



# **Co-living as a possibility for emerging artists in Los angeles**

A case study on Up(st)arts co-living and community

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<p>Miljoner människor flyttar till Los Angeles, en stad på USA:s västkust, i hopp om att få jobba i underhållningsindustrin. Staden är känd för sin film- och musikindustri och där bor tusentals kända artister och skådespelare. Staden är full av människor från hela världen med olika kultur och bakgrund. De flesta är inte förberedda på de höga hyrorna i Los Angeles. 780 000 människor i LA spenderar 90% av sin inkomst på hyran. Under de senaste fyra åren har hemlösheten dessutom ökat med 33%. (BBC, 2019)</p> <p>Att flytta till en ny stad kan kännas skrämmande och ensamt, speciellt då man försöker bryta sig in i en industri som kan vara brutal. Därför är det värdefullt att få kontakt med likasinnade människor som kan hjälpa och stöda varandra i en svår industri. Detta är vad Upstart, ett kollektiv för blivande artister, strävar till att vara. Att kunna erbjuda ett hem för likasinnade människor till ett förmånligt pris.</p> <p>Under de två åren jag bodde i Los Angeles flyttade jag runt en hel del. Att hitta en lägenhet till ett förmånligt pris nära min praktikplats var otroligt svårt. Till råga på allt detta kräver man i USA en kontroll av kreditpoäng som representerar en persons kreditvärdighet - något vi utlänningar inte kan ge. Efter ett års konstant flyttande hittade jag till slut Upstart. Det var perfekt för mig då jag snabbt kunde flytta in och eftersom man inte är bunden av något hyresavtal utan betalar månatligen för medlemskap så har man lätt att flytta ut närsomhelst. Detta ger otrolig flexibilitet som är värdefullt i en industri där de flesta reser runt en hel del. Upstart var en helt ny erfarenhet, något jag aldrig tidigare varit medveten om. Efter att jag bott i Upstart i ett år blev jag intresserad</p>	

av hur driften av företaget fungerar i praktiken. Då gemenskapen har vuxit till över 1000 medlemmar, blev jag nyfiken på vad medlemmarnas egna erfarenheter är och ifall de känner att Upstart hjälpt dem nå sina drömmars mål inom underhållningsindustrin.

Avsikten med denna avhandling är att försöka få insikt i hur samboende och gemenskap fungerar på en grundläggande nivå. Jag kommer att använda Upstart som fallstudie för att bättre förstå hur det i praktiken går till när man startar ett sådant företag, men också för att få en uppfattning om medlemmarnas erfarenheter och ifall det medfört nytta för blivande artister i Los Angeles.

Jag kommer att använda mig av olika material och metoder som stöder varandra i forskningen. Jag använder litteratur och artiklar för att forska i fenomenet samboende och gemenskap. Detta för att samla information och försöka förstå de fundamentala element som Upstart representerar. Utöver detta kommer jag också se på den globala urbana utvecklingen som stöder uppfattningen om varför liknande företag kunde vara nyttiga för vårt samhälle.

Utöver detta kommer jag att använda kvalitativa och kvantitativa metoder. För den kvalitativa metoden använder jag mig av semi-strukturerade intervjuer med grundaren till företaget samt sju medlemmar i gemenskapen. Medlemmarna kommer jag att välja ut på basis av längd de bott i Upstart, ålder, varifrån de är ursprungligen samt vilken kreativ industri de jobbar i. Den kvantitativa metoden är i form av ett frågeformulär som skickats ut till alla medlemmar, både nya och alumner, i Upstart.

Den sista metoden jag använder mig av är etnografi, då jag själv bott och upplevt Upstart som medlem.

Alla dessa metoder gör att jag nu förstår hur företaget Upstart fungerar och hur bra medlemmarnas gemenskap fungerar.

## TEORI

De tre fenomenen som är viktiga i min forskning är samboende och gemenskap samt den urbana utvecklingen.

Gemenskapen kan delas mellan termerna territoriell gemenskap och gemenskapskänslan (Gusfield, 1975). För denna forskning kommer gemenskapskänslan att undersökas

vidare. Enligt Mcmillan och Chavis (1986) finns det fyra element som bygger upp gemenskapskänslan. Dessa fyra är medlemskap (1), influens (2), integration och uppfyllande av behov (3) samt känslomässig koppling (4). Med medlemskap delar man ett gemensamt intresse och investerar en del av sig själv i det. Detta ger än känsla av tillhörighet. Gränser används för att skapa avstånd mellan medlemmar och icke-medlemmar, vilket hjälper medlemmarna att känna sig emotionellt trygga och accepterade inom gruppen. Influens, är känslan av att du har betydelse och förmår göra en skillnad. Det går till på två sätt - antingen kan man som medlem påverka gruppen eller så kan gruppen påverka en själv. Dessa motverkningar pågår samtidigt inom gruppen. Det tredje elementet, integration och uppfyllande av behov, betyder användning av uppmuntran som motivator för beteende och skapar en positiv atmosfär inom gruppen. Detta kompletteras också av delade värderingar och principer. Då medlemmar har liknande mål kan de tillsammans bättre uppfylla dessa behov och få den uppmuntran de söker. Det fjärde elementet, delad känslomässig koppling, bygger på att medlemmar i gemenskapen kan identifiera sig med varandra, oftast genom delade upplevelser, gemensam historia och hur man samverkat i olika situationer. (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

Den ökande urbaniseringen kombinerad med en växande population kommer att driva utvecklingen mot megastäder. Vi kommer att se 2.5 miljarder människor flytta till storstäder innan 2050. Pedro Ganhamo, som kurerade *"Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanism for growing Megacities"* för MoMa pekar ut att det vi inte för fram är att två tredjedelar av dessa människor kommer att vara fattiga. Därför är det viktigt att se till att dessa städer satsar på boende för alla. (Wired, 2014) En av städerna som går detta till mötes är Los Angeles. Då allt fler människor flyttar till LA, är det viktigt att bereda plats för bostäder på alla socioekonomiska nivåer. (Planetizen, 2018)

Samboende är en trend som ökar då allt fler unga människor flyttar till storstäder. Det är ett billigt boendialternativ samtidigt som man skapar möjligheter för medlemmarna inom samboendet att jobba tillsammans och kännas som en familj. Man bor med flera människor och delar gemensamma utrymmen och oftast också sovrum. Människorna delar oftast intressen, värderingar och avsikter, vilket bygger en gemenskapskänsla. (Coworking Resources, 2019)

UPSTART

Upstart är grundat 2017, och erbjuder kreativa människor ett förmånligt alternativ för boende. Medlemmarna betalar månatligen för medlemskap och boende. Utöver detta får man också tillgång till alla bekvämligheter, evenemang, workshops, kurser och möjlighet att lyssna på gästföreläsningar. Eftersom man betalar månatligen är man inte bunden av ett hyreskontrakt och har därmed friheten att flytta ut närsomhelst. Upstart erbjuder flera olika lägen och medlemskapet varierar mellan \$715 och \$795. Upstart erbjuder tillgång t.ex. till specialutrymmen som inspelningsstudio, gym, biograf, fotostudio och ljudisolerade bås. Grundaren Jeremiah Adler berättar om hur han själv flyttade till Los Angeles och snabbt märkte hur jobbig det var att bryta sig in i underhållningsindustrin. Utöver detta var det också otroligt svårt att hitta en förmånlig hyreslägenhet. Detta ledde till Upstart. Han ville skapa ett förmånligt boende-alternativ för kreativa människor och samtidigt skapa en miljö där likasinnade individer kan samarbeta och hjälpa varann navigera livet i LA och stöda varandra medan de försöker komma in i underhållningsindustrin. Att skapa en gemenskap som får det att kännas som om man inte är ensam.

