



Rural Coworking

People, Models, Trends



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Bertelsmann Stiftung (Ed.)

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Ulrich Bähr is the managing director and co-founder of CoWorkLand eG. Since the turn of the millennium, Bähr, who has a degree in media science, has been promoting the digitalisation of education in various roles. Since 2015, he has been working intensively on the digitalisation of rural areas for the Heinrich Böll Foundation Schleswig-Holstein. He is as much interested in research as he is in the implementation of sustainable development approaches in field projects.



Juli Biemann

At CoWorkLand, Juli Biemann is responsible for CoWorkNet, an initiative for networking and advising potential coworking space founders in the region of Lüneburg in Lower Saxony. After studying interdisciplinary Border Studies with a strong spatial focus, she is fascinated by the emergence of coworking spaces as Third Places in rural areas, where a wide variety of people can network and share ideas, knowledge and motivations.



Philipp Hentschel

Philipp Hentschel founded the freelancer network Welance with its own coworking space in 2010. As co-founder of the Coconat Workation Retreat and Hof Prädikow, he is very familiar with innovative coworking, living and working projects. Together with other activists, he bundles practical knowledge for the construction of important impulse locations in the Netzwerk Zukunftsorte (network of future locations). The network connects innovative living and working projects in rural areas that convert empty spaces into multifunctional places.



Jule Lietzau

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Alte Ölmühle, Wittenberge

Rural coworking spaces – an opportunity for positive structural development

Preface Alexandra Schmied

The Bertelsmann Foundation has been looking at the different aspects of the future of work – as part of the Workplaces in the Digital Age project – for some years now. The focus is on observing the effects it has on how the work is actually organized and on the employees. In recent years – and not just since the start of the Corona crisis – advancing mechanization has made it possible for more and more employed people to conduct their work on the move, i.e., at the place or time of their choice. As a result, the New Places of Work have become as diverse as the needs of the people using them. This not only applies to the offices on offer, but also to workshops like Makerspaces, or workspaces in semi-public areas: cafés, lounges or even spaces in shopping centers. The most prominent form of shared workspace, however, is the coworking space. A coworking space is a place where people come together to work together, but not necessarily with each other. ⁽¹⁾

The coworking phenomenon has become an integral part of the world's metropolises and the effects of these new places of work have become so concrete that they are in the process of reorganizing the familiar real estate structure in large cities. ⁽²⁾

In major German cities, we have observed a strong increase in coworking spaces and other facets of shared workspace offerings for those looking for an inspiring place to work outside of their own four walls or their place of employment – either temporarily or permanently.

The question then arose as to whether and what kind of “working alone together” can also be transferred to the rural areas. In our trend study, numerous examples of such new places of work in rural areas have been identified. But to what extent do the types of users, business models and motives for setting up these kinds of coworking spaces differ?

Rural coworking is good for the environment, regional development, securing skilled labour and one's work-life balance.

According to our interpretation of the interview results during the course of our trend study, these kinds of offers could, to some extent, stop the extinction of small towns and villages. In fact, rural and previously structurally weak regions could even gain strength through the influx of families and the revival of infrastructure. This would be particularly conceivable where a region, due to its rurality and remoteness, has characteristics which so far would tend to indicate economic weakness. Working in the rural area would turn this locational disadvantage into a locational advantage.

In addition, resource savings of a financial, temporal and environmental nature would offer advantages to employees. Furthermore an expansion of the catchment area for skilled workers could also offer economic advantages to companies that take up this offer of working in rural areas.

This kind of job offer would not only make sense from the point of view of how the work is organized and the well-being of the working population, but it would also be of great added value for reasons of regional development and, in particular, resource conservation for a more sustainable working world. This assumption is based on further conclusions taken from the numerous interviews. People would be able to use well-equipped workplaces close to where they live, if necessary, and would no longer have to move to the vicinity of their place of work or commute on a daily basis.

Rural coworking does – at a first glance – look to be a promising approach. Whether this first interpretation can be supported by closer empirical examination, and what successful coworking in rural areas can look like in concrete terms, therefore became the subject of this study. Here are the most important questions and assumptions in brief.

Rural coworking is more diverse than in the cities.

In order to be able to assess this, it was necessary to consider the motivation of the users, the founders and the different initiatives already operating successfully. We found that the target groups using coworking in rural areas who would be willing to use it long-term are much more heterogeneous than in the cities. On the one hand, employees just as much as the self-employed and freelancers increasingly use these New Places of Work. On the other hand, those using the offering come from very diverse sectors – society across the board is in fact represented.

Rural coworking applies other business models.

Another starting point in the design of the study was the question of the economic viability of existing coworking models in rural areas. It became apparent that the business models of coworking spaces in large cities cannot be transferred to rural areas without first being adapted. At the beginning of our research, it even seemed questionable as to whether a coworking space in a rural area could even operate economically based on the usual understanding. That is why we examined the conditions under which success can happen and what alternative business models can ensure the long-term survival of a coworking space. According to our investigations, there are separable economic business models that are clearly different to the urban coworking ones. In the long run, the role of local politics and economic development on site needs to be discussed.

Rural coworking is, for the greater part, a network.

