes to evaluate its progress and impact, something which is also confirmed by the involvement of several European Impact Hubs in the EU-funded BENISI project on ‘scaling social innovation’ (<http://www.benisi.eu/>).

This and other types of involvement in these kinds of projects, are related to the Impact Hub’s increasing attention for ‘having impact’. Wanting to have more impact, implies wanting to know how much impact one has and how one can increase this, so it is not surprising that the Impact Hub network works on new monitoring and evaluation frameworks, as announced on the website:

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“Please also stay tuned for a more detailed section on our impact, the lessons learned along the way, and new metrics identified in our upcoming annual assessment – and feel free to share your questions or ideas with us.” (Impact Hub website 2014).

Moreover, the sharing of ‘Impact Hub stories’, a concept that features on many Hub websites, and other forms of ‘showing the world’ what one is doing, seems not only to be a tool for learning or PR, but also a method for peer-driven accountability. One could interpret these as more qualitative, implicit and informal methods of monitoring and evaluation.

3.4 Other issues about the Impact Hub Network

In several interviews we asked: “Do you have any questions to us? Which research questions do you have? Which research questions do you hope that our project will answer?” Below we collected some answers to this question:

“The part that (...) I would find very useful to get further insight in is: how to best connect innovations that come really from the grassroots, so really at the edge, not known and kind of hidden, and how to marry those with large systemic change, without killing their innovative dimension? Because we are going into this ecosystem-building theory of change, we will have more and more interaction between this grassroots and the established institutional change, so any insights you could bring forward around how the two can marry without creating a disempowering relationship, we would highly benefit from that.” (Interviewee 8).

“I’m curious about how can we make this a larger open movement, a collective impact that we can explore together. And what are the practices that are really effective to enable us to do so? A lot of people like each other, but how can we actually do real stuff together? We have this challenge in the Hub network itself: what can we do together? Not just alignment, and everyone goes back doing their own thing in alignment, but how can we actually explore the global impact initiatives? Trying to respond to this in a network level but also interested in seeing this in movement level, in a way that transcends the IH network itself”. (Interviewee 17).

“How to benefit more from a growing global network? There is a global tribe, but also most are focused on local change: how can that be better leveraged for systemic impact, and be of more benefit and what would enable that? I would be curious from other networks: how can we improve on that piece? When and how is that useful and what can support that?” (Interviewee 2).

Intermezzo: Background of the Impact Hub Netherlands

Authors: Julia Wittmayer, Flor Avelino

As explained in chapter 2, two of our case-studies are based in the Netherlands. Our initial intention was to take the Netherlands as one local case-study, but we soon discovered that there were too many differences between Impact Hub Rotterdam and Amsterdam to treat them as one case-study. We thus decided on two case-studies. In this intermezzo, we give an overview of the shared beginnings of the Impact Hubs Amsterdam and Rotterdam. It is based on an interview with the founder of the Impact Hub Rotterdam, a founder of the Impact Hub Amsterdam and a report on the “journeys, achievements and learnings” of the Impact Hub Amsterdam in 2009 and 2010 (Impact Hub Amsterdam 2010).

The founders of the Hub Amsterdam and Rotterdam had met each other already 2001 during a *Pioneers of Change* learning journey in Brazil (see more on this network in section 3.1.2.). Inspired as they were, they hosted a learning journey on “Integration and Immigration” in Rotterdam in 2005. In the meantime, the founder of the Hub Rotterdam had been in Johannesburg (South Africa). Having heard about the Hub London, together with other *Pioneers of Change*, they started a Hub like initiative in Johannesburg with social innovators and numerous initiatives. Upon her return to the Netherlands, she met up with the founder of the Hub Amsterdam in July 2006, who had been a member of Hub London since 2005. They discussed emergent questions for The Netherlands such as: What is needed in The Netherlands now? And where can we go to find inspiring people sharing our vision of change in the world? In September 2007, the two women (together with a third one) founded the Stichting (Foundation) *The Hub NL*.

Starting from the idea that one Hub would be enough for the Netherlands, their first step was to do market research regarding three possible locations: Amsterdam, Rotterdam or Utrecht. They did so through community meetings in what they refer to as a “rather emergent process” (Impact Hub Amsterdam 2010: 9). Amsterdam was interesting due to it being international, creative and a cultural hotspot. Rotterdam was known for its entrepreneurial, innovative character, its industrial charm and its proximity to Delft. Utrecht was especially interesting due to it being located in the centre and being easily reachable. The market research showed that there was interest in both Amsterdam and Rotterdam for a Hub, but it also showed that the average Dutch target group (i.e. mostly self-employed entrepreneurs) and the communities they were already cultivating in the cities were not prepared to travel more than half an hour to a working place. Therefore they decided to start two separate Hubs.

Interestingly, the process went very different in both cities. In Rotterdam, the contact with the municipality went very smoothly. The municipality had just financed the Creative Factory in one of the old industrial harbour buildings and saw the potential of these kinds of investments. “*At that time, Rotterdam had a very active policy to keep young highly educated in the city, and we were a perfect fit. Thus, they very much wanted to stimulate our work*” (Interviewee 16). A rudimentary business plan was enough for the city, leading to the opening of the Hub Rotterdam at the Heemraadssingel in February 2008. The founder was running the Impact Hub on her own in the beginning.

In Amsterdam, there was no support from the municipality in finding a suitable location. Next to searching for a location, the founder also build up a team of about 10 people to start the Impact Hub fully-functioning from the first day. In November 2008, once the location in the Westerstraat was opened, many people signed up. There was strong collaboration between the two Hubs in the beginning, e.g. they co-created a Hub NL Summer School in 2009 and 2010 or worked together at the “*Dag van de Duurzaamheid*” in 2009 (Dutch for “Sustainability Day”). Once the Impact Hub

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Association and the Impact Hub Company were founded (see sections 3.1.2 and 3.3.1.1), the Dutch foundation connecting the two Dutch Hubs was not found necessary anymore, as they were now linked through the global network. More information about the differences, similarities and interactions between the two Dutch Impact Hubs will be discussed in the respective local case-study chapters, and in chapter 7.

4 Local initiative 1: Impact Hub Amsterdam

Authors: Flor Avelino and Tim Strasser

4.1 Overview of (development of) Impact Hub Amsterdam

In November 2008, The Hub Amsterdam opened its doors at the *Westerstraat*, in the western part of central Amsterdam. In 2013, it was re-localised to the area of the *Westergasfabriek* in *Stadsdeel West* and rebranded as “the Impact Hub” (following the global rebranding process). Today, the Impact Hub Amsterdam (IH Amsterdam) has a total of around 220 members, as well as a wider network of partners and followers that participate and/or cooperate in programmes (interviewee 2). On its website, the IH Amsterdam introduces itself with the following three banner statements: (1) “**An Impact Ecosystem.** Where impactmakers connect, work, meet, collaborate, learn, launch, grow and scale”, (2) “**A Community of Impactmakers.** 3000+ local changemakers in Amsterdam and 60+ Impact Hubs in cities globally”, and (3) “**For a Radically Better World.** Issue-driven entrepreneurs moving society forward” (IH Amsterdam website, 2015).

4.1.1 Location and Space

The IH Amsterdam has its address at the *Westergasfabriek* area, which is located in/next to the “Westerpark” in a relatively upper range, or at least gentrified, neighbourhood west of Amsterdam centre. Besides the IH Amsterdam, the *Westergasfabriek* area includes several other entrepreneurial, creative and cultural spaces and initiatives. There are various restaurants, bars, a cinema/theatre, and a few offices and workspaces, of which the IH Amsterdam is one.

Figure 4-1: Location of the Impact Hub Amsterdam

Source: IH Amsterdam website



The IH Amsterdam is located on the second floor of one of the first buildings that one comes across when entering the *Westergasfabriek* terrain, with a space of approx. 750 m². This overall space is divided in three separate spaces. First, there is the ‘dynamic’ space, called the ‘Café’, which is the first area one enters when coming from the main entrance. This is the busiest area, often with many people and many conversations. There is a diversity of communication means (ranging from screens and signs to posters and flipcharts) welcoming entering members or visitors. Various tables on the left side of the room offer space for people to sit and work. Then there are smaller, more café-style round tables on the right side by the window, a balcony, an area for coffee and tea (included in the

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membership fee), and a chill-out area with a sofa. Also, there are skype/phone cabins for people to talk without being disturbed, or without disturbing others. At the end of the space, there is a big wooden table where lunch is served for a limited number of members (sign-up required, max ca. 15-20 people). The wall is covered with photos of members, with their names and a short description of the projects they are involved in (see figure 4-4). Just before entering this first main space, one passes two company offices, on either side of the hallway. Throughout the period of the case-study, the organisations habituating those offices changed a few times, thereby changing the feel and visual atmosphere of those offices, and manifesting the idea of a dynamic place for incubation, start-up and emergence of new enterprises.

Figure 4-2: Entrance and 'Café' Space of Impact Hub Amsterdam

Source: Tim Strasser



After the café, there is a more silent space called 'Focus', where long tables offer space for focused work (see figure 4-3). There is also a corner with beanbags and sofas. A few standing tables are in this room as well, which can be transformed into whiteboards, or used as team-meeting tables with a white-board surface to draw on. This room is also used for events and private gatherings. One wall is covered with a big poster of the world map, indicating where in the world other Impact Hubs can be found, conveying a sense of being part of a global network.

Thirdly, the area behind the silent room is dedicated to three private meeting spaces of varying sizes and layouts, to be rented for specific meetings. These rooms can be rented and booked both by members (who get a discount) as well as external organisations (see more information on prices in 4.3.3 on resources) per half-day. If the rooms are empty and not booked, members can use them freely. 'The Café' space introduced earlier can be viewed as one large meeting space in general, so

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even without the separate meeting rooms, one can use the Impact Hub to have informal meetings (as we as researchers did several times, including interviews).

Figure 4-3: Silent space called 'Focus' in Impact Hub Amsterdam

Source: Tim Strasser



As researchers, we also often ended up working in the 'Focus' space, so as to concentrate on writing. While this space is considerably less noisy than the Café space, there can still be quite some sound coming from people walking through or from adjacent spaces, especially when these are booked for events. It was interesting to notice that some members of our research team enjoyed the 'dynamics', while others had more difficulty with the lack of silence. Some of us had the impression that the IH Amsterdam (and the Impact Hub more generally) either attracts a certain type of people (i.e. extroverts who thrive in such a dynamic environment) and/or that people mostly come to the IH Amsterdam when they have networking events or meetings, not when they want to work concentrated for hours on end. As a team member emphasised: *"We have never aimed to be a silent working place, there are other co-working spaces for that. We are an innovation space first and foremost"* (interview 1).

4.1.2 Community and Identity

Besides the 220 registered paying members of the IH Amsterdam, the founder of the IH Amsterdam recently stated that there is a broader membership base of about 420 people, including the advisory board and other people that receive the newsletter and mailing list, and that next to this "direct family" of 420, there is also a wider network of over 5000 partners who receive the newsletter and with whom IH Amsterdam cooperates (*Participant Observation 20.11.2014*). At all our visits to the IH Amsterdam, there were at least 50 people present, usually more, and sometimes even over 150 people (especially when multiple events were going on in parallel).

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Members, Enterprises and Events at the Impact Hub Amsterdam

The members of the IH Amsterdam display a wide diversity of social enterprises and projects, ranging from publishing services to website-buildings, facilitation methods and food allergy approaches, ecovillage designs and sharing economy platforms. Concrete examples of enterprises include: *Konnektid*, a sharing economy platform for people to share skills and knowledge in their neighbourhoods across the world (<https://www.konnektid.com/>), *MUD Jeans*, a brand of jeans based on an advanced recycling system (<http://www.mudjeans.eu/>), and *Allive*, an information sharing tool for empowering people with food allergies (<http://allive.com/>). On its website, the IH Amsterdam displays over 30 examples of such social enterprises by its members. The exact definition of ‘social entrepreneur’ seems to differ for each member. While there is a shared sense of having a positive impact on society, there seems to be quite some differences regarding the extent to which making profit is considered part of the deal: *“It’s very personal where you draw the line. (...) It depends on your own kind of limit, where you say ‘now it’s enough’”* (interviewee 27).

Figure 4-4: Members Wall at IH Amsterdam

Source: Tim Strasser



Overall, people at the IH Amsterdam seem to consist mostly of young (aged 20-40), highly educated, idealistic and ambitious individuals. Many members have a background working in business or other large organisations, and at some point decided to ‘step out’:

“Most of these members had a university degree, worked a good couple of years, quite a few in business or corporate sectors, or at least in the for-profit sector (...) and after a couple of years, they decided it wasn’t for them and started coming to us. (...) Obviously there are exceptions, people who have a longer history in international development and have spent a lot of years

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abroad and then came back here and started start-ups. There are others that just always worked in communications or advertising before deciding that they actually want to make use of the skills they already have and contribute to something positive (...). On average, there are few people who started as an entrepreneur from the get-go (...)" (Interviewee 4).

The IH Amsterdam has a rich programme offer, including general introductions, trainings, courses, lectures and all sorts of innovative forms of meeting ('labs', 'meet-ups', 'action-café's', 'challenges', 'workbenches' etc.). The regular 'workbench' sessions offer practical training for entrepreneurs, with topics ranging from Communications & PR or Sales & Marketing (Participant Observations, IH Amsterdam website), to attracting investors or learning how to 'pitch' one's enterprise concept. The monthly 'WHAT'S HUB' event for prospective members offers an introduction to the IH Amsterdam, including *"an impression of our community, the content and the space, a meet-up with fellow changemakers and entrepreneurs, and info on Impact Hub memberships and how to apply"* (IH Amsterdam website). There are also regular 'Business Model Challenge' programmes: the 7th edition is announced for April 2015 and promises to *"boost your business idea into a workable business model and to really start kicking it off"* and to help entrepreneurs move *"from idea to viable business in 3 months"* (ibid).

Amsterdam & Social Entrepreneurship

The image and identity of the city of Amsterdam is explicitly manifested and referred to at the IH Amsterdam in multiple ways. When people in 2008 discussed the founding of a Hub site in the Netherlands, Amsterdam was considered to be one of the three possible cities (see Intermezzo, p. 43), due to its *"international, creative and cultural"* identity (interviewee 16). This concurs with a more general public image of Amsterdam as the cultural and creative capital of the Netherlands, and as its main tourist attraction⁴. The importance of the Amsterdam identity is recurrently referred to in several interviews, and part of the success and allure of IH Amsterdam is explained in terms of the attractiveness of the city (interviews 2, 9, 16, 21, 28).

At the same time, the image of Amsterdam also has its downfalls. Especially when compared to Rotterdam, the city of Amsterdam and/or its inhabitants, are often accused of being too complacent, 'talking too much' and 'doing too little', a critique that is particularly expressed by people from Rotterdam and other areas in the more Southern parts of the Netherlands. This scepticism regarding Amsterdam is sometimes also mirrored in outsider images of the IH Amsterdam, as reflected in the quote below (by someone who actually works in Amsterdam and is a supporter of the IH Amsterdam):

"I like the stories, but they have to lead to something. There are so many creative ideas. And Amsterdam is a good example of being all about creativity, but we are not able to complete things. Rotterdam does have that mentality [of completing things]. There are also other cities in Europe, like Barcelona or Hamburg, there you really see that combination: a creative city, but with a worker's mentality [Dutch: "maar wel handen uit de mouwen"]. I wish that for Amsterdam, that we get a bit more of that Rotterdam mentality". (Interviewee 21).

A very particular illustration of the Amsterdam identity being manifested in all its dimensions at the IH Amsterdam, concerns a recent event that celebrated the 1 year anniversary of the *Westergasfabriek* location, and was announced as *"The Golden Age of Social Entrepreneurship"* (Participant Observation 20.11.2014). A central element of this event was a plenary speech by one of the advisory members, the director of the Amsterdam (Historical) Museum, who was introduced

⁴ Amsterdam is also the official capital of the Netherlands, but not its political capital (which resides in The Hague).

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as a museum director with an exceptional entrepreneurial approach to the cultural sector. His speech revolved around the “*DNA of Amsterdam*”, which was mostly characterised in terms of the entrepreneurial spirit of Amsterdam, which historically ‘peaked’ during the Dutch Golden Age in the 17th century. The suggestion of the event was that Amsterdam could, once again, be the birthplace of ‘a new golden age of *social* entrepreneurship’. Interestingly, this particular event was not only held for IH Amsterdam members, but also for partners and investors, in particular from the *Rabobank*, who’s corporate identity was quite present at the event, in between the prints of 17th Dutch Century painters and Golden Age images. On the one hand, we experienced this event as actually being quite *a-typical* for the IH Amsterdam, as the crowd, the suits, and the relatively corporate atmosphere, contrasted with the informal crowd and atmosphere that one encounters in the space on an average working day. At the same time, however, the event was representative of one of the aims of the IH Amsterdam: to connect its social entrepreneurs to social capital investors, and to merge social value goals with the world of business.

This event also demonstrates the strong attention of the IH Amsterdam for **social entrepreneurship** and ‘impact entrepreneurship’ as phenomena in which it is legitimized to have idealistic social goals, while also making money. A member described one of the main achievements of IH Amsterdam as: “*It’s a legitimacy to work businesswise with social problems. That it is ok to earn money and it’s ok to do good, that it’s not two separate worlds that you should not interlink*” (interviewee 27). Even though such social entrepreneurship is a topic across the entire Impact Hub network (see chapter 3), some Impact Hubs may be more or less ‘entrepreneurial’ than others, and the IH Amsterdam seems to be high on the spectrum of entrepreneurial orientation:

“What they [IH Amsterdam] have done really well (...) is that each of the three founders are entrepreneurs in their own regards. (...) Therefore you have a network with a very entrepreneurial drive. And that is in comparison with [other Hubs in] where at the core of their organization they did not have entrepreneurs; they had facilitators, coaches, people from the bank world, all kinds of different people, but not the entrepreneurs. And therefore they didn’t attract any entrepreneurs and it collapsed in the end. Because there were a lot of people who wanted to do the finance for the entrepreneurs, who wanted to source them, wanted to do this or that, but there was nobody there who actually wanted to actually do anything. And I think that’s something they build really well in here, because they attract the people that they are.” (Interview 27).

The (Art of) Hosting and Holacracy

Besides its Amsterdam identity and the strong focus on entrepreneurship, the IH Amsterdam also has more traits distinguishing it from other Impact Hubs. One is the explicit attention for the **Art of Hosting** and the **use of Holacracy** as a specific governance approach, which is described as one of the “*ongoing practices that characterizes our Hub*” (interviewee 2, see more in section 3.3.1.1). The Art of Hosting is present at more sites and levels of the Impact Hub networks, but not necessarily everywhere, and not as explicitly:

“Since the beginning there has been adaptive practice and an intention to this Art of Hosting. What does it mean to host people and to allow all members to co-create part of what the Impact Hub is to them? To see ourselves as part of our own community, to blur the lines and not just to be a service provider. That has been quite unique and that is something we have tried to keep working with as we go.” (Interviewee 2).

“There are many different co-working spaces but the biggest difference, the added value [of the IH Amsterdam] is that everyone knows exactly what everyone else is up to and connects that to each other. I don’t know another example of this.” (Interviewee 9).

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The Impact Hub Amsterdam has a certified Art of Hosting ‘steward’ as part of its leading team, and on occasion also gives *Art of Hosting* trainings and events. Besides the *Art of Hosting* as a particular approach to facilitation (see chapter 3.1, Text box 1), the IH Amsterdam also has a large amount of attention for ‘hosting’ its members in a more general sense. When entering the IH Amsterdam, one recognises ‘the host(s)’ of that particular day by their presence at an elevated table close to the entrance. Several hosts provided us with more information regarding their hosting role (*Participant Observation*). The internal resources of the IH Amsterdam include a hosting guide. Having prior hosting experiences is an advantage, but a starting host also receives coaching from the IH Amsterdam team to develop the practice. To develop a community, it is seen as crucial that one does more than just let people talk to each other spontaneously. One needs to create a space for open discussions and interactive learning, guided by good questions and topics that are interesting and helpful for serving the needs of the members. So organising more diverse and useful events to bring people into interaction and collective learning is something IH Amsterdam is currently developing further. We also asked members who are not hosts themselves, to describe how they experience the role of the host:

“The hosts are the great champions here. I think Amsterdam has a reputation for being one of the best hosted Hubs. (...) The host’s primary role, as I understand it, is to organize the space, see how people are using the space most effectively, so who’s got the meeting room for that day, who’s got the space. That’s one. To make sure there’s sustenance, food, wireless internet, all the things that we consume while we’re in that space. They also make sure that networking happens. (...) There is a lot of thought put into it: when you come into the Hub the hosts are right there. (...) Strangers to the space can get acquainted through the host and then network. So I think it’s quite a well-thought out space.” (Interviewee 5).

International Profile

Also distinctive of the IH Amsterdam is its explicit **international profile**. While many local Impact Hubs use native language for their main communication, English seems to be the first language at the IH Amsterdam, both at its website as well as within the physical space: *“I think what is unique here is that we have quite an international community. A lot of what we do is in English and I think that also attracts a very diverse community. [Also in] our programming [content], we cater to a very diverse crowd”.* (Interviewee 4). This international and English-speaking orientation partly follows from the international profile of the founders and other members of the leading team, but it also resonates with the city of Amsterdam as highly international and cosmopolitan city. While there is cultural diversity, we should note there seems to be relatively little diversity in terms of socio-economic backgrounds, and little presence of Amsterdam’s main immigrant communities.

Besides the international profile of the IH Amsterdam locally, it also seems that the IH Amsterdam is particularly active in international networks. The IH Amsterdam seems to be quite visible and recognised by others across the global Impact Hub network. One individual from the global Impact Hub network commented:

“I think the Impact Hub Amsterdam is brilliant at building a community of amazing changemakers. So the quality of solutions that you find in the space is quite high, actually. And also the quality of the discourse on the deeper elements of change, how transformation happens via new solutions. (...) There is a sophistication about their theory of change that’s significant in Amsterdam, and there’s a sophistication around the quality of solutions that you find in the space that’s different than in other places.” (Interviewee 8).

Besides the global Impact Hub network, the IH Amsterdam is also involved in other international networks, and in bi-lateral or multiple collaborations with other Impact Hubs across the globe. One

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particular example is the participation of the IH Amsterdam in the EU-funded incubator BENISI project on 'scaling innovation' (BENISI website).

4.1.3 Development through Time

While the IH Rotterdam had already opened its doors, the IH Amsterdam was still looking for a location and for municipal support. Once founded, it opened its doors in an impressive building at a central and upper range location in Amsterdam: the Westerstraat. The founder of the IH Amsterdam was joined by two co-founders, who had a strong founding community around them, which enabled them to make a professional start from the very beginning (Interviewee 2, 16). In November 2013, IH Amsterdam was relocated to the 'Westergasfabriek terrain', in order to allow for growth and expansion, including room for team offices. This was more than just moving from one location to another, but also provided an opportunity for further developing and realigning with a shared vision (*Participant Observation*). The new space was co-designed by and with the members in a 'collaborative space design' process. Architecture bureau AKKA was involved in designing the new space and facilitating the co-creation process with the members. Designing the space for interactions and engaging the users from the beginning in building a shared vision were key components of AKKA's approach: "*architecting interactions*" (ibid). When one of the hosts introduced us to the current space, s/he explained that the way the space is designed now was the outcome of an 'organic learning process'. The coffee area turned out to become 'the heart' of the space, due to the social interactions taking place there. It is hard to plan a space in advance and know where people will gravitate to most, which areas they prefer and which they avoid. So the strategy for space design was one of first setting up a basic structure, waiting and observing interactions with that setup, and then adjusting the setup in response to these observations. For a flexible space design, modularity of items in the space is key, so most tables have rolls as feet, so they can easily be moved and rearranged (ibid).

The relocation of the IH Amsterdam coincided with the global rebranding process from 'The Hub' to 'Impact Hub', which provided an important element in distinguishing the IH Amsterdam from other similar initiatives:

"The addition of Impact in our name really came because actually it was what we were always about already (...). I think at that time when we started, there weren't that many other initiatives happening or co-working spaces or communities in that sense, but now they are popping up. We feel [more] strongly about making that societal impact." (Interviewee 4).

One of the most obvious developments between 2009 and 2013, is that the IH Amsterdam has grown and professionalised, much like – and in co-evolution with – the global network:

"[The IH Amsterdam] has grown, and it's been much more professionally set up (...) because the demands were more professionalized. (...) The physical space is [also] much more professional, the other space was more like a living room, it was beautiful but difficult to work. Events went through the working space, the kitchen was in the middle, and it was more chaotic. (...) [It is] more organized here, more transparent, one can keep working without being disturbed." (Interviewee 27).

Another development that was reported lies in the increasing connection, trust and collaboration between members. People present at IH Amsterdam are reported to have become more relaxed and 'confident', and less concerned with outside appearance (e.g. clothing). Also, because business failure is a topic that is made transparent at the Impact Hub, members of the community are seen to have become more 'humble' in realising how much work, effort and idealism is required to make things work (interviewee 2).

4.2 'Innovation' and 'Change' in/by Impact Hub Amsterdam

4.2.1 Relation with social innovation

We distinguish the following dimensions in the way that the IH Amsterdam relates to social innovation: (1) social innovations *by* the IH Amsterdam as a particular concept/approach (e.g. innovative practices in co-working, incubation or governance), (2) social innovations *in/ at* the IH Amsterdam *by the members*, and (3) social innovation as an explicit *notion/discourse*. The IH Amsterdam explicitly uses the notion of social innovation, also to stress how it moves beyond technological innovation:

"When I think about social innovation, to me it's a lot about shifting the way people act and interact with each other and the way they act with our planet. (...) [It is also about] leveraging technology, when the innovation isn't about the technology itself but the technology behind the scenes that can enable social change. (...) It's not about creating the technology but about people finding technologies to make things happen and about the outcomes being different, or about ways to get things to market faster". (Interviewee 2).

"We're trying to create all the right circumstances for people to come up with innovative solutions for pressing issues (...) When the Hub started, that was already really innovative. Because in business you might be crazy to start sharing and collaborating because someone might run away with your idea (...) People are starting to understand that if you want to innovate, you actually have to share ideas, you have to bounce off each other. (...) I guess by default, if there's no solution to certain problems you're going to have to innovate to create them, creating systems to put them in place" (Interviewee 4).

Regarding the second dimension, social innovations by the members, there is a large diversity of social innovations across the different enterprises (see section 4.1.2. for examples). It is argued that at the IH Amsterdam, people sometimes work on "*crazy innovations*" (interviewee 4), that may not seem tangible yet, but that "*they're really working on innovations that later, we might have the start-ups that come up and actually implement them*" (ibid).

Not only is the Impact Hub facilitating others to work on innovation, it is also considered as a manifestation of (social) innovation in itself by having created a new place in Amsterdam with space for changing things: "*they do innovation themselves, and they facilitate it for the entrepreneurs*" (interviewee 9). The way in which the IH Amsterdam has designed the co-working space and community, is in itself considered 'socially innovative', or at least significantly different from other more mainstream/ average working environments.

"Things are significantly different here than when I'm on a location when I'm out for my normal consultancy job (...) so I can compare it to that. There is space to be alive here. For me there is space to work in a much more natural way, rather than being cut up in boxes and corners. The space itself is just more inspiring. I don't know about you but I would not even want to be found dead in most of the corporate working buildings... I don't understand how people survive year in, year out in those buildings. I honestly don't understand. Because when I work there for a week, my skin is dry because there is only air-co, you're tired because the light is weird, it's not healthy! Of course, some buildings are very well done and inspiring, but I just find most of them pretty terrible to work in. (...) And besides that, the container of the kind of personalities that a hub can hold is much bigger than a lot of the other organisations, especially if you look at the more traditional corporate world." (Interviewee 27).

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Not only is the space physically different, in terms of its interior, spatial design and its uses of materials, there is also a significant 'social innovation' in the way in which people behave, and the attitude with which they come to 'work':

"I think in terms of social behaviour what is different here is that people understand that it's this 'give and take'. You come to work on your idea, but it's the philosophy which comes with it, the intention that helping others is part of that as well. Because there is a bigger purpose to which they are doing that. (...) I think that understanding makes the feeling when you walk in a little bit different. Because people are not just sitting and chatting all day, but it's that underlying thought that you carry with you in all the work that you are doing that makes the difference." (Interviewee 4)

4.2.2 Relation with system innovation

In a way, the IH Amsterdam (as well as the Impact Hub network more generally) considers itself to be an 'innovation system', i.e. a (new) system in which innovation can (better) occur. This is also manifested in the representation of the IH Amsterdam and other Impact Hubs as an 'ecosystem' for innovation. This view of the IH Amsterdam is also confirmed by an external partner participating in the Advisory Board:

"I see the IH Amsterdam as a sort of incubator [Dutch: "kraamkamer"] of system change. The advantage of these entrepreneurs is that they don't have a history, so they can begin something completely new, without having to reform an existing business. They can play into niches, they can experiment, they can go bankrupt, find out there is no demand, or that it is not a good idea in the first place. And at the moment that it proves itself, other forces start playing a role. Then suddenly, companies really start playing into it, government starts reconsidering regulations. I think that precisely these kind of spaces are just the right way of trying out these sorts of different, new things; see if it works, if there are customers for it, and eventually you then see all kinds of different actions and reactions." (Interviewee 9).

But besides being a system for innovation in itself, how does the IH Amsterdam contribute to innovation at the level of larger societal systems? When asked about system innovation, either explicitly or in terms of 'change at the level of wider societal contexts, e.g. energy sector', it is often indicated that the IH Amsterdam would like to 'do more' about this. It is often indicated that one of the needs at the IH Amsterdam – both by the leading team as well as by the members – is to facilitate more cooperation around particular thematic clusters or domains (i.e. societal systems):

"To be honest, I don't think we have that many entrepreneurs who are really focusing on system change. And that's where we as Impact Hub want to be more. That is, we are trying to get that collaboration for such change. Any level of change that comes is great, but ultimately it's where people can actually get a system to shift, that's where it's really great." (Interviewee 4).

When explicitly asked about the extent to which IH Amsterdam contributes to wider social systems, one of the members answered the following:

"Not yet. (...) The trouble with systemic solutions is that systemic solutions require complex thinkers. And far too often what people tend to do is reduce systemic solutions to a few attributes. Steve Jobs died, lots of people stuck up the top 10 things he did, as if your company would become like Apple. But no other company should be like Apple. Each company should figure out their own configuration (...). Someone comes to the Hub and says I want my company and employees, who work 9 to 5, to work like they do at the Hub. (...) So you take a

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few surface attributes, like 'people are working late, I want people to work late'. And then you try to introduce that to your company by putting, I don't know, the top 10 things the Impact Hub does in the coffee room. And this is the trouble with methods like design thinking. Where the role of designers in the space is not clearly understood. (...) How do we create a space where people themselves are perfecting it a little each day? (...) Wabi sabi is the Japanese art of imperfection, incompleteness, and impermanence. It's finding beauty in everyday things we use a lot. (...) What is important is how can we productize the Hub's offering and help others understand that a space is never perfect, you know? It's the same thing when we move into a house. We want the perfect furniture, but it doesn't feel very good, it only feels good after 5 years when it has the feeling of being lived in, every day after adjusting. We accept wabi sabi". (Interviewee 5).

There also seems to exist some doubts/ scepticism about the idea of system innovation, as it is seen to contradict with a more organic understanding of change and innovation. It seems that the scepticism about system innovation mostly lies in its association with a technocratic design approach in which one size-fits all solutions are applied and replicated across an entire system. As such, it is not necessarily system innovation that IH Amsterdam members are sceptical about, but rather a particular understanding of it. One can argue, that members of the IH Amsterdam have a particular theory of change regarding system innovation, which is best illustrated when asked specifically about how they believe that their project/idea is/will contribute to changing the sector in which they are working with. This is illustrated eloquently by the answer we received from one of the IH Amsterdam members working in the food sector, whom we asked whether she had a vision on how to change the food system:

"If you look at the bigger picture of food, there are so many trends at the moment and because there are so many trends, and there are so many different researchers that speak against each other, there are so many gurus standing up saying they find the answers (...) it's scientifically really difficult to prove. (...) I want to create a company where you are closer to the market and where you leverage the fact that having severe allergies is not a trend but a non-negotiable motive to get healthier and better products on the market with less additives. I think we need to earn money by doing good things. Because as long as we keep earning our real money in Shell or another polluting companies and then do great products on the side, it fundamentally doesn't cause change. So I strongly believe in the notion that it's ok to do something good and earn money with it. This really needs to change, otherwise we keep spending money on unsustainable crap" (Interviewee 27).

Here we clearly see again the entrepreneurial perspective on change. The IH Amsterdam sees itself contributing to system change by producing products, services and ideas that can spread across the market, thus reaching many people, and thereby enabling systemic change. Some would call this approach a classical innovation theory approach. An important difference, however, is that the IH Amsterdam is not only focused on technological innovation or the production of new services and product, but also on changing the conditions and the drivers with which these services and products are designed.

Last but not least, it also seems that IH Amsterdam operates as a launching customer of certain 'sustainable products', including recycling bins, recycled furniture materials, sustainable catering, and so on. By doing so, it gives a 'good example', and it supports social enterprises that provide more sustainable services and products. In doing so, the IH Amsterdam strives for system innovation at a small scale, i.e. becoming in itself a (more) sustainable working environment.

4.2.3 Relation with game-changers

When asked to comment on ‘what are the game-changing developments of our times’, people involved in the IH Amsterdam often by themselves referred to game-changers such as the ICT-revolution, the economic crisis, and ecological issues around climate change and resource depletion. The **ICT-revolution** is an important development for many start-ups: many social entrepreneurs rely heavily on online communication and solutions, and the very idea of the sharing economy is for a large part dependent on virtual communication.

“I think at some point this past year every other person coming to us wanted to set up something with communication, collaboration, online, setting up an online community, all to do with information and how you communicate with each other” (Interviewee 4).

“The internet makes access to information better. [But] I don’t see the ICT revolution as much because the signal to noise ratio in ICT is terrible. (...) The internet is fantastic, but it’s been around since 1988. (...) I think we underrate how much new things are realized on top of old things. [The main thing is that] access is improved. (...) I would say let’s keep it [the effects of ICT] down to access. (...)” (Interviewee 5).

The relation between IH Amsterdam and the **economic crisis** is discussed in relation to (1) a move away from the corporate world and the rise of self-employment by social entrepreneurs, and (2) the emergence of innovation and creativity in response to the economic crisis and subsequent awareness about the problems of current systems.

“Just in times of retreating government and less money, people need to be more creative. So that’s where these entrepreneurs come into play, to foster creative ideas to address societal challenges” (Interviewee 9, external partner).

“There is a group of self-employed entrepreneurs that is growing very hard. (...) But I also see this development move back as soon as the economy becomes stable again, when it grows again. Then I foresee that big companies emerge again, and will hire staff again. Then such a group [of self-employed] will also decrease, I think.” (Interviewee 21, external partner).

“I feel the conversation around us, even in society is shifting. It is not necessarily about when is it going to get better, but really starting to understand that the system that we were working in is just not working. And it’s not a matter of getting better and getting back to the old system, but that they actually start to realize that a new system has to get into place. I think that is an interesting shift in conversation. (...) Within the IH community, those are people who are already open to those changes. If you are talking about all those major game-changers, like the sharing economy, or new economic system, we already have the people inside here who are working on that and who see that as the new reality. But what is interesting is if you have people outside of these surroundings who start at least to talk about it. I am not saying that they necessarily agree with it, but the fact that they are talking about it, that’s already interesting. So they recognize that there is something happening already.” (Interviewee 4).

“For most of humanity, human history is because we have faced adversity and scarcity, with innovation. (...) I think scarcity and adversity create innovation. Our tendency is to try to avoid it because the corporate world is structured around stability. The language is a family. Welcome to the family, you are now part of the ‘choose your corporate name’ family. And then there is a reorganization – in most corporates nowadays in Europe there’s a reorganisation every year. It’s a very nice way of saying people get fired. And then each reorganization is sold as the last reorganization. It would just be easier if we gave reorganisations a version number,

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1.0, 2.0, 3.0. Then people know that it is a continuous process of eliminating waste. And then the language of family is like welcome to the family and then the next year you're told you're too expensive. (...) It's the stability that we get used to: 'this is how things should happen, and I have a job that I can work from 9 to 5 and this is a job for life because they welcomed me to the family and I don't get sold for experiments'. But hey, nothing is stable." (Interviewee 5).

It seems that the economic crisis is not experienced as a problem that is inherent to the free market or the for profit sector, but rather as a trend that comes with the current for-profit market structure of large businesses, which the 'not-for-profit' approach of social entrepreneurship provides an alternative for, either temporarily ('until the crisis is over') or structurally (i.e. creating a new economic system).

Besides the ICT-revolution and the economic crisis, **climate change** also seems to be an important motivational driver for some members of the IH Amsterdam team and beyond:

"We need to first and foremost look at how we as an organization are contributing to this issue. So I think we are very aware of even how we use this building, where we get our food from, how we deal with energy. (...) From that perspective we can start looking at who are the people who we think are actually big, key players who can help crack this issue, who are contributing. Climate change is, you can say, the bottom-line of all of them. We identify different change sectors so people can do really amazing initiatives on local level, but ultimately even if they are involved in a completely different issue, the question of climate change should be carried in all of them. So that's how we relate to that." (Interviewee 4).