Jag talade med en del gamla och nya medlemmar som berättade om sina upplevelser med Upstart. Något som kom fram i intervjuerna var att den största orsaken medlemmar väljer Upstart är priset. Den andra orsaken var att få bo med likasinnade människor och gratis användning av gemensamma specialutrymmen. Eva berättar om hur stark gemenskaps känslan var då hon flyttade in. Men hon fortsätter med att berätta om hur det ändrades längs med tiden, och det mot slutet kändes mer som om de lät vem som helst flytta in vilket i sig betydde att gemenskaps känslan inte längre var den samma. Oscar berättar om hur han stortrivdes i Upstart under den första månaden, men hur han sedan märkte att de började ta bort vissa specialutrymmen som han behövde använda. Detta var ett problem för de flesta jag intervjuade. Taylor berättar att det inte fanns tillräckligt med specialutrymmen där hon bodde, och hur dåligt hon kände att Upstart drevs - allting gick sönder hela tiden. Ben, som bott i Upstart över ett år, berättar om hur över hälften av specialutrymmena har försvunnit sen han flyttat in, och hur snabb den månatliga omsättningen blivit jämfört med tidigare. Detta har lett till att Upstart känns mer som ett företag än en gemenskap där alla tar hand om varann. Jordan, som bott både som medlem, manager och nu som uppsyningsman säger att han känner att Upstart är vad man gör det till. Jag frågade Jordan om han tycker att Upstart hjälpt honom med att följa sin dröm, till

vilket han svarar 100% ja – 50% Upstart och 50% självengagemang. Han håller dock med om att det inte finns tillräckligt med specialutrymmen, speciellt på vissa av Upstart lokalerna. Men då jag frågade dem ifall de skulle välja Upstart på nytt svarade intervjuade medlemmar ja. Fastän de flesta kände sig smått lurade, då Upstart ändrades mycket under tiden de bodde där. De säger alla att människorna de träffade under sin tid i Upstart gjorde att allt var värt det.

Enligt frågeformuläret tycker 59.5% att hyran var på rätt nivå med tanke på vad du får ut av att bo i Upstart. Men 96.6% är nöjda över beslutet att bo i Upstart och ångrar inte att de flyttade in. Detta är intressant då det verkade finnas mycket negativa åsikter kring hur Upstart målades upp versus hur det egentligen var. Men det verkar som om gemenskapen och människorna de träffade i Upstart är huvudorsaken till att de är nöjda att de valde att bo i Upstart. Att döma av intervjuerna jag gjorde och frågeformulärets resultat tycker de flesta att Upstart hjälpte dem att sträva mot sina mål i början, men med tiden började Upstart utvecklas som ett företag som glömt de goda föresatserna de haft från början.

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The goal of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the fundamentals of co-living and community. I will use Upstart as my case study to then further research the effects of co-living and if emerging artists moving into Upstart might benefit from it. This study will research both the perspective of the members as well as the founder. As more people move to Los Angeles chasing their dreams, a co-living place like Upstart could be a great option for emerging artists to live in. <i>But what is it really like to be a part of such a community, and is it beneficial?</i></p> <p>This study is a case study that will use both quantitative and qualitative research methods, as well as ethnography. I will use literature to research the three phenomena's – co-living, urban development as well as community. This will support the empirical evidence gathered through both interviews with members and the founder as well as a electronic questionnaire.</p> <p>The results of this research will give a clear understanding of how co-living works, and the community that comes with it. Moving to a new city like Los Angeles where the rent is high and finding a community of friends can be hard, Upstart provides affordable housing with perks. As it is geared towards artists and creative individuals, the amenities that come with the membership are very valuable. To really understand if this could be the new way of living for emerging artists moving to a new city like Los Angeles.</p>	
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# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1	Purpose of this study .....	11
1.2	Material and methods .....	12
1.3	Limitations .....	13
1.4	Core Concepts.....	14
<b>2</b>	<b>THEORY.....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1	Urban development .....	15
2.2	Co-living.....	16
2.3	Community .....	18
2.3.1	<i>Sense of community</i> .....	18
<b>3</b>	<b>UPSTART.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>23</b>
4.1	Interview with Upstarts founder .....	23
4.1.1	<i>Background</i> .....	23
4.1.2	<i>Starting Upstart</i> .....	24
4.2	Interviews with Upstart members .....	25
4.2.1	<i>Anna</i> .....	25
4.2.2	<i>Oscar</i> .....	26
4.2.3	<i>Ben</i> .....	27
4.2.4	<i>Eva</i> .....	28
4.2.5	<i>Jordan</i> .....	29
4.2.6	<i>Taylor</i> .....	31
<b>5</b>	<b>RESULTS.....</b>	<b>32</b>
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>38</b>
	Appendix 1.....	38
	Appendix 2.....	38
	Appendix 3.....	39



## **Figures**

**FIGURE 1.** Single homes and the densification in LA p. 16

**FIGURE 2.** The four elements that define the sense of community p. 19

**FIGURE 3.** Pictures from different Upstart locations p. 22

**FIGURE 4.** Results from the research questionnaire p. 32

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles, on the west coast of the USA, is known as the entertainment capital of the world. Millions of people move to Los Angeles, in the hopes to be discovered or to get to work in the entertainment industry they desire. The city, that is known for its billions dollar movie and music industry, is home to thousands of famous people such as Leonardo Di Caprio, Angelina Jolie and Snoop Dogg. Especially Hollywood, a hilly part of Los Angeles, which is called “the playground to the stars” is where millions of emerging artists dream to be one day. Not only is it great for pursuing your creative dreams, it’s a vibrant city with a variety of events and activities. The climate is generally pleasant all year round, there are lots of outdoor activities and the creative scene offered is huge and diverse. The city is known as a “melting pot”, with people from all over the world, with varying backgrounds and ethnicities. Being different and unique is celebrated, not frowned upon, and creativity is seen all over the city in different art forms. But living the LA dream doesn’t come cheap. Los Angeles is one the most expensive cities in the world to live in. As rent increases year after year, the rate of homelessness rises. 780 000 people living in LA spend 90% of their income on rent, and in the past four years homelessness has increased by 33%. (BBC, 2019)

People in the creative field know it is not an easy road. Trying to make it as an artist in places such as Los Angeles can be hard, competitive, expensive and most of all stressful. Especially for people moving to a new country or city to pursue their art and passion it can be hard not having that support from friends and family around you. So finding an affordable place to live and a community of likeminded individuals could be beneficial for emerging artists that need that extra support. This is exactly what the company Up(st)art, a co-living community for budding artists, is trying to achieve.