We found different approaches when examining the business models, but they all had one point in common: the networking idea. After all, coworking in rural areas works best where networks are created or used, both in terms of development and marketing.

Rural coworking benefits from mobile working formats.

Thanks to digital transformation fueled by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world of work, new mobile working formats are emerging and shaping life at work as we know it. People are increasingly using work places flexibly, and on an ad hoc basis; that "one" place of work has become obsolete. New places of work in rural areas are benefiting from this development.

Rural coworking has a stimulating effect on local communities.

One of the most interesting initial questions for us was to what extent these developments affect services of general interest. In the course of the surveys, the results showed that – thanks to the emergence of new places of work and the possibility of mobile working – migration to peripheral rural areas is taking place again, and the first revitalizing effects are already apparent. To sum up, the following can be said:

Rural coworking is socially desirable, but has rarely been economically viable in the short term.

Outlook

The Covid-19 pandemic – which broke out at the end of the interview phase – changed the situation significantly. The home-office became the new normal and mobile working suddenly became socially acceptable. The virus forced companies of all sizes to try out new things and find solutions for continuing their daily work, stated in the Corona study from August 2020. ⁽³⁾

In addition to the positive development already described in this study, there is a further window of opportunity for the coworking model in rural areas. If more and more employees make use of coworking offers, companies as regular tenants of coworking workplaces take on a new significance. Therefore, the company-as-client factor can now be taken into account more strongly than before when assessing the potential profitability (and the viability) as a positive element of coworking in rural areas. A follow-up investigation of the motives and needs of the potential users is a valuable extra and is already being planned.

We are daring to predict the future

Apart from this current coworking trend in rural areas, there are also longer-term changes conceivable. These were not questioned in the initial interviews, but they seem logical and consistent to us after looking at the interview results.

First and foremost, this includes a significant change in traffic flows. Traditional commuting to urban areas will

decrease permanently if workers take advantage of more local coworking services. A shift in flows will increase regional traffic. This development would have a direct impact on transport infrastructure planning, land use and regional structural planning as a whole. Regional structures need to be upgraded while those of metropolitan areas will become less important.

The current developments we observed indicate that there could be a massive shift in the commercial property sector. This is because companies will require less space if the culture of presence within their corporate organization changes. Classic commercial properties will not lose importance, but they will be needed in a different shape and size. Large organizations will reduce their office space and increasingly establish shared office concepts. It is also conceivable that it will no longer be economical for individual sectors to have their own properties. We foresee an increase in local mergers of different companies. This will also affect the commercial property market.

Smaller commercial units then question the basic idea of industrial estates. Just as with the entire urban development policy, an adaptation to the demand and the market will have to take place here. A reorientation of industrial estates towards a place of local networked work and the increasing sharing of resources would be desirable.

Ultimately the private real-estate market will also be affected by this shift, because the importance of owning one's own four walls will increase as people spend more time at home. We therefore assume that the demand for individual properties in more rural or small-town areas will continue to rise and that the housing demand in urban areas will slow down.

If these assumptions prove true, we will be facing a radical change that will completely challenge the current urban development and urban planning policy. This means that policymakers are now called upon to (re)set the course for the future.

Key findings

- 1. Coworking in rural areas applies different business models.**
- 2. Coworking in rural areas is socially desirable, but rarely economical in the short-term.**
- 3. Coworking in the countryside works primarily as a network.**
- 4. Coworking in rural areas has a stimulating effect on local communities.**
- 5. Coworking in rural areas is more diverse than in the cities.**
- 6. Coworking in rural areas benefits from different kinds of mobile working formats.**

In order to look into this question, we asked well-connected and experienced experts in this field in the CoWorkLand cooperative – which also used the Future Cities network. For the nationwide study now available, they conducted more than 200 qualitative interviews and evaluated them with regard to their business models, start-up and utilisation intentions. The present publication offers a detailed insight into the typologies of users, founders and business models of new places of work in rural areas. Furthermore, it shows trends and offers hints for the development of promising offers. The results can now be used to give impulses to the different actors in rural areas – local politics, companies, employees, founders – and to stimulate further coworking initiatives.

Alexandra Schmied
Bertelsmann Stiftung

New work in rural areas – a system overview

Our study revealed an interdependent system of new work models and new places of work, the elements of which are described in detail in our trend study. At this point, we present an overview of the current state of this system, which is, however, undergoing dynamic development. Therefore, trend and potential assessments are always added to the respective type descriptions.

New rural workers

In the rural coworking spaces studied, it became apparent in which mobile, cooperative and decentralised working models people would work in rural areas in the future, and how this will change entire industries. This is an attempt at typification.

- Type 1:** Digital nomad – returnees bring a global trend to the province (p. 24)
- Type 2:** Urban settlers – decelerated commuters (p. 26)
- Type 3:** Hybrid founders – start-ups from employment (p. 27)
- Type 4:** Digital teams – effectively without a central office (p. 28)
- Type 5:** Consultants and coaches – drifters with new anchorages (p. 30)
- Type 6:** Scientists – far from the lecture theatre (p. 31)
- Type 7:** Craftsmen – cosmopolitan with ground contact (p. 32)
- Type 8:** IT worker and engineer – the original milieu of coworking (p. 33)
- Type 9:** Creatives – new places form the scene (p. 34)
- Type 10:** Teachers – a lot of feeling for the right environment (p. 35)
- Type 11:** Managers – new leadership at a distance (p. 36)
- Type 12:** Those interested – high-potential employees for transformation (p. 37)

New places of work

Our study aims to describe the distinct manifestations and business models coworking has developed in rural areas. We present them here.