"So climate change is very real. It's been an issue for a long time. (...) We tend to do things when there's a crisis. We have a deep consciousness today that there's a crisis on our hands. (...) Problems like these force us to think systemically and not say things like that's not my problem. Sure it is, don't you live on this planet? So I think they're fantastic in helping people understand that they do need to think things systemically". (Interviewee 5).

Although climate change is indicated as a very relevant development, it is also indicated that the Impact Hub 'could do more about it' in terms of explicit social enterprises focusing on Climate Change. As expressed by one of the member:

"Climate change, I think, receives a little bit too little attention. Including myself, by the way. (...) Which is actually surprising, now that I come to think of it. I think [...] all the members or, 90% of the members, are aware of it and are conscious about it, and we all try to adapt the consumption patterns towards less impactful purchases. [But] as far as I am aware, there are just very little enterprises that are focusing on that here in Amsterdam" (Interviewee 27).

It does seem that the IH Amsterdam is already 'doing more' to promote green technologies, as illustrated by its cooperation with other partners to launch the 'Investment Ready Programme', a "unique 4-month program for green entrepreneurs creating scalable solutions to global challenges" (Investment Ready NL website).

4.2.4 Relation with societal transformation

Like the global network, the IH Amsterdam seems to have a clear theory of change focused on social impact, and on creating an 'ecosystem' that enables social entrepreneurs, by creating a physical space for community, (informal) meetings and 'meaningful' encounters. Like the global network, the IH Amsterdam pays much attention to the notion of having 'impact'. On the website, IH Amsterdam presents itself as "an Impact Ecosystem" and "Community of Impactmakers". Both change and

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innovation feature as important goals and main targets in many of the interviews, conversations, events and texts on the website.

*"What's the infrastructure for realising innovative ideas? Impact cannot happen in isolation, it requires collective action. At Impact Hub you can access the resources, knowledge and talent to move your initiatives for a better world forward. We are a launch pad and **incubator for impactmakers** – those who **combine the rigour of the entrepreneur with the passion of the activist**. Connect with **a vibrant community**, work with other pioneers, meet in **inspiring spaces**, learn about how to **make change happen** and grow your business. Join a unique **ecosystem** where people and organisations thrive and are committed to building a more sustainable world" (IH Amsterdam website, emphasis added).*

"Changing the world is on the forefront of our minds, and we see entrepreneurship as the means. (...) We enjoy coupling enterprising action with an intellectualism, expiring our knowing and being able to learn from academic knowledge about how change happens and affects change on systemic level as well as just diving in and doing it. (...) Our members are collaborating in a way that is trying to reach intelligent change. [It is] not any longer about a bunch of people wanting to play against the system or just stick to a few, it's really about having a broader community and engaging the unlikely allies to find the change opportunity." (Interviewee 2).

On its homepage, the IH Amsterdam presents itself as being "For a Radically Better World. Issue-driven entrepreneurs moving society forward" (IH Amsterdam website). The underlying theory of change is one in which individual entrepreneurs (feel responsible to) contribute to 'societal transformation' through new and different entrepreneurial activities.

*"You are kind of being checked [by your peers] on what is actually your impact, what do you actually want to achieve, and that's also something that I don't really see in the systems of the other companies I work for. Because there, you're focused on your part within the bigger system of the company. (...) It's not as black and white, but the personal accountability towards the impact that you make in the world is not integrated in the more traditional business systems, which it is here. And I think, that makes a big difference. Because you're not just part of an organization (...) you personally have a role to play within society, within the problems and within solutions (...) And there are very many different ways, and sometimes you achieve or succeed and sometimes you don't, it's not all great and grand, but there is this notion that you have of personally having responsibility (...) That makes a big difference. (...) **You can't really hide behind the big system here**". (Interviewee 27, emphasis added).*

One of the meetings that we attended, called 'Workbench 4: Marketing & Sales', focused on positioning and branding ones company, also including several statements and discussion about how to affect change. It was argued that radical change (in terms of product/service innovation) will not come from big companies but from small start-ups. Because the latter can be more radical or extreme in their concept, strategy and approach, as they have no existing consumer base and can take advantage of a new knowledge base in setting up a business, rather than having to deal with constraining expectations of existing customers and having to adjust existing products and processes to new insights. Moreover, the facilitator of the workbench event also argued that such small start-ups can be more risk-taking and 'daring to fail', while having a more iterative approach to marketing their concept in a way of pitching regularly and adapting their concept every time, in response to the interactions with (potential) customers, in contrast to having a finalized and fixed business model that one seeks to place in the market (*Participant Observation*).

4.2.5 Relation with narratives of change

It is interesting to notice that discourses at the IH Amsterdam seem quite aligned with discourses at the global Impact Hub network level. This includes explicit reference to notions such as 'Holacracy' and 'the Art of Hosting', but it is also manifested in the way that the IH Amsterdam relates to social innovation, system innovation and game changers. Interestingly, the IH Amsterdam already practised Holacracy before the global team did, and it seems that the global team was inspired by the IH Amsterdam to try it.

It is also striking to notice how explicitly the IH Amsterdam aims to create new stories and a new language around things, and how this is intertwined with the use of words and images in the design of all communication, be it on the website, in brochures or in the physical space. There is a particular 'creativity' and 'originality' across the choice of words, which may come across as coming naturally and effortless, but there actually does seem to be quite much effort invested in it behind the scenes.

One of the most explicit manifestations of the IH Amsterdam consciously creating new stories, concerned the 2-hour 'Town Hall' meeting on the 20th of November 2014, which was communicated to the members through the following invitation:

***We invite you to mark a new step to the future on 20 November.** Following on our spring Town Hall as the first in our new Westerpark location where we delivered our yearly performance report and looked at issues that mattered to the community, we now invite you to our autumn Town Hall on 20 November during 16.00-18.00. During this time we will get an update on the state of Impact Hub and get a preview of priorities and activities for 2015, but more importantly **we will take a deeper look at the story we want to unfold together for impact in Amsterdam - and beyond.** Co-hosted with our very own storytelling sage Simon Hodges of Words That Change. (Impact Hub Amsterdam Memberships, e-mail 05.11.2014).*

The meeting was literally facilitated by a 'story-teller', and revolved around story-telling group exercises, ranging from fun interactions to more serious conversation. It seemed that this story-telling modus, was one that many people present felt comfortable with. After an intensive 'fun' and theatrical interaction, the story-teller touched upon the need for a 'vision' by half-jokingly commenting that "visions are like story-telling into the future, but we are all Buddhists here, we know that there is no future, and there is no past". Then he managed to ask future-oriented questions in-the-present - "What is the Impact Hub giving birth to?" and "What am I doing to serve it?" - and challenged participants to answer this question through a story. This exercise resulted in a surprisingly substantive conversation about how members wanted to increase their impact (*Participant Observation*, see more about this meeting in section 4.3.4). It also resulted in the recurring use of shared metaphors, such as 'a swarm of birds'. Beyond this particular example, people at the IH Amsterdam give the impression that they are quite aware and also critical about discursive hypes and trends, and about the tensions that exist between innovation and hypes:

*"I think there's several levels of engaged change. At one level there's the TED talk scale of change. It's a Friday afternoon, you've have a tough week at work, you watch a TED talk, you feel good about the world again, but it doesn't necessarily introduce systemic change. (...) There are deeper movements, like integral thinking, social entrepreneurship. But the great problem with words is that they can always be hijacked by people. (...) That's why I really like [that you ask] about narratives. Narratives allow us to share experience in a way that allows us to avoid labels. So I think that the other similar thing is crowdfunding or shared economy, these are labels. But narratives... I think **the most interesting narrative for me in contemporary times**, it's just emerging, it hasn't happened yet, **it's how entrepreneurs work in loose networks for systemic change.** It hasn't happened yet, I think it's emerging*

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today. Personally it's what inspired me to start [my enterprise] 7 years ago, it's what inspires me every day, the energy that you see from entrepreneurs. So I think that's the narrative that is very interesting. **Loose networks of collaborative networks, loose networks of entrepreneurs.**" (Interviewee 5, emphasis added).

[These concepts like sharing economy, open source, low-carbon, they are] "Great concepts, [but] misappropriation is always a concern. Labels are dangerous because they're prone to misappropriations. (...) The fact that hearsay, popularity, jargon, what's popular tends to be the basis of innovation should intuitively tell people that you shouldn't be doing this. If you're doing what everyone else is doing, it's probably not innovation. Unfortunately, however, this is how the innovation engines, the subsidies, and so on, work. (...) 'You want some venture capital? Well just check your buzzword compliance'. So by and large I think what's deeply missing in our society is methods of innovation incorporated in our daily business (...). When we realize that our businesses are imperfect, incomplete, impermanent by design, our products are like that, and that we need continuous ways of innovation every day in our work through continuous meditation and reflection (...). And the fact that we can help these businesses everywhere do this, I think that, for us is a social mission. Without sounding like evangelical Christs" (Interviewee 5).

At the IH Amsterdam, people do seem to feel that they manage to go beyond the talking, the words and the hypes, towards a level deeper. There is also a sense that the IH Amsterdam 'was already using these concepts' *before* they became a hype, such as 'social innovation' and 'social entrepreneurship', and there seems to be an awareness about using those terms and explaining what is meant by them.

4.3 (Dis)Empowerment by/in the Impact Hub Amsterdam

Empowerment

There is a clear focus on empowerment at the IH Amsterdam. First there is the pivotal empowering dimension of being part of an international network, 'locally active, globally connected', as elaborately described in section 3.3. Besides that global network, the empowerment observed at the IH Amsterdam can be related to the so-called 'Impact Hub experience' including: (1) 'inspiring space', (2) 'vibrant community' and (3) 'meaningful content' (see section 3.2.5). Therein, one of the most empowering elements of the 'vibrant community' lies in the fact that at the IH Amsterdam one can see that other people are 'doing it', being social entrepreneurs, developing new ideas, products and services that contribute to society while also making a living out of it. For many members, this has been an important driver to start as social entrepreneurs themselves.

"For me the space is really important. The physical space really makes a difference for me (...) there's lot of daylight, there's a lot of green, there's a space where I can be more dynamic or more quiet. Whatever is needed to get your work done, it's there. (...) [Also] there's more space for you to come in your suit when you need to have an important meeting, or walk around in your socks if you have a wet shoe, or whatever. (...) That space is there. So you don't waste any energy on fitting in. (...) For me that's a really big one. That leaves a lot of energy and focus left to do what really needs to be done, what you're out to do (...) That's maybe not specific for the Hub, but I have a lot of fun here. I can play here and that's for me really important, that it's not all serious, you can tease each other. (...) There's more playful energy and we're not too stuck up in being serious about what we do, even though it's serious shit we're talking about. (...) It's playful but at the same time it increases the consciousness level of the group and what

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you're out to do. So it serves a purpose. And I think we've lost that a little bit in society. Because play has a very important role in development. We all agree about that when we talk about kids, but somehow we think when we're grown up it doesn't have a role to play anymore." (Interviewee 27)

"Also not just for entrepreneurs but also people who come there to visit, or businesses: it's a place that is very inspiring, whereby a piece of the mentality of 'together we can do it', 'we can change something', also touches those who don't usually work in such an environment, with such entrepreneurs. So it has not just an inspiring effect (...) but also an activating effect: where people who come there are inspired to take action, to feel like doing something." (Interviewee 9, external partner).

"I think it empowers people because all of a sudden people realize that this dream that they have in their head can actually be reality. There is actually people doing it and making a living. And I think for a lot of people, they just don't think it's possible. (...) I really believe everyone ultimately just wants the world to be a better place and a nicer place and a lot of people think that you have to make a choice, it's either choosing for something that is good and not making a lot of money or, not being able to sustain yourself, or choosing for something which is destroying the world a little bit more but you can make a living with that. And I see people coming in here and slowly waking up and lightening up and seeing 'wow!', that you can actually combine the two. And it's possible, it's not some kind of a fairy tale." (Interviewee 4)

"Everything you need to learn as an entrepreneur you can learn at the Hub, so I think that's good. But also, that's me as a person, I need the working spaces where there's social people, where you can interact with people (...) I am more productive and I feel energized to be faster quicker, better when I have people around me." (Interviewee 19)

"I think being in the collaborative space with lots of social entrepreneurs that's in itself a great thing. You meet a lot of people with ideas. What's really empowering is the kind of people that move through these spaces as well." (Interviewee 5)

"[The international Impact Hub network was] very useful at the beginning. I was working alone, had no network in this field, I never wrote a business plan. Lots of things you need to know about starting as entrepreneur you learn from looking around, seeing how others are doing it and getting acceleration trainings. I went to Impact Hubs in London and San Francisco. I tell them who I am and what I need and they connect me to the right people and places. And also the other way around, people who want to start an internet company come to me and I can help them. So it's the exchange of experience." (Interviewee 19).

Disempowerment & power struggles

After articulating the empowering dimensions of the IH Amsterdam, it is important to also consider its (potential) disempowering effects. Things that were mentioned by the members themselves include: (1) The lack of diversity in the community, lack of people that they feel they would need to make a next step, ranging from craftsmen (see quote #2 below), to more business-oriented people giving more hard core financial advice (see quote #1 below), (2) the contrast and frustration between the optimism and positivism of the community versus the reality of institutional context and financial targets (see quote #1 and #4 below), and (3) a lack of a clearer societal sustainability framework to assess one's impact on society (see quote # 3 below)

"Everyone saying: 'you're doing very good, we're all so nice people' and hug each other, there can be a little bit too much of this. They don't say like 'did you get your targets this week?' It's

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a little bit too soft. I said to [one of the team-members] we need to do something about this. (...) It is needed in such an environment, you need to be supportive and help each other but also be tough to each other. (...) If we will keep our current growth rate we will never get to a worldwide movement. (...) It's really good to be in a supportive environment but also when people are harsh. (...) In real start-up accelerator programs, every start-up needs to grow 7% every week. You present your start-up every week and get killed if you didn't manage. But they also sit with you afterwards and help you look at different things and try new things. You need that kind of tough guidance. (...) Peer pressure works". (Interviewee 19)

"How I feel disempowered is, I don't think enough of the people I would like to meet in our society necessarily get attracted to this space. The people who I admire most in our society are craftsman. (...) What it doesn't empower me enough with is the connection with the craftsmen in our society because the craftsmen are not attracted to our space (...) What I'm really interested in is how does the Hub or spaces like the Hub attract more craftsmen in our society without them being branded as niche. So why do I have to get the label of social entrepreneur to be perceived as someone who should be in this space?" (Interviewee 5).

"There's something around the framework of sustainability that is not really clear. I think if we as a Hub don't get our sustainability point of view and framework more clear, we are going to lose people to other random communities of creators. I think that's the biggest threat of disempowerment. (...) What makes the IH very different from other communities of work and co-working spaces - even though the Hub is not a co-working space - is that the focus is on positive impact. But then, that's becoming a societal trend, so everybody claims to do that. So you have to become more specific, I think and [have] a more thorough understanding of what is impact and how do we create that and what are the measurements. (...) You need that framework to understand what it means to be sustainable or have positive impact or whatever you want to call it. That's the framework, or the milestones, whatever you want to call it, which I'm missing a little bit and I think we really need to step up on it, to also keep being ahead of the curve. Because I think the Impact Hub has been very much ahead of curve for a really long time, but the people are catching up. That's cool. But at the same time there's space and there's time for a new job and a more thorough jump on what it means." (Interviewee 27).

"[What] can actually work as a struggle, because you are here in a community of like-minded people, it is really easy to get carried away and get really excited and feel like 'it is happening, it is all possible'. But reality is that we are still operating in this old system. We are part of building the new and living the new, but it doesn't mean that we are in a bubble and we are also trying to stimulate that, [to] have the contact with the outside on a continuous base. Because otherwise you are really living in a bubble. I think it's tricky, especially in the beginning, when you join and you are on this high. You know you are really excited and you really think, yes, this is the new world. It's a big reality check to realize, yes, so this is, but what's happening outside? You need to deal with this and interact with that. I think in a way we do try to prepare people for that, but I can imagine that sometimes it also may be disempowering if you get too carried away." (Interviewee 4)

Besides the members, we have also asked 'external' visitors to describe their feelings when being at the IH Amsterdam. Besides the most common description of the IH Amsterdam being a very inspiring and vibrant place, there are also some more critical comments regarding feelings of disempowerment. One person we asked indicated that s/he felt quite intimidated by the crowd at the IH Amsterdam, which came across as a combination of 'hipster' and 'idealist', while at the same time, 'corporatist' and 'efficient'. S/he also felt taken back by the intensity of the 'interactions' and the strong 'corporate identity', in the sense that people seemed to strongly identify themselves with their work. Within our research team, we also discussed the issue of extroverts and introverts, the

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extent to which people need a quiet space to work, and the extent to which IH Amsterdam provides that (a quiet space being more than a room that is less noisy, it also is about overall levels and speeds of movement and interaction). What these and other considerations point to, is that it seems reasonable to expect that the IH Amsterdam attracts a certain kind of people, and that for these people, it is considered to be particularly empowering, while for other kind of people, it may be experienced as disempowering.

4.3.1 Governance

There are several dimensions of governance to discuss regarding the IH Amsterdam. We distinguish between internal governance and external governance. We consider the 'internal' governance of the IH Amsterdam to include (1) the IH Amsterdam team, (2) the share-holders (founders + founding members), and (3) (the interaction with) the hosts and the members. Regarding the 'external governance', we discuss different types of partnerships that IH Amsterdam has with external people and organisations, including: (1) the advisory board of the IH Amsterdam, (2) partnerships with investors, business, NGOs, research/education institutions and other organisations, and (3) the relations with the (local) government.

4.3.1.1 Internal governance

The IH Amsterdam team, as communicated on the website, consists of 12 members in total, including the following functions: (1) Community Host, (2) Impact Tracker, (3) Operational & Finance Lead, (4) Programs, Acquisition & Development, (5) Learning and Development Lead, (7) Program Coordinator #1, (8) Programme Coordinator #2, (9) Marketing Communication, (10) Hubmaker, (11) Co-founder & Program Coordinator and (12) Hospitality Lead, and Membership Lead. This team is introduced as follows on the website:

“Meet Our Team. Impact Hub's are hosted by a team that help serendipity along by connecting members, encouraging cross-sector collaboration, designing events and programmes and supporting your work. Impact Hub Amsterdam was founded by a small team of social investors who wanted to create a home of radical ideas that create positive social change. This home is hosted and facilitated by a multi-disciplinary team of hosts and catalysts with skills in micro-finance, human rights, advocacy, event planning, project management and finance”. (IH Amsterdam website)

Like other Impact Hubs, the IH Amsterdam works with the concept of '(The Art of) Hosting'. For more information about (The Art of) Hosting, we refer to Text box 1 in chapter 3, which is in fact partly based on interviews with hosts from the IH Amsterdam. Besides the role of hosts – which are for a considerable part members who receive reduced membership fees in return – the IH Amsterdam seems to be particularly professional in its hosting, as it for instance has a Membership Lead as part of its IH Amsterdam team.

“In my role as Membership Lead I am responsible for selection of new members and new teams. Anyone who wants to be part of the IH community, they go through me. I do intakes with them to get to know them a little bit and understand what the stage of their business is and more importantly, what their intent is (...) what type of impact they want to have in society and what type of issues they're involved in, which fields, and what stage, so that then I can better connect them to what they actually need to be able to accelerate their business”. (Interviewee 4).

When asked about how the IH Amsterdam is organised in terms of governance, one of the founders emphasised concepts such as “shared practice of distributed leadership”, “room for entrepreneurial energy”, and “everybody paying into a shared economy” (Interviewee 2). Like the global Impact Hub

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company, the IH Amsterdam works with Holacracy, described as “empowering people [who are] delegated authority, not just tasks” (ibid – for more information about Holacracy see Text box 2 in section 3.3.1.1).

“We work with a really interesting governance system. We work with Holacracy, so in that sense, within my role, I can decide how I think the organization should run. We all have some purpose within our circle, and our purpose is to make impact (...) and help enable [our members] to thrive. So I need to think from my role, what is the best possible way of setting up a membership structure that makes our business model also obviously financially viable and also fit with what the members need. (...) I’ve got maybe 50 colleagues all around the world who are working on the same thing, so I reach out to them a lot also and see which Impact Hubs are in a similar stage. Because for us, for instance, the stage that we’re in is that we have quite a few growing teams, so they need a different type of membership structure than we had a couple of years ago. And we don’t have that yet, so it is within my authority to create one. (...) We have quite a few other growing teams who are curious to hear about our structure and we’re really open about it in that sense.” (Interviewee 4).

The IH Amsterdam is described by several external partners as well as members as a particularly well organised and well hosted community.

“All they do is very conscious. They also do not do some things. For instance, it’s not self-evident that someone who comes there and has some money will also be able to work with them: they have a very clear compass of what they think is important, what they want to do that guides their choices and actions. They don’t stray away from that. That’s a strict policy that fits to all the people working there and is implemented on all levels: the building, coffee, furniture, people who come there and work, investors and so on. It is all guided by a strong policy and mission. (...) They are very ambitious but have a realistic way of implementing it. Also always positively self-critical. Always questioning and ready to listen and to respond to criticism. I found that very striking.” (Interviewee 9).

There also seems to be quite some informal governance or ‘self-governance’ going on at the IH Amsterdam. There is this saying of ‘hosting yourself’, which we have heard a number of times, which indicates a certain sense of responsibility on the part of the members as well to take initiative and facilitate e.g. a meeting, connections or a conversation. This ‘self-hosting’ is also explicitly stimulated by the introduction that one receives when becoming a member. The space and the ‘rules’ are explained in a very clear but rather ‘relaxed’ way, inviting one to feel ‘at home’, which also implies taking a certain level of responsibility.

There does not seem to be much explicit involvement of the members in the decision-making of the IH Amsterdam governance structure, and it also seems that members are content with this. It seems that members get involved in a much more informal or even playful matter (i.e. meetings that are focused on content and/or fun, rather than explicit formal process issues). This is also a topic that will be discussed further in section 3.3.4 on monitoring.

“Holacracy for us is more an internal way of organizing ourselves. So for the members, it doesn’t really actually affect them so much how we internally organize ourselves, as long as we’re internally efficient. I don’t know if they would notice a difference between two years ago when we were not using Holacracy or now.” (Interviewee 4).

[IH Amsterdam member]: “I like to go my own way and ignore them [= IH Amsterdam core team]. Their governance is that members own the space and do something with it. Make it comfortable and invest in myself. That’s good. They had this Holacratic way of working but I

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believe they ditched that, and now it is more hierarchical again. I think that's good. Sometimes you had no idea of who's responsible and it was a bit of a slow machine". (Interviewee 19).

The IH Amsterdam organisation did not let go of Holacracy and does not consider itself hierarchical. It is however the case that accountabilities *"have been streamlined"* and that specific teams have been created to focus on topics, such as Programs or Space & Community (interviewee 2). This seems to be noticed by the members as a welcome increase of efficiency and structure.

4.3.1.2 External governance

The IH Amsterdam has an explicit aim to develop 'partnerships' with external partners. We discuss three dimensions of these partnerships: (1) the advisory board of the IH Amsterdam, (2) partnerships with investors, business, NGOs, research/education institutions and other organisations, and (3) the relations with the (local) government.

The advisory board of the IH Amsterdam consists of eight individuals representing a diversity of organisations, including banks, a museum, NGOs, and several social enterprises.

"We have selected this group based on people we admire... that resonate with the Impact Hub's core purpose that reflect diversity in practice and combine different worlds that understand 'the social' and 'the business' as two sides of the same coin, and that demonstrate leadership in thinking and acting. We have invited them to act as the eyes, ears and senses of Hub Amsterdam in the external world and be a sparring partner at a strategic externally-oriented level. We are grateful to be in relationship with them, to be able to learn from their talents and to be the convener of them meeting each other." (IH Amsterdam Website)

The members of the advisory board seem important in supporting and promoting the IH Amsterdam on the one hand, and on the other hand in also providing constructive criticism. The economic viability of the IH Amsterdam seems to be one of the themes therein. As one of the advisory board members expressed it:

"I am a fan of the developments of the Impact Hub. I have a good impression of them (...) [But] I also find it an organisation that is difficult to understand [Dutch: "ongrijpbaar"]: who are you now and what do you want? Are you a collective, or are you [a collection of] individual initiatives? (...) What is really its contribution? I like social entrepreneurship, but you do need a financial model. I have a difficulty with [those] who are already active for 5 years, but I still don't have the feeling that they have a business model. I believe that sustainability is the continuation of your enterprise, that you want to continue, and can explore new and other things". (Interviewee 21)

This focus on the economic side of social entrepreneurship, also seems to play an important role in the way in which the IH Amsterdam approaches its partnerships. More specifically, there is a particular attention for (doing more with) the match-making between social entrepreneurs who are members of the IH Amsterdam, and potential business partners and investors.

"Right now, our most important partners are investors I would say, because they're making it all possible. It depends on what you rank as important. Because there are also other partners who are working with us on content who are really important. But if it wasn't for the first round of the banks who we have a relationship with who are enabling us to do something... That's quite important." (Interviewee 4).

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“There is of course a lot of innovation power that can also be applied to businesses. So if there’s a business with a societal problem or other kind of problem, that they can also ask these kind of entrepreneurs to think along” (Interviewee 9).

The relation between small, self-employed social entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and large businesses on the other hand, is of course a delicate issue in terms of power relations (as also elaborately described in section 3.3.1.2 regarding the Impact Hub at the global level).

“How do you deal with the fear of many entrepreneurs that if they cooperate with a bigger business, that they will take over the initiative or steal it? (...) There is quite a dependency relation there. If you start cooperating on these kind of things, how do you ensure that the idea which you thought of, that people respect that it is yours? (...) In the successful case, the initiator stays the owner of the initiative, then you can work as equal partners. When it doesn’t go well, then a business takes over an initiative, or changes it or adjusts something whereby it doesn’t fit with the original point of departure. So how can you actually continue backing your mission as an entrepreneur and still work together with big businesses, which in the end is kind of a smart thing to do? (...) When you are independent, nobody questions your integrity but if you are part of a bigger business that’s not entirely sustainable, than all kinds of questions are asked”. (Interviewee 9).

Besides investors and business partners, the IH Amsterdam also has numerous cooperations and partnerships with other organisations, including platforms, NGOs, research institutions, educational organisations, and so on.

“We are now really trying to establish partnerships with other organisations (...) who are actually complementary. They are working on complementary things so we can actually move forward. So I would say those are our most important partners right now. And now this year we are really focusing on our trying to get people together for specific issues. So most of the most important partners for that are issue holders, the people who want to collaborate with us on this”. (Interviewee 4).

Moreover, the IH Amsterdam has numerous international partners, in the Impact Hub and beyond, and in international projects like the BENISI-project on Scaling Social Innovation. It seems that one of the IH Amsterdam team members has a “good route to the EU”, and one of the IH Amsterdam core team members is also involved in co-leading the ‘European cluster’ of Impact Hubs (Interviewee 2).

Relation with Government

The relation between IH Amsterdam and the government, mostly the local council, is an interesting one, and has several dimensions. We describe a few of these dimensions, based on (1) interview with people from the IH Amsterdam, (2) interview with a local policy-makers, and (3) participant observation, in general, but in particular at the *Societal Renewal Lab*, which included the presence of a local politician and a local policy-official, and interesting discussions between them and others regarding the role of government (*Participant observation, IH Amsterdam 7.11.14*).

First, it is important to note that the underlying philosophy of the Impact Hub seems to come with a specific vision of what government is or should do. There is a recurring call for governments to be more responsive and facilitative towards on-going societal movements (e.g. social entrepreneurship or sharing economy), and to approach such developments less in terms of control. There seems to be a general sense that there is need for significant innovation in government. As formulated by two IH Amsterdam members:

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"I think the structures of government are designed around the paradigms of having frameworks which are control structures, to control infinite variety. But by definition you cannot control infinite variety by a few control structures because then you would have artificial segmentation by design. (...) What governments need to work towards is how to make themselves redundant. (...) Specifically I'm interested in how governing processes can become more based on large scale sense making as well. What should my neighbourhood be like? I think things are going that way slowly anyway. So I'm very interested in how governments can understand this (...). There lies the ultimate innovation in our society". (Interviewee 5).

"[The role of the government in the sharing economy is to] facilitate, look what's happening and don't be afraid of change. Now they're looking more at controlling a perceived danger, killing what's happening. (...) You have to look at what's happening, understand why it's happening and facilitate that change, because that change is happening. It's done by people and you cannot stop that. (...) Change the regulations if they need to be changed. Uber, for instance, we can ban it or make sure these people have insurance and pay their taxes. It brings lots of improvements, more available and cheaper transport, creates jobs, it's a good change. As with every good change, there's things that are not arranged yet. So government should facilitate that change and work on legislation". (Interviewee 19).

The relation of IH Amsterdam with Dutch government, both at the national and local level, seems quite ambivalent. There is definitely an interest on both sides to cooperate. Governments at all levels have an interest to stimulate and understand innovation and (social) entrepreneurship, especially now that there is an increasing Dutch policy discourse on a 'facilitative government' and a 'participatory society'. The IH Amsterdam has an interest in building partnerships with larger organisations that represent societal interests and thus support the social impact goals of the IH Amsterdam. Given these mutual interests, there are indeed linkages between IH Amsterdam, certain departments of the national government, with the Municipality of Amsterdam, and with the respective local department of the city section that the IH Amsterdam is located in (Dutch: "Stadsdeel"). There are relatively good relations with individual policy-makers, including both politicians as well as bureaucrats (Interviewee 2). However, there are a few specific challenges and tensions.

First, one of the main tensions of the current moment lies in the issue of the **(re)location**. When IH Amsterdam moved into the Westergasfabriek it was done on the basis of a lease contract for three years, but with an informal agreement that the lease would be extended. However, after the IH Amsterdam had moved and invested much in the new location, they were 'voted out' of the building by the city council (Interviewee 2). Supposedly, the IH Amsterdam and other creative businesses in the building (see section 4.1.1), are being replaced by a luxury hotel. We did not get a chance to dive into this topic in-depth (doing so would be an interesting topic for next phases of research, zooming in on this section on the relation between the IH Amsterdam and government). We did interview one policy-maker, but s/he was not involved in the decision-making about this particular area, so therefore could not comment on it.

This immediately points out a next tension, that being the **large and bureaucratic structure** of the Municipality. The Municipality of Amsterdam is an organisation with approximately 12.000 employees, including numerous clusters and organisational units (Interviewee 28). It is as such unsurprising that one policy-maker active in one section in the city, is not informed about what is decided on the other side of the city, let alone about why or how this has been decided. This structure leads to contradictory messages towards the IH Amsterdam, which experiences the local government as being "schizophrenic":

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“Every level is a bit schizophrenic (...) We have political parties that come here and want to film us and believe that we are the future of social innovation in the city and then on the other side votes against us to kick us out of this place because they want to build a luxury hotel.” (Interviewee 2)

This interaction leads to barriers for building relations and partnerships, which seems to be another major challenge in the interaction between the government and the IH Amsterdam.

“You want a relationship where you can look somebody in the eye and you can have a real relationship, but that’s tough because people change jobs [in the government]. We were co-creating really cool programs with [someone from government], [but] then [we] got no response for a year, spent time creating proposals based on their requests for it and then we are told that the program didn’t exist anymore. So we just have weird experiences with them (...) Maybe it’s just that we don’t play the game, we don’t understand, we don’t have a huge amount of patience for it. If you say let’s do something let’s try and do it. We’re quite pragmatic. (...) I don’t think anybody is mal-intentioned, but there is something with the system that creates mixed messages”. (Interviewee 2).

This ‘impatience’ is also noted by one of the advisory members, who notes that people at the IH Amsterdam are used to doing things quite quickly and pragmatically, and then tend to get frustrated when confronted with slower processes.

“I think that some things go too slow for them. If you look at the relocation [of the IH Amsterdam], it was approached almost like a military operation and it was very well done. They always have big plans about new ideas, and they can do it too and they’re realistic. But if things go slowly or more difficult... (...) I experienced it with [two members of IH Amsterdam team]: they want to move forward and find it difficult when sometimes the process takes unnecessarily long, things are not completed, or take too long to make a decision.” (Interviewee 9).

This ‘lack of patience’ poses a challenge for the cooperation with government, which is – by definition and by design – a bureaucratic and political institution with slow and long processes.

There are however, more challenges regarding the building of relations and partnerships. Even though the IH Amsterdam seems like a particular lean organisation where people know quite well what others are doing, the inherent network structure and focus on social entrepreneurs, does pose some confusion for a large structure like the government:

“For the municipality, it is really convenient to cooperate with one or two representatives (...) It is not always as clear at the Hub (...) there are entrepreneurs working on very specific things, at least from what I have seen so far. (...) It would be interesting if you unite more strongly as a network, or as part of a network, and if you can function like a partner, and can make use of various resources. Then it becomes interesting. So far, the first two times, my experience has been that I get linked to people via via... but then I am actually having a conversation with very small enterprises [Dutch: “bedrijfjes]. They do very very cool things, but then you end up with very small partnerships”. (Interviewee 28).

Having said that, the policy-maker that we spoke to was particularly enthusiastic about the IH Amsterdam and its possibilities. S/he worked for a relatively new innovation department at the municipality, which aims to stimulate and support innovation in the city of Amsterdam. It was described by the interviewee as a relatively new and small (3 people) department, which was like “a start-up within the municipality” (Interviewee 28). In particular, s/he was impressed by the

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entrepreneurial spirit of the IH Amsterdam, the network and its independence. The fact that the IH Amsterdam does not ask for subsidy but rather seeks a partnership, is a very welcomed attitude for a local government that is facing a national context with significant decentralisations and budget cuts (i.e. less money for more responsibilities). Ironically, however, the fact that the IH Amsterdam does not receive subsidy or other money flows, does at the same time seem to be a barrier for cooperation, in the sense that it becomes less clear for the government how to manage the commitment:

“The cool thing about the Hub – and that is a difference with other players – is that it functions on equal partnership. So in the conversations that we had so far, it is never about money. That is because they arrange their own funding. That makes the cooperation more interesting, because then the connection is much more loose. [But] With players that we do pay, it is easier to commit to”. Q: Can you say more about such partnerships not based on subsidy? “Those are exactly the ones that we find interesting. Especially now that we notice that when we are a partner, the money comes automatically... We increasingly have conversations in terms of: what do you need, what kind of idea do you have? Can we put people together? And then just because we are the one’s organising it, we can already help people”. Q: But you also said, when there is no money involved, there is less commitment? “When there is no money relation, you do not need to cooperate very closely. [But] one can [compensate] that when the content aims are the same. We do not need to do everything. So if the Hub helps entrepreneurs in neighbourhood X or Y, then it is cool that we know that and that we can support and bring people together. If we can help, we do that. (...) That is really our assignment. Not to set up a gigantic innovation department but rather to involve other players on content. A department on content, and not to start doing everything ourselves”. (Interviewee 28).

It seems that the local government is itself still really searching for its new ‘facilitative’ role, where on the one hand it is clearly looking for independent partners that are not asking for subsidy, but at the same time, it is still used to work with subsidies or other money contract agreements, and not sure how to manage cooperation forms outside of it. This dilemma is not just about the IH Amsterdam but about innovation more generally. As illustrated by this comment from a policy-maker about the IH Amsterdam: *“You feel that it is an innovative network where you try out things without knowing what comes out. (...) That also has to do with the physical space and with the people that are there”* (interviewee 28). From the perspective of innovation, this is a great compliment. However, from the perspective of government, it also poses a dilemma: if you do not know what comes out, how can you minimise risk and ensure equal access across different groups of citizens?

On this more substantive content level, there also seem to be some challenges regarding the way in which **societal aims and impact are formulated**. In principle, the (local) government and the IH Amsterdam share a common interest in increasing positive impact, socially, economically and ecologically. However, it seems that the levels at which such impact is defined, differ significantly. For the local government, there is an obvious focus on urban societal challenges, including topics such as spatial planning, transport, energy, healthy, welfare, safety, and so on. Defining problems at the level of such ‘vertical’ domains and sector boundaries, is however not the main focus of the IH Amsterdam, nor of the Impact Hub more generally (see sections 3.2. and 4.2). Rather, the IH Amsterdam sees itself to focus on more underlying issues, such as building relationships, regenerating trust, enabling entrepreneurship etc. It is, however, still a challenge to specify how these notions contribute exactly to solving large urban challenges. Such challenges are filled with political dilemmas and controversies, which are currently particularly ‘hot’ in the Dutch context, given the recent decentralisation plans. Also at the Societal Renewal Lab meeting (*Participant Observation*), this was one of the main debates between the policy-makers and other participants, in particular the issue of ‘equality’ and how to protect the more vulnerable segments of society.