During the two years I lived in Los Angeles, one of them I lived at Upstart. Previously having to move every 4 months due to unforeseen events, trying to find an apartment was a struggle every time. Not only did I have to find something within my price range, but it also had to be close enough to where I was doing my internship as I did not have a car. As public transportation is incredibly bad, you want to live in close proximity to where you work. On top of that they do a credit score check for most apartments, which we from Europe do not have. There was a lot of different factors that made it hard to find a place,

let alone one I could afford. Thankfully I found Upstart that not only gave me a home but also a family. It was the best option for me price-wise and not knowing how long I would stay in Los Angeles, it gave me the flexibility I needed. I wasn't tied to a lease and could pay month-to-month for as long as I intended to stay. Staying at Upstart gave me a whole new experience, nothing like anything I've ever had before. Upstart as a concept is smart, and I started thinking about what it actually would be like to start something like Upstart. And since the community has grown to almost 1000 members, I was interested in knowing what everyone's opinion and experience was with said company, and if it helped them in pursuing their own passions.

## **1.1 Purpose of this study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the fundamentals of co-living and the community. I will use Upstart as my case study for research purposes. How do you start a company like Upstart? And what is it actually like for the members to live at Upstart and be a part of the community? I will research and explore this to get a real comprehension on the positive elements that already exists, and the possible threats. What it actually is and how it affects emerging artists that are a part of the community. The objective is to find out if this truly could be the new way of living for emerging creative individuals.

Understanding what co-living and community is lets us understand what it can bring to the table. I believe this study will show that it is beneficial for emerging artists to grow by living with likeminded individuals and being able to collaborate and support each other. This might not only show it's beneficial for emerging artists, but also for cultural producers. As cultural producers we work with the artists, and being able to live with them and gain networking opportunities through that could be a game-changer. By doing research using a dual method of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as ethnography, I will have a better understanding of the pros and cons of the concept of community and co-living at Upstart. This will help me get a deeper understanding of how exactly it is beneficial for emerging artists.

## 1.2 Material and methods

The research methods are tools and techniques that will help me gather information. It is my intention to uncover interesting new facts, and how it is carried out will reflect the quality of results (Walliman 2011). As my research is a case study, I will benefit the most from using multiple research methods to support one another. For the theoretical part of my study, I will be using articles and literature that research the phenomenon “co-living and community”. I will gather information about how it works, and what the research has shown that the effect of living in these surroundings has proven to be. I will also conduct interviews for qualitative purposes and an electronic questionnaire for quantitative purposes. Ethnography will also be used as a method, as I have first-hand experience as a member and will use the information I have gathered through direct observation.

The purpose of interviewing is to get an in-depth understanding of a person’s experience. The way a researcher can investigate and research a specific case is through the individual person’s experience, and so asking the right questions will make or break the case. (Seidman 1991) My interviews will be done from two perspectives – the founder and the members. I am going to conduct one in-depth semi-structured interview with Upstarts founder, to fully understand how and why he started it, and what his vision for the future is. The second part of interviews will be in-depth semi-structured with seven members, both past and present. This will be done to fully understand their journey from choosing Upstart as their home to how it has lived up to their expectations. I will gather information on how Upstart co-living works in practice and how the community affects the members. The people will be chosen for these interviews will be done through purposive sampling. To get the broadest of perspectives, the following have been taken into consideration when choosing the interviewees: length of membership, where they are from, what their creative pursue is and how involved with Upstart they are.

For this research I will also be using ethnography as a method. Ethnography is based on direct observing where the researcher stays for a long time in the environment and observes, interacts and participates in their everyday life. (Silverman 2016: 113-114) As I

have lived at Upstart, I have gained first-hand insight into what it is like to live there, and can therefore gain a better understanding when performing the qualitative interviews.

Lastly I will be conducting the quantitative research, which will be in the form of an electronic questionnaire. A questionnaire is a method used to collect data from a sampling population and gain insight into who they are and how they think. It is not as in-depth as the interviews, but it will help to support the quantitative research. As the variable in this research method is the questions, it is important to construct them in a way that reflects the appropriate levels of measurement necessary, so that we can further analyze it. (Balnaves & Caputi 2001: 75-77) I will be using a mixture of a 1-4 rating semantic distance scale, an adjective checklist and some open-ended questions. These will measure their overall experience at Upstart, with questions ranging from their experience of the operational side of it as well as their experience of being part of the community.

All of these different methods together will give me an overall picture of the company, its functionality and how well the community works.

### **1.3 Limitations**

Co-living and community is a huge concept. That is why I have decided to limit my research to Upstart, as I do not only have a personal connection to it but I also find it important to understand the effects it has on people. Trying to break in to the creative field is already an extremely challenging and stressful task. Most people who want to work in this field will have to make sacrifices and maybe even move to a new city or country. So what better way than to move in to a community of likeminded individuals who can help each other thrive. Concepts like Upstart could become a new way of living and a game-changer for millions of people. I will also take into consideration the geographical location and culture, as this affects the member's experience.

## 1.4 Core Concepts

### **Co-living**

*“Co-living is a new way for people to live in cities, focused on community and convenience.”*

The practice of living with a group of people in shared homes, as well as sharing common facilities with one another. Facilities could include areas, rooms, or services for particular activities. (Cambridge Dictionary)

### **Community**

*“Here's a real sense of community (= caring and friendly feeling) in this neighborhood.”*

People who all live in one particular area or who are considered a unit because of their common interest, nationality or social group. (Cambridge Dictionary)

### **Facility**

*“Recreational/sports/leisure facilities”*

An area or room where a specific purpose or activity takes place. Usually something that is member based. (Cambridge Dictionary)

### **Urban Development**

1. The development or improvement of an urban area by building
  2. An urban area that has been developed and improved by building
- (Cambridge Dictionary)

## 2 THEORY

In this part of my study I will use literature and articles to explain the different phenomena that play a big part of understanding the fundamentals that Upstart builds upon. It consists of three main areas – urban development, co-living and community. These three parts will help create an understanding of the basics for a company like Upstart.