- Type 1:** Coworking classic (p. 44)
- Type 2:** Commuter port (p. 46)
- Type 3:** Bottom Hub (p. 48)
- Type 4:** Retreat (p. 50)
- Type 5:** Workation (p. 52)
- Type 6:** New village centre (p. 54)
- Type 7:** Housing and work projects (p. 56)

Forms of incorporation

Coworking spaces in rural areas can essentially be traced back to four founder types – here we describe motivations, opportunities and risks.

- Type 1:** Corporate spin-offs (p. 62)
- Type 2:** Committed community (p. 64)
- Type 3:** Municipal foundations (p. 66)
- Type 4:** Business development and business incubators (p. 68)

Forms of organisation

Coworking in rural areas works and forms network structures – four important forms of organisation can be distinguished.

1. Nationwide networks (p. 58)
2. Regional networks (p. 59)
3. Small chains (p. 60)
4. Satellite rings (p. 60)

Churches, banks, railway stations – where could coworking grow?

Coworking needs space. This offers traditional rural organisations the chance to develop new potential in underused or completely abandoned areas. Here we show currently observable trends (p. 70).

1. Church parish halls
2. Railway stations
3. Banks
4. Libraries
5. Sports club homes



Pop-up-Coworking, Grönwohld at the Eckernförde Bay

The future of work is already here – in the rural areas!

New, digital and location-independent forms of work and life models are already being tested by pioneers. An avant-garde of rural workers is researching how we will shape our lives in the future in the area of conflict between rural and urban. They are already living a working reality that many people today, as a result of the consequences of the Corona crisis, consider desirable.

The Digital Village Paradox

Since the increasing spread of high-speed internet in rural areas, there has been the expectation that digitalisation will lead to more and more people finding their place of residence in rural areas. The net offers cultural participation (streaming services, etc.), shopping (Amazon, Otto & Co), education (e-learning) and social connection (social media) and for many also the technical possibility to pursue their job far away from urban offices. However, the opposite has happened: Digitalisation accelerated the ongoing megatrend of urbanisation even more. A paradoxical situation.

Since the mid-1990s, the number of people living and working in metropolitan areas has continued to increase. One of the main drivers has been the triumph of the digital economy – new software and internet companies are emerging, especially in the major German cities like Berlin, Hamburg and Munich, attracting people who are looking for exciting and qualified jobs.

Trend reversal away from the middle class in the province

This means a profound change in a country whose medium-sized economy was traditionally at home in the country – anyone who wants to become something in a future-proof industry is no longer drawn to the hinterland of the hidden champions but to the bigger cities. Younger people are flocking to the big cities to study and work and are thus the major growth driver of the metropolises (along with immigration from abroad).⁽¹⁾

Many of the large medium-sized and industrial companies followed this changing labour market and moved their IT development centres or even entire company headquarters to the metropolises. As a consequence, this means a structural decline of highly qualified jobs in the country and an ever-increasing concentration of jobs for knowledge workers in the metropolises.

In all these large cities, however, the unbroken trend of urbanisation led to an explosion in rents and to a displacement of the middle class in particular to the suburbs and the wealthier suburbs.⁽¹⁾

At the same time, the number of employees in Germany who were given the opportunity by their employers to work from their home offices remained enormously low compared to European standards: only 25% of all employees had corresponding company regulations, and only 10% actually applied them and worked from home at least once in four weeks.⁽²⁾



Increase in commuter numbers despite digitisation

Both trends – growth of the suburban commuter belts with a low home office quota – are in turn logically reflected in ever-increasing commuter numbers. In recent years, commuting among Germans has increased steadily, both in terms of the number of commuters and the distances covered. According to an evaluation by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development, 19.3 million people commuted in 2018. In the year 2000, the figure was 14.9 million. As the Federal Institute has further determined, the average length of commuting distances rose from 14.8 kilometres in 2000 to 16.9 kilometres in 2018. ⁽³⁾

One consequence was the imminent traffic collapse in many German cities, which was expressed, among other things, in the driving ban debates of the last few years – and is largely due to the previously missed opportunities of the digitalisation of the world of work.

This ultimately plunges people into an everyday conflict that has an impact on overall life satisfaction. According to a survey by the ADAC, 60% of those surveyed said that they could not find an equivalent job closer to where they live. 54% felt an emotional attachment to their place of residence and accepted the commute for this – as the German Postal Service's happiness atlas shows – with very negative consequences for overall life satisfaction. Commuters who travel longer distances feel that this severely limits their quality of life.⁴ The digital village paradox becomes fully apparent here. Although digitisation has technically offered all possibilities in metropolitan regions, for several years now, working decentrally from rural homes and thus reduce commuting, it has structurally led to an increase in centralisation and commuting in the mainstream of the German working world.

Counter movement: back to the country!