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“What I find interesting and what is really a challenge, and I think that the government has a role in that, is the difference between people (...). There are people that get going, start a start-up that turns out successful, or not, those are people that know how to network, at the Impact Hub or elsewhere... there lies a lot of space to pick up opportunities and many markets for work. But there is also a larger group that finds it hard to get around, I think that is a big challenge. Especially because there is quite a large difference. (...) A challenge is (...) the scalability of things (...) With scalability I mean: how can you make sure that successful things become bigger? Not everyone is able to organise that themselves. (...) I think we need to be aware that an increasing amount [of issues/ policy themes] are coming to the city and we get an increasingly bigger role in that (...) What I would find interesting, and what I also said in an earlier conversation with the Hub, is to see how they contribute to (...) large city challenges (Dutch: “grootstedelijke uitdagingen”). [Those] themes that we are working on as city, where there is a lot of policy being made and where a lot of money is invested. Things where we do not think that we have all necessary knowledge (...) where we should cooperate with others. (...) We could cooperate with the Hub and start working on such [urban] themes. By looking at it in a different way. That can be done by organising a challenge or a lab, (...) or in other forms. And I do think that they [IH Amsterdam] have the expertise, and that there is a lot of innovative power present. The question is, how do you do that, how can they contribute to more systemic change. That is the big questions. What is interesting about the Hub, is that there are already interesting projects. It would be good to think about: which partners do we add, [and] if it is successful on a small scale, how do we use international networks to up-scale it?” (Interviewee 28).

In order for the IH Amsterdam to gain more connection with the local government, it also seems that it might be necessary to shift its focus of expertise, from process expertise, to content expertise, or otherwise, to specify more clearly how its process expertise is uniquely distinguished from other activities and organisations in the city, and/or how this process expertise helps to deal with the specific urban and municipal challenges as described above. While the Impact Hub was particularly innovative when it started back in 2005, there are nowadays many more institutions and initiatives focused on enabling and accelerating innovation, entrepreneurship and/or creative facilitation, both in Amsterdam as at the national level (e.g. Kennisland, THNK, IJSfontein, Social Enterprise NL, etc.).

“For example [someone from IH Amsterdam] had a plan to enable entrepreneurs in the neighbourhood, to start an ‘entrepreneur accelerator’. This is a super nice idea, but there are already very many accelerators in the city... they are tumbling over each other. (...) There is so much going on, so we have to see how we can best help one another.” (Interviewee 28).

In conclusion, there seem to be quite a few opportunities for increasing the cooperation between the IH Amsterdam and the (local) government. It seems that many local Impact Hubs across the world have structural relations with their local government, which is still lacking in the case of Amsterdam. As formulated by one IH Amsterdam team-member: *“In terms of structural relationships on the content like we find in other cities, that’s not what we experience, at least not in my perspective.”* (Interviewee 2). This seems like a missed opportunity, especially since the municipality of Amsterdam is considered to display quite some awareness of and willingness to deal with societal issues (including climate change and social equality), and also to accommodate new and social movements. As indicated by one of the members of the IH Amsterdam, the municipality is quite ahead with facilitating the sharing economy, aspires to be the first ‘shareable city’, and is the *“first government in the world to make flyers to explain how to rent your homes, not via AirBnB, but via holiday rentals”* (Interviewee 19).

The IH Amsterdam already seems to be consciously working towards improving its interaction with government. One of the main aims of the Societal Renewal Lab event that we participated in

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(Participant Observation 07.11.2014), was to explore how to create “a more friendly ecosystem” for social entrepreneurs to work together and address local issues in the city. Many entrepreneurs want to improve a neighbourhood by addressing the needs of the local population but face the obstacle of a very ‘tedious’ decision making power on behalf of the municipality of Amsterdam. That is, in order to intervene in the public space of neighbourhoods, the entrepreneurs need to deal with many legal or institutional barriers from local politics that take a long time to be addressed by the responsible authorities. One of the members we spoke to, stated labour participation as one of the issues some of the IH Amsterdam members want to address, for instance by improving accessibility of start-up funding, coaching, materials, and so on, for people to get things started. Specifically, s/he mentioned the importance of engaging youth or people dependent on social security in various tasks, like helping with events, and so on, to improve their chances of becoming employed (Participant Observation 03.10.2014).

While this case-study report was being written, the IH Amsterdam has had meetings with the Municipality of Amsterdam to discuss further cooperation. It should be mentioned that at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015, numerous partnerships were developed between the municipality and the Impact Hub Amsterdam, including several programmes for facilitating and ‘scaling’ start-ups in the city of Rotterdam⁵.

4.3.2 Social learning

(Social) learning is very much at the core of the entire Impact Hub network, as described under section 3.3.2. Each of the following learning elements are strongly manifested at the IH Amsterdam:

1. Public sharing of stories and experiences - on IH Amsterdam website and in media
2. ‘Inner-source’ sharing of questions and experience via the Hub-net (= members only) either at the level of IH Amsterdam or at the global level
3. Extensive programming: workshops, trainings, courses, events, etc.
4. Informal encounters at the IH Amsterdam space (coffee corner, lunch, etc.)
5. Match-making (by hosts/ Hub-makers) between individuals who can learn from one another

We have experienced each of these ‘learning’ channels first hand. Having a Hub-net account also implies receiving emails including invitations for and/or announcements about, which provide interesting opportunities for cooperation, but are also in themselves informative to know what is going on in a certain field. Participating in a lunch at IH Amsterdam is bound to make you learn about a new concept, idea or approach, including an open sharing of experiences and frustrations. On several occasions, we have been ‘connected’ by hosts or Hub-makers to other people, initiatives or organisations, which we had not heard about before, often things that were directly relevant to our own projects: e.g. for the TRANSIT-project, the Transition Academy, the start-up enterprise ‘Caracola’ of intern Tim Strasser, or the Master-thesis topics of the other interns on co-working spaces (Bernadette Kirner) and food transitions (Keighley McFarland). What is also striking to notice, is the extent to which members, hosts and the IH Amsterdam team, come across as eager to learn new things. As described by one of the advisory board members:

“The whole organization went for a learning strategy. They realise that the only way to go further is to learn from each other, from businesses, what’s happening around you, and so on.

⁵ For the latest information on the partnerships of the Impact Hub Amsterdam with the Municipality and several others, see: <http://amsterdam.impacthub.net/our-purpose/partners/>.

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There are lots of very open and curious people. They read a lot, they know what's going on, always seem up to date". (Interviewee 9).

The idea of 'learning' seems to be central to the IH Amsterdam team, and also something that is explicitly facilitated and 'made time for':

"Learning for us really occurs on a daily base. I think the main learnings are when something doesn't go according to plan, or when you set goals and it doesn't work out, and it's really a culture of sharing that and learning from each other. So it's not necessarily that all of the start-ups or everyone within the team you have to make all the mistakes that someone made before you. It's about actually setting a culture that you can also share the failures so that you can actually understand, 'hey that's an interesting learning path'. And there is a lot of reflection moments built in, in our team meetings." (Interviewee 4).

An important element in the facilitation of learning seems to lie in the underlying philosophies of Holacracy (see Text box 2 in section 3.3.1.1) and *The Art of Hosting* (Text box 1 in section 3.1). There is an important role for the host to make connections and draw people's attention to learning opportunities:

"A lot of learning can just happen even when you're sitting at lunch and people are sharing stories. (...) Because other people are listening and people are hosting this conversation, you have a moment where [one is] able to think 'that point is very interesting, let's highlight that moment in the conversation'. And that's when, all the sudden you shine the light on it when the story becomes a learning moment" (Interviewee 4).

It also seems that the programming at the IH Amsterdam aims to really respond to arising learning needs of the members. The Workbench sessions, which aim to offer members with various trainings and professional development sessions, are mentioned as an example of an IH Amsterdam service that emerged from the need of members for more education and professional support (*Participant Observation*). It also seems that the capacity of the IH Amsterdam – or of 'co-working' spaces more generally – to foster learning is one of the things that larger, external organisations recognise, appreciate and would like to take on:

"I really believe in that way of working. Ideally, I would like to have all walls here (municipality) removed, and that everyone would be welcome to come work here... after all, we are working for the city. Serendipitous encounters, I really believe one learns from that" (Interviewee 28).

On a more critical note, when thinking of 'social learning' from a broader societal perspective, in terms of what society would need to learn to tackle its challenges, one can also consider the limitations of the learning happening within the Impact Hub. As formulated by one of the members:

"We should forget about starting such learning at the Impact Hub or at Universities. We should start at school, when people are young. In primary education they should teach what social entrepreneurship and social impact is about. Learn the right attitude. (...). You cannot rely on gifting, subsidies... you need to make it self-sustainable. For that you need an entrepreneurial mind-set. [We need to] start with that in a playful way in primary school. [In the current system] it's about earning money almost in a capitalist, industrial way. We need to reform the entire education to be more focused on entrepreneurship and social impact. The Impact Hub is nice but it is not going to change generations, not going to change society... only groups of people". (Interviewee 19).

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It would be interesting to further explore the extent to which IH Amsterdam cooperates or could cooperate with education for younger generations. In our participant observations, we have seen plenty of interactions and cooperation with higher education and undergraduate students, but we did not (yet) encounter learning contexts where children were involved.

4.3.3 Resources

Like many other Impact Hubs, the revenues of IH Amsterdam consist primarily of membership fees (Figure 4-5 below), renting spaces (see Figure 4-6) and fees for events/training. There are many discounts possibilities, including hosting in exchange for a reduced membership fee, adapted partnership agreements (like the one with our research institute DRIFT, see section 2.1.2), discounts for multiple day bookings, and so on.

Besides these revenues, there are shareholder investments (Interviewee 2) and some modest sponsoring by partners (Interviewee 21). Moreover, the IH Amsterdam participates in projects such as the international BENISI project, thus receiving funding from the EU. Apart from that, however, it seems that the IH Amsterdam as well as many of its members, try to 'stay away' from government subsidies.

"Funds don't understand how entrepreneurs work. (...) You only get money for what you wrote down. But, as an entrepreneur: if it doesn't work what I wrote down, I need to shift. But with labelled money you cannot do that. (...) Imagine you find something really cool half way that you think is way more important. Are you gonna put it aside? It's crazy. It's a flaw in our system, in our thinking. (...) The best entrepreneurs don't get funding and the ones who have plenty of time to write funding {proposals} but act slow, they get it". (Interviewee 19).

In line with the overall Impact Hub concept, the IH Amsterdam is very much based on sharing resources, including material resources (spaces, coffee machine, printer, etc.) as well as knowledge, expertise, contacts, network, etc. Once you are 'in' the Impact Hub space – based on a 'basic value-exchange agreement' (i.e. paying a particular fee or agreeing on a contract) – thereafter most of the abovementioned resources seem to be shared quite freely and informally, without any formal transactions. (The separate meeting rooms are an exception, in the sense that they need to be booked and paid for, but as long as they are not booked/ empty, any member can use them, see also section 4.1.1 on the space).

On the one hand, the Impact Hub Amsterdam, seems to have an explicit 'business approach' to things, including profit-making elements (something which raised some scepticism amongst critical outsiders). At the same time, however, there is also a clear emphasis in the Impact Hub on value beyond money, including valuable partnerships. On several (at least three) occasions, members of our research team have found themselves in an open and direct 'negotiation' with people from the Impact Hub regarding value exchange, both in terms of money as well as other 'values' or 'resources' (knowledge, network, exchange, time, space, etc.). One example concerns the partnership membership agreement between the IH Amsterdam and DRIFT (as described in section 2.1.2). Another occasion was when we approached one of the business office members for an interview, the response being: "Interview? And what's in it for me?" We responded with an email specifying how we thought that a connection to the DRIFT institute and the TRANSIT project might have value for his/her enterprise. Some of us experienced this 'straight talk' and open negotiation about money and value as quite refreshing (compared to the common practice of 'talking around it'). At the same time, we also could see how some could be put off or even intimidated by this approach, especially when being less direct or assertive. It is often believed that such straightness is typical for 'Dutch culture', but this is certainly not always the case, especially not in the world of research and education (or at least not to the extent that it happens at the IH Amsterdam).

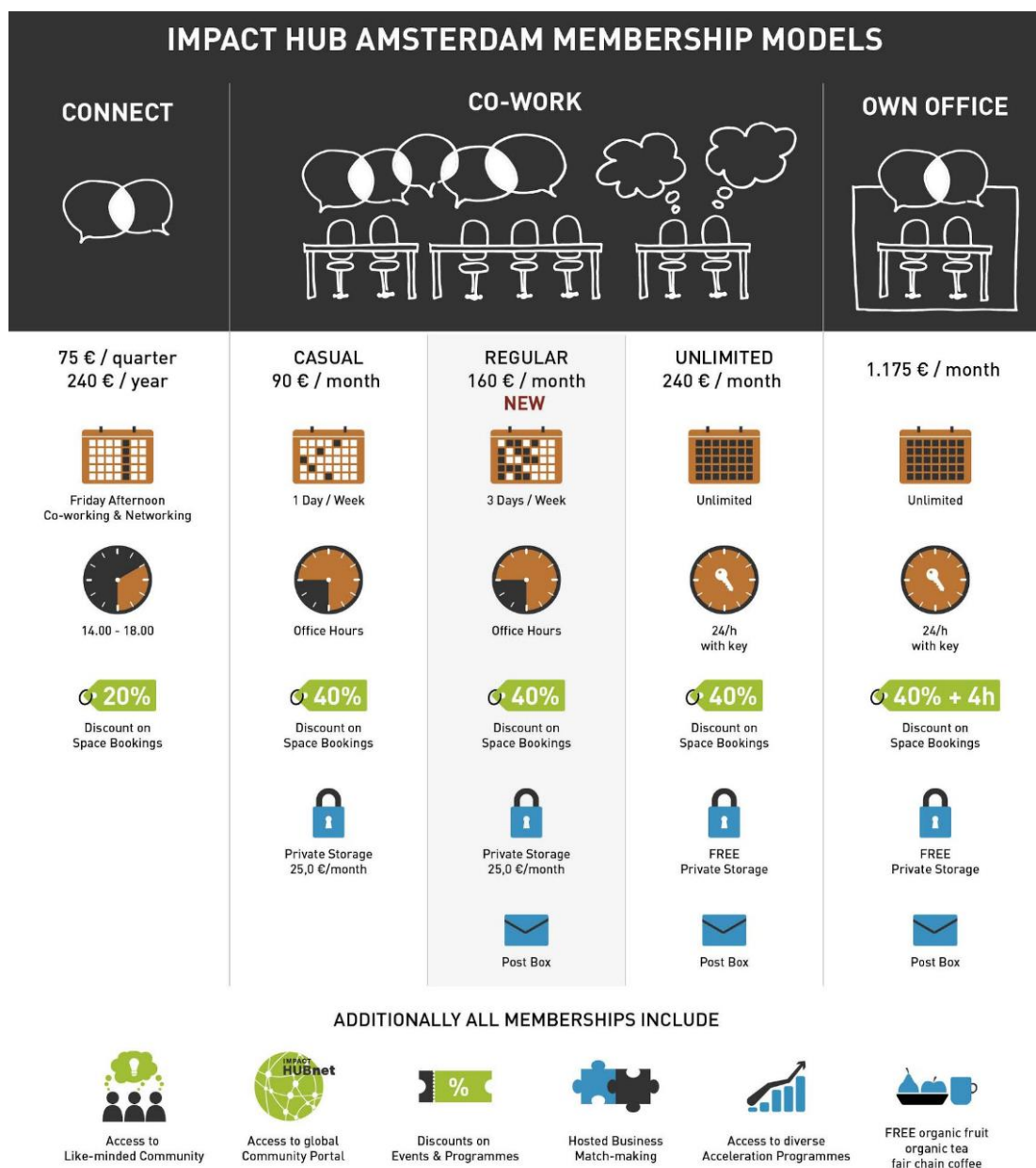
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There seems to be quite some emphasis, both at the level of the IH Amsterdam team, as well as the members, on being a 'good entrepreneur'. For the IH Amsterdam team, there is also an element of being an example to its members: *"From the beginning on [IH Amsterdam] was never really relying on subsidies. That's the whole point: If we ourselves are relying on subsidies then we are not exactly practicing what we preach"* (Interviewee 4). Related to that, there seems to be a conscious effort to raise and maintain the financial literacy of the IH Amsterdam team.

"We work in units within our team. So we're all quite in the loop of what our business model looks like and how we spend our money. There's a lot of emphasis from the 'directors' - it feels funny to say because we work on a very non-hierarchical level -, but they are really stimulating every person in the team to have financial literacy. So me, as a membership lead, I know for instance what is important to know about my own little business". (Interviewee 4).

Figure 4-5: Overview of membership models and respective prices

Source: Impact Hub Amsterdam Website



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It seems that this financial literacy of the IH Amsterdam team, is also promoted and supported by (some of) the advisory members, some of which are bank representatives. I asked one of them to comment on the extent to which s/he observed innovative business models at the IH Amsterdam, specifically asking about examples such as crowd funding or cooperatives. The answer was that s/he did “*come across some eccentric business models*”, but that these things could never be “*the main revenue model*” (Dutch: “*verdienmodel*”), and that “*it is all fine what is on paper, as long as I can understand it as an economist, what is being earned in the end*” (Interviewee 21). Such comment from the advisory member reminds us how the IH Amsterdam really operates between the world of idealism and grassroots social movements on the one hand, and the world of hard-core economics, banking and investment on the other hand. While questioning the current economic systems and pondering upon new ways of exchanging and measuring values, the IH Amsterdam meanwhile also operates within the existing economic system, and has an aspiration to do that ‘as well as possible’, while proving that such economic success can go hand in hand with positive social and ecological impact.

Figure 4-6: Prices for Spaces IH Amsterdam

Source: Impact Hub Amsterdam Brochure “Meet the Spaces”, 2014

ING Pricing & space information			
SPACES TO RENT	M2	CAPACITY	PRICE*/**
Boardroom	19	Seated: 10	4 hrs: €140,- 8 hrs: €240,- add. hrs: €35,-
Lab	38	U-shape: 15 Café: 25 Theater: 30	4 hrs: €240,- 8 hrs: €440,- add. hrs: €60,-
Studio	57	U-shape: 22 Café: 35 Theater: 45	4 hrs: €280,- 8 hrs: €520,- add. hrs: €70,-
Café	200	Seated 100 Standing 150	2 hrs: €300,- 4 hrs: €560,- 8 hrs: €1.050,- add. hrs: €150,-
Focus	100	Seated 100 Standing 120	2 hrs: €300,- 4 hrs: €560,- 8 hrs: €1.050,- add. hrs: €150,-

All spaces are equipped with writable glass walls, whiteboard, projector & wifi. Flipchart: €15,- per day. Brainstormkit; €25,- per day.

*Prices are excluding VAT
** Minimum booking time is 1/2 day (4 hours)

4.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

At the Impact Hub Amsterdam, there are two main topics that are subject to monitoring and evaluation: (1) the impact of the Impact Hub on its members/ customers (including satisfaction etc.), and (2) the impact that the members themselves are having in/on society (Interviewee 2). Given the

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underlying theory of change, it seems that the main purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to figure out how the first can be improved so as to increase the second: i.e. how the Impact Hub can enable its members to increase their impact. Here it is important to keep in mind that 'impact' is understood in economic as well as in social and ecological terms.

Every year, the IH Amsterdam uses the standardized global Member Impact Survey, which is developed at the global level and can be adapted to the local Impact Hubs (interviewee 2). As also indicated in section 3.3.4, the global network is figuring out how to improve the assessment of 'Impact'. Moreover, the IH Amsterdam also has and develops its own monitoring practices and 'metrics' to set targets and to track membership uptake and impact:

"At the beginning of the year, each quarter, we have strategy meetings, where we plan the year ahead. (...) Some of them are financial, where we say, 'this is the target that we need to make' and others are more to do with impact. So it's always about seeing how it weighs out: the impact that's most important and also needing to be financially sustainable. So we built in a whole structure. If I know I need to hit a certain target, I need to understand how many people are coming to my events, so we just built a tracking system that allows us to keep track. We set ourselves certain metrics. So I need to know how many new members are coming in every month, how many are downgrading, relevant metrics that actually say something about development of our organization. It's not necessarily about numbers but also in terms of mapping. If we want to know what impact we're making in which fields, it's about keeping track of who is working in which field and what the developments are in those fields and what the developments are in those entrepreneurs." (Interviewee 4).

Another member of the organisational team emphasised that *"monitoring is relevant at a program specific level where this tracking is embedded, and where we are supporting members to understand impact measurement, with an Impact tracker on board our team"* (interviewee 1). Regarding the 'mapping' of member's impact in different societal fields, it seems that is something that is under development still, and relates to the ambition to work more on systemic impact (as discussed in previous sections). For individual members, it is also a challenge to monitor the impact of their own concept/product/service/social enterprise (Interviewees 19, 27). It seems that there are still quite some opportunities for the IH Amsterdam (and/or the global network more generally) to provide their members with support regarding (self-)monitoring of impact (e.g. in terms of translating general and global understandings of 'impact' to (a) the local, urban context, or (b) specific fields/sectors).

In line with the overall Impact Hub network, the IH Amsterdam also relies much on the more informal and peer-driven forms of evaluation and monitoring, including interviews, conversations and focus group talks with members to assess their needs and levels of satisfaction. This seems like a wise approach, as many individual members are preoccupied with their own social enterprise, and would rather not be bothered with explicit monitoring activities. As one member and former host described it:

[Monitoring and evaluations] "are not interesting for the members, because the members want to be connected on content, and on valuable relationships, and they don't want to spend too much time figuring out for the Hub, what they're supposed to be doing. And I think it's a very delicate balance to strike. When I was host I was pretty clear on that I did not think that it should happen. It could happen once in a while but you first need to establish a relationship on a content basis, on really creating value and then you can ask. But otherwise you're asking too much. (...) [If you just come] up with the questions of 'what do you think we could do better to serve you with the Hub'... (...) I don't want to be bothered with that question I want to focus on my business, and whatever I need then, help me with that (...) It's a very fine balance to

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strike, I think. You also see [that] if you [do] put that [direct evaluation] question - it's been done not that long ago again - there is very little resonance. (...) Because it's too abstract and too much focus on the Impact Hub instead of focus on the entrepreneur." (Interviewee 27).

This quote suggests that explicit evaluation and monitoring attempts are not always as successful, and that not all members are willing to invest time in it. It seems that evaluation and monitoring need to be integrated implicitly and subtly in conversations about 'content' and 'valuable relationships'.

We recognised this type of subtle and content-oriented forms of monitoring and evaluation on several occasions during participant observation. One of the most explicit ones concerned the 2-hour 'Town Hall' meeting on 20 November 2014 (described in section 4.2.5). The meeting was attended by more or less 30 people, including core-team staff as well as members, and was opened with some information about how the Impact Hub was doing, globally and locally, and an invitation to the members to "keep coming with good suggestions: What do you need to make your business thrive?". Then the meeting was facilitated by a 'story-teller', and for a considerable part consisted of playful group dynamics, theatrical interaction, moving around, and much laughter. In the middle of all that 'fun', however, a surprisingly serious conversation emerged about the Impact Hub, about membership needs, and about what could be improved. Without knowing whether or not monitoring and evaluation was an explicit aim of the meeting, it did definitely provide information on what members thought was necessary to help them increase their impact, and to increase the impact of the IH Amsterdam. Things that were mentioned included 'opening up' more, more 'translocal' and 'intercultural connections', and creating more of a business spirit ("get more Donald Trump in here") (fieldnotes IH Amsterdam 20.11.2014).

Figure 4-7: Town Hall meeting 20.11.2014 Impact Hub Amsterdam

Source: @MirandaWillems on Twitter



4.4 Other issues about the local initiative

In many interviews, we asked: “Do you have any questions to us? Which research questions do you have? Which research questions do you hope that our project will answer?” Below we collect some of the answers to this question:

“What acupuncture points for change exist? Where should we be putting more pressure in the landscape, as individuals or as partnerships? How are social innovators hosted, and what’s useful for them? Are there general patterns? We have seen it in our trajectory and we have seen different approaches needed for different parts of the constituency. I would be curious if similar learning happened in other places. For members: what would have the most direct impact on them? There is a lot we can do but if you’re ready to take a leap: are you really ready? If you could accelerate to your ambition, what would most support you to get there? What are the specific needs?” (Interviewee 2).

“I’m really curious to hear from you about examples of organisations or game changers that you think are creating system change. Because ultimately that’s what we stand for, what we want to accomplish, and I guess the way we see it is that if you have all these small players at some point you create this tipping point, but do you think that there are other ways? Because sometimes it seems like it takes a long time to connect all the small players and have this tipping point. But I’m really curious to hear from you and from the research what you came across.” (Interviewee 4).

“I would be very interested in (...) how entrepreneurs can have methods for large-scale sense making and complexity so that they don’t fall into the traps of jargon. (...)I would be very curious how there could be collaboration and co-creation and structures of empowerment, and spaces of empowerment” (interviewee 5).

“It is important to know success conditions for an enterprise to succeed, so important to have networks for accelerating your project. How do you bring the network together? How to create ‘coincidences that are not coincidences’? Maybe it has something to do with whether the world is ready for it, the moment being right (...). Interesting to understand how these kind of facilitating organizations are designed”. (Interviewee 9).

“How can you grow local communities on a big scale? People need to meet each other, need a physical location. Need a critical mass in a specific neighbourhood to make it work. For a lot of new social changes you need that critical mass in a specific geo-location. How can you scale that idea, have high growth rate but still have local impact? Combination of scaling and local? How can we improve match-making, reputation, review systems? Shouldn’t be an overkill, everyone is making their own systems”. (Interviewee 19).

“How is it possible that it takes so long for consciousness of society to change? I’m flabbergasted by this because proof is there, experience is there, but still the majority is not shifting yet. (...) The same as climate change or not believing in evolution theory. So much research and proof, it’s madness that we don’t believe it. Science is incomplete and imperfect, lots of things we don’t know but there are some clear indicators we should act on”. (Interviewee 27).

“Social Innovation is such a broad concept (...) what is it exactly? (...) What could be interesting is to show what kind of contribution social innovation can have for large-scale urban and transnational challenges. The best way to do that would be to show concrete examples. So that people become aware that they can solve certain things themselves”. Q: Is there a lack of such

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examples? “(...) Everybody says that social innovation is important, but nobody has the numbers. What is it? How big is the sector? What is the money turnover? (...) What is it that it does? (...) I do believe that there really is a trend, but it would be interesting to quantify and explain that more. This can be done with stories, like in Tegenlicht [Dutch documentary series on social movements and trends] or Pakhuis de Zwijger [cultural centre in Amsterdam], but then the questions still remain: What are we talking about? How many social enterprises are there? What is the difference between social entrepreneurship and others that do something else? How do you distinguish them? There are quite some questions.” (Interviewee 28).

5 Local initiative 2: Impact Hub Rotterdam

Author: Julia Wittmayer

5.1 Overview of development in the local initiative

5.1.1 Identity and mission

According to their website (Impact Hub Rotterdam website 2015), the Impact Hub Rotterdam (IH Rotterdam) is a “locally rooted, globally connected social enterprise with the ambition to connect, inspire and support professionals within and beyond the public, private and third sectors working at ‘new frontiers’ to tackle the world’s most pressing social, cultural and environmental challenges.” One of the owners outlines that she wants to “offer ecosystems where people grant each other something” (Interviewee 1). Working at the IH should provide “leverage to increase your ideas and help you to improve your business, your turnover” (Interviewee 1). The main value propositions of the IH Rotterdam (in accordance with the global ones) are ‘inspiring space’, ‘vibrant community’ and ‘meaningful content’ (PO⁶, Willems 2014a BA-Thesis).

Figure 5-1: “The Hub does green things”

Source: Twitter @ImpactHUB010



This ambition is tackled by offering a working environment for makers, knowledge workers and coaches, neighbourhood initiatives and professionals (Impact Hub Rotterdam website, 2015). After a change in ownership at the end of 2013, the IH Rotterdam moved and is now located at a lively multinational shopping street. The building has served as a hat factory, a neighbourhood centre and had been empty during the last years. In the entrance hall of the building, the blackboard is located outlining upcoming activities. From there, one enters the large open space environment with 17 flex working spaces, a long lunch table for 13 people, a bar where people can sit and chat. On the same

⁶ PO refers to ‘participant observations’.

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floor, there are also four meeting rooms in use and a maker space (see Figure 5-2). Outside, there is a little garden that is also used. All rooms have an industrial touch up to being renovated very basically: white walls and open ceilings with visible pipes and wires, the use of a lot of wood and numerous plants (including tomatoes) give it a warmer feeling (PO).

Figure 5-2: Open work space with flex working spaces (middle), meeting rooms and maker space (down right).

Source: all: Impact Hub Rotterdam Website 2015, except down right: Tim Strasser



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Next to the actual physical space, most attention is given to the network or community. The IH Rotterdam has a number of activities and structures in place to facilitate networking amongst its members. It offers a “*place where experimenting and sharing is possible: initiatives for a pitch, a dialogue, a brainstorm or an exposition are always encouraged by our network*” (Impact Hub Rotterdam website, 2015). In fact, the facilitation of a “*growing and fascinating network*” (ibid.) is one of its main activities: one of the IH owners considers the enterprise as being “*community based*” (Interviewee 1). This is also what is considered most interesting by the members: “*What is really interesting here, the building is not interesting, the network of people is interesting*” (Interviewee 23). The values of this community, as presented by one of the owners, are commitment, openness and drive (PO).

Those interested in working at the IH Rotterdam, become a ‘member’. The target group is “*sustainable and social entrepreneurs*” (Impact Hub Rotterdam website 2015), who “*want to have lasting impact on the vitality and sustainability of a neighbourhood, city or the world. Or for those who just feel like a positive working environment where humanity is central*” (Impact Hub Rotterdam website 2015). This mission is shared by its members. One outlines it as follows: “*Here, there sit people who feel the urge to improve things*” (Interviewee 24). As of December 2014, the IH Rotterdam had 87 members (PO). Out of these, we witnessed between 2–10 people working in the open space at any one time, plus those using the individual meeting rooms and the maker space. Most of the people who join as members seem to be new to the city of Rotterdam, or more commonly at the beginning of their career as freelancers (“*Member stories*” 2014; interviews 18, 23, 26; PO). This includes people who have been made redundant as part of budget cuts due to the economic crisis (PO, Interviewee 23), who now aim to work out long cherished plans (PO, Interviewee 1). Next to a working space they also join for the social and community aspects (see section 5.3.1.1). On average the members are in their late thirties/early forties and work in different disciplines and work fields (see Table 5, Willems 2014a BA-Thesis).

Table 5: Overview of a selection of different member businesses

Name	Value proposition
010 media videoproducties	Videos with a journalistic edge.
Een 10 voor werkgeluk	Careercoaching and work happiness. (Translation: An A for happiness at work)
Life loves yoga	Yoga lessons
Plant Bliss	Vegan catering
Tomaline Research & Design	Architectural design on the basis of cultural research with a human touch
VVE’s met Energie	Supporting VVEs (associations of house/apartment owners) to renovate their common property to have a more sustainable housing stock
Better Future Factory / Perpetual Plastic	An interactive recycling and 3d-printing event-installation for young and old
5Ritmes dans en meditatie	Dancing and meditation workshops
Urban edibles	Development of innovative approaches to urban food/farming related issues
Rechtstreef	Pick-up point for fresh agricultural produce
Dialogo Opleiding	Dialogo procesbegeleiding, persoonlijke- en teamcoaching
Bumper	Hitchhiking for your parcels

While, there is some criticism of the current member group in that it would lack entrepreneurs and young people and was not diverse enough in perspectives and business ideas (Interviewee 3), this is overshadowed by others, who think that it is the creativity of actors (in terms of background,

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education, approach or business) which is interesting (Interviewee 23). The move to the new location and possibilities for expansion within the building would allow more entrepreneurs to join. The idea is to provide an inspiring place to “*people working on various topics: from recycling plastics to empowering people in the neighbourhood. This allows us to ‘innovate ourselves’ and innovate our services.*” (Interviewee 1). The IH also hosts one start up, *Better Future Factory*, which have their maker space in the IH and a pick-up point for the pre-ordered fresh and local agricultural produce of a local social enterprise, *Rechtstreex*.

Figure 5-3: Participants at a Breakfast lecture introducing TRANSIT during the Magic Impact Hub Days 2014. [5.6.2014]

Source: Twitter @ImpactHUB010



Next to being a “*matchmaking vehicle*” for their members, the owners see the IH Rotterdam as a social enterprise which creates value for society and the local economy and as such can also have wider social impact as independent actor (Interviewee 1, 24). As the aim is to combine the existing IH ambitions with a more “*Rotterdam attitude*” (Interviewee 1), the focus is locally on collaboration with different kinds of organisations in the city (Interviewee 1) as well as with local residents of the neighbourhood (Interviewee 1).

There are initiatives that are similar to the IH in Rotterdam. The main initiatives mentioned by members were other co-working spaces⁷. What distinguishes the IH Rotterdam is that it is offering more than just a physical working space. In his bachelor thesis on the IH Rotterdam, Willems (2014a) outlines that Rotterdam has 41 workspaces, out of these 24 focus on the same target groups, out of which 12 offer at least one of the value propositions in terms of space, community and content of the IH Rotterdam and none does offer them all. As put by the owner: “*In other co-working spaces you can enter with no one noticing. You can sit at a table and not talk to anybody for the whole day. That could never happen here. Other members approach you: ‘What are you doing?’ ‘Oh, that is interesting’ ‘Why are you here, what are you looking for?’ You could also just put in your earplugs and work. That is also ok*” (Interviewee 1). Also members see these additional value propositions of the IH such as a network and community (Interviewee 3, 18) of like-minded people (Interviewee 26) in an environment enhancing learning (Interviewee 24), and nudging the members (Interviewee 6). As put by a long time member, IH Rotterdam in a way offers “*social safety not financial safety*” (10). One of the important things that are/is happening between the members is a free sharing of information and help in the understanding that this will be reciprocal over time (Interviewee 3, 26).

5.1.2 Activities, Networking and Outreach

Rather than offering a full programme to its members, the IH Rotterdam organization relies on programming through its members and external organisations which it facilitates, stimulates and co-creates. As a basis, the IH Rotterdam organisation does offer the physical space, the hosting as

⁷ Members mentioned “Studio Lost and Found” (a co-working space, café and shop for recycled and/or sustainable items), Het Nieuwe Kantoor, Wisselkantoor, Koffie en Kennis, WTC connect, Rotterdam Collectieve, and different cafés in Rotterdam.

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well as shared daily lunches. The latter are usually attended by at least 75% of the members present that day (PO).

The IH agenda has a number of regular events. The weekly ‘network strengthening’ focuses on bringing members in contact, providing space for business-related questions to peers or fine-tuning one’s elevator pitch or business idea (see Figure 5-10 for the agenda of the network event). Other regular activities are yoga and meditation classes as well as quite recently a business support group of 8 professionals (referred to as “Open Doen”) and 2 coaching circles (PO). The IH agenda also includes more occasional activities, which are organized by members as part of their business proposition, such as trainings on finding one’s ‘happiness at work’ (Dutch: werkgeluk), a Masterclass on Emotion and Energy, or a workshop on ‘Wellbeing and the New Economy’. Part of the programming are external events such as an information evening for ‘Broodfonds’ (a collective insurance for self-employed) or an open day of the Rotterdam Volunteer organisation. These activities are usually announced on a blackboard in the entrance hall (see Figure 5-4), only the ‘network strengthening’ can be found online.

Figure 5-4: Blackboard in the entrance hall.

Source: Tim Strasser



There are different examples of activities which are co-created between the IH Rotterdam organizations and the IH members, which emerge from the network. The ‘Magic Impact Hub Days’ are an example, where the IH Rotterdam organisation provides for the frame and overall marketing. The programming of the actual days in June 2014 was done by the members. More than 30 events were programmed, one of which was a ‘breakfast lecture’ by us, introducing the TRANSIT project with a turn-up of 10 people (see Figure 5-3). Some programming is facilitated by the IH in the sense that a number of activities happen on initiative of members. Another example is the “Pimp je plee” (Pimp your toilet)-activity organised by two members and one of the owners – which invites

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everybody who uses the toilet to come up with ideas and material to make it a nicer place. It includes a competition for the most innovative idea, with the winner being announced at an informal gathering after work time and two scheduled days during which people can join in the renovation activities in February 2015. In a similar manner, the decoration of the façade is done. This co-creation mechanism is outlined by one of the owners at the New Year's Reception in January 2015. At the beginning of this reception, she outlined how this event came to take place and categorizes this as "a typical example" of how the IH Rotterdam works:

"I want to start with a nice example, because how should I explain how such a Hub really works, my god how this reception was organized, this is a typical example. It starts with Laura. Laura says: 'you know it's all nice and well that we all sit and work and have meetings, but there also needs to be a bit more party'. [...] 'I organize a reception' [Dutch: "borrel"]. [...] Really great, she announces it. And then Fathia says, 'yes but I think it's nice to help to get the Hub a step further [...] I want to use the reception to hear from everybody what they really want with the Hub'. Thus, she puts this on rails. 'And you know, I also think it is nice to sing a song tonight', she is also singer you know. Thus, she and also Laura use the Hub tonight to show their skills and their own work. Kürt, then, who, by the way, above all is going to be business consultant [...] he is a DJ tonight. He is asked to be DJ. Fine, you know I arrange all that with the tea and the coffee and the wine. Then comes Lottie: 'you know I think it is nice to open the façade as we are already some time busy with renovating it' [...] Fine, this also can nicely fit into the evening. [...] Then comes Edwin [...]: 'I think it is nice to organize some improvisation theatre' [...]. Fine, then comes Annemarie, she is the host today and confronted with this, she has cooked the soup, organized stuff and cooked and what have you [...] Annemarie comes here once in a while to volunteer and in exchange people here help her find a job [...] Phano is the intern, a MBO student, who supports facility management [...] he has been working hard all day – he really works hard constantly. Thus I think, this is it, we have it all lined up, it is going to work out. But then comes Rene here, and runs to buy stuff and to help [...] Ted is also at the network strengthening. 'Yes, I also want to help, what can I do?'. Yes, this is how things go here and it is just sociable [...] and meaningful and it does really show for what we stand in. I wrote this down [pointing to her notes] because it shows very much where we stand for, as a network [...] drive, enormous commitment and openness for each other and this is what our Impact Hub 010⁸ stands in for and this is what I enjoy so much on a day as today. So, now everybody knows what a Hub is." (Interviewee 1 in PO)

The IH has future plans for an incubator programme for starting entrepreneurs and businesses, as well as more concrete plans for kicking off projects in which different members of the IH collaborate (Interviewee 1).