### 2.1 Urban development

The global trend towards megacities with populations over 10 million seems unstoppable. In fact, urbanization is what will come to define the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Increasing urbanization combined with a growing world population will speed up this megatrends and we will see an increase in population of another 2.5 billion people moving into cities by 2050. To visualize this trend, you only have to look back 70 years when there were only two cities, New York and Tokyo, with populations over 10 million. In 2010 the number is 25 cities and by 2050 there will be an estimated 40 megacities around the world. (ESPAS 2019)

As Pedro Ganhamo, who curated *Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for growing Megacities* for MoMA, points out - what we don't reference to is that two-thirds of these people will be poor. How urban planners can work with and not against these urban residents to make cities more livable for everyone is what Ganhamo and MoMA want to figure out. (Wired, 2014)

One of the cities facing these issues is Los Angeles. The city, that used to be mostly a suburban area, met the limits of its capacity decades ago. The need to re-invigorate urban design to support the way people live is what needs to happen. As more people move to L.A., you need to make room for housing at every socioeconomic level. (Planetizen, 2018)

*“I think the densification of L.A. is inevitable from an economic standpoint and a growth standpoint. I know people are in love with single-family houses, but ultimately that's not going to produce the most efficient way of living in urban environments. I think that a strategic moratorium on that type of development would force us to create an urban growth boundary and densify from within.”*

Milton Curry, Dean of USC's School of Architecture (Lamag, 2018)



*Figure 2. Single Homes (Getty Images) and the densification in LA Credit: Ron Reiring/Flickr*

Almost fifty percent of Los Angeles is covered in single-family homes. (Los Angeles Curbed, 2020) A single-family home with a backyard is appealing to many, but the problem arises when everyone else wants one too. Suburbia optimizes returns for the few at the cost of the many. Urban environments however continuously optimizes for the many. The problem with L.A. is not the densification of it, it is the infrastructure with single-family homes that make it seem denser than it is. If more people live in a place where there is less cars, better public transportation and more walkable distances to theatres, plazas, markets etc. it makes it seems less dense. (Planetizen, 2018) A recent study found that dense, well-educated, immigrant-friendly cities promote and sustain longevity – especially for the low-income. (City Observatory, 2018)

## **2.2 Co-living**

Roughly one in three millennials under the age of 35 own a home in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), which is 8-9% lower than previous generations homeownership rates at ages 25-34 (Urban Institute, 2018). We have all heard of the concept “co-working”, but what exactly is “co-living”? Co-living is a new trend that is on the rise as more young people move to bigger cities making housing more expensive. It is a housing model where you live with many other people in the same space and share the communal spaces, most often even the bedrooms. It's based on creating a cheap housing option all



while creating opportunities for the residents to work together as well as making them feel like one big family. People share interests, values and intentions which makes it easier to get a sense of community. Not only do residents get affordable rent but they get community support and a sense of belonging. Moving to a new city can be daunting, but being accepted into a community with like-minded individuals right off the bat, can make a huge difference. (Coworking Resources, 2019)

Another perk of co-living is that there is usually not a lease agreement, making it a great choice for people who tend to move around a lot, whether it be for personal or professional reasons. Another perk is that the rent usually includes everything, which means you will never have to set up utilities, Wi-Fi or anything else. The space is already furnished and cleaners are usually also included in the rent, which means you do not ever have to worry about anything besides paying the rent on time. Besides these perks, you also usually get a bunch of facilities included, like a movie theatre, gym, working space etc. All of these perks make it an amazing housing option for young professionals. (Coworking Resources, 2019)

If all of this has not already drawn you to the idea of co-living, the operators usually organize social events regularly for residents. For people that are new to the city, getting the chance to live and collaborate with like-minded people, getting to use facilities provided and having regular social events to meet residents from all different locations are a huge key draw. (The Peak Magazine, 2017)

There are now hundreds of different co-living companies all over the world offering affordable housing options for young people. Some of the companies are bigger and offer housing in different locations, and some are smaller and might only offer one particular location. (Coworking Resources, 2019) Prices for different co-living spaces vary quite a lot depending on which city you are in and the size of the co-living space. (Business Insider, 2017)

As an example of a co-living company, Collective, is a co-living space in London that offers up to 546 rooms across 10 floors in a chic industrial building. There is no move-in fee and you can leave with one month's notice. One of the members who was asked about

living there said not being locked in a contract is what made him choose Collective, and the community they have is what made him stay.

But in the same way that it can be seen as a solution to the urban housing crisis, it can also be seen as a cynical way for property developers to make money off of the younger generation that have a hard time finding a place they can call home. Some would even call co-living a “dorm for grown-ups”. Some of the members at Collective saw it another way, saying they were shocked to see the close quarters people were crammed in to, and being watched through security cameras and informed if they broke any minor rules felt uncomfortable. (The Guardian, 2019)

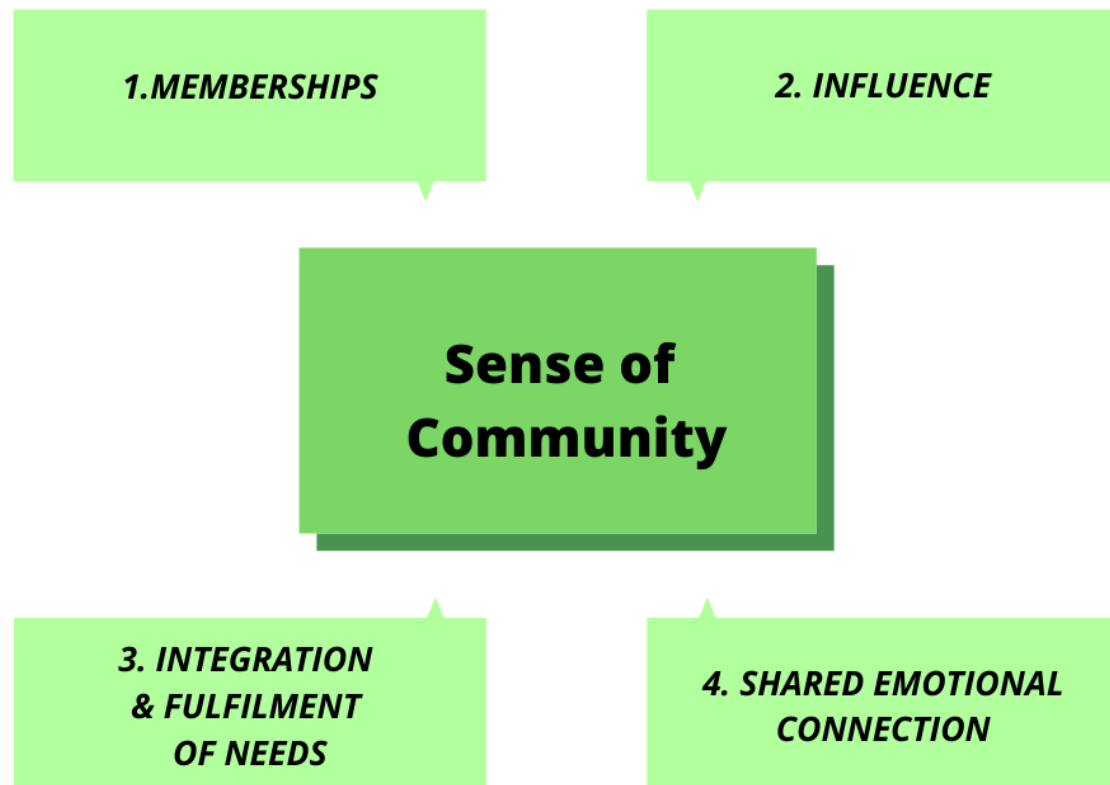
## **2.3 Community**

According to Gusfield (1975), a community can be distinguished in two major terms. The first is the geographical approach, which would be known as a neighborhood, town or city. This term is a territorial approach to the community where the location determines the community. The other one is the relational approach, in which it is not the location, but the human relationships and their interests and skills that determines the community.