And this conflict is growing, because the desire to leave the cities continues to grow – and not just for reasons of displacement. In a survey by the Kantar Institute, for example, only 13% of those questioned stated that they wanted to live in a city in the future, while 51% explicitly said that they wanted to live in small towns and villages outside of the suburbs. ⁽⁵⁾

However, this primarily seems to be wishful thinking within the existing framework conditions. Brandenburg, for example, may have gained more immigrants from Berlin in 2019 than vice versa.⁶ However, the figures also show that this is not due to a longing for rural life, but is primarily an effect of the Berlin housing market. Three-quarters of those who moved from Berlin to Brandenburg in 2019 moved to the surrounding area, with people between 30 and 45 years of age clearly the most frequently represented age group. This is the typical age when young families with increased space requirements in the city centres can no longer find adequate offers and pack their bags. In Berlin they are being pushed into the well-connected regions outside the S-Bahn ring. This trend is also clearly evident in Munich and other large cities. If we ignore the migration-induced influx from abroad, more people have migrated to the surrounding areas since 2014 than into the big cities. However, the remote rural areas do not benefit ^{(1), (7), (8)}

This trend also leads to a growth of the suburban communities and an increase in commuting – as an evaluation of the Federal Employment Agency shows, the number of Berlin commuters from Brandenburg rose to 215,600 between 2013 and 2019, which corresponds to an increase of 13.9%.⁽⁹⁾ So even moving out of the city does not lead to a qualitative transformation of rural areas – this cannot happen as long as the place of work continues to be in the cities. Rather, the

consequence is an increase in labour mobility and a further extension of the suburban belt into rural areas, with the well-known consequences for the structure of the communities concerned. We speak of the doughnut effect, in which the lively centres of the villages lose more and more shops, pubs and overall diversity, while the new development areas on the outskirts of the villages grow. It is the expansion of suburbia, and life there is not the country life that many people have in mind as a vanishing point. But the figures also suggest that many more people would move further out into the rural areas if their working reality and the supply situation in these areas would allow for it.

Generation Both – Urban dreamers of new territory long for the rural areas

Since about 2017, however, a real counter-trend has been observed, which cannot yet be recorded in the statistics, but which has the potential for a fundamental change. Particularly in Berlin, but increasingly also in other major German cities, more and more people are longing for a different and real country-life life in the rural areas. In contrast to the existing migration movement to the outskirts of the metropolises, this is the potential of younger urbanites, many of them also considering parenting between the end of their twenties and early thirties. This trend has so far been expressed more in collecting and searching movements than in an actual active population movement.

These are mostly young, well-educated people with a background of alternative work and life concepts, who have tried them out in the hip neighbourhoods and the digital economy of the metropolises, which is dominated by the new-work style. They have often left even provincial small towns and villages behind to experience a modern, cosmopolitan, urban lifestyle in the big city: sustainable, public welfare oriented, digital. A major difference to other migratory movements is the refusal to choose a place. These "dreamers of new territory" yearn for a life in the country, but they do not want to give up their urban lifestyle. They want both. And the attribute "urban" in its classical meaning does not describe the pace and density of the big city jungle, but rather an attitude to life that characterises popular districts such as Friedrichshain in Berlin or the Schanzenviertel in Hamburg: Café house culture, sustainable small shops, alternative scene events, creativity and a multicultural, cosmopolitan attitude to life.

In many trendy urban districts, this attitude to life can be experienced in an exciting reversal of circumstances: The street life there even shows rather rural attributes – represented by the beer table set, a piece of furniture that was once designed for Rhenish wine festivals and has long since conquered the pavements of the trendy districts in the metropolises. A casual, ecologically sustainable, but also digital, cosmopolitan and at the same time rural lifestyle is staged on them, which is also reflected in fashion, furniture and menu. The neighbourhood becomes a village within the city, complemented by the street life of the small Italian town square. Let's call it "rurban".⁽¹⁰⁾

Yet the desire for a life that offers the best of both worlds is not a new one. Kurt Tucholsky, 1927:

**„Yes, I would like that:
A villa in the countryside with a large terrace,
The Baltic Sea in the front,
Friedrichstraße in the back;
with a beautiful view, rural-mondane,
from the bathroom you can see the Zugspitze
but you don't need far to the cinema in the evening."**

The new city refugees are now looking for this urban lifestyle with its attributes beyond the city limits and bacon belts, in the vastness of the "real" country. It seems the traditional real estate offer of the developed villages and small towns cannot satisfy their idea of an urban life. The detached house in the new development area, the terraced house at the edge of town, the commuter train to the city are not options for them. The generation of both is not to be found in the previous offers provided by rural communities and the milieu of Suburbia, like the founders of the Uferwerk in Brandenburg (see p. 57) or Alsenhof near Hamburg (see p. 26). They are looking for new housing concepts in which they develop the communal life they know from their urban communities, in a near-natural environment that takes the urban lifestyle they celebrated in the trendy districts of the big cities to a new level. "Flat White in the Uckermark".