Next to a number of local collaborations with schools, welfare organizations, neighbourhood initiatives, the municipality and other social initiatives or social entrepreneurs in Rotterdam (see section 5.3.1.2), the IH Rotterdam is of course also member of the **IH Association**. In the beginning days, the founder or a member of her team would be taking part in global meetings and exchanges. A change in ownership of the IH also included the search for the added value that an international network of IHs has for a locally oriented place as the IH Rotterdam is. While the current owners did not participate in the global meeting in Mexico in April 2014, they participated in the global assembly half a year later in Madrid (PO). They also take part in global streaming of debates and see possibilities for applying to bigger grants such as Horizon 2020 of the European Union through the network. There is also support of IHs amongst each other (without involvement of Impact Hub

⁸ 010 is the area code of Rotterdam.

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Association) – there has for example been a skype call to support and advise an IH in financial trouble (PO).

While knowing about the **global network** that they could potentially connect to via the online services, such as HubNet, the Rotterdam members seem to not be too interested in this aspect of their membership. An extreme opinion was that *“Impact Hub, as a brand, has no added value anymore”* (Interviewee 23) – this member had tried several times to connect to the global network and was dissatisfied with the results. The name change from Hub to Impact Hub in September 2014 was not received positively by the members of the IH Rotterdam, they felt it brings a lot of pretence with it (Interviewee 7) and they keep referring to the place as Hub⁹. Other members do occasionally enjoy and/or participate in events (Interviewee 26) or have been using their membership to visit other IHs worldwide: *“I really feel empowered to work in other cities: I have friends in other cities and I feel free to visit them for a week and work from the Hub. Which is a great great thing. It’s much better than working from a coffee place.”* (Interviewee 18). While not being active in the international network, one member expressed a global connectedness among IH members: *“If you get to know somebody, and this person is member of a Hub, then you immediately have another relation. It says something about your way of working that you are an entrepreneur, who is intrinsically motivated”* (Interviewee 26).

In **comparison to other IHs**, the IH Rotterdam is considered to be *“one of the warmest Hubs I have been”* although it *“was always a bit rough, not quite finished, [...] a bit poor in a way”* (Interviewee 18). Some of the members had been to the IH Amsterdam on occasion for a training or event (Interviewees 23, 26). It is considered as completely different from the IH Rotterdam (Interviewee 23). It is the focus on the city and the local embeddedness that distinguishes the IH Rotterdam from the IH in Amsterdam (Interviewees 3, 18, 23). According to one of the managing directors of the global network, IH Rotterdam is:

“very embedded in the local reality, so in terms of the role they play for the local community of changemakers, [this] is very significant. And I know they are seen as a place for that change to happen from the grassroots, and they are brilliant at that. So that’ll be the first association in my mind: grassroots, local community embedded, very dedicated to that” (Interviewee 8).

5.1.3 Development of the IH Rotterdam

As outlined in the ‘Intermezzo: overview of the Impact Hub Netherlands’, the IH Rotterdam started in February 2008 as one of the first IHs worldwide. Its founder moved to Rotterdam after having worked abroad and gotten to know the principles of the concept. She also had a personal motivation for starting the IH: *“I started a Hub so that I myself could work there”* (Interviewee 16). With the municipality of Rotterdam being interested in supporting young entrepreneurs, the IH Rotterdam was opened at the location Heemraadssingel, an affluent street within a rather deprived neighbourhood. There were next to no comparable places in Rotterdam at that time (Interviewee 18). The focus was on facilitating accidental encounters between actors with different perspectives:

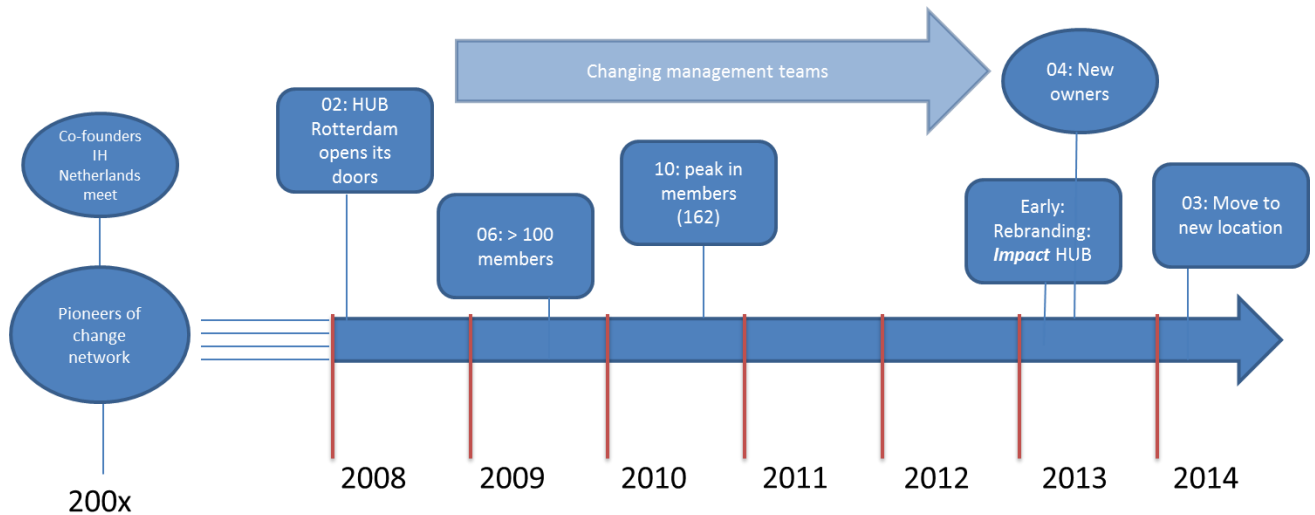
“Thus, those accidental encounters are of course numerous, if you put people together, let them wait at the coffee machine or the printer. This is really all we did, facilitating accidental

⁹ Up to the rebranding which was done in early 2013, the Impact Hubs were simply called Hubs (as explained in chapter 3). In the running text of this chapter we refer to IH consistently, also when strictly speaking at the specific time the entity was still referred to as Hub.

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encounters. But still a bit guided, because everybody is interested in making the world a better place". (Interviewee 16).

Figure 5-5: Timeline Impact Hub Rotterdam



Starting the IH without a team around her, establishing and maintaining a network accounted for 90% of her time, the other 10% went into the space and administrative and communicative tasks. In the beginning, the founder often had to explain what social innovation is and *"about the crazy things that all these young dynamic people were doing in such a social innovation network"* (Interviewee 16). She had close connections with the to-be-founder of the IH Amsterdam due to the common start, and both had close connections with the IH London. They informally exchanged practical tips, forms, software licences as well as people. London staff came to train the people in Rotterdam and Rotterdam people went to London to see how the IH was run. The IH London was the spider in the web and supported a number of people that aimed to start IHs elsewhere. According to the IH Rotterdam founder, *"you were sitting in the same boat that was a really nice feeling"* (Interviewee 16).

As her primary intention was to create a working place for herself, she started as quickly as 2008 to transfer operational duties to others. Twice, she invested about one year in building up a team of two to run the space as managers, and then retreated to the background. Twice, after about a year, the team out of free will stepped back. According to the founder, *"they stepped back because they had tried everything, they just did not manage to let it grow, it remained at the same level"* (Interviewee 16). Other members think the reasons can be found in the fact that the founder remained owner, which did not allow the teams to independently take decisions (Interviewee 18). In addition, the teams also had their freelance projects to attend to (Willems 2014a BA-Thesis). After 2010, the membership numbers were dropping, also leading to financial difficulties. In summer 2012, while not wanting to run the IH fulltime, the founder openly discussed three options with the members: 1) Closing the IH as a lot of other co-working spaces had emerged in Rotterdam, 2) Starting an association so that members run the place themselves, or 3) Searching for a new owner. The members believed in the added value of the IH and aimed for it to grow and to be run professionally. For these reasons, a selection procedure was started in which members were involved and possible candidates approached and interviewed – at a late stage in this process the current owners were approached. While the founder is still shareholder until the re-founding process with IH Association is finalised, all costs, benefits and risks are for the new owners (rather than managers as in previous

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attempts). In the meantime, the members themselves kept the IH running: they opened the building and organised the hosting – according to the founder this showed “*how big the wish was to keep it going*” (Interviewee 16). But the members could not also invest in the further development of the IH, which stagnated at this time and other co-working places in Rotterdam gained terrain (PO).

Figure 5-6: Current location of the IH RTD (floor map of first floor) – June 2014

Source: Facebook Impact Hub Rotterdam and e-mail to Impact Hub Rotterdam Members by one of the owners (13.02.2014)



Towards April 2013, the new owners took over: a couple, one of which a self-employed entrepreneur. One of their first activities was a common search with the members for a cheaper location to alleviate the financial pressure. In March 2014, the IH Rotterdam moved to a different location at the 1ste Middellandstraat 103 – a street in the neighbourhood Middelland (district Delfshaven), close to the city centre and train station. While the neighbourhood knows some affluent business streets (such as the previous location), it also knows areas which are physically not attended to, such as the 1ste Middellandstraat, while it also is a very busy multinational shopping street. This move had not been without controversies (Interviewee 1) – one of the difficulties was the representativeness of the building and the location. Some members searched for other work places, which they considered more representative for receiving clients (Interviewee 1, 23, PO). In the eyes of one of them, it has become more “*alternative in a decayed and half-renovated building than he considers good for the Hub as he knew it*” (PO). While some left or downgraded their membership, the overall membership numbers are slightly increasing again (Interviewees 7, 23, PO). Currently, the IH Rotterdam is in negotiations with the municipality about the use and development of the complete building (rather than only the first floor) (Interviewees 1, 25). It is through this new space that the owners want to increase the impact of the IH Rotterdam not only for its members but as outlined earlier also for the local economy and the residents of the neighbourhood (Interviewee 1). Beginning 2015, the fire department gave consent for taking more floors into use (PO).

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Figure 5-7: Sketch for development of current location

Source: <http://impacthub010.nl/contact/>, (accessed 14 November 2014)



In the future, the owners would like the IH Rotterdam to be more distinctively connected to the city. As being located in a city of ‘makers’, they would like to offer ‘maker’ space: the building does offer the possibility to also include work places to work with metal and wood and as such offer space to craftsmanship. Next to these “Maker Space Hubs” (Interviewee 1), there are plans to develop the building into an experience centre for sustainability or a sustainable trade centre - with a number of interested organizations (Interviewee 1, PO). The newly gained space will make room for offices, focus working rooms, maker spaces and a lunch yoga studio (PO).

5.2 Aspects of ‘innovation’ and ‘change’ of the local initiative

There is a distinct change in the discourse of the IH Rotterdam with the shift from the founder to the current owners. In the beginning, the discourse of the IH Rotterdam was very much similar to the one of the global network concerning their **theory of change**. For instance, the notion that new ideas are created by “*collaboration between unlikely allies*” (Interviewee 16). As put by the founder of the IH Rotterdam: “*Above all this is where the Hub, according to me, was very strong. By putting together the architect and the biologist without any other reason than there being a working space and that they then happen to talk over a coffee a brilliant new idea emerged*” (Interviewee 16). It was this theory of change, the organisation of accidental encounters of unlikely allies’ focusing on making the world a better place, which is also considered the innovation and novelty of the IH network (Interviewee 16). The term social innovation is very much related to social entrepreneurship: “*People, who make a positive contribution to the world through an entrepreneurial spirit, or who try to foster a positive change in the world.*” (Interviewee 16).

The difference with other incubators, according to the founder of the IH Rotterdam, is that these plan the process of innovation (from good idea to successful enterprise), while the IH leaves room for allowing things to happen and serendipity. The founder outlines that she “*does not believe in standard procedures for this [incubation]*” (Interviewee 16). According to her, the IH is “*an incubator where you need to raise your initiative on your own, with the help of a support network*” (Interviewee 16) and work in a safe space for experimentation of which failing is a part. This approach puts the initiative and responsibility much more with the entrepreneur (Interviewee 16). With all members working from a “*common shared value, which is the wish for a more honest, tolerant and sustainable world*” (Interviewee 16), the atmosphere is supportive rather than competitive, because “*it is in your interest (...) that his enterprise is going well, because you are working to shape one world*” (Interviewee 16). A focus was on the usefulness of experimentation: “*I think that if you try out 100 experiments, there are maybe 2 or 3 which have the potential to become big. But that does not mean that you should not experiment with the other 98 or should make space for them to grow*” (Interviewee 16) and “*you never know from the beginning, which system change it will trigger*” (Interviewee 16).

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While not disproving this theory of change, the current owners are less prevalent and outspoken about it. According to one of them, the IH contributes to societal change and impact by offering an enabling environment including a “*network, space, ideas and empowerment*” (Interviewee 1). Next to experimentation, the current owners focus also on providing an environment for prototyping: Members develop products and services and test them within the community, e.g. a garbage can system by the start-up Better Future Factory or the ‘working bliss’ services by another member. It is also understood as a facilitator of social innovation. In relation to neighbourhood initiatives, one of the owners puts it as follows:

“One can talk a lot about social innovation, but for real bottom up social innovation people need a space to meet, sit, talk and have a coffee. They need a little bit of money. I tell them to come and to discuss their plans for the neighbourhood with me. There is no need for them to pay, as I like to support neighbourhood initiatives by providing space.” (Interviewee 1).

As entrepreneur, she also sees the potential of having good relations with the neighbourhood, such as a good image, and new bookings and members in the future. She sees “*the Hub as a vehicle to explore what happens if you do it the other way. And I think it’s really working*” (Interviewee 1). She is offering this by, for example, providing her members with the possibility to pay their contributions in different ways: e.g. with Euro, with a complementary local currency (about three members do this), or through working as a host or taking over other tasks (Interviewee 1). Also, I as researcher was engaging in a barter trade (see section 2). Another example is the forging of links between a professional painter and an organization that supports people with mental problems who were both involved in the renovation of the new location. To one of the new owners it was “*inspiring because it wasn’t easy. This is what social innovation is about, working out of your comfort zone*” (Interviewee 1).

5.2.1 Relation with social innovation

With social innovation, we refer broadly to new social practices and/or new social relations, including new (combinations of) ideas, models, rules, and/or products (cf. Avelino et al. 2014).

The IH Rotterdam relates in different ways to social innovation. Firstly, there are social innovations by the IH organization, which can be related to the overall IH concept. The IH concept inherently contains a number of socially innovative ideas relating to the work and labor market, more specifically: ways of working, the design of the work spaces, attitudes to work as well as forms of work. The members engage in ways of working which are more collaborative and horizontal than is the case in mainstream companies. They do so in work spaces designed for interaction and networking, which are ‘hosted’ – as such they constitute new products, services and practices. The working attitude of members stresses personal satisfaction, work aligned with personal values, positive impact on the world and economic income (see section 5.3). A member articulates the following: “*I have the feeling it’s much more common now than 5 years ago that people admit to having greater ulterior motives than just getting in/an income. Wouldn’t say it was because of the Hub, I think the Hub is part of a larger social movement in that direction.*” (Interviewee 18). The majority of members are freelancers, social entrepreneurs or otherwise self-employed. As such, many of them are engaged in a non-mainstream form of work (e.g. formal employment at an organisation). The IH concept can thus be said to innovate the work and labour market as we know it.

Secondly, there are social innovations by the IH organization, which is experimenting with new business models, or elements thereof. The IH Rotterdam engages in bartering trades offering the possibility to pay membership fees by hosting the place or offering other services (e.g. support in

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the marketing). There is also the possibility to pay with the local complementary currency. There are also other forms of social innovation such as the forging of new social relations between societal actors. The IH Rotterdam does engage in that locally as it has been establishing links between a professional painter and an organization that supports people with mental problems who were both involved in the renovation of the new IH building (see section 5.3).

Thirdly, another way the IH relates to social innovation is through the activities of (the enterprises of) their members, which cover a broad array of topics and working fields. These range from technological innovations to new social services or business models, and as such engage in different ways in what we define as 'social innovation' in the TRANSIT project. For most of its members, it is a space which provides for innovation and cross-pollination (Interviewee 3). As put by a member: *"It is an incubator for entrepreneurs who make impact with their individual enterprises and who collaborate."* (Interviewee 26). Members see innovation in the forging of new relations, the collaboration in projects and the elaboration of new (business) ideas (Interviewee 3) and less in practical or physical innovation (with the exception of Better Future Factory) (Interviewee 24). The ideas are seen to manifest through their businesses, as put by a member: *"you see this happening every day. It can happen on the smallest scale: people specialised in archiving, who set up a new project together with a copy-writer and an illustrator, or that they are organising a workshop together."* (Interviewee 24). Another explicit social innovation are the alternative transactions that the members engage in. There is a culture of sharing resources of all sorts (knowledge, information, competences and experiences) between members in an informal manner, without formal financial transactions – it was referred to by one interviewee in Rotterdam as *"gift economy"* (Interviewee 26): an economy where something is given without engaging in a direct exchange, rather exchanging gifts is often governed by cultural values (see Mauss 1990).

Lastly, the IH Rotterdam, especially in its early days, was explicitly referring to the discourse on social innovation, one of the first scholarly articles on social innovation and the Impact Hub was written by a member of the IH Rotterdam (Witkamp et al. 2011).

5.2.2 Relation with system innovation

There is no particular framing of a specific system that is to be changed or impacted through either the work of the IH members or through the IH as a whole. The members work in a variety of fields, and as such have different 'systems' within which they could be positioned. As put by the owner: *"The Hub cannot claim their impact, it's theirs [the member's]"* (Interviewee 1). It also seems that a number is not thinking in terms of changing something 'out there', rather they do what they are good at (Interviewee 23) or are happy with (Interviewee 26) and take it from there – whether the impact is on the city or further away is not something that seems to be either considered important or manageable (Interviewee 24). One member also said that it would be too specific to define themes, topics or a future image as this would create expectations and would change the motivation of people joining (Interviewee 24). Another seems to focus on doing things locally: *"I think it is interesting to work locally. There is enough to do."* (Interviewee 23, also 24). While, the founder thinks that *"a number of these projects really do have the potential to change the system"* (Interviewee 16), we do in the following not focus on the (potential) impact of the projects and businesses of the individual IH members, but of the IH Rotterdam organization as an actor.

From the interviews and participant observations a number of different systems can be delineated that the work of the IH contributes to changing. The most obvious one is its relation with the **changing labour market and the way people work**. In the Netherlands, the last years have seen a discussion on what is termed 'the new way of working' ['het nieuwe werken'], referring to an

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increasing flexibility of employees to work where and when they like (Slijkhuis 2012). One member does relate the IH to this discussion but also thinks that the way of working at the IH is the next step in this development (Interviewee 26). With offering new ways of working, the IH indeed plays into the changing labour market in the Netherlands – there is a growing number of people working as self-employed – the number of ‘self-employed without personnel’ (‘ZZP’) nearly doubled from 450.000 in 2000 to some 800.000 in 2014 (Stam 2013, CBS 2015). On a more critical note, this move towards more and more work done on a freelance basis in the Netherlands, is not always as voluntary as it may seem, comes to the expense of employee rights and benefits, as well as long-term security in terms of pension arrangements. It also increases a dogma of individualisation, specifically the idea, that it is all a result of our ‘own’ doing. Thus whether one does good (scoring a new project) or bad (not scoring a project) is due to one’s personal skills and not due to an economic crisis or higher competition. This dogma eradicates any social critique in its beginnings (see Van Stigt 2013). A more critical perspective and reflection on these issues are an interesting avenue for further analysis.

The new owners of the IH Rotterdam more specifically have an outspoken aim to have impact as a social enterprise on **their immediate surroundings**, the 1ste Middellandstraat, the neighbourhood, and the city of Rotterdam. This neighbourhood was built around 1900. In 2012, it had some 12.000 inhabitants out of which 47% were ‘non-western foreigner’ (‘niet-westerse allochtoon’) and 37% were between 25-44 years (compared with 37% and 31% respectively on city level) (CBS 2015). 47% of the inhabitants had a low yearly personal income (19.200 Euros or lower) in 2010 (ibid). Due to the economic crisis, the city of Rotterdam, as other cities also has cut budgets and stopped investing in certain areas. While streets close to the 1ste Middellandstraat had seen investments and were renovated, there was apparently no money left for a physical intervention in this street. It is the diversity in the street in terms of shops, ethnicity and beliefs which makes the area “*a vulnerable place in the city, but also very interesting*” (Interviewee 1). It is physically located close to the city centre and has great potential – this is an opportunity but also a threat to the current business model, which is relying on a low rent. There are competitors who want to develop this place commercially (Interviewee 1). The building had been used as a community centre for years, and a lot of people in the neighbourhood have good memories about it. It is also for these people, that the IH Rotterdam wants to have added value and therefore opens its doors for neighbourhood initiatives that search for a meeting room or for events by the district commission. The idea is to develop the IH and thereby the neighbourhood. In this context, the owners are also critically considering this as gentrification, which they think can be “*an important way to improve poor places in the city*” (Interviewee 1 in PO) while having eye for the approachability of both space and knowledge. As outlined earlier, the IH Rotterdam also cooperates with local schools, welfare organizations, neighbourhood initiatives, the municipality and other social initiatives or social entrepreneurs in Rotterdam (see section 5.3.1.2). It seems that the IH Rotterdam has been quite successful in forging these kinds of local linkages and collaborations and as such increasing its impact on the city.

Related is the relation to the **real estate market in Rotterdam**. As put by one of the owners, they “*could address the problem of vacant space and bankruptcy, the situation we are in in the Netherlands. And also other countries are dealing with this. The world-wide recession is all about the real estate problem that blew up.*” (Interviewee 1). This is specifically the case for public real estate with a social purpose – those buildings which are for example used as community centres, swimming pools or school. In a scenario study, an interdepartmental study estimated that there will be a reduction in square meters of public real estate from 80 million in 2010 to 60 million in 2030 due to budget cuts but also due to IT developments and different social relations (Bouwstenen voor Sociaal 2013). Due to budget cuts, community centres all over Rotterdam have been closed down and at times also put up for sale on the market. Many of these buildings have not been maintained during the last years and are not apt anymore to be used in their current state (e.g. asbestos, drafty windows). Also in the building where the IH Rotterdam is located, the municipality had to remove asbestos during

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December 2014 and January 2015¹⁰. At the same time, these buildings are supposed to be rented out for market-conform prices – meaning that any initiative with social goals will find it difficult to pay the full rent (cf. Wittmayer et al. 2013 for another case in Rotterdam). The owners have taken on this challenge in collaboration with Rotterdam's Department City development (see also section 5.3.1.2). As put by the owner: *"The challenge I see is: I believe that we can redevelop this very old real estate ourselves, with our network, working with our social capital we have here. I'm convinced we can find a way to do that and to gain ownership. So it's not the Hub and a big investor giving a lot of money to the building, and so on. That's my conviction, and lots of people believe in that."* (Interviewee 1). Actually addressing this challenge in an entrepreneurial way and in collaboration with the municipality, *"could also be an innovation that we can of course share"* (Interviewee 1). And the owner thinks that there is broad interest for this, as she sees within the municipality but also in other cities that have similar challenges. One of the policy officers working closely with the IH Rotterdam, says that also project developers are now looking at developing *"these kind of 'Hubs'"* (Interviewee 25).

The redevelopment of the building is also connected to a **number of other potential impacts on societal systems**. Next to the real estate sector, the owner also connects the redeveloping of the building to the financial system. *"Actually this idea of redeveloping this building as a social trade centre is targeting financial systems: you have to find a new way, not to do the big investments but invest with social capital also"* (Interviewee 1). This way of doing things would create ownership, which in turn empowers people. The latter is thus referring back to a social innovation, thus an innovation in the social fabric of the community. Another link is to ecological systems, as the future plans are to make the building a *"zero energy building, grow food on the roof with volunteers, have a nice rooftop bar, insulation, green facades, flowers, bees and honey."* (Interviewee 1).

5.2.3 Relation with game-changers

While tackling *"the world's most pressing social, cultural and environmental challenges"* (Impact Hub Rotterdam website, 2015) is what the IH Rotterdam wants to facilitate, there is next to no reference made to either climate change or other ecological boundaries as game changers. Poverty and energy were both mentioned once in interviews. The latter also more specifically in reference to the cost parity of renewables and fossil fuels. The overall focus is very much on economic and technological drivers, such as ICT revolution and the economic crisis and worldwide recession.

The founder views the economic crisis as leading to job losses, opening up the way for many people to rethink their careers and to also *"dare to make the step towards their dream job"* (Interviewee 16). It also led to a decrease in subsidies, increasing the importance of entrepreneurship. The owner relates the *"world-wide recession"* (rather than 'the economic crisis') very much to the real estate situation: as coming forth from a crash of the real estate bubble and as leading to an increase in empty space.

Also the ICT or digital revolution was mentioned. It is considered *"one of the big changes of our times"* (Interviewee 23). It refers to technological developments such as web shops, 3D printing (which is considered as a game changer on its own), artificial intelligence or twitter which also have led to the current empty shop spaces in inner cities, to an acceleration of communication, greater transparency and dynamic and an *"increasing impossibility to keeping secrets"* (Interviewee 18). According to this member this has consequences for governance and hierarchies.

¹⁰ E-mail communication by The Hub Rotterdam on 1.12.2014, Subject: Belangrijke informatie: asbestsanering in souterrain Middellandstraat 103/ onder Impact Hub

5.2.4 Relation with societal transformation

There has been little to no reference to societal transformation as defined by Avelino et al. (2014: 9): “*fundamental and persistent change across society, exceeding sub-systems and including simultaneous changes in multiple dimensions.*” All references to larger societal change could either be captured by the concept of system innovation, game changers or narratives of change.

5.2.5 Relation with narratives of change

There were many implicit references made to narratives of change, or “*discourses on change and innovation, i.e. sets of ideas, concepts, metaphors, and/or story-lines about change and innovation*” (Avelino et al. 2014: 9). An important one is of course the reference to ‘**social innovation**’, which is also a narrative of change focusing on how new social practices, ideas and relations can change society (Interviewee 16).

For the IH Rotterdam, social innovation is closely related to the ‘**social entrepreneurship**’ narrative – the social entrepreneur is seen to “*change the world*” (Interviewee 23), in an economic system that is referred to as “*conscious capitalism*” (Interviewee 23). It was also mentioned that with a growing number of social entrepreneurs, this term will be stretched and it would also be up to the IH Rotterdam and its members to be clear on what is the core of their social entrepreneurship (Interviewee 18). An organisation-related narrative is on ‘corporate social responsibility’. The latter was referred to in the belief that it will become “*normal that companies would have to worry about their responsibility in increasing levels*” (Interviewee 18). Closely related to the mission of social entrepreneurs it at least highlights social values next to economic profit.

Figure 5-8: The RotterDAM - the local complementary currency

Source: www.rotter-dam.nl (accessed 20.01.2015)



There are other narratives that concern **alternative forms of economic exchange**. One narrative is focusing on **barter economy**, where one does not exchange goods for money but goods for goods, time or services. The IH Rotterdam itself offers its members to engage in such exchange for paying their membership fees. A related reference was made to the **gift economy** (Interviewee 26), where

something is given without engaging in a direct exchange, rather exchanging gifts is often governed by cultural values (see Mauss 1990). The latter can be seen in the exchanges that the members engage in with one another – they are supporting each other with their respective expertise without financial transactions. And a last narrative concerned the use of **complementary currencies** – as it is possible to pay ones invoices at the IH Rotterdam with the local currency, the RotterDAM.

A second cluster concerns a set of ideas on the **role and motives of individuals**, which is outlined by a number of the interviewed members. The underlying idea is that societal change starts with the individual – only through a change at the individual level will society change (Interviewee 23, 26). This change of the individual should be based on personal intrinsic motivation, “*if it does not originate from there nothing changed*” (Interviewee 23, also 26). In a variation thereof another member outlines: “*as I do the things that I am good at, other people will join who also do things that they are good at and we can create added value together*” (Interviewee 23, also 26). This closely connects to another narrative of change, the storyline that people do not work for money but rather

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for enacting and realizing ulterior motives such as sustainability (Interviewee 18, 26). The inclusion of “*intuition and emotions*” has become “*more mainstream*” (Interviewee 16). As outlined by a member: “*I have the feeling it’s much more common now than 5 years ago that people admit to having greater ulterior motives than just getting an income. Wouldn’t say it was because of the Hub, I think the Hub is part of a larger social movement in that direction.*” (Interviewee 18).

Then there were a **number of other ideas and concepts** touched upon by individual members, these include:

- Decentralisation: the idea that production (e.g. energy, food) is becoming more decentralised. Decentralisation often comes along with a small scale (Interviewee 16).
- Urban gardening: closely related to the idea of decentralisation of production, urban gardening is about increasing the consciousness about the food we eat and get city dwellers into contact with nature and food production (Interviewee 18).
- Recycling and 3D printing: This narrative is related to the start-up Better Future Factory and includes the assumption that waste is a resource. Accordingly, the IH Rotterdam does offer drinks in plastic cups during events, which are then given to Better Future Factory to create new products (PO).
- Cooperative movement: The idea that collaboration is based on cooperative ideas rather than market economics. The IH Rotterdam was likened by one of the members to a “*big cooperative*” (Interviewee 24).
- Changing collective consciousness: the idea that humans are spiritually connected which eliminates the belief in ‘coincidence’. Rather than coincidental, meeting a certain person is related to a collective consciousness. (Interviewee 23)

Another interesting aspect relating the IH to change is the following observation by one of the members:

“Another thing is more intangible. A lot of the things we call hip nowadays, like urban agriculture, monetary innovation. There’s a lot of things that people at the Hub will say ‘oh yea, I’ve been seeing that for 5 or 10 years now’ and for many people it’s still like ‘ooh, what’s this going on?’ So there is, I think, an easy flow of newness within the Hub network. People in the Hub network are generally aware of the things that are new and coming. So in that sense it probably breeds a sort of common understanding, it allows people to be ahead of the curve. Like I said, it’s more intangible, harder to define. But there’s a sort of easy flow of newness.” (Interviewee 18).

5.3 Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment of the local initiative

Before detailing empowerment and disempowerment mechanisms along the four mechanisms outlined as part of the TRANSIT conceptual framework, namely governance, social learning, resourcing and monitoring, we first have a closer examination of the motivations for actors to join and stay with the IH Rotterdam. Most of these motivations can be outlined along the three value propositions of the IH Rotterdam, namely inspiring space, vibrant community and meaningful content.

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Inspiring space

A main proposition of the IH Rotterdam is the environment which it offers for its members and initiatives. This is the physical place but also, as outlined by one of the owners and by members *“emotional, a place where you can feel at home”* (Interviewee 1). As such it is closely related to the community aspect outlined below. The IH Rotterdam is considered as a *“landing stage for new, local initiatives”* (Interviewee 26) with examples such as meditation, or ‘neighbourhood palace’¹¹. The latter is an example of the social proposition it has to the neighbourhood. It is also a landing place for people who are starting their business and can engage in bartering, rather than having to pay the membership fee in cash: *“it gives them really a landing stage from which to further grow”* (Interviewee 26). As such this echoes the statement of one of the owners (confirmed by members) that the IH offers an environment *“to develop yourself”* (Interviewee 1, 26). She continues *“people come here and feel that, it’s almost a spiritual story: I can be fully myself, and work and find money to work. And that’s something a Hub can offer, as an environment.”* Next to be a *“safe place for experimentation”* (Interviewee 16), the IH Rotterdam is also a place for prototyping one’s ideas and practices.

The creation of this environment is done through the simple activities outlined earlier (see section 5.1.2) and through the interaction between members. These activities are the hosting, the daily shared lunch, the regular network strengthening and other irregular events such as Magic Impact Hub Days. A member describes it as follows *“If you are in a social environment which does not reduce you to your behaviour or so, but which keeps on inviting you to join: for lunch, an opening weekend or what have you, this is good for you”* (Interviewee 6). Others feel encouraged in pursuing specific ideas (e.g. on urban gardening) (Interviewee 18), or think that through this environment it is more probable that collaboration can take place (Interviewee 24).

There are also members who do not believe in too much structures and ‘facilitating environments’, rather they believe in the power and responsibility of the individual to take care of itself. According to a member, the latter is more possible in the more unstructured environment of the IH Rotterdam as compared to the IH Amsterdam (Interviewee 23, also 18). The IH Rotterdam is a *“stimulating inspiring environment which leaves the initiative to the individual. It does invite you to innovate [...] but does not force you to do so. It is a great environment without obligations”* (Interviewee 24 in PO). Another member considers that this does lead to new ideas, but not to maturation of ideas (Interviewee 18) – for this a more structured approach is considered necessary.

Vibrant Community

Interestingly, most of the interviewees would not refer to the global IH community to which they have access to e.g. via HubNet – most interesting and rewarding for them would be the connection to local people. Only one interviewed member would mention the access to a *“worldwide movement of entrepreneurship”* as a motivation to stay connected to the IH Rotterdam (Interviewee 18).

The community or network is mentioned by next to all Interviewees as an important proposition of the IH Rotterdam. One member said: *“What I think is very strong about the Hub, is that it sure enough it is a community which focuses on a sustainable, or better world, in whatever way”* (Interviewee 6). Other refer to a *“community feeling”* (Interviewee 24) or think of it as the biggest strengths of the IH Rotterdam (Interviewee 3). The network *“this is what it is all about”* (Interviewee 23) – both in terms of business as well as in terms of emotions.

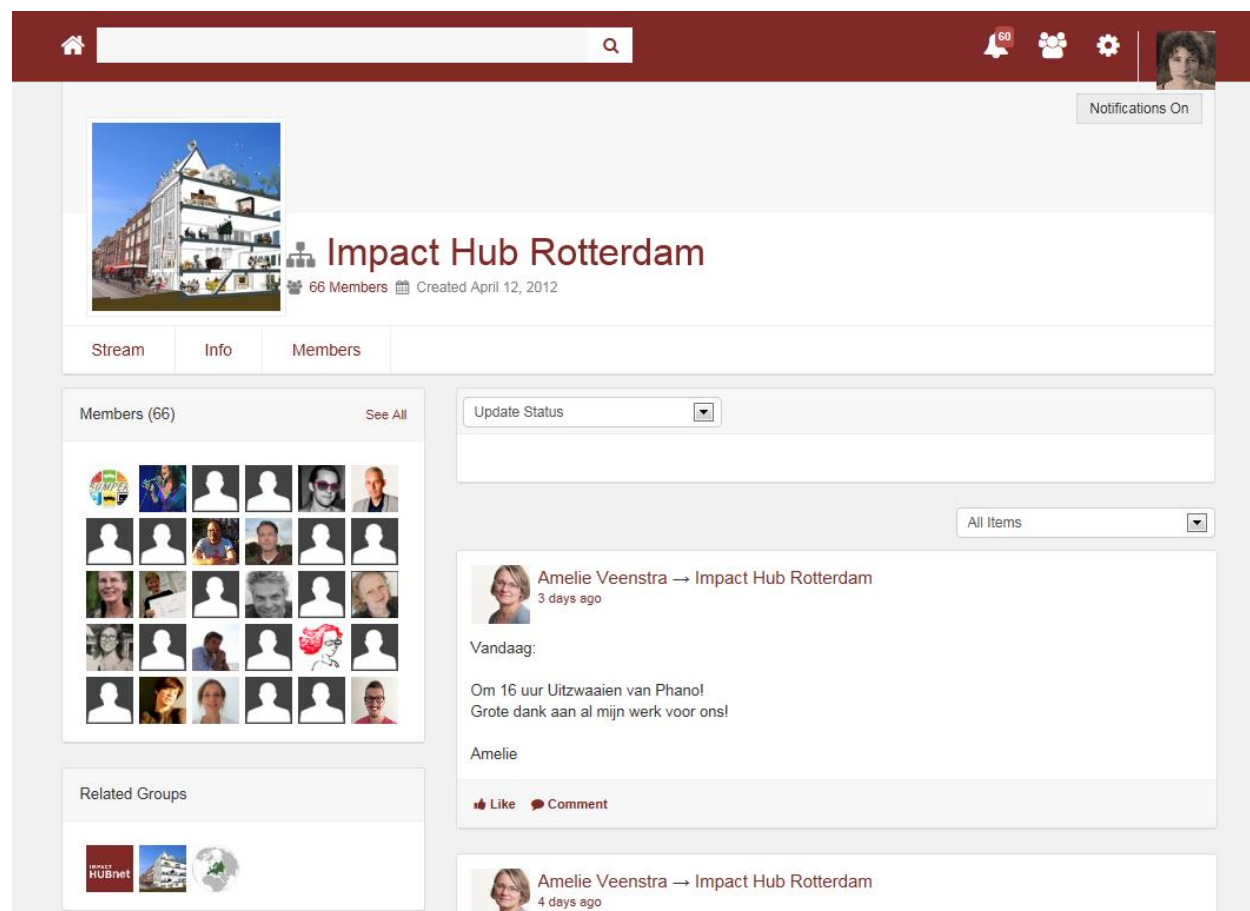
¹¹ The ‘neighbourhood palace’ is an easily accessible place for inhabitants of the area to socialize.

