



# The tale of the Funky Spaces Group

2006 - 2020

In 2006, Mike Zeidler launched the [Association of Sustainability Practitioners](#) (ASP) with Anita Roddick in an exciting new flexible workspace called The Hub.

The Hub at 5 Torrens Street was the first of its kind, snubbing office space conventions with ultra-flexible hot-desking arrangements considered by industry insiders 'too small' and 'unworkable' in the absence of reliable anchor tenants. Jonathan Robinson, a key spokesperson for the founding group described a vision for low-cost spaces where people from all walks of life could come together to work for a better world.

Some six months later, Jonathan got in touch with Mike. He said (approximately):

*'We have people clamouring to start up Hubs everywhere in the UK - none of them have any money, and none of them have a building we could develop. Apart from Bristol. In Bristol, someone's found a suitable building which is available, and they're prepared to put up 1/3 of the money. The problem is, there's nobody in Bristol to lead the project. You seem pretty well connected there - can you help?'*

Mike had worked for nearly 7 years at the Chamber of Commerce as a partnership broker for Bristol. His role brought people from all walks of life together to work on practical projects to improve the city's future. Mike said yes. He found two other investors willing to put up 1/3 each - one of whom was Gordon Roddick\*.

One of the first things he did was invite a group of people who ran places he considered 'Funky' to meet up. He proposed they find ways of supporting each other, sharing best practice, referring people to the most suitable venues and working together to grow the market instead of battling for thin slices of action.

Some were enthusiastic, some were wary - but they came. They found they were able to serve the public better as their differences made cross-referrals easy. They hosted each other, tackled common problems together, and developed strong bonds of trust through peer to peer support.

Fast forward 10 years, and the market had developed considerably. There were now large numbers of hot-desking entrepreneurs, and no shortage of spaces to

choose from - but Funky Spaces remained unique. It was the only listing in the UK which committed its members to peer to peer support and learning exchange, connecting office, community and event spaces in service to those who work for more than just profit.

In 2016, the number of venues listed in Bristol expanded from 12 to 38, a group began to emerge in Manchester, and people in four more cities also expressed an interest. Part of the attraction lay in an increasing desire to offer more support to the changemakers who used our spaces by facilitating connections and learning across networks.

By 2018, Mike Zeidler anticipated a national Funky Spaces service, vibrant with learning and exchange, supporting more than 250 members and thousands of changemakers. He led the establishment of the Association of Coworking and Collaboration CIC and invited people to help develop his vision, co-producing strategic goals and operational plans to test in the market.

Research brought new connections with the London Coworking Assembly, an unincorporated informal group just like Funky Spaces had been. This was the end of the road for the Funky Spaces brand, which was dissolved in 2020 to avoid confusing the market.

At the time of writing, the Association of Coworking and Collaboration is due to begin trading by 2021 in partnership with the London (and EU) Coworking Assemblies as the UK Coworking Assembly.

*\*Gordon went on to invest heavily in what became the Impact Hub with over 80 spaces in a social franchise spanning the globe. This excellent article by Michael Bachmann [describes the Hub's journey](#).*