Hybrid rural life: at home in many places

At the same time, they are looking for housing models that make it possible to use each of the places where they live only temporarily. In their advanced, digital working world, a permanent stay in one place is no longer a necessity – they combine, for example, the use of a shared room in Eimsbüttel with integration into an urban community such as on Alsenhof in the north of Hamburg, to then spend the winter in a work retreat in Thailand. Here too, they want it all. Objects of desire are abandoned three-sided farms or estates, but as in the case of the Libken housing project it can also be a prefabricated concrete slab building from a former LPG housing complex. It is essential that these places offer space for designing one's own environment in a rural sense – in other words, that one can transform to suit one's own lifestyle.

Equally they must offer space for other newcomers, like-minded people, as they say escaping the city is a group activity. We know from our interviews that many people are thinking about living a new, hybrid urban-rural life in the form described above, but one of their biggest concerns is to be alone in the rural areas among rural residents who do not share the same values and cultures while at the same time form a community that might seem to not be inclusive at all.

Initiatives like Zukunftsorte Brandenburg use online groups to bring together Berliners looking for new territory in meetups where potential properties in rural areas are presented. In guided workshops, the city dwellers then explore their rural future spaces with the aim of finding a hardcore group of people, who then actually form a project group to make their rural dream place come true. For the time being, there is mas-

sive potential: thousands of rural people in Berlin and other cities who have so far only dreamt of a rural life. They look in fascination at the few pioneers who have actually gone to the rural areas in their first projects, self-organised as cooperatives like on the Prädikow farm or as cooperatives like on the Alsenhof or at Wir bauen Zukunft in Nieklitz am Schaalsee. However, the threshold for making dreams come true is still too high to allow a real movement to develop. It takes a lot of energy, commitment and capital to build up the new places to live and work in the often desolate rural vacant lots. That means a constantly growing demand cannot be matched by a supply of places that are easily accessible to those searching for them. Very few people want to embark, found and build something for years before they can live their dream. In other words, life is not yet convenient enough to scale.

Rural municipalities and state planning authorities as well as regional companies would therefore do well to take a closer look at the new needs and expectations of the Both generation and to offer new, easily accessible, well-connected public transport services for living in larger loose communities with space for self-development and joint economic activity. The first good examples, such as the KoDorf in the municipality of Wiesenburg/Mark, are already emerging. An exciting question that still awaits to be answered, however, is what concepts will replace the classic new development areas and what an industrial 2.0 area could look like. A place where founders in the digital economy will settle. It will have to have completely different qualities than the functional, purpose-built streets at the city gates that continue to be planned today.

Digital Pioneers: founding new workplaces in rural areas

A courageous avant-garde of the Both generation are taking matters into their own hands and creating their own New Places of Work as rural coworking spaces. We have examined the motivations, challenges and dreams of these rural founders in the context of this study. In the following we give a generalised insight into their world of life and thought. It is only the offer of these New Places of Work, which provide a modern infrastructure in the rural areas, that makes rural life an alternative to life in the city for the Both generation. It is the juxtaposition of fibre optic cable and orchard meadows that makes hearts beat faster. The digital pioneers recognise the emerging need, above all because they themselves are usually among the very people who feel it. That is in fact how many innovations begin: You solve a problem that affects you. These are the true pioneers. Even in 2020, coworking was only a developed market in the metropolises, and the first offerings are beginning to pop up in Germany's large and medium-sized cities. Coworking is still not a market in rural areas and people there are still largely unaware of what it entails.

The first wave of founders originated primarily from the new work and coworking scene in the metropolitan areas from the creative industries, IT, the Internet economy, media, innovation consulting sectors. These people are mostly self-employed digital knowledge workers, who, as the avant-garde of a new working world, lead a highly mobile,

self-organised working life, independent of location. And who would want to go to the country – which often means returning home. The idea of people moving from the cities to rural areas, to realise their dream of rural life, is a strong tradition that goes back to Henry David Thoreau, the garden city movement of the early 20th century, through to the hippie and eco-movements of the 1970s and 1980s, and the retired grammar school teacher, who today affords a residual farm in the country.

However, the digital pioneers, who are now setting out, are not only creating space to live for themselves, but a place for others to work. And this is how they are beginning to solve the structural problem described above: the concentration of modern workplaces in the metropolises. They are opening up their regions to the members of the Both generation. They are taking a big leap to create laboratories in a new flexible, innovative, mobile working world, while the working world in the big cities is still stuck in the age of presence culture. Yet the residential and work projects described above are only one variety of the New Places of Work in the rural areas, which can often be found in and around Berlin, where there is a particularly high level of vacancy, which is a spatial and stylistically suitable area for urbanisation. Depending on the region, target group and supply situation, the pioneers are establishing very different types of rural coworking spaces, which we describe in detail from page 40 onwards.

A typical example of these digital pioneers is Jessica Brockmann, who founded the MS39 coworking space in Soltau in Lower Saxony in 2018. In the years before, Jessica had roamed the world as a digital nomad and had pursued her job as a digital architect in the most beautiful places in Europe and Asia. Before that she worked in coworking spaces like the Betahaus in Hamburg, one of the birthplaces of the German coworking scene. When she decided to return to Germany, she was not drawn back to the neighbourhood of the big city, but to her home town of Soltau. In an empty space in the family's former bakery, she saw an opportunity to bring two worlds together – life in the down-to-earth home town with the big-city lifestyle she had grown fond of. She founded a coworking space because that way she could also create a growing community of like-minded people – the milieu she would otherwise have missed in the country.