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In the words of one member, members choose for the IH Rotterdam, because “*Here are the right people, with the right energy and I can make the right relations*” (Interviewee 23). An expression thereof is that “*you can identify 30-40 entrepreneurs whom you know, where you know what they are busy with*” (Interviewee 24). Working at the co-working space does result in increased turnover, as outlined by one member: “*sitting here does result in Euros*” (Interviewee 23). Also other members mention that the connection to others at the IH Rotterdam led to projects (PO, Interviewee 6). For example, through members asking each other for help with projects that one lacks some expertise for (e.g. designing a website) (PO). It also makes it easy to collaborate and to commonly accept large assignments (Interviewee 23).

Figure 5-9: HubNet Interface

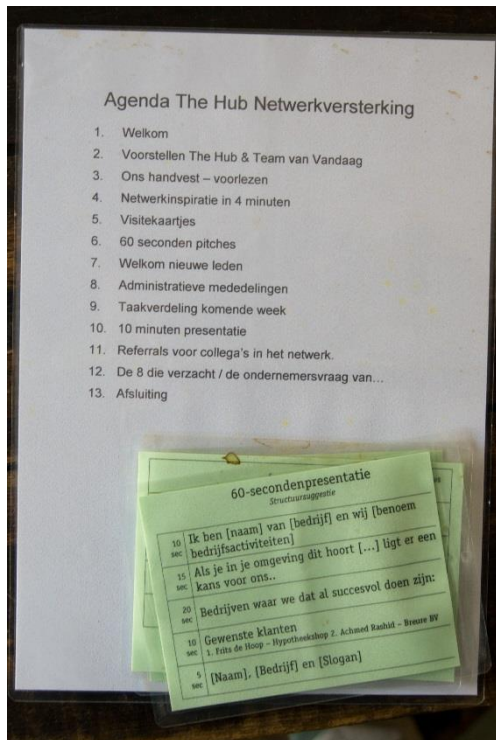
Source: HubNet



Another member outlined that the IH Rotterdam helped him a lot in getting started in Rotterdam and as a freelancer, it gave him a feeling of being at home (Interviewee 18). This community feeling is established and reinforced through the actual space that one shares and the numerous activities that the IH Rotterdam engages in, as outlined earlier (e.g. hosting, shared lunch, network strengthening, providing a specifically designed working space) (Interviewee 6, 23). For one of the owners “*it’s a relief when you’re in your own sort of niche, with like-minded people*” because “*outside you almost have to fight the whole time to convince people that a different way is possible*” (Interviewee 1).

Figure 5-10: Agenda of the network strengthening event

Source: Tim Strasser



The essence of this community are the like-mindedness of its members and shared values. One of the owners uses an interesting metaphor: *“It’s almost like going to church: everyone believes in the same. But everyone has different experiences and knowledge [...]”* (Interviewee 1). The members find each other in their urge to make the world a better place (Interviewee 24) and they feel at home and welcome in the community of the IH Rotterdam (Interviewee 18, 26). As put by a member: *“You get a sense of shared values, you have something in common. But there isn’t necessarily a larger vision for change, more about engaging with each other.”* (PO). In engaging with one another, members are not afraid that their idea could be stolen or that they are supporting a competitor, rather there is a high degree of *“trust in the community that people don’t run away with your idea”* (Interviewee 3 in PO). This is based on values such as openness and friendliness according to the same member, but also on the assumption that they are together working on making the world a better place (Interviewee 16). In a presentation, one of the owners outlined the values of the IH Rotterdam as commitment, openness and drive (PO). Interestingly,

members also mention that they like that shared values are not only talked about but lived, e.g. through the bartering exchanges offered (Interviewee 26, PO).

It is this communal aspect that makes a member characterize the IH Rotterdam as *“permeable: easy to get in and hard to get out”*. Interestingly, a number of members that have been engaged more actively in earlier years, do not quit their engagement with the IH Rotterdam altogether, they stay loyal by taking a cheaper membership form (Interviewee 18, PO). What we heard less during official interviews, but much more in informal talks, is that members mentioned that they would not want to sit everyday at the IH Rotterdam as this is *“too much in-crowd”* (PO) or it is just *“too much at times”* (Interviewee 26). This reinforces the idea that people are not necessarily at the IH for getting a lot of work done, rather they are also there to have their social interactions (see also Interviewee 26, PO).

Meaningful content

The openness of the IH Rotterdam in terms of actual content has also contributed to a perceived shift in the foci of the members. Some members struggle herewith: while they welcome and appreciate the openness of the network, they also think it is a pity that they see less and less people working on sustainability related topics (Interviewee 6) and more and more people working in the field of coaching and training. But the community is not all inclusive in that not everybody can join. One of the owners outlines *“I have a workspace, I cannot open my doors to all the people in the street, but I’d like to offer something.”* This is why the IH Rotterdam is engaging in different kinds of bartering trade and in collaboration with local organisations and neighbourhood initiatives.

In relation to our research interests on innovation and change, there is an interesting division felt within this community. Looking at the current members of the IH Rotterdam, a member perceives *“two different co-working networks”* (Interviewee 6) – one focusing on the topic of making the world more sustainable and the other being more driven by self-realization. The former are members who

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explicitly work on sustainability related topics – thus working towards societal change. Following this mind-set there is no competition amongst entrepreneurs as every successful project brings the shared vision of a better world a step closer to realization (Interviewee 7, 16). Sustainability is considered in its broad sense as relating to environmental but also social aspects such as tolerance or poverty. Those thought to be driven by self-realization are members who start from individual motivation and satisfaction with their work and think that this in itself will lead to change. This change would not be referred to in terms of societal impacts, or societal change (see also section 5.2.5) (Interviewee 23, 26). Rather it is referred to as contributing to one's *"personal development, and I think thereby to the world"*. Thus *"if everybody does what he is good at, everybody will be a bit happier"* (Interviewee 23) – the focus is on starting from one's potential rather than one's shortcomings or from any big intention for impact outside one self. Another members makes the distinction between members who are *"focusing on smaller things"* (Interviewee 18) which he considers disempowering, because he is mainly interested in system change for which he feels the need to collaborate with others.

Interestingly, there is but one respondent who consistently uses only one of these two discourses – for the other Interviewees these go hand in hand. By way of example, one of the members aims to make vegan food big in the Netherlands – this definitely is an ambition for societal change that has a strong sustainability focus. In outlining her motivation, the member says that she engages in activities that make her happy. By being inspired herself, she can become an inspiration for others, which is a way of changing society. She also sees others in the IH starting from an attitude of wanting to engage/engaging in activities that make them happy.

5.3.1 Governance

In looking at governance, the first of four topics of the TRANSIT conceptual framework, we distinguish between external and internal governance. As part of internal governance we outline the internal structure of the IH Rotterdam. As part of external governance we examine different linkages and collaborations with actors outside the IH Rotterdam.

5.3.1.1 Internal governance

The IH Rotterdam is an organically growing enterprise. While the two owners, one as CEO/Business Developer/Community Manager and one as CFO, run the IH Rotterdam, on the records it is still officially the founder who is shareholder (see below). One of the owners is entrepreneur (developer of sustainable business on topics related to sustainable energy production and housing), the other is managing partner of a consulting firm focusing on questions and challenges of public facilities. As such both are not full time present at the IH Rotterdam. Being a couple in private life gives them ample time for discussing and exchanging also on issues related to the IH Rotterdam and to support each other. Quite pragmatically one of them describes the work of running the IH as *"80% general and technical services, even if it comes with a nice story"* (Interviewee 1). The key activities include financial organisation, strategy, marketing, developing the business (i.e. acquiring new members), connecting members and maintaining the network, hosting the space, establishing partnerships, programming events and workshops, and communication via social media, newsletters and website (cf. Willems 2014b, PO).

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They are supported in the management activities by the “Impact Hub 010 team”¹², which counts 11 members as of December 2014 (Impact Hub Rotterdam 2014) and consists of a Hub Office Manager, an intern, member hosts and special member hosts (PO). A Hub Office Manager was first hired in September 2014 for 2-3 days a week on the basis of an hourly wage (Interviewee 1, PO). One of the owners outlines that she decided to take somebody on board to support her in running the IH, so she also finds time to concentrate on her business. As she does “*not yet have an income from this Hub, so you need to earn your money somewhere.*” The former Hub Office Manager had first engaged in bartering (one day hosting in exchange for a membership). As Hub Office Manager, she did community hosting and management (incl. professional and personal contact with members), space management incl. bookings, and e-mails (Interviewee 1, 26). She had some more ideas for further development, such as a better usage of the online network but first she focuses on the smooth delivery of the mentioned activities. Since the start of 2015, another person has taken over this role (PO).

Figure 5-11: Lunch

Source: Twitter @ImpactHUB010



Part of the IH concept is the role of the host. During the official opening hours (9am to 5pm), there is always a host present. As put by a member: “*yes, the [host] is really important, absolutely. S/he has to take care of the linkages that people get start to talk to each other*” (Interviewee 6). The host opens the workspace, welcomes members, prepares tea and coffee, answers the phone, helps with questions with regard to facilities (e.g. booking a room, help with printer), receives guests and potential members, prepares a daily common lunch as well as connects people to each other. Every day one of the member hosts hosts the space – of that s/he spends 4 hours on hosting tasks together with an intern from the local vocational school. There is no specific philosophy to the hosting currently (Interviewee 26). While there were references to ‘Art of Hosting’ by the founder, a member outlined that he thinks that it is not interesting to have “*professional hosts*” (Interviewee 23) as this would increase the monthly membership fee considerably. There are a whole range of different people acting as host– most of these are members who host for specific times in the week in exchange for a membership. One interviewee also does it because it puts himself in a situation to connect (to) other members (Interviewee 23). Next to the official host, there are a number of members (mainly those part of the IH 010 team) who do feel responsible for a smooth management of the space even if they do not have the official ‘hosting’

function that day. They would be the first ones to hear the bell if the official host went out to buy lunch ingredients or was on the phone (PO).

¹² 010 referring to the area code of Rotterdam.

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A last element in the internal structure are 'special member hosts' who do special tasks. One member for example is focusing on questions of spatial design and architecture, another cares for the edible plants inside the location and in the garden and a third started beginning 2015 to do programme management (PO).

The fundament of the IH Rotterdam are its members. As of December 2014, there were 87 members (PO). There was a peak in membership in October 2010 at 162 members, with an all-time low at 66. The year 2014 had seen a slight increase in amount of members, but more so in the actual use of the space by members and their visitors. The members, on average are in their end thirties/beginning forties with a balanced female-male ratio. The large majority is white, highly educated and are self-employed, freelance or social entrepreneurs (PO, Willems 2014a BA-Thesis). They work in different disciplines and work fields such as (environmental and social) sustainability (Interviewee 1, 3), Health, Coaching, Consulting, Media, Career development, Marketing, Interior design, Architecture, Programming, Public real estate and public space development, graphic designers (Interviewee 1, 3, 14, 24, 26, "Member stories" 2014). Other aspects are food (through the pick-up point of Rechtstreeex) and recycling of plastic waste and creating new value from it through 3D printing (through Better Future Factory). Members are the fundament of the IH Rotterdam not only because these are the clients, but also because in Rotterdam they are closely involved in developing the IH. As outlined in section 5.1.2, the members play a big role in event programming and in co-creating the space. Other examples are a working group on making a vision of the new building, another one takes care of the façade, others feel responsible if the host is unavailable as outlined above, or help in organising events or co-organizing these (PO).

While the owners formally have the ultimate decision making power, they encourage everybody to shape the IH Rotterdam (PO). A member describes it as "*very flat, egalitarian*" (Interviewee 24), another outlines that the owners "*facilitate the building and do their own projects. It feels like we are all colleagues*" (Interviewee 18). The organisation of the New Year's Reception 2015 was typically done in such a collaborative way (see section 2.1.2 Activities, Networking and Outreach).

As such, we cannot fall back on traditional conceptions to outline the internal structure of the IH Rotterdam. There are numerous role overlaps (e.g. a member can also be a host) and at times roles have a temporal character (e.g. interns are only coming for a specified period, a member might be hosting one day/week). With the members also being hosts, and engaging in the event programming and future development of the IH as well as other bartering exchanges, there is no clear-cut division between being an IH Rotterdam staff who caters for the clients *and* being a member (i.e. client). In general, everybody is encouraged to get involved, especially for bigger decisions, such as the search for a new owner and for a new building (Interviewee 24). With some members being more active and feeling more responsible than others, it is also those who actively co-shape the IH Rotterdam through their opinions, arguments and ideas (Interviewee 18). As such it is not so surprising that one member describes the management of the place as "*controlled chaos*" (Interviewee 3). These collaborative relations and the co-creative atmosphere could partly be an outcome of the difficult transition time in search for a new owner during which the members took a lot of responsibility and partly due to the open and encouraging leadership of the owners. It seems to be something quite unique for co-working spaces that members care not only about their own business but also about the common image (cf. Interviewee 18).

In relation to IH global, the decision making structure has become more and more formal with increasing regulation and standardization (Interviewee 16). According to the IH Rotterdam, they are the first instance where an IH is taken over by new owners and where a "*refounding process*" is taking place (Interviewee 1). There are no procedures for such a process of licence transferral. While the IH Association preferred a completely new founding process, along with its financial and administrative implications, the IH Rotterdam had offered an audit after the transferral. This process

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was complicated by a number of additional factors: the looming bankruptcy of the IH Rotterdam, the rebranding process to *Impact Hub* and the implementation of a new website and a new management tool by IH company. The new owners were first of all focusing on sanitizing the finances of the IH Rotterdam along with all the work this implicated, such as the move to another more affordable location with minimal means and an informal settling of the transferral of ownership with the founder- so as to be able to keep the company running. In the meanwhile also the rebranding process asked considerable time investment from them. Given this context, IH Rotterdam relinquished the implementation of the new tools, which were also not perceived as the most suitable and straightforward solutions and not meeting their needs and budget constraints. The invoicing of these tools led to a challenged relationship between the IH Rotterdam and the IH Company and a listing of the IH Rotterdam as a non-voting member (Impact Hub Compendium 2014). Since the global governance structure are there to serve the local IHs (see chapter 3), the owners of the IH Rotterdam were hoping for support and flexibility in their situation but rather felt the formal demands and requirements as an additional challenge. As requested by the IH Association, they recently filed a new feasibility study with the global network of IHs to be voted upon at the next general assembly. Constructive talk took place between the owners and the chairman of the IH association. Just before finishing this report, the owner of the Impact Hub informed that the challenges were resolved: they can present their feasibility study at the next general assembly for regaining full membership rights (PO).

5.3.1.2 External governance

The IH Rotterdam as actor does have partnerships and linkages with a number of other actors. We can distinguish between the municipality as specific partner, collaboration partners and potential/interested partners.

Figure 5-12: Rechtstreecx @ Impact Hub Rotterdam

Source: Twitter @ImpactHUB010



The relation to the municipality of Rotterdam is a special one, as they are owners of the building that the IH Rotterdam is located at. As outlined earlier, the building had been abandoned and the municipality would not invest due to budget cuts (Interviewee 1). Instead the municipality invited private parties (local branch of a supermarket chain, group of architects, Impact Hub) to explore together how to transform the building (Interviewee 1, 25). Currently, the IH Rotterdam has a temporary (1,5 years) low budget rental contract for one floor with the municipality of Rotterdam (Interviewee 1). They were accorded a temporary contract only, because the municipality did not want to “prioritize them as compared to the other initiatives” (Interviewee 25). In an interview, a municipal officer of the city development department, indicated that the wish of the municipality is still that the initiatives “do it together” (Interviewee 25). This has at times been a point of disagreement with the owners. Whether they can stay in this building depends

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on a good business case with the local supermarket and the group of architects according to the municipal officer. This plan has high priority within the IH Rotterdam in 2015 as announced by one of the owners during the New Years Reception (PO). The municipal officer herself is sympathetic to the work of the IH Rotterdam, but also has to legitimate her work within the municipal organisation, e.g. with the municipal real estate department. The IH Rotterdam does have good connections to the district commission as well as to other departments such as the 'stadsmarinier'. This also led to collaboration in terms of hosting neighbourhood events in the IH Rotterdam.

Collaboration partners are organisations such as Pameijer, or Zadkine with whom the IH Rotterdam wants to serve a societal goal. With Pameijer, an organization supporting people with (small) mental handicaps or psychosocial or mental problems, the IH Rotterdam was collaborating for the renovation of the current location. By doing so, they also involved a local craftsmen who is now working more often with clients from Pameijer (PO, Interviewee 1). With Zadkine, a school for vocational education, the IH Rotterdam is collaborating in offering accompanied internships for students, The IH Rotterdam is also working with other local initiatives such as a complementary currency (RotterDAM), the local FabLab organizers or Rechtstreex – being a pick-up point of their produce (see Figure 5-12). In addition, several neighbourhood events, whether organized by the district commission, municipality or local initiatives have been hosted in the IH (PO, Interviewee 1, 24). By being physically present at a prominent location in the neighbourhood, a lot more people just walk in. They are for example curious about the tenants, or curious about what became of their old community centre or search for a meeting place with their neighbourhood initiative. The municipality is sceptical about the local impact, they feel more people should come to the neighbourhood events, so that it becomes “*commonplace*” (Interviewee 25).

Other interested and/or incidental partners are the Groene Passage (a sustainable shopping mall), Rotterdam Milieu Centrum (Rotterdam Environmental Centre), the Erasmus University (e.g. DRIFT or Rotterdam School of Management) or the University of Applied Sciences (Hoogeschool Rotterdam).

5.3.2 Social learning

Learning does play a role in the IH Rotterdam, for some members more explicitly than for others. In this section we outline how the IH Rotterdam does relate to social learning, simply understood as a learning process taking place through social interaction. The IH Rotterdam can itself be described as a learning environment, it offers structured learning processes to its members such as through workshops, events or guided by the host. In addition, there is also ad-hoc or accidental learning between members.

The IH Rotterdam is considered as incubator and facilitator of learning networks (Interviewee 7) by its members. It offers an environment in which the individual is continuously encouraged and nudged into joining activities, such as the common lunch or the New Year's Reception (Interviewee 7, PO). It is through the interactions during these activities that knowledge is exchanged, i.e. learning takes place. Another member sees the IH being “*mainly about knowledge exchange*” (Interviewee 3). Extending this, the IH is also a safe place for experimentation, prototyping, failing and learning from it (Interviewee 1, 16, PO). Meaning that other members will be supportive rather than showing Schadenfreude if a project did not work out as planned. It offers structured learning processes such as the 'network strengthening' sessions or other kinds of more incidental courses and workshops. There is also guided learning by the host, who is responsible for knowing the ins and outs of members and putting them in touch.

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A last way of learning is the more accidental and ad-hoc learning by members from each other by getting in contact for example at the infamous coffee machine. It is thus dependent on the initiative of members to get in contact with one another and to ask for support, feedback or get inspired by what the other has to tell. There are different dimensions of what is covered through this contact. One dimension relates to the use of the facilities at the HUB (e.g. printer, WIFI) (PO). but also other technical questions about one's laptop or software (Interviewee 23, PO). Another dimension relates to having sparring partners on a content level, e.g. a last check on a mail to an important client. In addition, they exchange opinions about possible clients or collaboration partners. One member outlined that he "*learned how you can work as entrepreneur*" (Interviewee 24) and to find and harvest new business opportunities (Interviewee 24). Members also coach each other more practically, e.g. in how to make a film, how to give presentations or to market oneself (Interviewee 24, 26). What one can learn thus depends on the other members of the community. For the business development of one member, the IH Rotterdam helped a lot in the beginning in getting started as a freelancer, but at a certain point in time he missed people from whom he could learn more for his business development (Interviewee 18, also 24).

5.3.3 Resources

In terms of resourcing (in the broad sense and for example including natural, monetary, human resources), we first outline the business model of the IH Rotterdam and then we consider the IH Rotterdam as providing resources for its members to reach their goals.

As outlined earlier, the main value propositions of the IH Rotterdam are an eco-system for innovation and community-building based on providing a flexible workspace and entry to a (world-wide and local) network of people working on making the world a better place. It communicates this via word of mouth, the website and social media such as facebook and twitter. The business model of the IH Rotterdam has been outlined in detail in Willems (2014a, 2014b). In the following we focus on the main points.

The IH Rotterdam has two main income streams: the membership fees and the renting out of rooms. There are different kinds of memberships as outlined in Table 6. The main difference is the frequency of access to the workspace. In addition members might be using the address of the IH Rotterdam as company address (free of charge for HUB Frequent, against a monthly fee of 15 Euro for HUB Connect and HUB Casual). Membership includes being part of the IH network with access to HUBnet, the worldwide platform of IH members, discount for renting meeting rooms (50%) and for events and the use of communication channels of the IH Rotterdam for the promotion of activities (website, blackboard with events, Facebook, twitter). The IH Rotterdam has four meeting rooms and the open space which it rents out to its members and third parties. The rooms range in tariff from 10 – 50 Euro per hour or 25 – 125 Euro per half day and in size from 4-100 people.

Table 6: Overview types of membership

Source: Impact Hub Rotterdam website, 2015

	Use of Workspace	Monthly fee
HUB Connect	1x per month	25 Euro
HUB Casual	1-2x per week	95 Euro
HUB Frequent	Unlimited (own key)	195 Euro

Already on the website, they announce a number of particularities to this membership fee system (Impact Hub Rotterdam website, 2015). These include the possibility for discounts for starting entrepreneurs or for bartering (one weekly day of hosting in exchange for a HUB Casual

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membership). One can pay in the local complementary currency and is expected to contribute to the daily lunch either through bringing ingredients or donating Euro 3,50. In practice, this system seems to be even more flexible (see for example section 2.1.2 for the exchange with us as researchers). The relation between the IH Rotterdam as an actor and its members is thus based on an economic transaction but quickly goes beyond this to touch upon issues such as learning, self-realization, community (see section 5.3.1.1.3). One of the owners outlines that she would like to look into a different kind of value proposition for her members. She outlines it as follows: “*when you come here and work, it gives you leverage to increase your ideas and helps you to improve your business, your turnover. So it would be very interesting to have a model, based on the increase of your income that you plug back into the Hub.*” (Interviewee 1).

The IH Rotterdam is also searching for resources. In relation to the location, the IH Rotterdam searches for good ideas on how to turn the building into a ‘sustainable trade centre’ and the necessary financial resources. The development of the new façade is an interesting example. As the IH Rotterdam does not own the building and the future situation is unclear (temporary contract), there is no money earmarked and available to be invested in a make-over of the façade. One of the members is working on and with temporary public spaces – she managed to arrange 50% of the costs from the municipality. She started an experiment where she is using the façade as means of communication, see Figure 5-14. As a bottom line, the IH Rotterdam, even if doing social projects, would prefer not to rely on money from the (local) government – as this is considered unsustainable (Interviewee 1). Simultaneously, they also profit from it, e.g. in terms of having a low rent. As a last point, the IH Rotterdam is also searching for human resources and for a good solution for practical work and facility managing.

Figure 5-13: The façade of the IH Rotterdam building in November 2014 (compare with **Figure 5-7**)

Source: Impact Hub Rotterdam



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The IH Rotterdam provides resources for its members to reach their goals. These resources include a working environment, in terms of the facilities (e.g. desks, WIFI, meeting rooms, coffee), activities and its (access to a) local community and global network. These latter could be considered human resources as both community and network constitute access to other networks and people. The founder outlined the advantages of an international network as follows:

“If you then have an international network, as big as it is now, it is 10 times easier: you can find investors, board members, ambassadors, and everybody has their network in their region, it is very fast if you really want to get something done” (Interviewee 16).

For the IH Rotterdam members, however, it is mainly the local community which is interesting (see section 5.3.1.1.3). The IH Rotterdam also provides knowledge, which is exchanged between members (see section 5.3.2). It does not provide financial resources to its members, in that it is not funding or providing venture capital. One of the owners outlined that this is an area that she would like to look into more, namely improving the contacts between entrepreneurs and investors (Interviewee 1).

The network of the IH Rotterdam might also be considered as a resource for others than the members. This is how one of the owners approaches it. In her negotiations with the municipality, she emphasises the network as social capital through which redevelopment of the building can be accelerated: *“The challenge I see is: I believe that we can redevelop this very old real estate ourselves, with our network: working with our social capital we have here. I'm convinced we can find a way to do that and to gain ownership. [...] that's my conviction, and lots of people believe in that.”* (Interviewee 1).

5.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

In their current phase of navigating financial difficulties, the IH Rotterdam does not measure its impact. The focus is on sharing stories and supporting each other, according to the owner. They do however have an administration where they, for example, list membership numbers.

5.4 Other issues about the local initiative

From the interviews we could harvest a number of questions for our research as well as a number of other initiatives, networks or developments that we could take account of in terms of future case selection.

Questions for research:

- What is the role of consciousness development in TRANSIT's theory of transformative social innovation? (Interviewee 23)
- What is the role of cultural and religious aspects in TRANSIT's theory of transformative social innovation? (Interviewee 23)
- What is the role of ulterior motives and intuition in TRANSIT's theory of transformative social innovation? (Interviewee 16)
- How can you grow and generate larger impact while staying true to your original ideals and intuition, thus without becoming a standard company with all checks and balances? (Interviewee 16)

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Other initiatives, networks or developments to take account of:

- Open source movement: This is a network with impact that is relatively invisible, e.g. Drupal. (Interviewee 23)
- Alternative ways of financing: crowd-funding (Interviewee 16), Bit coins (Interviewee 23)
- Social networks, such as twitter, facebook, linked-in (Interviewee 23)
- Private sector development: Fast growing companies with innovative concepts and/or doing 'disruptive innovation': which companies are changing markets, e.g. BAS Energie in the Netherlands entering the energy market, Tesla, Paypal (Interviewee 23)
- Spirituality: Center for Integral Wisdom, Mind Valley (Interviewee 23)
- Innovative educational concepts, such a Knowmads in the Netherlands (Interviewee 26)

6 Local initiative 3: Impact Hub São Paulo

Author: Rita Afonso

6.1 Overview of development in the local initiative

6.1.1 Development of Brazil IH

In Brazil, there are a number of different cities where Impact Hubs are located. Impact Hub São Paulo (IH São Paulo) was the first Impact Hub (IH) in Brazil and the second in the world, implemented by the global IH network CEO (in that position from 2012 to 2014). IH Belo Horizonte, in the state of Minas Gerais, was the second IH funded in Brazil, and the IH São Paulo team was part of it. There are another two locations of IH at Recife (State of Pernambuco) and Curitiba (State of Paraná). And another IH initiative is in process to be opened in Florianópolis (State of Santa Catarina). About three years' time is needed to engage stakeholders before having an IH unit open. An attempt of founding an IH in State of Rio de Janeiro was unsuccessful, and we also interviewed one of the leaders who worked for two years on this initiative.

6.1.2 The understanding of the term "social" and IH values

In Brazil, we have been focusing on the IH São Paulo. In Brazil, the word 'social' has gained tremendous use in the last two decades always associated with actions or studies that are in some sense related with integration and social inclusion, in other words, activities and studies about (or to leverage) the inclusion of the poorest sections of the population in the labour market and the consumer market for goods and services. This is due to the fact that the country has major social inequality, and in the last 12 years, the federal government has concentrated on inclusion, allowing 30 million people (NERI 2010: 12) who had no purchasing power, to be able to ascend to the 'C' socio economic class.¹³

Looking at the website, reading articles and identifying actors in the network, the IH did seem to be a network, but focused on the richest sections of the population, which, as described above, seemed contradictory with the way the Brazilian researchers understood 'social' innovation. However, after accomplishing the participant observation period, we were surprised by the enormous dynamism of those involved and their belief in a better world.

¹³ 1 Euro equals 3.11 reais. The minimum wage in Brazil is R\$ 727.00. However, this is the wage paid to workers of the most unskilled jobs such as domestic servants, for example. Still, many of them earn two minimum wages. According the "Critério Brasil" (Brazil criterion from the Brazilian Association of Research Companies.), family average gross income of socioeconomic classes in the country correspond to the following values:

Classes	Renda média bruta familiar no mês em R\$
Classe A	11.037
Classe B1	6.006
Classe B2	3.118
Classe C1	1.865
Classe C2	1.277
Classe DE	895

For more informations, see: <http://www.abep.org/new/criterioBrasil.aspx>

Text box 4: IH São Paulo Purpose and Values

Purpose - "Develop knowledge, spaces and programs that inspire, connect and empower people to realize their business ideas for a radically better world".

Values - "**Trust** is the central principle of all actions and relationships in the Impact Hub. It is what makes us get up everyday and act believing in humanity and the possibility of creating a radically better world. Through whole, honest attitudes, expectations and with clear information and real and personal exchanges built on the Impact Hub, a reliable environment capable of extracting the best of all initiatives". **Courage** means "we dare to be ourselves. Addressing the challenges."

Risk - "Try the new. Open paths. Thinking the unthinkable and do the improbable".

Collaboration is when "you have a common goal with others and join efforts to reach it. In this process the virtues that each has are enhanced. When I'm looking to be my best version. It is when we unite the diversity and build something meaningful. It is a state of mind, is knowing how to learn and renew through the other". (Compendium 2014)

Their purpose and values, as shown in Text box, 4 express in fact what they seems to be: a group of friends trying to work with a more human emphasis. Later in the report, this emphasis will become more explicit in the contradiction between work and pleasure.

The quote below expresses the path they are opening to ease this contradiction (work/pleasure).

"It is a very spontaneous and genuine history (...) some friends without knowing that it was impossible to be done, did it. That today reaps benefits of an emerging global movement that seeks to reframe the own economy and culture of how people relate and that is before an absurd and very fast growing. (...) Emerged as a network of friends who began to grow and welcome people (...) is a giant organism, with very large scales that deals with a type of distributed operation that multinationals themselves today have, but with a language totally focused on centralization and control and they seek another language, and they come from that place. So for me is an incredible challenge" (Interviewee 22).

Furthermore, we understand that a profound change in relation to the mind set of youth from the privileged socioeconomic classes emerges with the IH in Brazil. In other words, we understand that IH has a huge potential for change, yet today it is still restricted to this part of the population and only in places where it operates. We must consider that Brazil is a very large country (about 200 million inhabitants) with a continental territory.

6.1.3 The IH business

On their website the IH São Paulo defines their business as:

"a global network of impact entrepreneurs. A shared workspace. An innovation laboratory. A business incubator. A collaborative centre of social entrepreneurs". They affirm that they offer "a unique ecosystem, resources, inspiration and collaboration opportunities to increase your impact. (...) diverse community will inspire, connect and enable you to develop your best work every step of the way" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.).

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The IH is based on the concept of networks - *"the only form of organization of this planet used by living systems"* - as a *"first organization stage for the emergence of issues and developments"* (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.). Supported in networks, they believe that the Impact Hub network is a 'platform' to scale up social innovations: *"Since the beginning this issue of the network was very strong. For instance, people who invested here, not all needed to use the space. But they wanted to be part of this network"* (Interviewee 17). Among the members of the IH São Paulo are people who pay only for the use of the network and do not use the physical space.

Another important observation is that IH's activities in Brazil are quite diffuse. IH does not plan exactly in which system to act and make changes. The IH here in Brazil is a group of people connected to the international network who wants to change the world, promoting a space that facilitates exchanges; but the business accepts that members of co-working spaces do not have a specific focus. Business members' activities are quite diffuse, see Text box 5 for examples.

Text box 5: The business of the member companies

IH members work with e.g.:

- the base of the pyramid - members offer, for large enterprises, business with the base of the pyramid. One of the jobs they perform is, for example, a project to sell products 'door to door' from a large company, with low income vendors, and which also lead health information for consumers, also with low incomes.
- different ideas in the Brazilian context - a research project whose members travel the world to find out what motivates people and sell these findings (sometimes before travelling, i.e. big companies sponsor them) in reports and workshop formats for companies operating in Brazil.
- communication consultancy - still quite 'business as usual', whose differential 'impact' is conferred to work impact strategies for clients (uses innovative process within the context).
- international representations of other movements and networks - representation of an international movement that certifies companies that want to become more sustainable and create a network between them.

The people who founded the IH in Brazil have worked in AIESEC, an international NGO, and gathered at a meeting in London during the process of foundation of IH London, the first one in the world. Nowadays, many participants of AIESEC are part of IH Network, according to interviewees from IH São Paulo.

There are, in Brazil, four IHs - São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Recife and Curitiba - and one trial initiative¹⁴ - Florianópolis¹⁵. São Paulo is the oldest one in Brazil and the partners that created these Hub had co-created the London version, even before the Brazilian one. They can be considered as a business centre where members are part of their network and use their spaces.

In São Paulo there are two units: Bela Cintra and Vila Madalena (both names of neighborhoods of São Paulo city). In Bela Cintra there are the spaces for the paying members and in Vila Madalena they rent the space for events (there are no members working) and use it for the same purpose for themselves.

¹⁴ It can take a period of about 3 years during which aspiring Hub Initiatives engage with stakeholders before opening a unit.

¹⁵ There was a Hub Initiative in Rio de Janeiro that failed. We interviewed the leader of this initiative.

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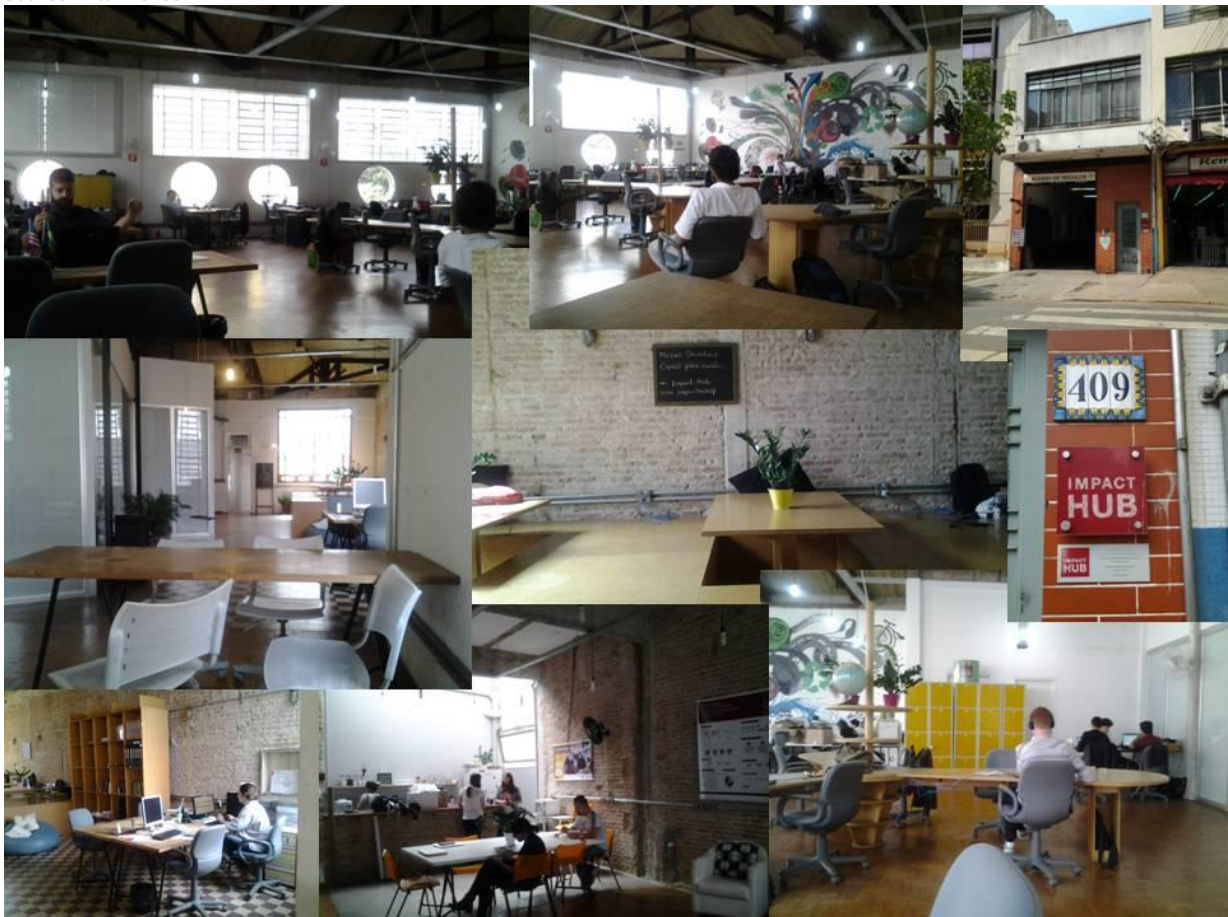
IH São Paulo has about 290 members, of which 60 use the co-working space. Both spaces are large (with few walls) and in both there are collective rooms with tables (shared work stations) and meeting rooms. Bela Cintra is a much larger space than Vila Madalena. Bela Cintra still has 'meeting tables' within the same space where there are collaborative work stations and in this unit it is possible for members to have a unit work station where they can leave their belongings as in a conventional office, but in the same space as the other. Figure 6-1 and Figure 6-2 show the two spaces.

