„Nourishing the scene:
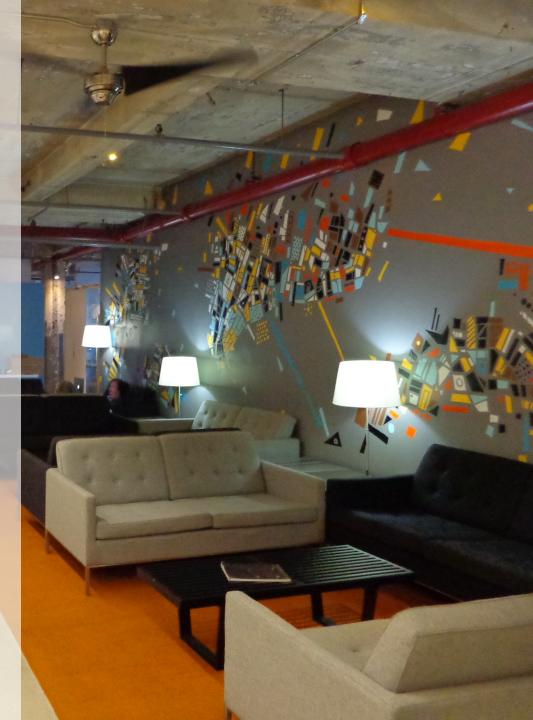The role of co-working
spaces for internet-enabled
entrepreneurship."
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What is co-working?

There's no academic definition yet: For me, the most important and distinguishing characteristics are:

1. flexible, shared work settings in an open floor plan

2. cultural model (community, collaboration, openness, diversity, sustainability)

3. reflexive global movement

Co-working spaces can be described as *new* because they differ from older models of shared office spaces (whether self-organized or not) in their short-term rent of desks (per day, week, month) and subsequently their flexibility, mobility and constant changing social composition within the co-working space and the cultural model that underpins co-working as a phenomena embedded in the 'sharing economy' and the open source movement.

Causes

- continuous rise of freelancer and self-employed people, particularly in creative industries professions, e.g.

    - US: 17 million fulltime freelancer in 2011 (16% of total workforce)

    - Germany: number rose by 40 % up in the last 10 years to 4,3 million (11% of the workforce)

    - UK: number rose by 12 % between 2008 and 2011 with 1,56 million freelancers (5-6% of the workforce)

- new information and communication technologies that led to more mobile, project-based, freelance and self-employed work that could be carried out 'everywhere' with the help of a computer and internet access

- downsides: social isolation, blurring of boundaries between work and home, managing risk

Who is working there and why?

– 53 % freelancers, **14 % entrepreneurs**, 24 % employees of a company
– 33 % female and quickly rising
– Age: 45% between 25-34, 29% 35-44, 13% 45-54, 5% 54-65
– 58% worked at home before
– 66% say the want the flexible desk at the most
  (Sources: 3rd Global Coworking Survey, www.deskmag.com)

What do they like on co-working?
– 84% say „social interaction"
– 82% say „random encounters and opportunities"
– 77% say „sharing of information and knowledge"

Changes through co-working:
– 33% declared an increase in income
– 92% declared a positive change in their network
– 75% declared a rise in productivity
  (Sources: 2nd Global Coworking Survey, www.deskmag.com)

Coworking values

Community

- mutual support, networks for informal exchange

Collaboration

- ad hoc working together, sharing of ideas, solutions and resources

Openness

- sharing of information and knowledge

Diversity

- support heterogenity of ideas, perspective and work practices
- pooling of work, knowledge and practice cultures and people in different points in their career

Sustainability

- infrastructural sharing as ecological optimizations
- social strategies in constructing relations with partner, supporters and keeping former coworkers „in the loop"

"Collaborating strangers": Four hypotheses

1. Co-working Spaces as the (re-)organization of knowledge work

2. Co-working Spaces as learning spaces

3. Co-working Spaces as a new innovation model for distributed, inter-organizational, collaborative knowledge work

4. Co-working Spaces as urban interfaces

Co-working and Entrepreneurship:

Co-working and co-working spaces (could) enable:

- Bonding and bridging

- Learning and skill development

- Identity formation and professionalization

- Storytelling

- High labour turnover

- Innovation

- Co-creation and entrepreneurial opportunities

Co-working spaces act as:

- Intermediaries

- Network hubs

- Entrepreneurial opportunity structures

- "Structural holes" (Ronald Burt)

A conclusion:

New Ideas emerge *between* people rather than within people. (Paavola et.al.2004: 564) and I would argue that co-working spaces are a perfect empirical lens to study that hypothesis comprehensively. By studying the way, how people relate through work to each other, we can learn a lot about bridging differences, how diversity and dissonance turn into fruitful collaborations, collective creativity and new innovations.

Co-working spaces are not just the context in which activities happen or provide the stage on which entrepreneurial activity is performed — co-working spaces are an opportunity structure where entrepreneurial opportunities can emerge.

Until now, coworking is mainly depicted by the practitioners themselves or by companies who support the movement through blogs or conferences. We lack a systematic social-scientific analysis on coworking and its assumed effects, exchange processes, or reciprocity rules in terms of sharing or collaboration and furthermore, how it relates to political, cultural, economic and social transformation processes in cities.

Feed, MobileSuite, Nadelwald, Betahaus, Supermarkt, Serendipity, Raumstation, creative media lab, Büro 2.0, United Urbanites, Agora Collective, ArtConnect, UfaLabs, co.up, nest, social impact lab, Wostel, Google Campus, The Trampery, Central Working, Bootstrap Company, The Cube, wecreatenyc, Gasmotorenfabrik, Solution Space, Kölner Zeiträume, GarageBilk, Seats2Meet, ThinkSpace, Utopiastadt, Citizen Space, produktivhaus, Creative Density, Uncubed, COOP, Thinkspace, Palast der Produktion, Werksbad, The Founders Hub, Mutinerie, Office Nomads, Utopicus, Plug&Play, Makespace, CoCoon, Urban Station, Startup House, General Assembly, WeWork, New Work City, Grind, Bitmap Creative Labs, Brooklyn Creative League, Paragraph, No-Space, The Yard, Greenpoint Coworking, 3Ward, Hive55, Projective Space, Dumbo Startup Lab, In Good Company, The Brooklyn Garage, Loosecubes, Alley NYC, Bat House, Secret Clubhouse, Sandbox, Toolbox,