Other founders rural coworking spaces have similar backgrounds: The self-employed web expert Christopher Schmidhofer, who founded weXelwirken in Kusterdingen-Wankheim in 2010 after having worked in coworking spaces for a long time, or the group around Janosch Dietrich and Julianne Becker, who also worked in the media sector across the globe before founding Coconat. For all these founders it was about building a coworking business whereby their main motivation was not of a financial nature. They all stay in their professions in the initial phase and sometimes they even create these New Places of Work for other reasons.

Motivations of rural founders

- They want to have a workplace in a rural area with a good technical infrastructure.
- They want to work (and drink good coffee) in a beautiful, natural, rural place.
- They want to work in a community with others, for emotional reasons, but also to benefit from the self-employed individuals in their network.
- They are looking for serendipity and the innovative power of chance encounters.
- They want to strengthen rural areas and develop new, sustainable concepts of local supply, housing or tourism.

They create exactly those industrial 2.0 areas – places in rural areas where digital workers, founder teams or project teams from corporations find an anchor point in rural areas that did not previously exist, shaped at the same time by the rural lifestyle of the cities, by sustainable thinking and cosmopolitanism. The working world of the future becomes apparent in these New Places of Work.

This future is not only digital, but it is also mobile and diverse, dissolving the silo thinking, hierarchies and presence culture of the old working world and replacing them with network structures that have high innovative value.

The positive effects that such start-ups have on the communities and regions in which they settle can be clearly seen in the stormy development, with numerous innovative settlements and population influx that the small town of Bad Belzig has experienced, and subsequent to founding of the Coconat coworking retreat in 2017.

Such success stories made the establishment of coworking spaces attractive to others in the rural areas. We describe the different types of founders starting on page 62.

The New Rural Workers

Let us now leave the founders and look into these New Places of Work. Who actually works there? Who are they, these New Rural Workers? For this study, the CoWorkLand team conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with more than 166 rural coworkers (the methodology is described on pages 20 to 30). In the rural coworking spaces, an avant-garde is gathering, who not only perform innovative activities in their jobs, but also do so in new ways. They live according to completely new, very diverse forms of work organisation, which have become possible through New Work, through the flexibilisation and digitalisation of the world of work. For example, we found the first digital nomads, who cannot lead their wandering life independently, but in employment. Or part-time employees, who are setting up online businesses in their free time and do

not want to do this in the home office alone, but are looking for the innovative atmosphere and networking of the coworking space. Starting on page 24, we present the New Rural Workers and their working methods in detail in a data-based typology.

Similarities and differences between rural and urban coworkers

The New Rural Workers are setting a trend that extends beyond their milieu. Our research shows that their projects and lifestyles – the classic combination of the latest technology and café-house atmosphere in all its variations – are increasingly proving to be highly connectable to a much wider range of residents in rural areas.

Rural coworking – very broad target groups

- Rural members of the original milieu – creative industries and knowledge workers
- Self-employed people from a wide range of sectors, like coaches, tax consultants and craftsmen
- Employees from the region or commuters

Our interviews show that the clientele of rural coworking spaces presents a correspondingly different picture than in the city. Their target group is much broader, rural coworkers are not only representatives in the classic original milieu, but reflect the spread of rural society – these range from academic persons to craftsmen as well as soldiers and teachers. These rural coworking areas showed surprising results in our research, as it corrects the expectation that especially the classic urban coworking milieu also populates the spaces in the rural areas. Equally the average age of rural coworkers is well above what is expected when urban standards are applied (see graph on page 18).

An example from our interviews is the Alter Heuboden coworking space at Westensee near Kiel where a seamstress sits next to an engineer who works for the NASA and comes from the country, and a marine scientist employed at GEOMAR in Kiel. And networking among such different coworkers is not an uncommon feat. For one of the marine biologist's research projects, the seamstress makes special nets that he cannot get on the market. This is a classic networking effect of very different professional worlds, which is the great future innovative force of rural coworking and a great opportunity for industrial 2.0 areas, which the regional economic development agencies often have yet to recognise.

Main motivation: connection and inclusion

Another important difference to urban coworking became apparent when the motivation to use a coworking space as a

place of work was addressed. There are two major drivers for the use of coworking spaces in cities: on the one hand, the desire to participate in a community, and on the other, the high rents combined with long rental periods for conventional office properties. In the rural areas, this second motivation does not apply as lack of space is not a problem for the people there. You could, therefore, say that true coworking takes place in rural areas – driven above all by the desire for community. There is, however, another major deficit in rural areas and that is accessibility. Apart from access to technical infrastructure, it is above all the access to other people, an environment, a community of like-minded people. After all, in large parts of Germany's rural areas it is not necessarily where the creative class, according to Richard Florida live. They are simply spread over a much larger area than in the city, where they cluster in certain neighbourhoods. The segregation in the rural areas, on the other hand, is low. This broad spatial dispersion naturally gives rise to precisely this deficit in terms of accessibility: A need for meeting spaces, for networking, for inspiration, for joint cultural and professional events. And these offers are in turn accepted by the kindred souls of other rural milieus and occupational groups given the great connectivity described above. Rural coworking spaces are therefore far more important for people with a general tendency towards creativity and community than in the city as there are many other places and occasions that can be easily accessed there. In this respect, and while more and more of the Creative Class move to the rural areas, rural coworking will in future be part of the basic services in rural areas and an important factor in the choice of location for those seeking a place to live. More on this topic from page 38 onwards in the chapter "Kita, Kaufmann, Coworking".