The São Paulo IH is a private company¹⁶ (as are all IHs in Brazil) and offers four types of services (key outcomes): collaborative space (co-working), a business incubator (consultancy advice to the members included in membership payment package), the Hub School Festival, and an innovation consultancy (that works for other enterprises or organizations by payment).

Two respondents said that the IH is a place that serves start-up business; and when companies mature they can no longer work there. It is all about open architecture and the conversations that were so important to early learning. Thus, the IH can be regarded as an "incubator" for business.

Figure 6-1: Bela Cintra Impact Hub

Source: Rita Afonso



¹⁶In Brazil it is possible to have the following legal status: co-operative; NGO, private corporation company (sociedade anônima - S/A) and private company with limited liability company (some members). The IH is a private company with limited liability company.

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6.1.3.1 Revenues

The Hub survives on its own revenues, whose sources are the following: leasing space (with discounts for members and full price for non-members); classes (paid courses); members association (who pay tuition); consultancy (for companies and organizations); sponsorship for the 'incubator project' with activities with actors and projects on the periphery neighbourhood of São Paulo (but this is the business, according to them, that is functioning worst).

According to interviewees, only the spaces of co-creation are common between all the Impact Hubs around the world. All other activities can be different and they are free to adopt different models of management and organization, in the way that can better function in the city they are located:

"Basically what we do worldwide is to create spaces, physical or to relationships, that inspire, connect and empower people to enable them to make these ideas of entrepreneurship with a positive impact on the world (...) we always spoke of a radically better world". (PO)

"The Hub is a model of light incubation, creating an environment to flourish ideas". (PO)

Members (who join) have access to: the HUB net global virtual community; exclusive email and local group lists; access to closed Facebook groups; participation in network/community activities; global passport to use its services anywhere in the world (in IHs).

If there is a perennial issue in the IH São Paulo, it is 'change'. They spend a lot of time thinking about things they can change in the environment to bring together work, profit and purpose, as well as ways to improve business and learning. An interesting aspect is that the business model of local IH (rental spaces for co-working) is responsible for only 30% of revenue¹⁷, which forces them to think, all the time, about new ways to improve their profits.

6.1.3.2 Hub School Festival

With this aim, they created the Hub School Festival. The Hub School Festival began, at first, from the need to share knowledge, because all companies operating in IH had knowledge about something that other companies needed. So, The Hub School Festival was a way to accelerate the learning among members. In the first year (2010), it was conducted only for the member companies of the IH. The success of public and profits was great, what made the members decide to open the opportunity for anyone interested to participate both as 'student' and as a lecturer. Event management is done in a shared way: the hosts build a financial projection and, at the end, the profits are divided between all members, and everyone gets a percentage. In this way, one member does not get return only for his course, but for the whole result of the event. This stimulates everybody to collaborate to make the event a success, from the organization to the disclosure: *"It is not enough if my workshop is full if the others are empty"* (Interviewee 20). Currently, the Festival is held twice a year and lasts three weeks. It offers knowledge about different themes like social innovation, entrepreneurship, self-awareness, social impact, impact measurement, communication, sustainability, participation methodologies, design thinking, and many other themes which are new areas that do not have much material ready. According to one respondent it is *"a practical learning"* (Interviewee 17). These are spaces of exchanging where members (and other speakers) teach based on what they do day-to-day. More than 6.000 students have attended these events. Members get 20% discount. Moreover, it has free monthly workshops that take place for members of the network (for non-member costs around R\$ 150.00) (Festival Hub Escola 2014, accessed 2014).

¹⁷ The others revenues are: membership 10%, events 20%, Hub School 10%, projects 30% (sponsorship and consultancy).

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Figure 6-2: Vila Madalena Impact Hub

Source: Rita Afonso



6.1.4 Entrepreneurs of the network

The IH network members were accepted by IH São Paulo team because of their work with 'impact business', as they call it, i.e. diffusers of social or environmental benefits. Membership in the IH is personal, not institutional, so what is most valued is the status of the entrepreneur/professional. In this sense, they never refused entry of people in the network. However, in two cases and because they thought the new member did not contribute positively to the environment, they asked for the person to leave the network.

Entrepreneurs of the network in São Paulo are mostly around 30 years old, though there are some who are younger (23, 24 years) or older (45, 46). The stories of these young people are similar: they are young Brazilians from middle/high income classes who were educated in the best schools in Brazil and many attended university abroad, mainly business and finance schools.

Technically, they understand very well what they are doing and are quite innovative in this field, shaping new forms of management and organization. They are moved by what they call "*a radically better world*" (Compendium 2014) i.e., attempting to reconcile their business profits with social and environmental benefits and with pleasure of work. With all the entrepreneurs we talked in interviews or even informally, the common narrative was to work not only for money, but to transform the world: "*The biggest benefit that an entrepreneur is looking for when connecting to the Hub is to be connected with more people, to receive content, be inspired and have ways of making your business/project. And basically what a community person does is create those conditions*" (Interviewee 14).

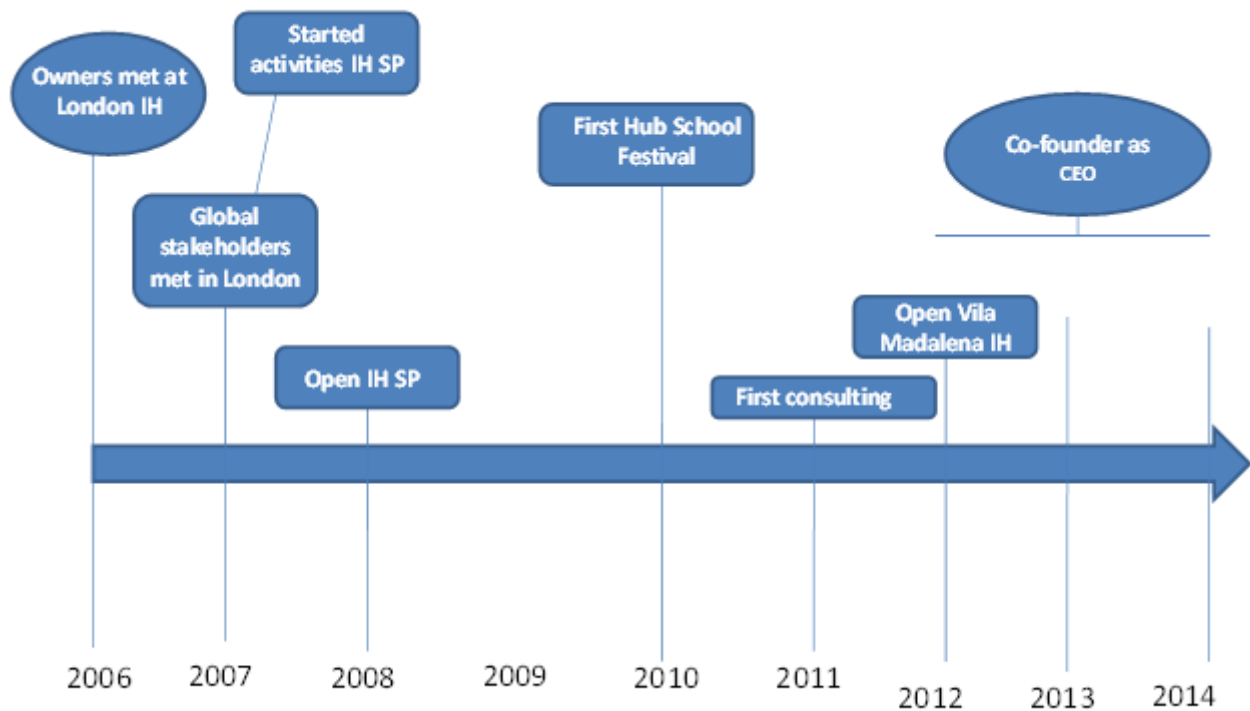
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The Impact Hub enables its network through these activities and others, such as events and meetings: Content events - courses, workshops, debates, co-creation; Inspiration and Integration Meetings - co-creation, presentations, lunches and parties.

In São Paulo there are two co-founders and one other partner who joined them after having worked as a volunteer in the initiative. One of them takes care of operations, another takes care of management and the last one takes care of new business (consulting and new business). There is a communication assessor and a person responsible to program the Hub School Festival. There are also two people who care for the day-to-day management (one in Vila Madalena and another in Bela Cintra). The communicator assessor has the host function in IH São Paulo.

Figure 6-3 and Table 6-1 are a timeline and a table (resp.) showing major changes in the local manifestation:

Figure 6-3: IH São Paulo timeline



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Table 6-1: activity and context timeline for IH São Paulo

Year / period	Important activities/changes/milestones in local manifestation	Important changes in context
2006	The two first owners from IH São Paulo meet in London in a London IH event. They get to know each other there. One of the owners says that in the beginning the Hub had "a trait more Hippie", attract a lot of social entrepreneurs and had little investor impact. In the beginning there was a lot of experimentation	Beginning to assemble the Hub in São Paulo.
2007	February – London; meeting with several people who wanted to open Hubs around the world ("was a transformative and very energetic meeting"). July - Started to find space in São Paulo for the second IH of the world.	In Brazil IH starts an approach including companies and NGOs. Events with organizations such as Natura and Artemisia18 took place. London had already formed the idea of co-working, but the rest was being raised in São Paulo, attracting a very diverse audience and arranging the space through co-design.
2008	Open Bela Cintra IH, in São Paulo (the first one)	Open the co-working space
2010	First Hub School Festival	Another activity beyond co-working
2011	First open Hub School Festival First Consulting - With the cosmetics company Natura, a project in Manaus (State of Amazonas) designing space of Amazon innovation.	Another market and a new way to access resources A new market and a new way to access resources.
2012 - 2014	2012 – Opening of the second location in Vila Madalena One of the owners from IH São Paulo becomes CEO of the International IH Council (2012-2014)	Another way to access resources Brazil (more) connected with the global network

6.2 Aspects of ‘innovation’ and ‘change’ of the local initiative

The theoretical basis for network and scale of social innovation are presented on IH São Paulo website with the article published by the Berkana Institute, authored by Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze (n.d.), called "Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale".

The authors first refer to the concept of emergence - *"how life creates radical change and takes things to scale"* - considering the concept of networks and connections as necessary to transform society. According to them, through emergence, networks connect and lead to communities of practice: *"living systems begin as networks, shift to intentional communities of practice, and evolve into powerful systems capable of global influence"* (Wheatley and Frieze n.d. b, c). Also on the website, the local manifestation defines social change and innovation:

"We, Impact Hubs, by applying the lessons of living systems and working intentionally to create spaces for emergence, we are demonstrating how local social innovation can be scaled. This

¹⁸<http://www.natura.com.br/www/> : <http://www.artemisia.org.br/>

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process promotes solutions to the major challenges facing society, such as health, education, new economic systems and more sustainable solutions for urban life" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.).

The most radical change in São Paulo is to change the mind-set of the media and high-income youth. Brazil is a country with great inequality. These young people from IH, all respondents, grew up believing that work and well-being were different and impossible to go together (in one form or another it has been in all narratives). Then they worked in traditional business and did volunteer work on weekends, where they found more pleasure. What makes the IH more clearly linked with change and innovation is that it puts these young people together and tries to make them realize that it is possible to 'be happy and earn money at the same time' (even if they earn less).

Another representative change they promote is related to the logic of business. They have a methodology to create and develop business (and they apply it to the IH itself and within the members in the network)¹⁹.

"Put knowledge and the gift of each person to do something larger (...) very focused on the collaboration (...) with us exchanging, everyone can grow together and then it will bring a greater impact" (Interviewee 20).

For many respondents, IH is the bridge between dreams, reality and ideas – bridges with different people who can assist with the viability: *"You do nothing for the Hub, the Hub is oriented towards you or towards some other purpose. And The Hub is here to support you in that "* (Interviewee 13).

The activities of the Hub School are fairly valued by all respondents. They buy a pass that permits them to circulate on all activities. It was the activity most frequently mentioned spontaneously when they spoke of how useful IH is: *"We are constantly changing, and this I regard as one of the achievements of the Hub (...) because I believe that innovation is not only in what we do, but the way of doing, being very fond to rethink and try"* (Interviewee 17).

6.2.1 Relation with social innovation

Already before the IH São Paulo started, there was a network of entrepreneurs who wanted to change the world and already worked in this direction. The IH joined these people in an appropriate space that empowers and inspires them to meet their goals. Respondents see IH São Paulo as a space for social innovators:

"Impact Hub São Paulo is part of a global network (...) Soon discovered that there were many people with that pioneering spirit seeking to turn the world working from their homes or coffee shops. They were entrepreneurs who combined determination and rigor of an entrepreneur and the passion of an artist or activist to face the greatest challenges in the world. The idea

¹⁹ The methodology is related to the 'Golden Circle' (According to them, they took inspiration from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqZyg2XAmDk> / Senek, Simon O. *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, 2009). The way business is done is inverted and the Hub Experience is based on this. In the first part (about 1:30 each part) of the video, they talk and present the IH and its aims. In the second part, they do a workshop based on this, proposing that different groups of different people try to imagine a new business based on the golden circle. While in traditional business, it is first necessary to know what to produce or service (even the more modern market research shows the way from the area or sector, for instance), their logic is the opposite. First they try to understand the beliefs of the people involved; the second step is to understand or try to find out which beliefs are shared among those involved in the business (or business idea in preparation). The third step corresponds to an attempt to determine what competencies exist in the group, while they think about what product or service that group could create, develop and deliver to market. And only after this step the plans are made.

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was devised to create a habitat for Social Innovation that is inspired by the best of an incubator, an innovation agency, a think-tank, an office, a coffee shop and an art studio" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.)

On their website, the IH São Paulo is described as an "*integrated ecosystem*" capable of interrelated business with social impact, enhancing the work of the members:

"an integrated ecosystem or community that could be a meeting and collaboration platform for people with the same profile: potential entrepreneurs who want to create business with social impact, or even where practical dreamers can come together to innovate" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.).

By being together, exchanging knowledge and interacting, it is possible to achieve more favourable conditions, strengthening themselves and their innovative ideas (and therefore difficult to implement at an early stage) and to find markets:

"I think the Hub is unique. First by how it predisposes to remain the way it remained as a concept (...) and because independent of those moments in which the Hub passes it keeps bringing things that are sensational (...) And all these initiatives I see emerging here in São Paulo are from the people who passed through here or who have been bitten by the bug of people who passed through here" (Interviewee 13).

In this sense, the IH has created new, more collaborative social relations among members, exchanging learning and knowledge. It has also created new processes, in addition to co-working, for example, the hybrid path for financial support it began:

"In the end of 2006 the first meeting took place, yet without physical space which began to be sought in 2007. We had difficulties to reassure the owner of the space, since we did not have assets or fixed employment. We needed to pay six months of rent in advance: we raised the money with people we knew, some of it we raised as a loan with interest, some without loan, and some as a donation. We co-created the space seizing more investment for the construction" (Interviewee).

Many of the ideas and actions arising in IH São Paulo can become models and new ways of thinking as in the case of this hybrid financing that inspired other forms of financing used by the members, such as a business that tries to provide start-ups with resources from ordinary people.

Although co-working in Brazil is not an innovative way to work anymore, the IH São Paulo was the first to open in Brazil. As such, they are a great reference and after them a series of similar spaces opened in São Paulo and in the country:

"São Paulo has over 40 co-working spaces, a lot of them influenced by The Hub Initiative: My Hub Space, Design Hub, My Hub, Laboriosa and Goma that was originated from the Hub Rio Initiative. None of them worries about social initiatives or impact business, just The Hub. I'm glad we have enough people doing it, because it means that the world is changing (Interviewee 14).

In São Paulo some big enterprises from different productive sectors (such as banks and cosmetics industry) start to use IH consultancy to co-design spaces for creative work. IH São Paulo has expanded services targeting this audience. This is an emerging market to IH São Paulo which brings new relations between them and big enterprises:

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"So thinking of innovation as a whole, we are good at some part of it, because it is part of the innovation you create the appropriate processes and leave it running well. That's where we have to work better (...) we increasingly have explored this with companies because they are usually the opposite of us; they are bad in having the idea and prototype fast and cheap, and they are very good at defining the process" (Interviewee 17).

Text box 6: IH São Paulo Consulting Services

Design of multi-stakeholder processes to generate social innovation

They design and conduct dialogue cycles and stakeholder engagement processes. The methodology emerged from the practical experience of the network and involves in-depth interviews, trend mapping, group dialogues and co-creation workshops.

Entrepreneur training to create shared business value

Connect a network of entrepreneurs to lead the process of reinventing large organizations and implement shared value strategies. On the website they say "we empower entrepreneurs in four ways: developing a support network inside and outside the company; providing tools to support them in the challenge to create and implement new products and services; creating environments and innovative forums within the company; supporting in the process of 'internal sale' of new product, service or process".

Trusteeship by innovation content to inspire, connect and empower

Offer lectures, workshops and courses to inspire, connect and empower managers, leaders and entrepreneurs.

Creating spaces that foster innovation and collaboration in businesses and public spaces

Through co-design methodology, they "re-design and re-mean spaces that serve to be creative in its various situations of interaction (...) This method is inspired by the human-centred design that puts the individual at the centre of the process". (Impact Hub São Paulo n.d.)

Another important innovation of the founders and members of the IH, is that they created a new relationship with the labour market and no longer accept a job that does not give them pleasure: "(...) *two points: one was to reinvent the work, seeing work as something totally different, purposeful, more lazing, more interesting, more daring, more colourful; and another was the question of support for many entrepreneurs*" (Interviewee 17).

The basic change is to see work as something pleasurable, and that can contribute to a better world. Work as something beyond financial results must also generate social and/or environmental outcomes:

"I believe we have an innovation that comes from the inside out. Since the beginning, we have provoked and transformed ourselves to create the Hub. Resign, create something totally new, experience... We looked at London, but we were not satisfied with that and were thinking about what goes right for Brazil (...) And I think one issue that has always compelled us to innovate was boldness, the fact that we want to do something very different (...) forced us to innovate in process" (Interviewee 17).

Some of these young people said that before the IH they did not know it was possible to experience 'good work' together with traditional work. Some said they worked in the traditional market to make money (dissatisfied with the amount of hours invested in it) and as volunteers in projects with purpose.

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The surnames of families of young founders and many members of IH are traditionally the names of families involved with business. These young people traditionally would work after completing their studies in traditional businesses, large corporations, in specific sectors, following the tradition of their families. But they were not satisfied with the type of work they did and questioned what that work was for:

"Because people there already have a conscience they do not want to work with golden handcuffs shackled to an organization, selling your time in exchange for the holidays has never been a delight to my generation" (Interviewee 22).

6.2.2 Relation with system innovation

The system innovation promoted by IH São Paulo can be connected with what they call "impact". IH refers to itself and its members as 'Impact Entrepreneurs' in search of a better world:

"We develop spaces with soul. We facilitate engagement processes. We co-create motivational content. We do this to generate innovations, creating a collaborative culture and enabling the spirit of entrepreneurs in companies" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.)

They use their slogan, "a radically better world", as the ultimate goal to be achieved by IH São Paulo. However, the meaning of *impact* or *radically* are diffuse and it is neither set in any primary or secondary document, nor in interviews. The term *impact* referring to entrepreneurs and business can have several meanings: the environment provided by the physical space; the belief in a better world, and the actions for the creation of a more sustainable world. In some cases it also refers to a more collaborative and horizontal way of work, as we see below:

"a unique ecosystem inspiration, resources, knowledge and opportunities for collaboration to create a radically better world" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.)

"businesses and projects that promote positive impact on society at local and global level. Our members are entrepreneurs, social investors, professionals, activists, creatives, consultants, entrepreneurs working in large organizations, students, educators, future entrepreneurs and anyone and /or organization interested in directing their activities to a more sustainable reality" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.)

"we believe that a better world is created through the joint achievements of creative individuals, committed, passionate and focused on common purpose" (Impact Hub São Paulo website n.d.)

"we seek to create spaces and experiences to integrate these restless people who do not agree with social, environmental, cultural and economic inequality. They see opportunities for change and mobilize your community to transform reality" (Bussacos 2014)

The impact of IH is related less with the concrete results of the business and more with a change of mind-set to create new ways of working and new forms of business, that result, in addition to income or financial resources, in improving the quality of life and also ways of working that do not "close their minds": *"It helps me, because when you do only your work, you began to close your mind; it helps me to maintain my vision open and connected with everything that is happening"* (Interviewee 11).

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When asked about systemic innovations, the answers are quite different, concentrated in changes in the educational system (referring to the Hub School Festival) and the financial system (hybrid forms of fundraising). Both the IH São Paulo as well as some companies that were born as member are being called by large companies for consulting or sponsorships. This means that in general, companies are recognizing the innovative value of IH São Paulo.

6.2.3 Relation with game-changers

During the interviews, we noticed that not all respondents knew the meaning of the expression 'game-changers'. We had to help them in this understanding so that they could respond.

They understand game changers as something that impacts and is impacted by them and their actions as trends. The main game-changers they indicated were: the educational system, work system and financial system, and the shared economy.

Educational System: Regarding the educational system, the clear reference of respondents was, at first, the open and collaborative way of exchanging knowledge provided by São Paulo Hub School Festival, where everyone learns informally from other participants of the Festival. But collaborative space and working with many exchanges between members was also cited: "*People are not used to recognize what they do well, they are very insecure. The Hub School aims to change that, an event to get you out of the comfort and lead you to show what you can do*" (Interviewee 9).

Work System: For the respondents, the traditional work system in companies with top-down decision making is outdated, which is why companies loose talent. The IH São Paulo influences this system supporting new ways of working, where decisions are more horizontal and creative:

"Relations with work are totally different, careers focus on new values, which are autonomy, freedom, welfare, investment in learning versus security, defined career... Zero fidelity with companies (...) And even more understandable that (...) not entering the company you have an alternative to earn money as a start-up, so even if you want to make money, soon and enough, there is another system there. It will increasingly be something possible. So this is changing, and has already changed a lot, but I think it will change much more from now on. Will be very difficult for the companies (...) The companies have no idea of what to do" (Interviewee 15).

Financial system and collaborative economy: The Hub model promotes entrepreneurship, according to the respondents, supported by the group and more collaborative way of working, where the investor is not the only source of power - and power is distributed between investor and entrepreneur:

"One of the most important macro-trend would be entrepreneurship. Nowadays it's really easy to open a company in a shared economy model, and besides that, people are more able to change to a new business because the power today is with the entrepreneur and not with the investor" (Interviewee 14).

"A macro trend would be how to reorganize the resources, giving less importance to the money and material resources dimension, which are finite, and most importance to the knowledge sharing, that multiplies by using" (Interviewee 22).

6.2.4 Relation with societal transformation

Looking from the Brazilian perspective, there is a change in the mind-set of the youth involved in central positions at the IH and born into the upper middle class in the country. The IH has a role in Brazil, specifically in São Paulo, to 'join' young people who were uncomfortable with the path laid out for them because they felt stifled by traditional middle/upper class work. This network empowers them by showing them that what they feel is shared with other young people with similar profiles and dissatisfaction. It also shows them that it is possible to follow a purpose and make money at the same time, even if at first one has to accept to earn a little less or nothing, while planning and developing a business or an idea. Some say that their businesses are at a stage, that they already earn more than they earned in previous jobs. But all believe that they will get enough to enjoy quality of life with their business.

The work of the Impact Hub in Brazil, with its disruptive way to act in the labour system, the education system and the financial system, though it works within several sub-systems, as well as its thinking and acting is still that of a minority. Co-working, for example, in Brazil, was introduced by the IH, and today there are hundreds of similar spaces throughout the country. But many of these spaces are just a way to share the costs of doing business and not necessarily a way to pursue sustainable business. The other co-working spaces in Brazil, for example, work with traditional business, i.e. they are not businesses oriented to sustainability.

6.2.5 Relation with narratives of change

The following ensemble of ideas and concepts are taken from interviewees:

Impact Business - Business that are, at the same time, positive in profit and in social and environmental results, business related with positive impact. In a certain way, this expression is used in business that works with new ideas and in a new relationship between people: "*We work with people who want to cause a positive impact on the world, so the members have a very similar way of thinking*" (Interviewee 14). All interviewed members mention impact business and transformers business, more horizontal business in terms of power and knowledge and talk about the network as a 'platform' for these businesses to multiply.

Purpose - Related with impact business. Business that have new values that go beyond financial profit:

"I started as a communication company, but after having been in touch with the Hub, the proposal became work with communication, but with different purposes, more focused on NGOs, for example; nowadays, it provides strategic planning services to small initiatives" (Interviewee 13)

The 'purpose' appears as if other businesses (most common) had no purpose. When referring to 'purpose', they are referring to 'good intentions' i.e., businesses that encourage people to promote their work with a better quality of life for themselves and for others. Much of the IH São Paulo speech is clearly in opposition to how the 'jobs' in large companies are positioned in their speeches, as a limiting work, hierarchical and vertical in terms of power.

Social Innovation - Referring to new forms of relationships between people, in the way they work and in the purposes of the business: "*My idea is to create an area of social innovation in the enterprise*"

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(...) to think about scalable projects that have impact (...) that really develop the communities" (Interviewee 11).

Scalable - Referring to business, ideas and network: *"Is the technology that will perform a scalable change in social projects, really ..."* (Interviewee 11).

According to the interviewees, they all 'do' social innovation and everything they do is scalable. In fact in their speeches, they believe that because the network is global, scale already exists.

A curious point is that they feel like they are perceived as 'hippies' because they see work as something with values like friendship and dialogue as more important than financial results. For these respondents, the movement of social businesses, impact investments, the shared economy and platforms that allow these movements to scale will change the world.

6.3 Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment of the local initiative

All respondents pointed out that they feel empowered to be part of the group. They also use the expression 'empowered' commonly:

"What we do is create an environment where people are inspired and connect and gain more courage and more feature to make their ideas happen. So our impact is much the empowerment of the individual and the organization to make the idea work out; and have a structure that supports the success of this idea and scale it globally (...) the impact is very encouraging, showing that it is possible and there are people who are there to dream and to make it happen along with you" (Interviewee 14).

It was common during the interviews that the respondents talked about how they felt alone and without support in the beginning (when they perceived that they did not want to do the things they studied, or not in the same way) as it was common to hear from them how they felt like 'hippies' when they met the IH. The IH put them together, something like 'you are not alone':

"I think this is what we do, this is our main focus (...) and we do this through connections, content, benefits that allow viability, infrastructure, space. The hub is a tool of empowerment, encouragement and viability of new business" (Interviewee 14).

Another very relevant issue in change and innovation of this group is that the members do not feel alone anymore in their (dis)satisfaction. At the IH they share the same feelings and appear quite happy to be able to overcome the insecurity felt on *"having to start over alone and not knowing if they could"*.

They have more or less the same narrative and they really believe that they are working to change the world. The IH empowers people who want to first change their own life, and as a consequence change the world. They try to change their lives because they cannot find meaning in working in a big enterprise. Some of these young people, even when staying in big business, want to change the way they work, within the enterprises. Because they have a good formal education they are able to point out where the work should change.

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"It starts to lack sense, to lack a purpose. I identify that I needed to work with something more human, the brought impact, innovation. And then I found out The Hub (...) it was clear that this was indeed the way" (Interviewee 11).

They recognize themselves as a generation that changes the way one works, putting together money, a purpose and social and environmental benefits:

"The Hub was able to see a vocation and it is on the border of the decay of the old and emergence of the new. This place is an uncomfortable place (...) So in terms of the future, they are the people who are building bridges (...) I do not know what will happen in the future, but I have seen two things: either a success connecting different worlds and the failure of, sometimes, been unable to make this worlds communicate, especially when we talk about the social "(Interviewee 22).

Some of the respondents refer to themselves as a 'tribe' or a 'crowd'. They use this expression to show they feel like a group that, for the first time, broke the commitment to traditional work. Respondents say that the 'other people' (parents, friends, colleagues) think they are the 'hippies' or 'crazies of the 21st century', because of the collaborative values:

"In the beginning the Hub had more a Hippie trait, attract a lot of social entrepreneur and had very little investor impact; but the profile of the founders of the different Hubs was giving the tone, I had a more corporate background and in the beginning there happened a lot of experimentation". (Interviewee 17)

As 'hippies' we can understand that the collaborative values and the difference between the way of working between the members of the IH São Paulo and large companies are noticed, even by new members: *"I wake up, I meet 'my people'"*. (Interviewee 11)

"For me, it was phenomenal (...) here I could understand that there was a new universe that was what I imagined and that was happening, I found "my cup of tea" (...) Here I understood that I would be able to structure my way to work and to support myself financially with this" (Interviewee 13).

"The worldview is very similar. A view that you can work with what you love, doing good things for the world. A slightly freer vision of traditional market structures (...) are people who are willing to innovate" (Interviewee 14).

Respondents said that the format of co-working space of the IH allows, in fact, many exchanges. But two of them claimed that when the company has success and focus (after developing the idea and with the help of others and the collaborative space), they cannot concentrate at work and therefore need to leave the space.

".. because... it was a lot of interaction and at the end, they could not focus on what they must do... there is a very open space, people say 'help me on it', 'I saw you know this.' And then they could not do what they must do (...) 2 or 3 person told me that, that they need to rent another space..." (Interviewee 11).

The space of co-working is claimed to be useful only in the beginning of the development of the idea, when they are learning, but "when they learn enough to do" they must go out because the space negatively impacts their work.

6.3.1 Governance

6.3.1.1 Internal governance

The IH São Paulo consists of three local organizers: two co-founders and one owner (who came later than the others and first was a volunteer at IH São Paulo). All decisions at the local level are taken by these three local organizers. The owner is responsible for the operation of the organization. One of the co-founders is responsible for the management and the other one takes care of new business and consulting.

The communication assessor is an employee of the IH with a very important role in the co-working space: being the host of the IH (see Text box 1 in Chapter 3):

"The operating system of the Hub works with hosting. The Host is the person who receives (...), which makes you see the network, because the network is invisible, then the Host introduces you; and this role is essential because you use better the platform when you know who is circulating there" (Interviewee 22).

Another employee takes care of the Hub School Festival, organizing the programming; and two others are linked to the owner in the operation work. All reportedly get along very well with each other and also with members (working in the co-working space). The co-founder does consultancy most of the time outside the IH São Paulo space and is the majority shareholder. This is the basic structure of administration of the local initiative.

The space has associated members who pay for its use. Decisions involving these members, such as programming the Hub Festival School, are articulated between the local organizers, employees and members involved. The members are divided into two categories: the members who use the co-working space and the members that are only part of the network, i.e. have access to of the online network and cheaper access to the Hub School Festival, but do not use the physical space to work.

The IH local organizers are involved in the everyday decisions in IH São Paulo: *"The local governance makes few things"*(Interviewee 17). At the global level, they are adopting a way of horizontal management referred to as 'holacracy' and a tool called 'liquid democracy' (see section 3.3.1). To help and validate the internal governance there is a council made up of people from other organizations external to IH São Paulo which meets once a year with local organizers. The IH São Paulo business model comprises an ecosystem formed by local organizers (who profit from or are employed by the business), the members (who pay for the type of use they make of the physical space, the network and the Festival) and the board.

6.3.1.2 External governance

The interviews brought little result for this item. Spontaneous answers to the questions showed that there is hesitation for responses, caused by lack of knowledge. Many members do not know how the IH São Paulo relates to external actors, even among those who work in the physical space of the IH and are more present in the everyday life of the organization.

The most important actors who emerged in the responses were 'the founders' and the 'communications assessor', even when we were asking about external actors. Others, more generally, answered 'the network'.

"I do not know the actors, I do not work there, but the founders are important actors."
(Interviewee 11)

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"Without the network, without the entrepreneurs, the Hub does not exist." (after a long moment of silence, she says that there is no clear reference) (Interviewee 20).

However, one member indicated two external actors which the IH São Paulo relates to: Ashoka and VoxCapital, an impact business investor that invested in the IH São Paulo foundation.

Only one of the responding members - who does not work in the physical space, gave a more elaborate answer:

"The situation is divided in two levels: the high administration, that are the ones who can look from the outside and act in a more strategic way, and the second level, that are the ones who sees the day by day and make everything happen. The high administration are the most important actors and the leaders of The Hub, because they are the ones that 'keep the thing alive'." (Interviewee 13)

6.3.2 Social learning

Social learning is the most striking fact in IH, especially among members and new businesses that work in the co-working space. There is a great dynamism within the space and many exchanges between members.

There's also learning in the virtual IH national network, a platform that brings together connected members in Brazil. There is also the virtual international network platform, but among respondents, only the local organizers of the IH used it, although all have access to it. Businesses in IH São Paulo are very diverse, and everyone has their external network, which allows exchanges and learning.

Also, the day by day interaction is an important area of social learning between local organizers and members. Here, again, the role of the communication assessor - as a host - is essential for connections between people. The aim of this position is to connect people, and the exchange may allow acceleration of knowledge and learning.

The Hub School Festival is the highlight of this trade. Many people roam the two units of the IH São Paulo during this event. They are people from the network and from outside the network going to the IH to offer and attend lectures and workshops, teaching one another what they know in a very informal setting. Furthermore, the Festival management model contributes to learning. The financial model is shared, i.e. they plan together the costs and prices, and the bottom line is divided by all who give courses and workshops as well as the work of promoting the Festival. The Festival activities are broad in terms of themes. In 2014, there were activities such as: design thinking, collaboration, development groups, creation, urban planning, communication, human development, self-knowledge, networks, co-design, social projects, mobilization campaigns, social business, financing causes, crowd funding, and start-ups.

6.3.3 Resources

Human resources seem to be the greatest asset in IH São Paulo. When they join, new members gains access to the national and global virtual community, to the local e-mail list, to the Facebook groups, and to all activities of the IH. The co-working space also creates the physical space for in-person networking. The main feature of IH innovation is knowledge of people and the link between them. Through this, partnerships and exchanges arise. The resources come from all this exchange, human resources, financial resources, technological resources.

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Regarding financial resources, the IH São Paulo initiative relies on membership packages, events (space rental), consulting for companies and organizations and sponsored projects. As explained in previous chapters, the business model of IH in Brazil is a fragile model.

6.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

In IH São Paulo, the management and financial performance are monitored but there is no impact monitoring. According to one interviewee:

"Measuring the impact is our weak point. Already had a few attempts, but are still early in the process. The impact is indirect and therefore difficult to measure. Additionally, the profile of members is to do and not to stop and analyse." (Interviewee 17)

Some members even claim that the impact of IH is not measurable because the impact occurs after they leave IH and/or what occurs in people, changes that occur within them to build 'a radically better world'. In São Paulo, an internal member mentioned the efforts of the international network on measuring impact. But respondents say that they do not have this culture, while recognizing that it is important: *"The biggest one is the impact of the mental model of being a reference for people and showing that it is possible to work in this different way"* (Interviewee 12)

6.4 Other issues about the local initiative

Travel (to know the world) has a very important role in the Brazilian local manifestation. This is related to the possibility of knowing the world, people and different realities of their own. The connection with the international group AIESEC is important if the IH São Paulo.

In the research, the most known networks studied in TRANSIT are Ashoka and IH. Some interviewees know Eco villages, but other networks are virtually unknown.

7 Synthesis of case study

The Impact Hub (IH) is a global network of social entrepreneurs that combines elements from co-working spaces, innovation labs and business incubators. There are currently over 70 IHs spread across 5 continents with another 20 IHs in the making, which are all members of a global Impact Hub Association (Impact Hub website 2015). Combined, these have a total of some 9.000+ members, who are mostly social entrepreneurs ‘working on ideas for a radically better world’²⁰. This chapter focuses on comparing the three local Impact Hubs (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, São Paulo) and the global network.

7.1 Overview and condensed time-line

7.1.1 Identity, mission and activities

As the name “*Impact Hub*” indicates, there is an explicit aim to have societal impact. This goal is manifested at different levels: the global network organisation, the local IH sites, as well as in the projects and enterprises of most of the individual members. This impact is aimed for through three ‘key value propositions’ which are shared across the three local IHs under study and the global network. These are (1) an ‘inspiring space’, (2) a ‘vibrant community’ and (3) ‘meaningful content’, which together constitute what is referred to as ‘the Hub Experience’ (Impact Hub Compendium, 2014). Underlying these value propositions and activities are the globally shared IH values of ‘trust’, ‘courage’ and ‘collaboration’, which are fully subscribed to by all three IHs. IH Rotterdam supplements these with local values, namely ‘commitment’, ‘openness’ and ‘drive’.

In terms of physical space, IHs usually provide a shared open co-working space, meetings rooms and possibly separate office spaces for individual start-ups. These are carefully designed: all three IHs showed interior design elements with wood, metal and also plants with an upcycled, DIY and unpolished touch to it. These co-working spaces are ‘hosted’, a term that comes from ‘The Art of Hosting’ which is a leadership strategy based on facilitation and moderation. At all three IHs, hosts engage in operational and facilitative tasks as well as community building during office hours. Next to the physical space, the IHs provide a virtual space, the HUBNet, through which it connects members across the globe. In a more metaphorical sense, space is also provided in terms of a laboratory, an ecosystem, or an incubator. Next to these similarities, the actual locations are different across the three IHs. While IH Amsterdam and São Paulo are located at an upper range location, the IH Rotterdam could be seen as a gentrifying element in a busy multicultural district shopping street of Rotterdam. However, all of them seem to be firmly embedded in the urban fabric of their respective city.