For a better understanding of how Upstarts community works, I will in chapter 2 present the concept of sense of community.

### **2.3.1 Sense of community**

There are different criteria's to look at when defining what establishes a sense of community. To have sense of community normally points to member's feeling of belonging and reflects their experience as a part of the community. There are multiple factors that determine the sense of community. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), there are four elements to their proposed definition.



*Figure 1. The four elements that define “Sense of Community” (McMillan & Chavis 1986)*

The first element (1) is memberships. With a membership, you share a common interest and have invested part of yourself. Therefore you feel a sense of belonging. It brings you together from the get-go, and you know who belongs in the community and who does not. However, boundaries come with membership. Boundaries are used to create a social distance between members and non-members. It can help the members feel emotionally safe with developing intimacy within the group. It also helps with feeling that one belongs to the group and is accepted. Personal investment also belongs to the element of memberships, as it provides the feeling that one has earned his or her place which makes the membership more valuable and meaningful.

McMillan and Chavis's (1986) second element (2) is influence - having the sense that you matter and have the ability to make a difference in your group. There are two directions you can go with the element influence. One is the notion that you as a member of the group have influence over what the group does. The other one is that you are cohesive and the group is able to influence you. These two directions work simultaneously, because members that acknowledge other members needs and values actually make those members the most influential and powerful group members. The group members that want to dominate the other members actually become the least influential and powerful group members.

The third component (3) McMillan and Chavis (1986) discusses is the integration and fulfilment of needs, which could be translated as reinforcement. Basically, using reinforcement as a motivator for behavior, maintains a positive vibe within the group and its members. This can be done both for an individual within the group or the whole group. Having group success bring the group closer and being competent within the group is another reinforcement. People seem to gravitate towards individuals who can benefit them in some way, which makes individuals with certain skills and competence more attractive to group members. This concept can be a blind and directionless principle unless it is complemented by other concepts, such as shared values. Feeling like you are a part of a community, or having a sense of community is really bound by all of you sharing values and principles to some extent. When people who have shared values and principles come together, they find that they also have similar goals hence feeling that if they come together they might be better at fulfilling these needs and attain the reinforcement they seek.

The fourth element (4) is shared emotional connection that actually builds, in part, upon shared history. This does not mean they have to have "participated" in it, but instead identify with it, for example through events and the specific attributes of the events. This may strengthen the emotional connection between the members in the community. There are a few principles that are important to the element of shared emotional connection. Interaction and especially the quality of interaction, is an important feature as the more people interact and the more positive the interactions and relationships are, the bigger the chance of having a close relationship between them are. Another important feature in

emotional connection is shared events. There is for example enormous bonding between people who go through a crisis together. Beyond this, investment is also an important feature. Members that invest more of their time and energy into their “community” are more emotionally invested and involved. All of these different features have an effect on the shared emotional connection felt between the members of the community.

### **3 UPSTART**

Upstart was founded in 2017, and offers creative people an affordable option for housing. It is a co-living housing option, where members pay a monthly membership fee in exchange for housing. The membership fee also gives you access to all their amenities, classes, workshops, guest speakers and events. The membership fee is paid on a month-to-month basis, which means you have the freedom to move out at any time without the stress of being tied to a lease.

Upstart offers many different locations, which all come with their own amenities. The rent also differs depending on which location you stay at, but ranges from \$715 to \$795 per month.

Members share facilities and bedrooms. The bedrooms are divided by gender, but some of the locations offer gender neutral bedrooms. The bedrooms are lined up with sleep pods, one for each member. The sleep pods differ, depending on location. Each member also get their own space for their belongings as well as a storage space for suitcases and bigger items.

Upstart offer amenities, such as recording studios, art space, gym, sound booth, self-tape studio, dance space and movie theatre. These amenities are free for all members to use, which you can book using Upstarts own booking system. They also offer classes and workshops throughout the month, which you easily sign up for through Upstart. There is no limit to how many classes and workshop you can attend. They also have guest speakers that will come and offer insight to the different creative industries. Beyond this they also organize various events, like camping, sailing, theme parties and weekend getaways.

However the biggest event that they organize annually is Upstart Awards, which celebrates all the member's achievements throughout the year.

Upstarts mission is to offer an affordable housing option, to give members the tools they need to further their careers as well as cultivate people and give members the chance to work together and network. (Upstart, 2021)



Figure 3. Pictures from Upstart Locations. [www.livingatupstart.com](http://www.livingatupstart.com)

## **4 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In this chapter I will present my research findings that were derived from transcription of audio recordings, and further analysis of these written transcripts.

### **4.1 Interview with Upstarts founder**

I had the pleasure of interviewing the founder of Upstart, Jeremiah Adler. The 33 year old, born and raised in Portland, Oregon, has grown Upstart beyond what he ever imagined it would be when he started it four years ago.

#### **4.1.1 Background**

Jeremiah came to LA when he was 23, with no money but the dream of becoming a successful script writer/director. During his first years in LA he both got exciting opportunities of directing pilots as well as the disappointments of never selling any of them. He was essentially struggling to make ends-meet not knowing when the next check would come. To support himself he ended up getting a job in property management. Jeremiah laughs about the irony of him being forced to give up his creative career because housing in the city was too expensive, and now he had transitioned into having a career that was based off of making the city more un-affordable. As more and more people came with their big dreams of making it in LA, the reality of it was that most of them did not meet the ridiculous criteria's set out to rent an apartment. If you weren't making two and a half or three times the rent, didn't have a savings account nor a credit score you were not able to rent an apartment. And so here he was, denying creative people with big dreams of making it in LA, just as he had tried to.

Upstart was birthed out of an early thirties crisis with him hating what his life had become. And so Upstart was a response to not wanting to be a part of making the city un-affordable or choosing people based on their finances, and at the same time helping them in their pursuit of making it in the creative industry. He thinks what you need to be doing when your young is spend all your time pursuing your creative career, but with the city being so expensive you end up having to spend all your time working a day job just to afford someplace to live. He wanted to admit people, not based on their bank account, but on

their shared passions and to create a community that helps creative minds come together. And so he decided to make his dream a reality.

#### **4.1.2 Starting Upstart**

As he did not have a background in business, he did what no one should – used multiple credit cards to open the first location, which was Hoover. With the masters lease signed and his first location open, he was there working every day. As they did not have staff, he was responsible for everything. After all the rent money came in the first month, they decided to take everyone canyoneering, and the next month they rented a sailboat and took everyone sailing. That is how the Upstart Events started. The amenities were sparse, and after a while they realized they could take a chunk of the rent money and actually use it towards something people need but can't afford. So at their next location they invested in a recording studio. As they grew, their amenities grew. With eight locations open right now, Jeremiah says one of the challenges is figuring out the exact ratio on how many members for every amenity. As the members move in and out, it is hard to know what they need more of and is all based on a feedback loop.