Coworkability – technical and cultural conditions of rural coworking

But why is this trend only now emerging? As with many digital innovations, potential only opens up once some important framework conditions have reached a certain degree of maturity. Our interviews showed that there are essentially six internal and external conditions that enable the New Rural Workers their work and lifestyle – together we call it coworkability.

Six dimensions of coworkability

- **Technical skills and tools:** Coworkers organise their work digitally. They carry it on their laptop into the coworking space and take it back with them in the evening, they organise their work tools in various apps and online services, communicate digitally and manage their data in the cloud.
- **Freedom:** Rural coworkers can decide on the place and time of their work as autonomously as possible, and in this respect, they are not subject to instructions from management or to strict company or legal regulations.

- **Knowledge workers:** Coworkers are knowledge workers – their main tool is a laptop. The higher the proportion of working time spent at a desk, the higher the coworkability of a job description.
- **Team and trust culture:** The New Rural Workers are on the move, but not as loners, in fact they join together according to their need to form agile, digital teams based on a culture of trust. The team members could be sitting very close by or even living on another continent.
- **Network beats hierarchy:** The New Rural Workers maintain their professional reputation in digital and real networks. They don't have a career that requires permanent presence on the ground and perception by superiors. They develop their brand. They can do this from anywhere in the world where they have access to these networks.
- **New work-life balance:** The New Rural Workers work to suit their life, they design their working life very individually. The nine-to-five, the pace of the urban office worker, is foreign to them. They highly value designing their working methods individually and varying them time and time again. Work must fit in with life, and not the other way round.

A classic rural coworking spaces user we met during our field research was the co-traveller kind. They are often independent creative people like designers or other knowledge workers, and they have left the city because their partner has taken a job, for example, in the administration of a rural community. And they make this change of location possible precisely because they already have a high degree of coworkability and can do their job from anywhere. But the change of location has its price: a lack of accessibility. They feel isolated in the diaspora and are often the first to sign up for a desk in a new rural coworking space. There they hope to rediscover their lost urban life. In order to truly participate in this new working world as many of the coworkability characteristics as possible must be fulfilled: an employee will not be able to permanently work mobile and content if they have an internal regulation that allows them to do so, but works in an organisation where there are no agile, self-responsible team structures, or where they even fear being subject to career disadvantages if too little presence is shown in the central office.

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Organisations that want to develop further in the direction of mobile, decentralised work (and thus remain competitive in the "war for talents") will have to rely more on these fields of action in future for organisational and personnel development. Therefore, visits to rural coworking spaces are recommended in order to experience the internal development potential.

To sum up: Rural coworkers are characterised by the fact that, on the one hand they seek access to a community of working people, and on the other they are highly coworkable: age, profession or education play a subordinate role. And this in turn shows that rural coworking has what it takes to become a mass phenomenon and a driver for real structural change – particularly if the huge almost untouched potential of employed commuters can be tapped into.

Corona update: a quantum leap towards a new working world

The corona pandemic broke out during our field research and at the time of publication of this study in November 2020, the crisis was getting worse despite a summer improvement. The consequences of the crisis for the world of work are well documented: A Bertelsmann Foundation study on this topic shows that 92% of the experts assume that the crisis will accelerate the digital transformation in companies. In the long term, both the spatial and temporal distribution of work will be oriented towards the standards newly established during the crisis. The prejudice that the largely isolated way of working leads to reduced work performance is countered by 78% of the experts surveyed by saying that at least the same amount, if not more, of work is done in the home/mobile office.⁽¹¹⁾ So home offices are here to stay. On the one hand, numerous studies agree with this, where on the other hand big employers are already preparing themselves for this during the crisis. Siemens, for example, will make home office possible for 140,000 employees in the future.⁽¹²⁾

So, what does this mean for the future of rural coworking? Commuters in particular are always seen as the large target group whose development would take rural coworking out of its niche and make it a worthwhile business model. At the same time, this would really unleash the transformative power of mobile work, which is also an important motivation for many rural founders when setting up their own business. If fewer people commute to the cities, this would mean less pollutant emissions, which would make it easier to achieve climate goals and end driving ban debates. Reconciliation of work and family life would be strengthened if people spent less time on the roads, and new life would

return to the villages and small towns if commuters were to work where they live. Will commuters really populate rural coworking spaces in large numbers in the near future, when the transformation of the world of work triggered by the Corona crisis is transferred from a state of emergency to the new normal? At the moment, of course, this is uncertain as employees are now sitting in their home offices and not in their urban offices. Both urban and rural coworking spaces are among the sufferers of the pandemic as communal places. Opinion polls only help to a limited extent – surveys on the future of work relate exclusively to the future use of the home office. However, even these figures include interesting trend statements. In a survey by the TH Köln (Technical University of Cologne), 70% of home office novices say that the biggest shortcoming of a home office is the lack of social contacts and exchange with colleagues. This is followed to a much lesser extent by inadequate office equipment (30%), poor Internet connections (19%) and distraction through childcare (16%).⁽¹³⁾ This is in line with our qualitative interviews with commuters who would definitely like to do without their daily commute to the city. Many would like to work at a place close to their home, but not necessarily in their home office all the time. And that for a variety of reasons.