At the heart of the IH are its members, referred to as either community or network: this includes 290 members in São Paulo, 220 in Amsterdam, and 87 in Rotterdam. The socio-economic profile of the members of all three IHs is very similar: mostly highly educated urban dwellers with relatively high socio-economic status. Most of them have travelled and/or worked abroad. One member of the

²⁰ These numbers are obviously not set in stone, as we had interviewees mentioning different numbers. According to one interviewee, there are 7.500 people around the globe that are “engaged on a day to day basis”, of which 50% are “social entrepreneurs driving their own initiative in either a business or a not-for-profit model”, and on a “lighter basis” there are over 100.000 people involved (e.g. in events, programmes, partnerships, advisory board, etc. (interviewee 8). Another interviewee indicated that there are about 450 “Hub-makers” around the world, that are involved in ‘making’ the 60+ Impact Hubs, including founders, but also other core-team members involved in organising, managing and running the local sites (interviewee 2).

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IH Rotterdam outlined that members across IHs do share a certain way of working: *“If you get to know somebody, and this person is member of a Hub, then you immediately have a different relation. It says something about your way of working that you are an entrepreneur, who is intrinsically motivated.”* (Interviewee 26). This way of working also combines a focus on social impact through entrepreneurial and business-oriented activities. Members are social entrepreneurs, freelancers or otherwise self-employed individuals, who combine earning a living, work driven by personal values, and making the world a better place.

Each IH offers activities which are to different degrees programmed by the local IH organisation or by its members. A broad array of events are offered: they include workshops, trainings, discussions and special sessions focusing on enterprise, career or personal development as well as societal developments. These activities are very much dependent on the local members and their business propositions but also their wants and needs. Each local IH has characteristic activities. Members at the IH Rotterdam for example also program physical activity such as regular yoga and meditation lessons. The IH São Paulo has the Hub School Festival: a three weeks event, programmed by members along their business propositions, taking place twice a year. A similar event (in set-up but not in terms of the financial model) are the Magic Impact Hub Days in Rotterdam – which are also used by members to prototype new business ideas. The IH Amsterdam offers regular “workbench” meetings with practical training for entrepreneurs (e.g. Communications & PR. Sales & Marketing), and besides that, a range of other workshop formats such as ‘innovation labs’, ‘action cafés’, ‘challenges’ and ‘Art of Hosting’ trainings.

7.1.2 Development of the Impact Hub(s)

The development of the IH is intimately intertwined with the rise of ‘social entrepreneurship’ and ‘social innovation’. Social entrepreneurship can generally be characterised as an activity that integrates economic and social value creation (Mair and Martí 2006), by using business skills and knowledge to create an enterprise that is commercially viable while also accomplishing a social purpose and contributing to innovation and societal transformation (Alvord et al 2004:262). In contrast to the notion of a ‘social enterprise’, the notion of ‘social entrepreneurship’ is focused more on the individual level, i.e. ‘social entrepreneurs’ (Birch & Whittam, 2008:441). The defining characteristic of a social entrepreneurship is not whether or not it makes profit, but rather that there is *“an explicit aim to benefit the community”* and that *“the material interest of capital investors is subject to limits”* (EMES, 2011). One can argue that the rise of social entrepreneurship as a discourse and as a practice, is intertwined with the notion of social innovation. The explicit attention for the latter was one of the distinguishing features of the IH network in the starting days. Both discourses and practices on social innovation and social entrepreneurship have ‘co-evolved’ with the development of the IH network, mutually enabling and strengthening one another.

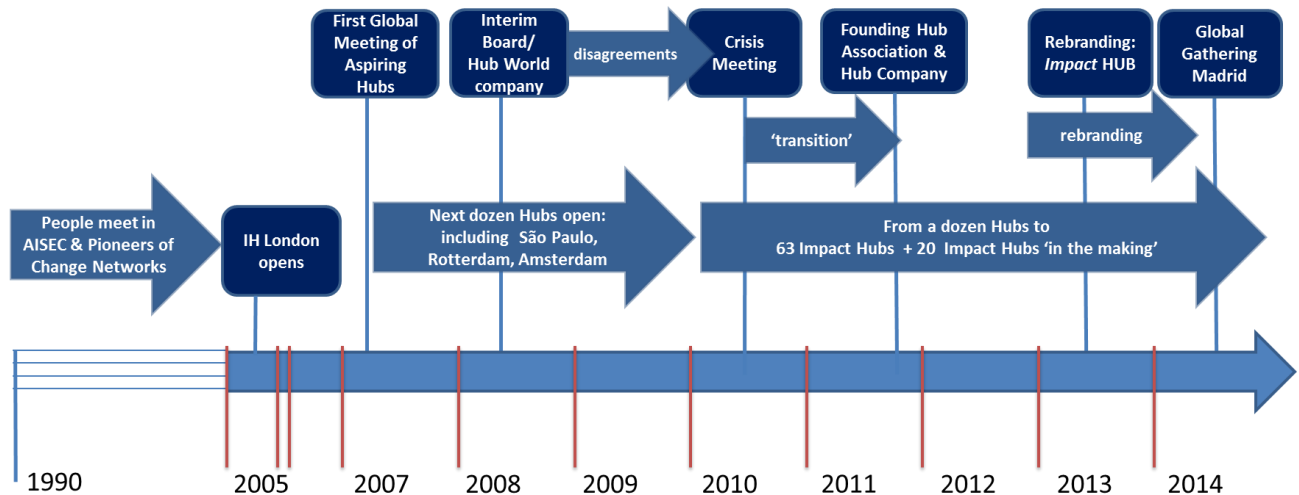
The structure of the IH network has changed significantly over the years. Originally, the network was called ‘The Hub’ and local settings were referred to as ‘Hubs’. Since the foundation of the first Hub in 2005, the network has considerably grown and replicated: from 1 to 70 IHs in less than 10 years. As formulated by the IH website: *“The idea has been spreading like wildfire and resulted in the emergence of a global movement to create Impact Hubs in more than 45 cities around the world. From London to Melbourne, Johannesburg to São Paulo, San Francisco to Singapore, the community is rapidly growing in a way that is globally connected and locally embedded”* (Impact Hub website, 2015).

All three IHs under study have been part of the ‘first wave’ of openings. They opened in 2007 (São Paulo) and in 2008 (Rotterdam and Amsterdam). The founders of the three local manifestations knew each other before they actually opened their respective IHs, some of them having met in networks such as Pioneers of Change and AIESEC. These personal connections between the founders

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led to close connections between the respective local IHs (i.e. transnational networking) as well as between the local IHs and the global network organizations, up until the point when the ownership of IH Rotterdam was transferred from the initial founder to new owners in 2013.

Figure 7-1: Development of the Impact Hub Network



Unsurprisingly, the rapid growth of the overall network was a turbulent time, especially with regard to the establishment of a global network structure. Company units were founded and dissolved, association structures were negotiated. As put by one of the board directors of the IH association: *"After a period of crisis and transition, Impact Hub has emerged as a global structure that is partly a movement, partly a business, and partly a network. Along the way, its leaders—a group of people devoted to social innovation—had to master the art of organizational innovation"* (Bachman 2014). This period in 2010/11 is also referred to as the 'transition' phase and resulted in the current organizational structure, consisting of a global IH Association, a global IH Company and local IHs. All local IHs are members of the global IH Association: decisions are taken in a general assembly, where in principal all local IHs have a voice: one Hub, one vote. The Association in turn owns the IH Company GmbH, which offers services to the local IHs. In 2013, the Hub network was rebranded as the 'Impact Hub' in order to emphasize the common network aim of catalysing impact.

Both IH Amsterdam and IH São Paulo are actively involved in the IH Association and Company. There is one personal union, with the founder and managing director of the IH São Paulo also being the (former) Chairman of the Board of the IH Association. While the shared history and the shared personal networks do still connect the IH São Paulo and the IH Amsterdam, the IH Rotterdam is left out of this equation due to the transfer of ownership. Both IH Amsterdam and IH São Paulo are looking into new governance models such as holacracy or liquid democracy, which are also used at the global level, while there is no reference to these in Rotterdam. The latter is in a refounding process where ownership is officially transferred from the founder to new owners. The latter are currently focusing on financially saving the IH after a period of weak management and decreasing membership numbers.

As such, we observe that there are different roles for local IHs in relation to the global network organizations. While there are some, such as the IH Amsterdam and IH São Paulo, which are closely connected, based on long-established personal relationships, other IHs such as the one in Rotterdam, do not have the same kind of relationship and also not the same kind of involvement at the global level. This does not mean, however, that the IH Rotterdam does not have connections to other IHs

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directly – there are regular contacts with fellow IHs. At the latest global gathering in Madrid in September 2014, one of the main topics was how the different local IHs could cooperate more systematically to increase their impact. The connections with the global organizations (such as the IH Association and the IH Company) seem to be mostly relevant for the management of the IHs. In general, it is them, who also accord the global network an important role. This also goes for many members of the IH Amsterdam. While members in São Paulo as well as Rotterdam seem far less interested in the global network.

In terms of development of the three local IHs, both IH Amsterdam and Rotterdam have moved location (in 2013 and 2014 respectively). The IH Rotterdam was primarily searching for a location with lower costs that also would provide room for expansion and for different kinds of members (e.g. start-ups, maker spaces). The IH Amsterdam was looking for a larger place that would allow for growth and inclusion of team offices. The IH São Paulo opened a second location in 2012, which is exclusively dedicated to events. It is currently also looking for a larger space for their main co-working space.

7.2 Aspects of ‘innovation’ and ‘change’

“Impact Hubs are where change goes to work”, is one of the main ‘slogan’ of the network (Impact Hub website). As the name ‘Impact Hub’ indicates, there is an explicit aim to have societal impact. The overall IH network has a ‘theory of change’, which is focused on social entrepreneurship as a driver of societal change and improvement. Besides this recurring element of social entrepreneurship, the theories of change across the IH network have varied and shifted over the past few years, both at the global and local levels.

While initially, the focus was on individual social entrepreneurs and their enterprises and innovations, it has shifted towards the creation of *“local ecosystems for entrepreneurial change”* (Interviewee 8) as enabling environments for social entrepreneurs, including more system collaboration and collective impact. These ecosystems are created through the three value propositions of space, community and content. This shift in theory of change was done explicitly. One of the managing directors of the IH Company literally talks about a changing ‘theory of change’ and that they now *“have a new theory of change, that ecosystem change is more effective than individual change alone”* (Interviewee 8, cf. Impact Hub website 2015).

This new focus on the IH being an ‘ecosystem’ for innovation seems to appear across all local IHs under study, albeit with different interpretations and practices. Both the IH Rotterdam and São Paulo, as well as the IH Amsterdam, consider themselves as “ecosystems” for change. While this is less explicit in Rotterdam, the IH São Paulo has built its theory of change on an understanding of the IH as *“an integrated ecosystem or community that could be a meeting and collaboration platform for people with the same profile: potential entrepreneurs who wanted to create business with social impact, or even where practical dreamers can come together to innovate.”* (Impact Hub São Paulo Website 2015). The IH Amsterdam presents itself as *“an Impact Ecosystem, where impact makers connect, work, meet, collaborate, learn, launch, grow and scale”* (Impact Hub Amsterdam website 2015). As such, the IH Amsterdam as well as the global IH organizations seem to consider themselves to be an “innovation system”, i.e. a (new) eco-system in which innovation can (better) occur (cf. section 4.2.2).

In the following, we outline the relation of the IH’s global network organizations and local manifestations to change and innovation along the TRANSIT conceptual categories of change and innovation, namely social innovation, system innovation, game changers and narratives of change. In discussing these, we will distinguish between the IH *organisations* and the IH *members*.

7.2.1 Social innovation

With social innovation, we refer broadly to new social practices and/or new social relations, including new (combinations of) ideas, models, rules, and/or products (cf. Avelino et al. 2014). In the following we distinguish four ways in which the IH relates to social innovation (cf. section 3.2.1): 1) Social innovation as an explicit notion/ discourse; 2) Social innovations by the IH as a concept; 3) Social innovations by the IH organisations and 4) Social innovations by (the enterprises of) the individual IH members.

As outlined at the beginning, the development of the IH network is intertwined with the discourses and practices on social innovation and social entrepreneurship, mutually enabling and strengthening one another. Respondents in all local IHs and the global network organisations, were explicitly using the concept of social innovation. While this was standing out in our research in Amsterdam and São Paulo, in Rotterdam fewer people referred to it explicitly. Interestingly, however, one of the first scholarly articles on social innovation and the Impact Hub was written by a member of the IH Rotterdam (Witkamp et al. 2011).

Secondly, the IH concept inherently contains a number of socially innovative ideas relating to the work and labour market, more specifically: ways of working, the design of the work spaces, attitudes to work as well as forms of work. The members engage in *ways of working* which are more collaborative and horizontal than is the case in mainstream companies. They do so in *work spaces* designed for interaction and networking, which are 'hosted' – as such they constitute new products, services and practices. The *working attitude* of members in São Paulo, Rotterdam and Amsterdam stresses personal satisfaction, work aligned with personal values, positive impact on the world and economic income. A Rotterdam member articulates the following: *"I have the feeling it's much more common now than 5 years ago that people admit to having greater ulterior motives than just getting in income. Wouldn't say it was because of the Hub, I think the Hub is part of a larger social movement in that direction."* (Interviewee 18). The contrast between this working attitude and more conventional ones was especially stressed in the case of São Paulo. There, members are referred to as 'hippies' by others such as family members or friends due to this working attitude. Next to that, the overwhelming majority of members of the three IHs are freelancers, social entrepreneurs or otherwise self-employed. As such, many of them are engaged in a non-mainstream *form of work* (e.g. formal employment at an organisation). The IH concept can thus be said to innovate the work and labour market as we know it.

Thirdly, the three local IH organisations are also experimenting with new business models, or elements thereof. Both Dutch IHs engage in bartering trades offering the possibility to pay membership fees by hosting the place. The IH Rotterdam also offers the possibility to pay with the local complementary currency. The IH São Paulo has an innovative financial construction with regard to the IH School Festival, an event that is organized twice per year. The profit is equally divided amongst all those who engage in the programming and offer a workshop or similar. There are other forms of social innovation such as the forging of new social relations between societal actors. The IH Rotterdam does engage in that locally, for example it has been establishing links between a professional painter and an organization that supports people with mental problems who were both involved in the renovation of the new IH building. Also, the global network (governance) structure is regarded as a social innovation, in the sense that it offers an *"alternative"* for how organisations can 'go global', shifting *"from a franchise model to a highly distributed, decentralized but functioning global organisation model"* (Interviewee 8). We have also seen, that this model has been challenged (e.g. through a 'refounding' process such as in Rotterdam) and has been in constant development.

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Finally, another way the IH relates to social innovation is through the activities of (the enterprises of) their members. What all three local manifestations have in common is that their respective members are covering a broad array of topics and working fields. These range from technological innovations to new social services or business models, and as such do engage in different ways in what we define as 'social innovation' in the TRANSIT project. A very explicit one are the alternative transactions that the members engage in. There is a culture of sharing resources of all sorts (knowledge, information, competences and experiences) between members in an informal manner, without formal financial transactions.

7.2.2 System innovation

In general IH discourse, there is a strong ambition to contribute to wider systemic change, witnessed by catchphrases such as 'change the world' or the strong emphasis on 'impact'. This is not shared among all members and locations. While this is strong in IH Amsterdam and the global network organizations, in both the IH Rotterdam and São Paulo, several interviewed members did not seem concerned so much with what it is that their work impacts upon (i.e. which system), as long as they work from their personal values.

With the recent discourse change towards creating 'ecosystems of innovation', the focus moved to systemic and collective impact, of which network(ing) is seen as a crucial part. Rather than connecting the concept of 'eco-systems' for innovation with the concept of 'system innovation', it can also be understood more in terms of *innovation systems*, i.e. systems in which innovations are more likely to emerge, but which do not necessarily lead to system innovation (i.e. change at the level of wider societal system). At the IH, so far, the focus seems to be more on creating an 'eco-system' in which innovation can emerge, than on guiding specific system innovations with a clear substantive, normative or political direction or vision. There seem to be no clear vision on where or to what this change will lead. *As such, none of the local manifestations has clearly demarcated systems or working fields on which they or their members aim to have impact. Or, as a manager of the IH Company emphasised in the interview: they do not work with these "vertical" boundaries (Interviewee 8). Rather, the broad aim of members of all three IHs is to work towards a 'radically better world' and to have 'societal impact'. Some argue that the network is "still scratching the potential of the network as a platform for up/downloading programs for impact worldwide."* (Interviewee 17).

Nevertheless, we can distinguish a number of different systems with which the respective IHs and their practices interact and to which they could be related or be seen to impact upon. The main system that we perceive to be impacted by the IH, is the economic system. Here we use economy in its broad sense, as not only including finance and labour, but transactions and trading practices more generally, including phenomena such as the 'informal' and 'social' economy. We see that all our IHs under study engage with **new understandings of economy**, including the 'sharing economy' and the 'social impact economy', which relate to the strong focus on social entrepreneurship (see section 7.2.5). This engagement with 'social entrepreneurship' and 'social impact economy' is manifested in the IH network and in local IHs both at the level of its narratives and ideas (e.g. on what a different economic system could look like), as well as in innovative 'economic practices' by IH organisations and members. For instance, with their innovative practices in terms of **financial arrangements** (e.g. bartering trade, local complementary currencies), the IHs do offer, experiment with and foster alternative ways of economic exchange. While the impact hereof on the wider economic system in both Brazil and The Netherlands might be limited, the IH is in good company along with other innovative networks and movements working on innovating the economic system.

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Moreover, as outlined under social innovation, the IH model as such is an innovative practice as compared to the current **way of working and arrangements in the labour market**. In all three cities, the IHs had been amongst the first ones to offer co-working spaces and as such inspired a whole development of different kinds of these spaces. There are over other 40 co-working spaces by now, in São Paulo (interview 14), as well as in Rotterdam (Willems 2014a) and Amsterdam (Launchdesk Website 2015). The IHs distinguish themselves from other co-working spaces through their explicit aim to be more than places where people can work next to each other – the members aim for societal impact by doing work they like and which pays their bills. It is this combination between social impact, economic impact and personal satisfaction which is recognizable across all three local manifestations. Moreover, the IHs can be seen as small ‘sharing economies’ in themselves, in the sense that there is a culture of sharing resources of all sorts (knowledge, information, competences and experiences) between members in an informal manner, without formal financial transactions. Without concluding on causal relations, we can say that the IH does play a role in a larger movement towards redefining ‘working environments’ at large: ways of working (e.g. collaborative), the actual working spaces (e.g. in designed open space rooms), the attitudes to work (e.g. including ulterior motives and a joy for one’s work) and forms of employment (e.g. promoting a trend towards self-employment, entrepreneurship). The IH São Paulo has made it one of its business propositions to consult larger organisations on this issue.

Also interesting to consider is the geographical systems that the IH targets. In practice, we see that the three IHs have close relations with the city they are located in (see section 7.1.1). While this results in an international orientation in Amsterdam, with English being the working language, in São Paulo and Rotterdam this results in a focus on embedding the business in the city and making impact locally. The embeddedness in modern cities seems to be a more important context to the development of the three IHs than is the national context. The global network organisations constructed the urban influence of the IHs in terms of *“levelling up of power and connectivity across fragmented solutions [across] the city ecosystem”* and *“reinventing public space”* (Interviewee 8). Some Impact Hubs are also moving out of their own co-working spaces *“into public space and host conversation and innovation that happens there, reviving communities and social spaces”* (ibid). The IH São Paulo organisation outlines on its website that the ‘urban’ is one of its specific foci: *“This process promotes solutions to the major challenges facing society, such as health, education, new economic systems and more sustainable solutions for urban life”*. The IH Rotterdam organisation does see itself as an explicit lever for change in relation to the not so well off neighbourhood that it is located in currently. As such, it aims to address *local* social problems (e.g. integration, social inclusion, neighbourhood revitalisation in their own direct environment). Both other IHs (organisation and members) do also work on these issues, if not locally but also nation-wide and even world-wide. The actual geographical reach of the projects that the IH members work on is local, national, transnational and global.

7.2.3 Game-changers

Given the idealistic drivers behind the very background and creation of the IH, one would expect a high level of awareness regarding societal trends and global developments, including ‘game-changers’ as macro-trends that are perceived to change the rules of ‘the game’. This is however not generalizable across the IHs and applied mainly to interviewees of the global organisation and the local Dutch IH networks. At the global organizations and in the IH Amsterdam, there is also a sense that the world is already changing (whether we like it or not), and that we need new ways of working with and within that. *“Another world is happening and you’re invited to take part in it”* (Impact Hub website, 2015). This goes further than the focus at the IH São Paulo on the IH changing the world, it includes the notion that the IH invites people to better play into a changing world. When discussing the economic crisis or the general idea of ‘game-changers’ in interviews, it was often related to a

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more general sense of existing systems 'going down', and new movements emerging based on more bottom-up and decentralized approaches: "*When the old system goes down this creates energy and takes people to this new movement*" (interviewee 17).

For the development of the IH network, the macro-development of internationalisation, globalisation and transnationalisation seems to have played a significant role. There is a sense of 'global connection' and responsibility for dealing with global challenges, which is also manifested at (some of) the local IHs. These developments are closely connected to technological developments such as the ICT revolution, through which digital communication was made broadly available.

Another 'game-changer' that has a significant impact on the IH network, concerns the economic crisis. As put by one of the managing directors of the IH Company:

"On the back of the economic crisis, we got an increase of uptake, in our communities. Because more people see, actually there is no reliance we can really have on big institutions. Going entrepreneurial and coming up with organisations that fulfil your life's needs, but also your purpose needs, is maybe a better alternative. So we got a big, big traction on the back of the economic crisis, because the economic crisis was not just a financial crisis, it was also an institutional crisis and a purpose crisis, and on the back of this institutional and purpose crisis we got a lot of people coming to us and saying, 'Enough, I really want to do something, and I want to be proactive around it'." (Interviewee 8).

While this has been going on for a while at the level of the global network organizations and in the Dutch IHs, it is only getting started in Brazil in combination with the crisis of a major oil company. In the Netherlands, the rising unemployment has contributed to an increase of self-employment and has made people doubt current systems and search for alternatives.

7.2.4 Narrative(s) of change

With narratives of change we refer to "*discourses on change and innovation, i.e. sets of ideas, concepts, metaphors, and/or story-lines about change and innovation*" (Avelino et al. 2014: 9). It seems that the IH is quite conscious about its use of language (i.e. it explicitly aims to create new narratives and coin new metaphors) and about its use of images. The websites of the global network and individual IHs, as well as the actual co-working spaces, display an exceptional attention for the design of their visualisations, images and word choices. It seems that the IH organizations do make use of the knowledge and expertise of the many IH members who are active in arts and culture, design and media.

At the IH network, discourses around social entrepreneurship, (social) innovation and change are regularly evoked. They are referred to by all three local IHs and the global network organizations. Those discourses are important building blocks of the IH identity and are used quite consistent throughout the years. They bear a close relation with the theories of change of the IHs both globally and locally. While the main change in these theories of change has been outlined before (see section 7.2), we go into some more detail here.

Before the change of the global structure and accompanying rebranding, the Hub network used the concept of 'radical change' and 'for a radically better world'. It was found that the word 'radical' had to be taken out because it was an issue for some IHs (particularly in Eastern Europe) (Interviewee 17). The global team indicates that they tried to capture the essence of the notion of 'radical change', while using different terms. Along with the rebranding to *Impact Hub*, came a changed way of introducing the concept of the IHs: from a focus on 'radical change' and 'social entrepreneurship' to

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a more systemic language around ‘ecosystems’ and ‘impact economy’. This does not stay at the level of narrative or discourse, rather, the IHs aim to create a full-round experience, which they refer to as the “*Hub Experience*” (Impact Hub Compendium 2014). This visual and sensory experience comes along with their narrative on how the IH changes the world (i.e. their theory of change), namely through creating ecosystems of innovation by offering ‘inspiring space’, a ‘vibrant community’ and ‘meaningful content’ (i.e. their ‘key value propositions’) (see Figure 7-2). Next to these, a number of very ‘typical’, recognisable metaphors include e.g. ‘(The Art of) Hosting’, and ‘incubation’ and concepts such as holacracy, or liquid democracy (both new forms of decision-making – see Text Box 3).

Figure 7-2: Hub Experience

Source: Impact Hub Compendium, 2014

Hub Experience



Besides the strong relation between the IH and the discourses on ‘social innovation’ and ‘social entrepreneurship’, there are also other discourses and narratives of change that the IH seems to have a strong resonance with. One narrative shared across all three local manifestations is the narrative on ‘work based on intrinsic motivation, personal values, trusting relations and societal impact’. This narrative relates to the key values of the global network: trust, courage and collaboration. In this narrative, the individual has motives to engage in the labour market that go beyond economic subsistence. Rather the focus is on enjoying work, earning money and thereby changing the world. The impact that they hope to have with this is put as follows by a member of the IH São Paulo: “*The biggest one is the impact of the mental model of being a reference for people and showing that it is possible to work in this different way*” (Interviewee 12). One of the managing directors of the IH Company outlines it as follows: “*At the bottom of how we approach a social issue or system, there are some ways of how we work together as humans that are holding us back from change. (...) [It is about the] quality of relationship and the way we operate with each other. (...) We pride ourselves in building another kind of society.*” (Interviewee 8)

Other remarkable narratives relate to economic transactions and trading practices: bartering (IH Rotterdam, IH Amsterdam), sharing economy (IH Amsterdam, IH Association), circular economy (IH Amsterdam), social impact economy or impact business (IH Association, IH São Paulo), or impact entrepreneurship (IH São Paulo, IH Amsterdam). Interestingly, what is living in all three local manifestations is that the IHs had used many concepts (such as those related to sharing economy practices) before these became ‘a hype’. Once certain concepts or narratives become more popular, several IH members express a feeling of ‘been there done that’. A quote by a member of the IH Rotterdam illustrates this feeling very nicely: “*Another thing is more intangible. A lot of the things we*

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call hip nowadays, like urban agriculture, monetary innovation. There's a lot of things that people at the Hub will say 'oh yea, I've been seeing that for 5 or 10 years now' and for many people it's still like 'ooh, what's this going on?' So there's, I think, an easy flow of newness within the Hub network. People in the Hub network are generally aware of the things that are new and coming. So in that sense it probably breeds a sort of common understanding, it allows people to be ahead of the curve. Like I said, it's more intangible, harder to define. But there's a sort of easy flow of newness." (Interviewee 18). This quote clearly exemplifies the sphere of pioneering and innovating that is present at IHs.

7.2.5 Societal Transformation

From the perspective of the TRANSIT project, societal transformation is the result of a co-evolutionary interaction between different types and levels of change and innovation (social innovation, system innovation, narrative of change and game-changers). One could argue that the Impact Hub network contributes to such 'co-evolution' in terms of creating globally connected and locally active 'eco-systems' for change and innovation, or as it is formulated by the network itself: creating spaces 'where change goes to work'.

When looking at the different types of change and innovation, it seems that the different levels and local sites of the Impact Hub network, overall seem to be primarily focused on (a) tangible social innovations (as manifested in physical spaces, practices and communities of social entrepreneurs), in combination with (b) the spread and development of 'narratives of change' on how individuals can contribute to change through entrepreneurship, including discourses on social entrepreneurship, social innovation and/or 'ecosystems' for innovation, and the framing of entrepreneurs as 'change-makers' or 'impact-makers'. While these narratives of change also exist beyond the Impact Hub, it does seem that the Impact Hub network is an important player in crafting and communicating these images of social entrepreneurs, and in proposing this as a path through which societal transformation can be achieved. While some levels and local sites of the Impact Hub network do aim for 'system innovation', there seems to be less consistent attention for system innovation at the level of specific sector domains or policy fields. While some do have an explicit wish to contribute to systemic change, most of the people involved view systemic change as something that will come forth from changing one's own way of working.

Regarding the *direction* of the societal transformation that the Impact Hub network aims to contribute to, this seems to lie primarily in the area of a new, different economy (in the broadest sense of the word), e.g. a 'sharing economy', or a 'social impact economy' (see also section 7.2.2). While we can see a change of the economic system as a system innovation at the level of a societal sub-system (as discussed in section 7.2.2), such new economy can also be viewed more generally as a societal transformation in itself, in the sense that it (potentially) impacts and changes all areas of society.

From a more critical perspective, some would argue that this focus on a new economy concurs with neo-liberal discourses and policies and an on-going trend of marketization and privatization, in which everything becomes a matter of economy. In such a perspective, the IH is reinforcing on-going trends and political systems, rather than transforming them. Some would argue that the notions of a 'sharing economy' or 'impact economy' are ways to transform our economic system into more informal and social principles. Others would argue that it is the other way around, that these are manifestations of the market further penetrating in and 'taking over' the informal and public spheres. The same discussion applies to the increase of self-employed entrepreneurship; to what extent it contributes to societal transformation, or whether it enforces the on-going neoliberal trend of marketization. In the Dutch context, we see that through the economic crisis and a decreasing employment by organisations, the number of self-employed people is increasing (Stam 2013, CBS

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2015). This does apply to people in their mid-careers but also to graduates starting their working careers, many of which are starting as self-employed entrepreneurs or freelancers. While this has positive effects such as a relative freedom in following one's values, it also does obscure that many of them live fragile and precarious lives. The access to social security benefits or state pension for example, is limited. In the Dutch public debate, several have expressed their worries about this trend, and called for a more critical and cautious approach to this trend (e.g. Tonkens and Duyvendak 2014, Van Stigt 2013).

Another, related, critical question, is to what extent the Impact Hub is 'really' contributing to societal transformation of the economic system, in terms of helping to alleviate economic inequality and poverty. Although the Impact Hub networks does explicitly aim to contribute to opportunities in less well-off contexts, through programmes such as the "Africa Seed Programme", still the Impact Hub's ways of working are certainly not accessible to everybody in practice, rather they seem to be mostly accessible to a certain type of highly educated and/or highly skilled people. As discussed in the respective chapters of the local case-studies, the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds of the Impact Hub members, is very limited. In the case of São Paulo, the Brazilian context with high levels of poverty and inequality makes the relation of the Impact Hub to this societal challenges particularly pertinent. While the IH São Paulo has attempted to engage in projects that deal with these issues, this has turned out to be quite challenging. While the IHS Amsterdam and Rotterdam do have members that are explicitly working with poverty alleviation in their enterprises, the actual uptake and empowerment of poor populations within the IH communities itself, seems to be limited.

These are all difficult discussions, in which the basic question is who or what is capturing or being captured by what, and who is excluding or being excluded by whom. The TRANSIT project deals with these questions at length, and the Impact Hub can be an interesting case for future research to deepen this debate both theoretically and empirically.

7.3 Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment

There is both an explicit and an implicit focus on empowerment in the IH. In São Paulo and Amsterdam the term is an explicitly and frequently used expression. The term is also used by the owner of the IH Rotterdam. A member of the latter community also gives a critical assessment hereof pointing to the patronizing connotation that this term can have. According to him, social entrepreneurs are not in need of being facilitated, they can find their own way (Interviewee 23).

Empowerment does take place on different levels. On the level of the transnational networking, this empowerment lies in providing people with transnational and global connections. Moreover, it is emphasised that the global network and its organisations primarily aim to empower the individual members, rather than empowering the institutional level (Interviewee 8). On the level of the local manifestations, empowerment can be described in terms of 'enabling' individual social entrepreneurs through the three IH value propositions: (1) 'inspiring space', (2) 'vibrant community' and (3) 'meaningful content'.

In terms of **space**, the IHS provide space for their members to work, meet, learn and get inspired by or inspire others. The actual look and interior design of the spaces show remarkable similarities across the three local IHS. All three spaces show elements in wood, metal and also plants. It has an upcycled, DIY and unpolished touch to it. This look and feel might contribute to young people and start-ups feeling comfortable, welcome, and/or like it is 'their' space. Like the entrepreneurs and their young companies, the space itself is 'not done yet', but with warm and vibrant colours, non-traditional use of space, and attention to overall feeling, design and comfortable aesthetics and (to some extent) sustainability- far from the formality, uniformity, or coolness of the traditional

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business world. It is an inviting and welcoming environment which is hosted and purposefully designed to make informal encounters possible – both offline and online. In terms of actual spaces, the IH membership does give access to all local IH working spaces across the globe. The virtual spaces, which give access to a specific local as well as the global network, are most frequently used in Amsterdam as compared with the other two locations. Members of the latter focus even more on local offline encounters.

A crucial value proposition in terms of empowering individuals and organizations is the **community**. All respondents of the three local IHs under study, point to the empowering aspect of being part of a community of like-minded people. They work from their values, combine making money with having a positive impact and choose to do so as freelancers and social entrepreneurs. This shared identity is for example expressed by members of the IH Rotterdam by referring to themselves as ‘Hubbers’. In São Paulo, this shared identity is reaffirmed by the owner: *“It’s so, so powerful if you get together and align on exploring business opportunities for impact globally. I have background and worked in big companies as well as local NGO’s and also struggled to find my tribe in a way.”* (Interviewee 17). Next to an internal sense of community and shared identity, IH members are also seen as ‘different’ by outsiders. In São Paulo, for example, members are referred to as ‘hippies’ by others. While the socio-economic, political and cultural context is profoundly different in Brazil and the Netherlands, the socio-economic profile of the members of all three IHs is strikingly similar. As outlined earlier, the IH attracts mostly highly educated and/or skilled urban dwellers with a relatively high socio-economic status who have travelled and/or worked abroad. While the members of IH São Paulo and IH Amsterdam are on average 30 years, the members of the IH Rotterdam are somewhat older end-thirties/beginning-forties. They combine a focus on social *and* economic impact and as social entrepreneurs, freelancers and self-employed engage in business activities, through which they aim to make the world a better place.

In all three IHs, the businesses and work fields the members engage in are very diverse. Important in this attitude are life choices of IH and team members in all three IHs: they have experienced working in a corporate environment and felt stifled by traditional middle/upper class work, now they work based on their personal values. While we found that some of these personal changes were not as voluntary as they might seem (e.g. members had gotten laid off in the first place) and that some had difficulties in making a living, the overall attitude is very positive. At the IHs, one can see that other people are already ‘doing it’, being social entrepreneurs, developing new ideas, products and services that contribute to society while also making a living out of it. For many members, this role modelling has been important in gaining courage to start as social entrepreneurs themselves. The more disempowering notion in this is the lack of diversity in the communities that we studied: in all three IHs, the members felt that the focus is on starting entrepreneurs while some of them would need a different crowd to be able to make the next step with their maturing enterprise. This community is also exclusive through its attractiveness for young(er), highly educated people with an entrepreneurial attitude. Another two-sided experience is that people go to the IH for the community and for the interaction, the socialization being a very important aspect, while at the same time, members at the IH Rotterdam and São Paulo indicated that this can also result in too much interaction.

In terms of **content**, the openness in terms of actual themes and the diversity of perspectives and knowledge available has both empowering and disempowering aspects. Working with others around the globe on a ‘radically better world’ is empowering as is the confrontation with other perspectives through which to uncover one’s own blind spots and increase one’s horizon. Simultaneously, this can also be disempowering as it does not give a clear idea about progress in the sense of working towards a specific goal (cf. section 7.2.2). At the IH Amsterdam for example, one member indicated that the lack of a clearer societal sustainability framework to assess one’s impact on society turns out as disempowering.

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Overall, the empowering dimensions of the IH global network and the local manifestations can be summarized as follows (cf. section 3.3):

1. A sense of being **welcome** and having a physical place in one's city and across the globe
2. A sense of being **locally active** while also **globally connected** and working towards a **common purpose**
3. A sense of **community and strength** in a group of like-minded people within a certain local IH and throughout the world
4. A sense of access to a **(global) pool of people** with different sets of competences, knowledge, experiences, solutions, etc.
5. A sense of **legitimacy and visibility** through a common brand and network, which may help to profile one's own enterprise
6. A sense of a **podium** for one's skills and one's enterprise through the online and offline possibilities at the IHs
7. And all this in combination with a **sense of freedom and independence** as a self-employed entrepreneur, not 'working for' a larger company/network

7.3.1 Governance

Internal governance

In terms of internal structure the three local IHs are quite differently organized. The IH Amsterdam organisation has a crew of 12 paid staff for different business aspects (such as membership leads or program coordinators). In the IH São Paulo both owners and crew members get paid, whereas in the IH Rotterdam there is currently one paid staff for 2 days and the owners do not yet earn a living from the IH. But next to these, there is a broader network of people being engaged in hosting (in exchange for membership) as well as in being engaged temporarily for addressing specific questions (e.g. marketing strategy) – this often happens on the basis of exchange or voluntarily. All three are set up as social companies.

