

these publicly funded fusions of private-sector initiatives with social goals compete with their operations or incur a cost in terms of workspace independence and creativity.<sup>170</sup>

This analysis is preliminary as it is based on a survey of self-selected participants; however we can make some initial recommendations. Local government support of cowork spaces should be tied to evidence that they are actually delivering clear sustainability benefits.

Websites like sharedesk.net and neardesk.com help workers find office space to rent by the hour in established cowork spaces, but new sites like sparechair.me are also connecting workers to temporary office space in people's homes. This could be a great use of existing space, or one more addition

to the short-term-rental phenomenon that is creating challenges in the residential market.

Some local governments are exploring ways to apply the best aspects of cowork spaces to libraries,<sup>171</sup> traditional new-business incubators, and social enterprise development. These efforts seek to reproduce the energizing social interchange and innovation that can happen when people confer with others outside of otherwise siloed fields or occupations. Moreover, this provides opportunities for sharing of contacts and capacity-building through sharing professional tips. Although some cowork businesses are quick to distinguish these fusion arrangements from "genuine" cowork spaces, the potential of these hybrids to make valuable contributions to sustainability is exciting.

## CASE STUDY: GANGPLANK – CHANDLER, AZ

Gangplank is a non-profit cowork space that seeks to build communities by bringing tech-sector mentors and start-ups together. Founded by Jade Meskill and Derek Neighbors in 2007 with considerable assistance from the private sector (including \$400,000 for building renovation), and later, the City of Chandler, Arizona, Gangplank defies easy categorization. Part community centre, cowork space, and tech business incubator, it admittedly does not look as glamorous as many private-sector cowork spaces<sup>172</sup> but users don't have to pay a fee to access it. "It's not about the space," Meskill told local media.<sup>173</sup>

*"Our vision of being a free space and having true collaboration where people are potentially making world-changing projects are parallel goals," said Katie Charland, Gangplank director of operations. "We're working toward projects that will change the community as well as grow businesses."*<sup>174</sup>

Gangplank is "anchored" by several tech-related businesses, who occupy the space rent-free but provide the City with

consulting and community services and contribute to local schools and charities.<sup>175</sup> Established and emerging users of Gangplank include engineers, programmers, photographers, videographers, podcasters, painters, illustrators, and all manner of artists. All users who come in and use the free wifi are encouraged to "pay back" in social capital, by learning and sharing skills, mentoring, helping in the computer lab, or organizing and volunteering at events.<sup>176</sup> Engagement of youth figures prominently in the organization's ethic, and the site's computer lab is welcoming to kids of the people working there.<sup>177</sup> Chandler's downtown redevelopment manager has lauded them in local media for bringing a "whole new segment of business to the downtown" and credited them for having brought in a:

*"whole new genre of people ... and interesting new connections with the outreach events they have done."*<sup>178</sup>

While Gangplank does not appear to be promoting significant reductions in terms of our impact on natural systems, it is unique in its recognition of the need for cowork spaces that are more inclusive and where social capital is the preferred currency.

Is Gangplank scalable? Yes, and no. What makes this project unique, and potentially difficult to scale, is that it is animated by people in the tech sector who favour social capital rather than money as its main currency.<sup>179</sup>

*"It takes a very specific group of people, and I'm not sure if this would catch on everywhere," said Stephanie Leibold of Tempe, who brings her Bold Ave. graphic design business to Gangplank twice a week. "You've got people here with a passion for this who are making it happen. Without someone that committed, it wouldn't happen. Most coworking spaces you hear about are a for-profit thing. Not everybody has that kind of vision. This is not for everybody. It's not supposed to be. It's a long-range, let's-make-a-change type of thing."<sup>180</sup>*

And yet, it is scaling, as local governments and some nonprofit donors see Gangplank delivering value in terms of mentorship and less formalized type of small business development than is typical of business incubators. A city façade grant helped Gangplank purchase its current location in converted downtown retail space. It now has two other locations in Chandler, Arizona; one in Richmond, Virginia; and one under development in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada.