I talked with Jeremiah a little bit more about Upstart today, and how they've created the community. He says it all starts with an application essay, followed by a deep-dive in social media to really get a vibe of the person in question. When people ask why they got denied, it usually comes down to being able to tell that they are probably not going to be a good fit as a member of the community. It is constantly evolving, and the purpose is to let in talented ambitious people but also people who are going to have positive impact on the community. Letting the wrong people in can have a negative impact on the community, as the community is a formation of everyone's energy, and it only takes one person to shift or make a toxic environment. So choosing the right members has a huge impact. All of the locations come with their own challenges and making sure everything works and that everyone is happy is what they want.

Jeremiah tells me about his vision for the future. The plan is to expand with locations around the world to facilitate easy re-locations.



## **4.2 Interviews with Upstart members**

The interviews with the members are in-depth semi-structured. Pseudonyms were used for all members. As part of the research I used a quantitative method, a questionnaire, to support the qualitative interviews conducted. This questionnaire was sent out to the Facebook group that belongs to the Upstart community. 37 people, ages 18-37, participated in the questionnaire. 73% of the participants are from the U.S, and the rest from abroad. 35% of the participants are alumnus and do not live at Upstart anymore. The time lived at Upstart vary between 3-17 months.

### **4.2.1 Anna**

Anna is a 25 year old from New Jersey. She came to LA to pursue acting and music. She found Upstart through Facebook, and was first drawn to it because of the cheap rent but also intrigued as the place was advertised as a place that cultivates people. She has since moved out but spoke to me about her experience during those 6 months she lived at the collective.

Anna initially loved living at Upstart. As an actor and musician, having access to a recording studio and self-tape room was pivotal and being able to be around other creative people was inspiring. When she first moved in, most people that were there had been living there for a longer period of time and the sense of community was strong. But as problems arose, people started moving out which shifted the energy in the community.

She stated to me that things were not as good as it had been made out to be. Soon after she moved in, amenities started disappearing and being less accessible. The few amenities that were left, were always fully booked and had poor execution as far as functionality goes. She references to the self-tape room that had a water heater that would make noise, and the recording studio lacking air-conditioning. As public areas on the property were turned into facilities like rehearsal spaces, the ability to cultivate with other people was diminished. Soon after, members that had been there long before her started moving out. She described it almost like a pattern, where one moved out and soon the rest followed. This in turn meant new members moving in that ended up shifting the dynamic of the

sense of community they once had. She feels that the best way to keep the roots of Upstarts sense of community, you have to have mostly older members live there, and a few new move-ins each month that you incorporate into that.

Anna described how she felt like they started marketing Upstart differently soon after she had moved in. Where before it was directed towards an older audience serious about their art and a place to stay short or long-term, it had now become a place marketed for younger people, fresh out of college and did not serve as a great place to stay longer.

Upstart advertises their weekly classes geared towards the creative field, and their monthly events to help cultivate people. I spoke to Anna about these, to in which she replied that there are very few classes, and it is mostly members who have to take the initiative and do it. The monthly Upstart event almost never happen, and if they do she feels like they only use it as a marketing ploy for pictures. They still use old pictures on their websites of their amenities and she describes it all as false advertising. The quantitative research showed that 40.5% strongly disagreed with Anna, saying they felt their expectations lived up to the reality.

In the end she felt like she was not getting what they had promised her, and moved out. If the amenities would have worked like they advertised then she could have utilized them more for her career but this was not the case. Reflecting back on her time at Upstart and everything that came with it, she talks about how it really is the people that make the place, but feels like Upstart does not directly add to this. She came out with some great friends and networking opportunities and ultimately does not regret living at Upstart, even though it might not have been what she initially thought.

#### **4.2.2 Oscar**

Oscar is a 26 year old from Texas who works as a content creator. He moved to LA to get his foot in the door and grow as a creative and ultimately wants to start his own production company. He found Upstart through Facebook and moved to Upstart straight from Texas. The main reason he chose Upstart was the cheap rent, but added that being surrounded by other creative people was a major factor.

Right when he moved in, Upstart organized a 48 hour film festival between the locations, which he said really helped him to get to know everyone and opened up doors for more projects with the other members right from the start. He even ended up entering Los Angeles 48 hour Film Festival with some of the members. Initially, being a part of the community helped him pursue his passion, as people were always ready to help each other out with their own set of talent. He described the community as a family and a mixed pot with very different people from all over the world.

Oscar soon got over his honeymoon phase, and said things started to change. Upstart had a designated quiet work room that he utilized the most, but in his second month they implemented a fee per month to have a desk space. He says most amenities might exist but they are not very convenient. Some of them you can only use between certain hours, which they did not disclaim beforehand. The designated work room was always too full, and never quiet. Some amenities that were advertised for him never even worked at all, referencing to the Jacuzzi and sauna in the back yard. He ultimately feels like it was too many people and not enough amenities. Being around people all the time also made it hard for him to fully concentrate on his work, even though he does mention that being able to collaborate and network helped him grow immensely as a content creator.

Oscar moved out after living at Upstart for 7 months. Talking to him about his thoughts of what was initially marketed to him versus what reality was like, he found that they definitely left the negatives out. But with this he still finds more positives than negatives as he got to know people that he never would otherwise have met and still feels like a part of its history. Even now, most people he meets are somehow connected to Upstart and he feels like you can bond through both having had the Upstart experience. If he had the choice to do it all over again, he says he definitely would.

### **4.2.3 Ben**

Ben is an Irish actor/screenwriter who moved to the United States over a year ago. As most foreigners know, finding a place in the US is hard, as most rentals will check your credit score which countries outside the US do not have. Because of this, Ben was living at a hostel working for free rent when he finally found Upstart through Facebook. His

main reason for choosing Upstart was the voice-over booth that they had as an amenity, as he did a lot of voice-over work. The cheap rent was another reason he chose Upstart.

Ben is still at Upstart, and has been for the past 16 months. He tells me that Upstart initially helped him pursue his passion but is actually doing the opposite now. He states that when he first moved in, it initially lived up to what was marketed to him. He believes that the application process used to be stricter, and now it feels like they let anyone in which in turn has made the sense of community evolve to the worse. The big turn-over of members every month is a major factor to why the sense of community is worse than what it was initially. In his opinion Upstart has become just a business that has forgotten its roots.

He focuses on the fact that over half of the amenities are gone, and the other half always fully booked, He also states that most of them do not fit their purpose. The biggest change that impacted him negatively was the removal of the work room, as that was the only place to work at a desk. A lot of the amenities are also moved to new locations to make a grander entrance which in turn makes the existing location worse.

I asked Ben about his experience with the acting classes provided, to which he responded that he does not go to any of them as they are taught by actors with less credentials than himself and other members. He also notes that most of the guest speakers they have had at Upstart are not industry professionals, which is what Upstart advertised them to be.

Overall, Ben does not regret moving in. He says having the Voice-over booth has helped him immensely and the fact that the rent is cheap is a big plus. He wants to continue to write and produce and will be moving out soon to focus more on his art.