In all three IHs, the space is hosted: throughout opening hours a host is present and fulfils a number of tasks. Overall, the hosting idea is connected to the concept of the 'Art of Hosting'. Most importantly, the host is responsible for both physical and social maintenance of the IH space. S/he knows the members, knows what they are working on and as such can make interesting links between them. S/he can facilitate meetings, ensures coffee and tea are present, and takes care of administrative and logistical tasks for ensuring the physical space operates smoothly (see Text box 1 in chapter 3). As put by an interviewee in SP: *"The operating system of the Hub works with hosting. The Host is the person who receives (...), which makes you see the network, because the network is invisible, then the Host introduces you; and this role is essential because you use better the platform when you know who is circulating there"* (Interviewee 22). While there is a whole pool of hosts in both IH Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the IH São Paulo relies on one regular full time host, who is at the same time the communications assessor.

In terms of decision making, the IH Amsterdam and São Paulo are both working with Holacracy, a new form of decision-making (see Text Box 3) to take internal decisions.

External governance

All three local manifestations, as well as the global network organizations, consider external actors in terms of (potential) 'partners' and the relations with them in terms of either 'partnerships' or

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'collaborations'. Both the IH São Paulo as well as the IH Amsterdam do have a strong international focus, including collaborations in international projects (such as the European funded FP7 research project BENISI²¹ on scaling social innovation) or having leading positions in the global network organisations. They are also still close connections to international networks such as AIESEC or Pioneers of Change. In Brazil, still many members are part of either of these networks.

Collaborations do take more specific forms, such as the relations to external advisory board members (e.g. IH Amsterdam) or with universities and research institutes. The IH Amsterdam and Rotterdam as well as the global network organizations are cooperating with the latter for example to evaluate progress and impact as well as supporting feasibility studies. Another specific partnership concerns the relations to (local) governments. The collaborations with the latter, as large bureaucratic institutions, can turn out to be quite challenging, especially given the fundamentally different organisational structures. This shows in all three local manifestations: the IH São Paulo is still working on establishing good relations with their local government. Both the IH Amsterdam and Rotterdam do have ties with their local governments. In the current Dutch public debate there seems to be a need for significant innovation in governments, including a call for a more responsive and facilitative (rather than controlling) attitude towards on-going societal movements (e.g. social entrepreneurship or sharing economy). The relation of IH Amsterdam with Dutch government, both at the national and local level, seems quite ambivalent. There is definitely an interest on both sides to cooperate while there are also tensions and challenges. The latter is also the case in the specific relation of the IH Rotterdam with the local municipality – this relation is mainly defined by the fact that the building is owned by the municipality. While the IHs do have fragile business cases (see section 7.3.3) there is a general antipathy against government subsidies in both Dutch cases.

Hence other collaborations, such as those with investors, or sponsors, are found particularly interesting. Generally speaking, these are larger organisations which look at the IH, either to find promising innovations to invest in, and/or to have the IH help them make their own organisations more innovative. There seems to be an increasing interest by such investors or corporates, which are attracted by the growth sector of social entrepreneurship. The IH Amsterdam focuses for example on the match-making between social entrepreneurs who are members of the IH Amsterdam, and potential business partners and investors. The IH São Paulo is consulting corporate actors with regard to workplace innovation.

7.3.2 Social learning

Learning seems to be the main mechanism through which the IH (aims to) empower people. We can distinguish between more structured learning, which does take place through different channels at the IHs, and more unstructured and incidental learning by members approaching one another out of their own initiative or asking for help for specific questions. In the following we discuss the more structured learning along five channels: physical space, virtual space, programming, activities and (social) media.

A main channel is the provision of space for encounters. Through providing a shared working space, people do get in contact with one another and can exchange stories, experiences and information as a basis for learning. Some of this space is more clearly facilitating encounters such as the coffee corner, the hosting table or the printer – as these are the knots where people are bound to pass and meet. For the IH São Paulo, this is where one of the emphasis in terms of learning lies – rather than in any virtual or media channels.

²¹ <http://www.benisi.eu/>

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A second channel is the sharing of questions and experiences via the virtual space, HUBNet. This is the IH intranet through which members are connected to other members at their local IH and to other members worldwide. For the majority of members we interviewed for IH São Paulo and the IH Rotterdam, the global dimension of HUBNet is less important. The local Rotterdam HUBNet is mainly used to indicate upcoming events or sharing news on opening hours etc.

Thirdly, all IHs facilitate learning through extensive programming. For the IH São Paulo this is especially true with regard to the Hub School event, which is a formalized learning event that gives room to structured and unstructured, explicit and implicit learning from and with each other. It offers knowledge about different themes like social innovation, entrepreneurship, self-awareness, social impact, impact measurement, communication, sustainability, participation methodologies, design thinking. In Rotterdam, programming is a bottom-up activity facilitated and stimulated by the local team. For the IH Amsterdam, there is a mixture of programming by the IH team and by its members.

A fourth channel of facilitated learning is through the activities provided by the IH organisation. The main example is the actual hosting: the host also matches individuals who can learn from one another, they do so in all three local IHs. Another example is the shared lunch that is provided by the host in both IH Amsterdam and Rotterdam or the 'happy hours' in São Paulo.

A final channel concerns (social) media, via which stories and experiences are shared. We can see this strongly at the IH Amsterdam, where stories and experiences are shared via the website and in social media. Also the IH Rotterdam shares member stories via the website, giving an insight into the type of people that can be met there. Other sharing takes place quite frequently via social media channels such as twitter or Facebook. The IH São Paulo does not engage in this kind of story sharing.

Next to these formal and informal learning channels, the IH does breed a culture of learning. It is argued that the whole set up of the IH, as well as the particular way in which the global structure governance has been developed, aims categorically at learning. Part thereof is the celebration and sharing of failures. Several sources report that at the international level, there has been the organisation of "Fuck Up Nights" to exchange failures. The IH Amsterdam took on this idea and organised their first "Failing Forward" event in February 2015.

7.3.3 Resources

In general, the IHs are struggling to find sustainable business models – while especially the IH São Paulo has very diversified income streams, the IH Amsterdam can rely on a vast (international) network and the IH Rotterdam focuses on the core. All three IHs have a similar business model in that their main income is based on membership fee, renting out rooms, and organizing events. The importance of any of these three pillars varies between the different IHs. For all three, the renting out of rooms is certainly an important financial pillar. As compared with IH Rotterdam or Amsterdam, the IH São Paulo does have two important additional pillars, one is the organisation of the Hub School twice a year and a second is the involvement in projects (e.g. consulting for companies and organisations, sponsored projects). This type of consulting other companies about, for example, the creation of co-working spaces or new values does not play a role in either of the other IHs. Both the IH São Paulo and Amsterdam do have access to minor sponsoring, which is not the case in Rotterdam. In São Paulo, the IH is sponsored for their involvement in developing new impactful ideas for social projects in slums and poor neighbourhoods. In Amsterdam, a cooperative bank is sponsoring the IH. While there is almost an aversion against government subsidies in

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Rotterdam and Amsterdam, a financial resource which is considered as unsustainable, the IH São Paulo is actually striving for government sponsorship but did not manage to receive it yet.

Although the financial contribution by members is not a sufficient resource, the membership base is an important resource to yield financial income through the other two pillars. The official membership models are very varied in all three locations. Most noticeable is the difference between two types of memberships in São Paulo, where one includes the use of the shared spaces and the other does not. The latter members are thus not physically co-working but rather gain access to the virtual network and the activities such as the Hub School. In both IH Rotterdam and Amsterdam, membership fees vary according to the amount of time that the member aims to be present at the IH – ranging from one specific afternoon (IH Amsterdam) to unlimited use of the space with own keys (both Amsterdam and Rotterdam).

In the IH Amsterdam and Rotterdam we see that in practice it is even more varied including bartering (e.g. trading membership against hosting) or the use of local currencies (in Rotterdam). Interesting in terms of community building is that once the fee is paid, which mainly happens in non-physical ways of a digital money transaction, the access to all resources at the spaces themselves are 'for free': there is no additional financial transaction necessary at either the coffee counter or the printer. This barrier free and self-service attitude increases the feeling of 'being at home' or at least at a trusted place: where else would one get a cup and press the buttons at the coffee machine.

7.3.4 Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation is approached quite differently in the three local IHs and on the global level. At the global level, monitoring and evaluation focuses on (1) keeping track of the development of the network, (2) evaluating the needs of local Hubs and members, and (3) 'measuring impact', something that is discussed much at the moment (related to the wish to have more 'systemic impact'). There is a global Global Membership Survey format, which can be adapted to local Hubs. Several IHs have created their own Impact Reports. The IH Amsterdam uses this standardized global Member Impact Survey every year. There, the focus of monitoring and evaluation is on two topics: (1) the impact of the IH on its members/ customers (including satisfaction etc.), and (2) the impact that the members themselves are having in/on society (Interviewee 2). Given the underlying theory of change, it seems that the main purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to figure out how the first can be improved so as to increase the second: i.e. how the IH can enable its members to increase their impact. Here it is important to keep in mind that 'impact' is understood in economic as well as social and ecological terms. In the IH São Paulo, the management and financial performance are monitored but there is no impact monitoring done. The latter is considered difficult to measure as it is indirect, invisible and/or time delayed. The IH Rotterdam, being fully focused on the refounding process is not engaging in monitoring and evaluation currently.

There was one global membership survey performed in 2012/2013 which evaluated the impact of the IH network on society in the past few years (Impact Hub Infographic, 2014). The results are visualised in an infographic, which the IHs Amsterdam and São Paulo have printed and put on their walls. Recently a new survey was conducted between February and March 2014. The data and information are in a similar format presented as a sequence of infographics (Impact Hub, 2015). Similar to the survey from 2012/2013 it includes an overview of the "impact orientation" of the members (43% social, 16% environmental, and 41% financial) and the "impact areas" (fields and issues addressed by our members", including sustainability, education, design, arts and culture, media, capacity building, and many more). Furthermore, the overall "effects on society and economy in 2012" are summarised as 400 + "new start-ups founded and initiatives started", 3.500+ "new full-time jobs created", 100+ million € "new revenues created", and "countless new commitments and

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ideas for impact”. Interestingly, the infographic also displays a schematic overview of “the entrepreneurial journey”, in terms of “progress of members since joining Impact Hub”, which includes 7% “exploration & interest” stage today (and 6% when joining the IH), 4% “intention formation” (17% when joining the IH), 8% “idea development” (22% when joining the IH), 29% “start-up initiative” (26% when joining the IH), 35% “running operations” (25% when joining IH), and 17% “impact scaling” (6% when joining the IH). The Infographic also includes an overview of how members feel ‘inspired’, ‘connected’ and ‘enabled’, and “87% would highly recommend Impact Hub” (Impact Hub report, 2015).

Next to these more quantitative ways of evaluation, sharing “Hub stories”, a concept that features on many Hub websites, and other forms of ‘showing the world’ what one is doing, seems not only to be a tool for learning or PR, but also a method for peer-driven accountability. One could interpret these as more qualitative, implicit and informal methods of monitoring and evaluation. Wanting to have more impact, implies wanting to know how much impact one has and how one can increase this, so it is not surprising that both the global organizations as well as local IHs (e.g. IH Amsterdam) are working on new monitoring and evaluation frameworks. What needs to be kept in mind is that explicit evaluation and monitoring attempts are not always as successful, and that not all members are willing to invest time in it. It seems that evaluation and monitoring need to be integrated implicitly and subtly in conversations about ‘content’ and ‘valuable relationships’. At the IH Amsterdam they deal with this by organizing content-oriented and ‘fun’ sessions, in which questions of evaluation and monitoring are integrated in a subtle and intrinsic manner.

We were also struck by the apparent lack of monitoring of/ attention for negative societal impact and unintended affects. In a context with such an explicit desire to have positive impact, it seems meaningful to (also) ask the question: what are or may be the (unintended) *negative* impacts of Impact Hub activities, and how can one deal with those? This critical question is not only directed at the Impact Hub, but also at us as researchers, both within and beyond the TRANSIT research project: *How can we improve existing conceptual and evaluative frameworks to facilitate critical questions and meaningful conversations on both the positive and negative influence of social innovation initiatives?*

7.4 Other issues

The case-studies of the Impact Hub network point to a variety of challenges for future research. These challenges for future research are based both on our own questions as researchers, but also on the research questions that respondents themselves expressed (see sections 3.4, 4.4 and 5.4).

The first challenge for future research lies in the **discourses and movements around a ‘new economy’**, ranging from notions such as the ‘social impact economy’ and ‘sharing economy’ to the phenomena of social entrepreneurship and the ‘social economy’ more generally. There is obviously as societal trend emerging around this, of which the Impact Hub is only one out of many networks and organisations. It would be interesting to compare how other transnational networks under study in the TRANSIT research project relate to different dimensions of this ‘new economy’ (e.g. Ashoka, Credit Unions, Global Ecovillage Networks), and also to look beyond these networks towards wider movements around specific approaches to the economy, e.g. the ‘sharing economy’, ‘gift economy’, the cooperative movement, etc. Part of such research would also be to dive into the critical debate that we touched upon in section 7.2.5: in how far these trends around a new economy are contributing to societal transformation, and to what extent they are reinforcing the on-going neoliberal trend of marketization, privatisation and increasing levels of socio-economic inequality. The rise of ‘social entrepreneurship’, and its relation to ‘active citizenship’, points to a ‘blurring’ of the boundaries between private and public, formal and informal, non-profit and for-profit. It would be

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interesting to research these developments from a multi-actors perspective on shifting power relations between state, market, community and 3rd Sector (Avelino & Wittmayer 2014).

Another interesting cluster of topics for future research, lies in the **urban dynamics** between spaces such as the Impact Hub and other urban initiatives. Besides the local Impact Hub sites, there are large amounts of 'co-working spaces', breeding grounds, start-up incubators, cultural hotspots and so forth, in the cities under study (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, São Paulo). What are the urban dynamics between these different places and initiatives? Again this would provide an interesting ground for comparison with the other networks under study in TRANSIT, such as Fablabs, Hackerspaces, and Transition Towns: studying how these and other initiatives interact within specific cities, and what their impact is on the urban environment. This would provide an interesting insights in 'urban social innovation dynamics'. This also relates to the critical questions that we touched upon in section 7.2.5, regarding issues of inclusion and exclusion.

A related topic lies in the relation between social innovation initiatives and different levels of government. In this case-study report, there have only been two interviews with local policy-makers, while there is much more to discover around the relation between the Impact Hub, municipalities, and other levels of government. One particular research question that came out of our local case-studies, is how and to what extent the social enterprises being 'bred' at the Impact Hubs, match with the societal policy challenges formulated at government levels. Issues such as poverty, equality and access, but also sustainable infrastructure and climate change adaptation, are topics that several governments are concerned about. While many 'social entrepreneurs' do tackle these themes, they do so at a small scale or in an indirect manner, and there are questions on how to relate these entrepreneurial ideas to societal challenges at urban, national and regional levels. It would be interesting to further research these dynamics in relation to social innovation governance and institutionalisation (Pel & Bauler 2014).

Last but not least, one particular challenge for future research is what we can 'give back' to cases under study such as the Impact Hub. The research questions expressed by our respondents include many questions on 'how to' (1) improve networking at local and global levels, and (2) increase and monitor systemic impact, and they are curious to hear what they could learn from other networks and initiatives. It would be interesting to compare all the different networks under study in terms of their strategies for balancing local and transnational networking activities, and how they aim for 'impact'. Moreover, it would be fruitful to then consider what different fields of research (e.g. transition studies, social movement theories, governance research) have to offer in terms of theoretical insights to answer these questions. For instance, one of our respondents asked the following research question:

"How to best connect innovations that come really from the grassroots, so really at the edge, not known and kind of hidden, and how to marry those with large systemic change, without killing their innovative dimension? Because we are going into this ecosystem-building theory of change, we will have more and more interaction between this grassroots and the established institutional change, so any insights you could bring forward around how the two can marry without creating a disempowering relationship, we would highly benefit from that."
(Interviewee 8).

This question lies at the core of various fields of innovation research, particular in the transition perspectives on grassroots innovation (e.g. Seyfang & Smith 2007, Seyfang & Haxeltine 2012). While the TRANSIT project aims to move beyond the state-of-the art and develop innovative theoretical perspectives, it is also a challenge how to build on existing theoretical insights from the state of the art, and how these can be applied to the cases under study and how they can be shared and communicated to answer the questions of practitioners.

8 List of References

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Annex 1: Bibliography of materials

8.1 Primary Literature

References	Year	Abstract	Link
Impact HUB			
Impact Hub Global Website			http://www.impacthub.net/
Impact Hub Amsterdam Website			http://amsterdam.impacthub.net/
Impact Hub Rotterdam Website			http://impacthub010.nl/
Impact Hub São Paulo Website			http://saopaulo.impacthub.com.br/
Impact Hub Movement growing worldwide	2013	Forbes Magazine article on the growing Impact Hub Movement worldwide (2013)	http://www.forbes.com/sites/devinthorpe/2013/11/21/impact-hub-movement-growing-worldwide/
How the HUB found its Centre	2014	After a period of crisis and transition, Impact Hub has emerged as a global structure that is partly a movement, partly a business, and partly a network. Along the way, its leaders—a group of people devoted to social innovation—had to master the art of <i>organizational</i> innovation	http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/how_the_hub_found_its_center
About Impact Hub Rotterdam	2014	We believe that there is no absence of good ideas in the world. The problem is a crisis of access, scale, resources, connections, knowledge and impact. Impact Hub Rotterdam is a place where change goes to work.	http://impacthub010.nl/about/
Werkplek voor Wereldverbeteraars	2011	basic introduction with key names and dates of founding process	first article in Hub Stories folder
Coworking spaces			
Where the Coffee Shop meets the Cubicle	2007	From working in coffee shops to creating communities	http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2007-02-26/where-the-coffee-shop-meets-the-cubiclebusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice

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Shared Workspaces a wave in the Future	2008	Coworking spaces in the San Francisco Bay area	http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Shared-work-spaces-a-wave-of-the-future-3294193.php
They're Working on Their Own, Just Side by Side	2008	'Hat Factory' in San Francisco	http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/20/business/businessspecial2/20cowork.html?_r=3&ex=1361250000&en=bd589ebb73df147&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&oref=slogin&
Inspiration Strikes Only a Desk Away	2008	Inspiration and cross-pollination through shared workspaces	http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/20/business/businessspecial2/20ideas.html?ref=businessspecial2
Practical Values: Works Well With Others	2008	What if the day at the office is actually good for you?	http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/01/practical-values-works-well-others
Global Tele-Offices: An Answer to Working through the Recession	2009	Coworking spaces and their link to the recession	http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cameron-sinclair/global-tele-offices-an-an_b_184983.html
Co-working: a room not of their own	2009	Coworking spaces/ freelancers in Portland/ Oregon	http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2009/04/coworking_a_room_not_of_their.html
Can't Afford an Office? Rent a Desk for \$275	2011	Long popular with tech start-ups, shared workspaces grow in popularity as workers seek affordable facilities	http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203791904576609301747256470
Setting the desk jockeys free. The rise of co-working	2011	Alternative office spaces, flexible work arrangements	http://www.economist.com/node/21542190?fsrc=scn/fb/wl/ar/anotheralternativetotheoffice
Coworking: If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them (For Now)	2012	Start-ups in coworking spaces and how those could grow	http://smallbusiness.foxbusiness.com/entrepreneurs/2012/04/11/coworking-if-cant-beat-them-join-them-for-now/
Collaborative consumption or collaborative innovation? (Part 1)	2013	Blog article on Collaborative innovation initiatives	http://icubeblogg.wordpress.com/2013/01/08/collaborative-consumption-or-collaborative-innovation-part-1/
The spaces between: Incubators, hubs, or co-working spaces?	2013	Merete Grimeland of World Wide Narrative and Helen Bakos of Sweet Chili Arts explore the spaces between hubs labs and incubators for social innovation	https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/socialinnovationeurope/magazine/methods-and-tools/interviews/spaces-between-incubators-hubs-or-co-working-spaces
Working Alone, Together	2013	NY Times article on networking in coworking spaces and the possible difficulties of working from home as freelancer	http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/fashion/solo-workers-bond-at-shared-workspaces.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&
The Death Of The Office: What Happens When The Workspace Is Mobile, On-Demand And All About Networking	2013	Work becoming more flexible, thus evolvment of workspace	http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2013/11/06/the-death-of-the-office-what-happens-when-the-workspace-is-mobile-on-demand-and-all-about-networking/

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Workspace Innovation	2014	Workspace innovation: creating teaming areas and shared workspaces allows for cross-pollination of ideas	https://www.experience.com/alumnus/article?channel_id=career_management&source_page=office_life&article_id=article_1126286326893
Inviting Ideas: are You ready for a more Collaborative Workspace?	2014	Collaborative workspaces	http://insights.wired.com/profiles/blogs/employees-want-a-more-collaborative-workspace#axzz3184rfVbe
Deskmag		Magazine for Co-working	http://www.deskmag.com/

8.2 Secondary Literature

References	Year	Labels
Impact HUB		
Witkamp, M. , Raven R. and Lambèrt, M. (2011) Strategic niche management of social innovations: the case of social entrepreneurship, <i>Technology Analysis & Strategic Management</i> , 3(6)	2011	ImpactHub, SE, Transition
Witkamp, M. J., Royakkers, L. M. M., & Raven, R. P. J. M. (2011). From cowboys to diplomats: Challenges for social entrepreneurship in the Netherlands. <i>Voluntas</i> , 22(2), 283-310.	2011	
Ricardo Altimira Vega et al. (xxxx) 1+1=3: How Can Social Innovation Change Cultures and Create Public Value? A Mediterranean Comparative Multiple Case Study, Available at: www.med-eu.org/documents/MED6/papers/FRONDIZI.pdf	?	Impact HUB, Institute for Social Innovation
Coworking spaces		
Diana M. Hechavarria , Maija Renko, Charles H. Matthews (2011) The nascent entrepreneurship hub: goals, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and start-up outcomes, <i>Small Bus Econ</i> (2012) 39:685–701 DOI 10.1007/s11187-011-9355-2	2011	Entrepreneurship
Anne Leforestier (2009) The Co-Working space concept, CINE team project	2009	Coworking space concept
Ignasi Capdevila (HEC Montréal) (2013) Knowledge Dynamics in Localized Communities: Coworking Spaces as Microclusters, Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2414121 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2414121	2013	Coworking spaces, microclusters

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Christian Stumpf, Creativity & Space. The Power of Ba in Coworking Spaces (2013) Master-Thesis Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen	2013	Creativity, Coworking Spaces, Ba
Bruno Moriset (2014) Creativity, creative class and urban development, Paper 2nd Geography of Innovation International Conference, Utrecht	2014	creativity, urban development
David J. Nicol, Iain A. MacLeod (2005) Using a shared workspace and wireless laptops to improve collaborative project learning in an engineering design class, Computers & Education 44, 459–475	2005	Shared workspace, collaboration
Marianna d'Ovidio, Marc Pradel (2013) Social innovation and institutionalisation in the cognitive–cultural economy: Two contrasting experiences from Southern Europe, Cities 33 (2013) 69–76	2013	Social innovation
Jared Tham (2012) Social Incubators: A Place for Changemakers to Call Home, Social Space 100 - 105, Available at: http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien_research/102	2012	Social incubators, change makers
Steelcase, Deep Dive 360 (xxxx) Insights about Collaborative Workspaces	?	Collaborative workspace
I.L. Mul (2012) Success Factors for Co-Work Locations in Stimulating Open Innovation, Master-Thesis University of Amsterdam	2012	success, coworking locations

Annex 2: List of interviewees

Inter-viewee ID	Position	Name	Date(s)	Duration	Interviewer(s)	Relevant for cases:
1	IH Rotterdam director & CEO	Amelie Veenstra	2014.04.14, 2014.08.20	01:20, 01:28	J.M. Wittmayer., J.M. Wittmayer & T. Strasser	RTD
2	IH Amsterdam co-director/co-founder	Tatiana Glad	2014.06.10	02:00	F. Avelino & B. Kirner	AMS, GLOB
3	IH Rotterdam Member	anonymous	2014.06.12	01:00	J.M. Wittmayer & B. Kirner	RTD
4	IH Amsterdam team member, membership lead	anonymous	2014.06.24	00:53	F. Avelino & B. Kirner	AMS, GLOB
5	IH Amsterdam business member, Product Foundry	anonymous	2014.06.24	01:50	F. Avelino & B. Kirner	AMS
6	IH Rotterdam Member	anonymous	2014.06.24	01:10	J.M. Wittmayer	RTD
7	IH Rotterdam Member	anonymous	2014.06.24	01:10	J.M. Wittmayer	RTD
8	IH GmbH Managing Director & Practice Lead	anonymous	2014.07.02	01:06	F. Avelino & B. Kirner	GLOB, AMS
9	IH Amsterdam Advisory Board, ASN Bank	anonymous	2014.08.18	01:19	F. Avelino & T. Strasser	AMS, GLOB
10	Sponsorship representative of the Inter-American Bank	anonymous	2014.08.25	00:41	R. Alfonso	SP
11	IH São Paulo Member, employee of company	anonymous	2014.08.27	00:30	R. Alfonso	SP
12	IH São Paulo Member, entrepreneur	anonymous	2014.09.02	00:57	R. Alfonso	SP
13	IH São Paulo Member, entrepreneur	anonymous	2014.09.03	01:03	R. Alfonso	SP
14	IH São Paulo Communication Assessor	anonymous	2014.09.03	01:34	R. Alfonso	SP
15	IH São Paulo co-founding Partner, major owner	anonymous	2014.09.03	01:32	R. Alfonso	SP
16	IH Rotterdam founder & ex-director	Moraan Gilad	2014.09.04	01:20	F. Avelino & J.M. Wittmayer	RTD, AMS, GLOB
17	IH Association Board (former) chair, IH São Paulo co-founder, IH GmbH CEO	anonymous	2014.09.04, 2014.10.07	01:35, 00:52	R. Alfonso, F. Avelino & T. Strasser	SP

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Inter-viewee ID	Position	Name	Date(s)	Duration	Interviewer(s)	Relevant for cases:
18	IH Rotterdam Member, Sustainability Services	Marten Witkamp	2014.09.05	01:12	F. Avelino & T. Strasser	AMS, RTD, GLOB
19	IH Amsterdam member, Konnektid	anonymous	2014.09.10	01:21	F. Avelino & T. Strasser	AMS, GLOB
20	IH São Paulo Co-founding Partner & general management	anonymous	2014.09.11	01:19	R. Alfonso	SP
21	IH Amsterdam Advisory Board, Rabo Bank	anonymous	2014.09.16	n.a.	F. Avelino & T. Strasser	AMS
22	IH São Paulo Manager Hub Initiative	anonymous	2014.09.16	01:42	R. Alfonso	SP
23	IH Rotterdam Member, Business Intuitive at joostburger.nl	Joost Burger	2014.09.17	01:24	J.M. Wittmayer	RTD
24	IH Rotterdam Member	Tony Nelis	2014.09.17	01:04	J.M. Wittmayer & T. Strasser	RTD
25	Municipality Rotterdam; Project lead Spatial Economic Development, Department City Development,	Nynke Schaaf,	2014.09.17	00:50	J.M. Wittmayer	RTD
26	Member & former IH Rotterdam Hub Office Manager	anonymous	2014.10.10	01:07	J.M. Wittmayer	RTD
27	IH Amsterdam member, previously involved in IH Berlin & Brussels	anonymous	2014.12.09	00:45	F. Avelino & K. McFarland	AMS
28	Policy maker Municipality Amsterdam - Department Innovation	Tijs Roelofs	2014.12.11	00:57	F. Avelino	AMS
29	Board member Impact Hub Association	anonymous	2015.03.05	00:58	F. Avelino	GLOB

Annex 3: List of meetings and events attended

Meeting and events attended as part of data collection, dialogues, etc.	Purpose of attending (IH affiliation)	Date and duration	Attending from the research group
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	13.5.2014, 11:10 – 16:00	J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	21.5.2014, 9:40 – 15:10	J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	23.5.2014, 9:00 – 13:30	F. Avelino, J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	23.5.2014, 13:30 - 17:00	F. Avelino
Magic Impact Days - Breakfast Lecture	IH Rotterdam	5.6.2014, 8:00 - 10:00	J.M. Wittmayer
Magic Impact Days @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	7.6.2014	B.Kirner
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	10.6.2014, 13:00-17:00	F. Avelino,B.Kirner
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	11.6.2014, 9:00 - 13:00	J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	16.6.2014, 12:00 - 13:30	J.M. Wittmayer, B.Kirner
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	17.6.2014, 13:00-17:00	F. Avelino,B.Kirner
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	23.6.2014, 12:50 – 18:15	J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	24.6.2014, 10:00-18:00	F. Avelino,B.Kirner
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	13.8.2014, 12:15 – 17:20	J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	20.8.2014, 9:00 – 17:15	J.M. Wittmayer, F. Avelino, T. Strasser
Hub School Festival, several lectures and workshops.	IH São Paulo	26.-28.8.2014, 15 hrs	R. Alfonso
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	26.8.2014, 11:30-16:00	T. Strasser
Impact Hub On Air @ HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	27.8.2014, 18:00-21:00	T. Strasser
Workbench: Marketing & Sales	IH Amsterdam	29.8.2014, 15:00-18:00	T. Strasser
Hub Experience, event to present IH São Paulo for new/potential member	IH São Paulo	2.9.2014	R. Alfonso

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Meeting and events attended as part of data collection, dialogues, etc.	Purpose of attending (IH affiliation)	Date and duration	Attending from the research group
Hub School Festival, several lectures and workshops.	IH São Paulo	3.-4.9.2014, 15 hrs	R. Alfonso
TRANSIT advisory board @ HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	3.9.2014 13:00 - 17:30	J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	10.9.2014. 09:00-17:00	F. Avelino, T. Strasser
Japan book workshop @ RTD	IH Rotterdam	13.9.2014 8:30 - 13:00	J.M. Wittmayer
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	17.9.2014, 9:40 – 16:00	J.M. Wittmayer, T. Strasser
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	2.10.2014, 9:40 – 17:00	J.M. Wittmayer
Workbench: Communications & PR	IH Amsterdam	03.10.2014	T. Strasser
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	4.11.2014, 10:00 – 18:00	F. Avelino, J.M. Wittmayer, T. Strasser, K. McFarland
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	5.11.2014, 10:00-17:00	F. Avelino, J.M. Wittmayer, T. Strasser, K. McFarland
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	6.11.2014, 14:00-17:30	F. Avelino
Societal Renewal Lab @ HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	7.11.2014, 13:00-18:30	F. Avelino
Netwerk versterking @ HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	10.11.2014, 9:00-12:00	T. Strasser
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	11.11.2014, 12:00-18:00	T. Strasser
Coworking @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	12.11.2014, 13:00-18:00	T. Strasser
SI-DRIVE festival	Lisbon (IH transnational)	12.11 - 14.11.2014	J.M. Wittmayer, F. Avelino
Coworking @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	19.11.2014, 9:45 – 18:00	J.M. Wittmayer
Townhall & Anniversary @HUB AMS	IH Amsterdam	20.9.2104, 16:00 - 22:30	F. Avelino
New years Reception @HUB RTD	IH Rotterdam	9.1.2015, 18:00 – 20:30	J.M. Wittmayer

Annex 4: Information Flyer TRANSIT project

About the Research Project: Transformative Social Innovation Theory (TRANSIT)

TRANSIT aims to develop a theory of transformative social innovation that can help to increase the transformative impact of social innovation. A main research question is: how are people empowered to contribute to social innovation in the context of a rapidly changing world that faces social and ecological challenges? Examples of such challenges are welfare system reforms, economic crises, climate change and the ICT-revolution. TRANSIT studies how people across the world are helping to face such challenges through *social innovation*, i.e. innovation that is social both in its ends and its means. The project will study a total of 20 international networks that work on social innovation, including at least 40 in-depth local case-studies (in Europe and Latin-America), and a survey of 200 more cases. Examples of social innovation initiatives under study include ImpactHubs, Time Banks, Credit Unions, Hackerspaces and FabLabs, Transition Towns, eco-villages, science shops, alternative energy cooperatives and many others. This final product of the project is a transformative social innovation framework, including a number of policy briefs, tools and training packages which aim to increase the transformative impact of social innovation.

TRANSIT involves 12 research partners: ten organisations from across Europe and two from Latin America. It is co-funded by the European Commission and the partner organisations and runs for four years in total, from January 2014 until December 2017. The framework and practice tools will be developed by the TRANSIT project team in collaboration with others, e.g. social innovation initiatives, renowned experts and policy makers. Different types of workshops will be organized to bring the different groups together and learn from each other. The main outcomes of the project will be the mentioned framework and tools as well as a number of information leaflets for policy makers and practitioners and a large, searchable database with about 200 examples of social innovation initiatives.

About the Case-study: The Impact Hub

The Impact Hub is one of the case-studies. We believe it is one of the leading examples of social innovation, and a network that brings together a diversity of social entrepreneurs in several places across the world, which address social or ecological problems and that contribute to societal change in different ways. We would like to study the Impact Hub at the following 3 levels:

Case-study of the transnational network: global Impact Hub

- How: 1) document/internet reviews, 2) interviews, and 3) participant observation at events
- When: between May – December 2014

In-depth local case-studies: Impact Hubs in the Netherlands and in Brazil

- Where: The Netherlands (Amsterdam & Rotterdam done by DRIFT) and Brazil (Rio de Janeiro & São Paulo done by UFRJ)
- How: 1) document/internet reviews, 2) interviews, and 3) participant observation at events
- When: between May – December 2014

Study of 10 local cases

- Where: across Europe and Latin-America (to be decided)
- How: 1) online survey and 2) short phone interviews
- When: between May 2015 – April 2016

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What TRANSIT can offer to the Impact Hub

- A research report of the case-studies of the Impact Hub, analysing transformative social innovation processes
- A personal meeting to discuss our analysis and report and/or a presentation of our findings to a larger audience
- Opportunities for networking and discussions with other social innovation initiatives (see overview of cases on p. 3), researchers and policy makers, for example at workshops organised by the TRANSIT project depending on your interest
- When we communicate about the TRANSIT project (e.g. at conferences, with flyers, website) we can exemplify how the Impact Hub works on transformative social innovation
- Later in the project, TRANSIT can offer:
- Access to a public, web-based resource hub about social innovation (an interactive website that provides access to various resources about transformative social innovation)
- Access to a set of tools ('tool box') that are theory-based and practice-tested and aim to support social innovation initiatives

Overview of TRANSIT's social innovation case studies (first selection)

TRANSIT will be studying a total of 20 social innovation networks, of which 12 have been selected already (see table on p. 2). For each of the 12 networks, the table includes the type of social innovation or the name of corresponding international network and a short characterization of the network or the type of social innovation. Furthermore, the table includes the name of the institution responsible for coordination of the case study and the location and the responsible institution for the two in-depth case studies of local manifestations of the social innovation initiative.

Type of social innovation or specific title of the international network	
1	Impact Hub: Global network of social entrepreneurs
2	Ashoka: Network for financial support to social entrepreneurs
3	Time Banks: Networks facilitating reciprocal service exchange
4	Credit Unions: Different types of credit cooperatives
5	RIPES: Network for the promotion of social solidarity economy
6	FABLABS: Digital fabrication workshops open to local communities
7	Hackerspace: User driven digital fabrication workshops
8	Living Knowledge Network: Network of science shops and other community-based research entities
9	DESIS-network: Network for design for social innovation and sustainability
10	Global Ecovillage Network: Network of eco-villages and other intentional communities
11	Transition Towns: Grassroot communities working on 'local resilience'
12	INFORSE: International network of sustainable energy NGOs

Annex 5: Interview guide

This are guiding question for first set of 11-15 interviews – to be adapted for a next set of interviews. Time indications are for interview of 1- 2 hours, possible incl. a small break.

Cluster 0: Who are you - 5-10 min

- What is your connection to the IH?

Cluster 1: What is the Impact Hub (IH) – 15-20 min

- What do you consider to be the main achievement of the IH?
- How do you experience the international networking in the IH?
- What is specific about the IH Amsterdam/ Rotterdam/São Paulo/Belo Horizonte?
- Which other initiatives that you know have similar goals and approaches as IH?
- [How do you summarize the past-present-future of the IH in a short story?]

Cluster 2: Relation IH to ‘innovation’ and ‘change’ – 15-20 min

- What is the impact of the IH?
- Does the IH relate to innovation? And how?
- Does the IH relate to change? And how?
- Is there a societal system which IH aims/ contributes to change? Do you consider yourself part of that system? What other system(s) are you part of?
- What do you believe are the most important ‘game-changers’ of our times?
- In the TRANSIT research we study a number of networks and initiatives [show list]. Which of these research networks do you recognize?
- [What according to you are the most important narratives on change and innovation?]
- [How does IH relate to the ‘mainstream’ trends and practices?]
- [Are there thing in society IH contributes to maintaining? (How) does it contribute to stability?]

Cluster 3: Actors & (Dis)empowerment – 15–25 min.

- Who are the most important actors in the IH?
- Who are the most important partners of the IH?
- How is the IH organized in terms of **governance** structures?
- Does **learning** in IH occur? How?
- What are IH’s most important **resources** and how are these shared?
- Does the IH **monitor/ evaluate** its development and impact? How?
- Do you think the IH **empowers** people and if so, how?

Cluster 4: Other emerging questions & issues – 10 – 15 min

- (Any relevant issue that comes up before/during interview)
- Are there any topics you missed in this interview?
- Do you have any questions to us?