Its offerings now include conference rooms, computer labs, and a recording studio. Incubators in its Arizona locations have professional services agreements with the cities which obligate Gangplank to provide free services, event hosting, and advertising to city businesses. In return, the cities cover Gangplank's operating costs, including electricity and internet. Gangplank's Avondale, Arizona location is in a city-owned building, and that city budgets as much as \$60,000 annually for Gangplank.<sup>181</sup>

Gangplank's evolution continues as it expands to an international level, hoping to create an organization where people are available 24-7. Part of its Tucson operation has amicably reorganized as CoLab and aligned with another non-profit organization, due in part to "monetary differences as well as philosophical ones". CoLab intends to function as a business incubator with a primarily local focus.<sup>182</sup>

## CASE STUDY: THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION – TORONTO, ON

The Centre for Social Innovation, founded in 2004 in Toronto, provides a variety of capacity and resource supports for social mission-driven organizations. There are now four locations in Toronto and one in New York City.<sup>183</sup> The backbone of the Centre is the co-working space, ranging from private offices to meeting rooms, lounges and mixed-use work floors. The Centre works to catalyze innovation by fostering community entrepreneurship and cross-sectoral collaboration. It offers a variety of workshops and programs to help its members explore new ideas and accelerate change, including TechSoup Canada,<sup>184</sup> Agents of Change: City Builders,<sup>185</sup> and the Desk Exchange Community Animator.<sup>186</sup>

### Recommendations: Leveraging Coworking For Urban Sustainability

- Provide support to non-profit or social enterprise cowork spaces with a clear mission to support the development of transformative organizations and businesses.
- If supporting private cowork spaces for their presumed economic development benefits, consider prioritizing support for those that:
  - meaningfully quantify these benefits and the role those cowork spaces played,
  - make demonstrably more efficient use of energy and materials in construction and use: for example, through smaller per-person allotments of space; a mix of businesses that use the space at complementary times of day; a desk reservation system to ensure that the space is used efficiently; rate systems that reward people who walk or bike to work,
  - use greener materials and equipment, designed for durability and reuse,
  - involve a set proportion of businesses that promote less consumptive lifestyles (for example, through local purchasing or re-use), fairer distribution of opportunities (e.g. through fair trade), and local purchasing and markets,
  - provide childcare or scaled rates that make it easier for female participants to attend,
  - mix a wide range of socioeconomic classes and actively

recruit women entrepreneurs as members,<sup>187</sup>

- utilize partnerships with other cowork spaces to leverage group buying power for transit, car-sharing among workers for whom transit is not an option, purchase of local food, and energy production,
- provide professional development opportunities to under-engaged segments of the work force, and
- are (or become) cooperatively owned and managed, to increase community capacity to develop more inclusive work environments.

### For More Information:

- Find Canadian cowork spaces at Coworking Canada: <http://www.coworkingcanada.ca>
- A resource on the culture of private-sector coworking: <http://www.deskmag.com>
- Article: “Can Coworking and City Governments Partner?” [www.shareable.net/blog/can-coworking-and-city-governments-partner](http://www.shareable.net/blog/can-coworking-and-city-governments-partner)
- Gangplank website: <http://www.gangplankhq.com>
  - Users’ perspectives on Gangplank: <http://www.yelp.ca/biz/gangplank-chandler>
  - Press coverage of Gangplank: <http://www.gangplankhq.com/press-room/>
- The Centre for Social Innovation: <http://www.socialinnovation.ca>
- The HiVE Vancouver is a non-profit cowork space in Vancouver, BC: <http://www.hivevancouver.com>
- Ideas for combining cowork spaces with libraries: [pcworld.com/article/241574/coworking\\_at\\_the\\_public\\_library.html](http://pcworld.com/article/241574/coworking_at_the_public_library.html)