#### **4.2.4 Eva**

Eva is a 26 year old from California who is mainly pursuing photography. She found Upstart through Facebook, and chose to move in mostly because of the cheap rent but also to have the opportunity to live with other creative people as well as getting to use the amenities.

Eva says that Upstart has helped her career greatly. In her first six months at Upstart she collaborated with a lot of actors and models that were also members. This ended up putting her on Sarah and Jeremiahs radar, the Upstart founders, and she was hired as Upstarts official head shot photographer. With that came free rent which opened up a lot of time to pursue and develop her career. Eva has now lived at Upstart for 13 months, and tells me about the changes she has experienced during her time there. When she first moved in she describes the sense of community as great overall, and says that in her house in particular it was so strong it felt more like a family. As time went on and Upstart grew and changed, the members started to quickly rotate. By this time she has been through nine different cycles of people and says it is not what it used to be. The photo studio was great at first but changed a lot so she ended up getting her own photo studio.

In regard to the classes and events she tells me that the classes are mostly geared towards actors and musicians. The events however was a big let-down as they were a big part of why she wanted to move in. She was told that there would be monthly events and their social media was filled with videos and pictures from sailing trips, camping trips and other big events, and since she moved in they have only had two big events. So in that regard she felt it was false advertising.

Eva concludes by telling me how great Upstart is. She says even though it is lacking in a lot of areas, the community and opportunities made it worth it. She describes it as feeling like you're a part of something really big. Ultimately she believes that Upstart is what you make it. Upstart can only provide you with a world of opportunities but it is up to you what you do with it.

#### **4.2.5 Jordan**

Jordan is a 25 year old English musician that moved to the United States to work as a band manager in Chicago. After a year they moved to LA to pursue their own music career and found out about Upstart through a one of their famous friends that was intrigued about the concept of Upstart and asked them to go and tour the place for him. But Jordan ended up loving it and moved in right away. They described their initial thought of Upstart while on their tour.

“It was amazing. There was someone on the steps of Harvard (location name) with a guitar making a song, and I walked into the kitchen and there was someone producing a song and someone else was teaching someone how to cook. And then I walked into the chill room and there was someone watching “The Shining”. And then we walked to Hobart Theatre and there was someone doing a dance lesson and it was just so filled with so many different creative opportunities and people who were working with their art and it was literally the most special thing I’d ever seen. So I fell in love with it from that moment.”

Jordan has lived at Upstart for a year, both as a member, manager and now supervisor. They tell me that the biggest reason for choosing Upstart was that they are creative 100% of the time so living with so many different people that were like that felt like home.

As to whether Upstart has helped them with pursuing their passion, they tell me 100%. 50% Upstart and 50% self-dedication. In their opinion, Upstart provides you with the spaces but it is up to you to do the work. 43% of the participants in the quantitative research agreed with Jordan, saying that Upstart helped them work harder towards their goals and a staggering 89% felt that the community Upstart provided was extremely beneficial for them.

Speaking about the community sense, they call it one big weird dysfunctional family and states that it has a great sense of community as everyone is there for the same reason and you instantly have common ground. As Jordan has lived in multiple locations, they said that every location has its own vibe and that the biggest difference between the locations are the amenities that come with it. They also state that their current location is the only one with gender-neutral rooms. In the quantitative research done, members were asked to choose words that they find describe the community the best. 91% of the words were positive and the words used most was Supportive, Family, Fun, Friends, Motivating, Welcoming, Networking/Connections and Inclusive. A lot of the members described it as it feeling like a “permanent summer camp”.

Going in more about the different perspectives as a member, manager and supervisor they say as a manager you work two hours a day and get free rent, whereas a supervisor you work three to four hours a day and get free rent plus pay. Jordan feels that working as a supervisor now gives him more time to dedicate to his art. As a supervisor they feel like

they have the ability to impact on member's lives more which they love but that there is a lot of conflict resolution and knowing when to pick your battles which ultimately takes a lot of your energy.

Regarding the amenities they state that the amenities are the reason they are still there and that the amenities are what creates the community as you get to work with others. But there is not enough amenities and as the amenities varies with properties, choosing where you live can have a big effect on your creativity.

Being able to be around people in what they describe as the loneliest field and city in the world has made it all worth it and the community feels like their family. The rent is more than worth it in their opinion as they think you get what you take. If you use it as a place to live and do not use any amenities or work on your art or take advantage of the classes and events provided then it is probably not worth it. Ultimately they feel that it is way better than what was marketed.

#### **4.2.6 Taylor**

Taylor is a 26 year old from Iowa and graduated from grad school for Journalism. She moved to LA to pursue writing and after living in an Airbnb she found out about Upstart through a friend. The reason she chose Upstart was mainly because of the cheap rent but also availability. As she moved into the Cloverdale location, her first impression was how different it looked from pictures, she soon realized that they had used pictures on their website of a different unit in Cloverdale which was bigger with a bigger kitchen and living area so she felt that it was a bit of false marketing there. Taylor tells me living at Upstart feels extremely unorganized, but that is because she moved in to a new location with 60 people moving in at the same time, it was to be expected. The community sense grew strong and was the only reason people stayed. There were only one amenity at Cloverdale, which was a whisper room. Cloverdale is the second most expensive location of Upstart, and in her opinion there are not enough amenities to justify the rent compared to the other locations.

As a writer, she does not have a quiet space to work, and even though there is a designated work space unfortunately the rules are enforced inconsistently which means it is not quiet at all. As far as classes and events go, often they do not happen at all and when they do, they are mostly catered to musicians and actors.

She has lived at Upstart for almost two months and describes it as going from bad to worse and says it is a combination of poor management and everything breaking constantly. She believes that Upstart is more committed to themselves and the business than they are to the members that make the business.

Asking Taylor if she regretted moving in, she replied saying that she, in fact, did not regret it as it brought her the community and friends. But she does emphasize that community is made up by the members and not by Upstart.

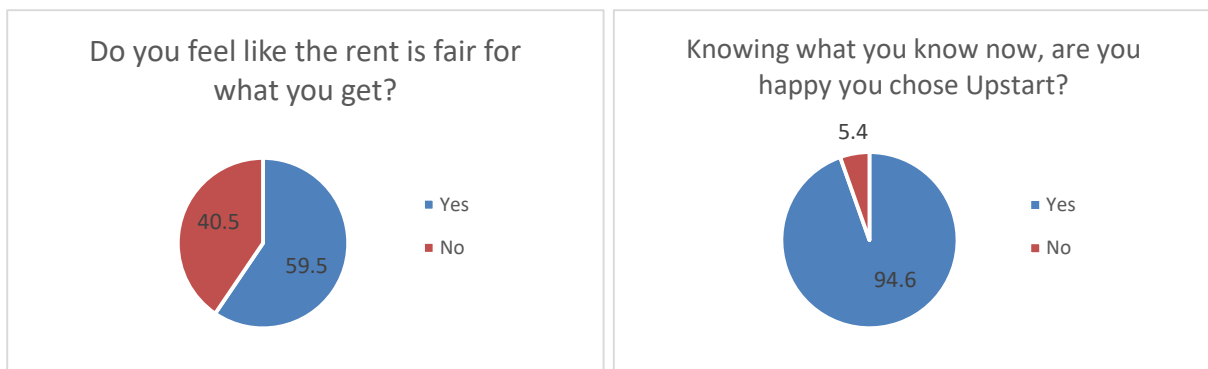


Figure 4. Results from the research questionnaire

## 5 RESULTS

The goal of this research was to provide an understanding of how a collective like Upstart works, and if there is anything to gain from living and being a part of the community as an aspiring artist. As the term “artist” is very broad, the results from the interviews can vary depending on the choice of the creative field.



Each member's experience is independent of the other and should be treated as such. However, the pattern which emerged from these interviews can lend a good understanding of what a member can experience if they choose to become a part of the community.

Understanding the importance of urbanization and how a community can benefit budding artists is what helped us understand the background of why a company like Upstart is useful. The first pattern that I immediately noticed was the reason why they chose to live at Upstart. It was clear that the membership fee was the biggest reason for member's interest in moving to the collective. The second was the community and being able to live with like-minded individuals. These two things are also what the founder, Jeremiah, set out as his goals. To lower rent cost for artists, as well as provide a safe space with like-minded individuals pursuing the creative field. And being able to work together and network, which is essential for any person pursuing the creative field.

The second pattern I found was the marketing aspect of it all. As Jeremiah explains, the whole concept of Upstart was created around not only being able to provide a more affordable option for housing in LA, but to also create a community and offer amenities for the members to use. What I found interesting is how the members felt about the accuracy of what was advertised to them. It was said to be a place with amenities free to use, a great place to cultivate and network. In reality what I gained from the members is how badly it was run. All of the members talked about how the amenities started disappearing soon after they moved in, and how there was not enough amenities for the amount of people living there. This is something Jeremiah also spoke about - the difficulty managing the amenities and knowing the amount of amenities needed. However, as the members interviewed all lived at Upstart during the span of a year period, it feels like it was something that never really worked. As the community grew bigger, the amenities did not.

As time went on, they started getting lenient on who to bring in to the community, which led to it not being what it was ultimately set out to be. The older members spoke about the amazing sense of community they had when they moved in, and how as time went on they became less strict of who would be approved to become a member. This in turn led to it losing that strong sense of community that it was built upon.

Another thing that was falsely advertised was the Upstart Events and classes. Jeremiah spoke about how they started the Upstart Events, and how they set out to do one big event every month for members to cultivate. But, as I spoke to members past and present, it seems like the events did not really exist, a part from a few times spread out. The classes were also not what it seemed to be, as they did not cater to all art forms, nor were they run by professionals.

An interesting fact that I gathered was how the two members that really felt like Upstart did a great job were the two members that worked for Upstart. This can mean that they either put more effort in their pursuit of their careers which led to them being offered jobs within the community or it could also be that being that they are working for Upstart makes them more invested in the company and feel like they gain more from being there.

There are some different opinions whether Upstart directly helps with pursuing a career. In-directly Upstart helps because it provides them a place to stay within their budget, as opposed to normal rental places, which means Upstart provides them with the means to live in LA. There were some mixed feelings about what Upstart actually does for you beyond that. It seems that while the idea of what Upstart tries to do is great, execution is not their strong suit. Is this a great place to live on the cheap? Sure. Is it a great place to meet people? Of course. But is it setting out to do what it advertises? In short, no. The false advertising of what life really is within the community is obvious after all the interviews conducted. That is not to say that people within the community can't create their own little community. The most interesting point though is, even with all the negative reviews and false advertising, almost every single person would choose Upstart all over again. Which leads to the conclusion that even though it does not do what it sets out to do, people gain enough for it to be worth it. But you can clearly see that the community of people that comes with co-living is beneficial for members. Especially for people trying to break into the entertainment industry. Not only does it provide a safety net but it also provides valuable networking opportunities. And as a cultural producer, getting those instant connections and networking is crucial. We as the producers work with the artists and the event industry and having direct contact with emerging artists allowed them to get to know me on a personal level and trust me which then lead to job opportunities.

What I also learnt was that it is extremely hard to run such a business, especially if the monthly over-turn is huge. It seems like Upstart grew too quickly and that came with issues, especially regarding the amenities which was a huge selling point for members.

Co-living places in general seems to be of great value to megacities and there seems to be a huge demand for it. Not only for urban development but also for how our generation and future generations live. Traveling and moving around has become the new normal, and I think that co-living spaces, like Upstart, will not only be necessary but also extremely beneficial to have all over the world.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1.**

Questions For Jeremiah

1. Tell me about yourself
2. What did you do before founding Upstart?
3. How did you get the idea of Upstart?
4. How did you get it started in practice?
5. What felt hard/easy?
6. How did you market Upstart/what message did you communicate about upstart
7. How did you expand to the size it is today?
8. How do you choose your members?
9. What tools do you use to build up the community?
10. What are your visions for the future?
11. Is there anything else you want to tell me in regard to the subject?
12. Knowing what you know today, would you change anything regarding running Upstart?

### **Appendix 2.**

Questions For members

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. (Where are you from?)

2. Where do you see yourself in the future?
3. How did you find out about Upstart?
4. What made you choose living at Upstart?
5. Do you find that Upstart has helped you with pursuing your passion? (How, please elaborate)
6. Do you find that the community sense is strong?
7. How do you find the sense of community between the locations?
8. How do you find Upstart now that you have lived there for a while compared to what was marketed to you?
9. What is the biggest pro/con in living at Upstart for you personally?
10. Do you feel like the membership fee is fair based on what you get for it?
11. Knowing what you know today, would you still have chosen Upstart as your place to live (Do you regret moving into Upstart).

### **Appendix 3.**

Questions for the quantitative method – Questionnaire

Hi Upstarters! My name is Stella Musgrove, I'm studying in Finland at Arcada University of Applied Sciences and I'm currently writing my thesis on the benefits of co-living and being a part of a community and using Upstart as my case study. I used to live in Upstart for a year, and became intrigued on the effects it has on emerging artists.

This questionnaire should take no longer than 2 minutes to complete, and the data will only be used for research purposes for my thesis. Please respond to all questions! Thank you!

1. Age?
2. Where are you from (city/state/country)
3. What's your art?
4. Which location do you live in?
5. How many months have you lived at upstart?

6. On a scale of 1-4 how beneficial do you feel like the Upstart community is for you
7. Where did you hear about Upstart?
8. Expectations vs Reality: Did Upstart live up to your expectations? (1-4)
9. Do you feel like the rent is fair for what you get?
10. What word would you use to describe the community? 1-3 words.
11. Choose your top 3 amenities (keep in mind function, order, cleanliness, use of space etc.)
12. Do you feel like you work harder or less towards your goals since moving to Upstart? (1-4)
13. Knowing what you know now, are you happy you chose Upstart as your home?