Main reasons for a coworking space as an alternative to a home office

- **Loneliness:** The home office lacks casual social contacts, the undirected communication. Coworkers want a place where they can work alongside others without actually working with them.
- **Elimination of work boundaries:** Coworkers want an office that they can leave at the end of the day and where they can leave their work behind.
- **Distractions:** Users are looking for a place where they can work undisturbed by their family and not be distracted by household chores, etc.
- **Technical infrastructure:** Users want to work in a place that is set up as a place of work, has various uses such as rooms for meetings and where they do not have to worry about the functionality.

Working in a coworking space in a village seems to offer more advantages when compared with a home office, so it could be an important alternative to a home office. The Fraunhofer IAO also predicts that the forms of work we describe will spread to the employee milieu, such as digital nomadism, whose natural working environment is a coworking space.⁽¹⁴⁾

But how realistic is that? So far, we have confirmed that the vast majority of employed commuters have low coworkability. The sudden forced introduction of the home office, however, significantly increases the coworkability of a wide range of employees through the rapid digitalisation of work

communication in the scope of "Technical Skills and Tools". Working from a distance is now the norm, technical infrastructure, internal agreements and, to a lesser extent, corporate cultures have been adapted. It can also be assumed that there is a large percentage of people in their ranks who already bring soft coworkability criteria with them, especially the desire for a different work-life balance than rigid office job often allow for. However, despite the possibility for a wide range of employees to work in a home office, an important criterion of coworkability still has development potential – the freedom. Of course, this will never be similar to that of self-employment for employees. However, even in the Corona crisis, it falls short of what is actually possible, as changes in internal company regulations are usually limited to enabling the home office, but not gaining the permission to work flexibly at very different places of work.

As of October 2020, employees who choose a coworking space as their place of work find themselves in a legal and statutory grey area – and therefore will not do so, or are not allowed to in fact. The choice remains between home office and office, and as we have shown above, these two alternatives are not sufficient for many of the workers.

Employers, legislators and collective bargaining partners should therefore set the framework conditions not only for home offices but also for mobile work if they want to meet the needs of many employees for new and alternative places of work.



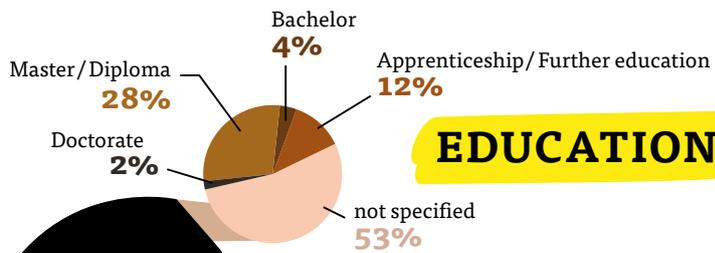
Rural coworking – a working model for the broad levels of society

As part of our pop-up coworking tours through northern Germany, we conducted 166 interviews with coworkers. At the beginning of our tour, there were still few rural spaces, but that changed with time. Our statistics show who responded to the concept when offered in rural areas.

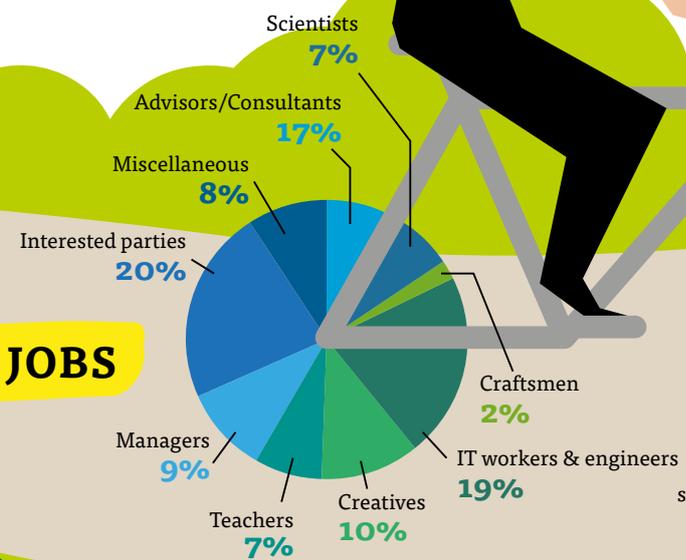
We were surprised with the high number of employees that make up only a small part of the classic users in cities. The high level of interest from people without an

academic school leaving certificate was also much higher in comparison. Just as surprising was the spread of occupations as well as the large age distribution. After gaining more insight, it seems that rural coworking has a much broader target group and integration power than in urban areas. There is demand from those who seek a community feeling and are free to choose their place of work. In contrast to urban places, space requirements hardly play a role.

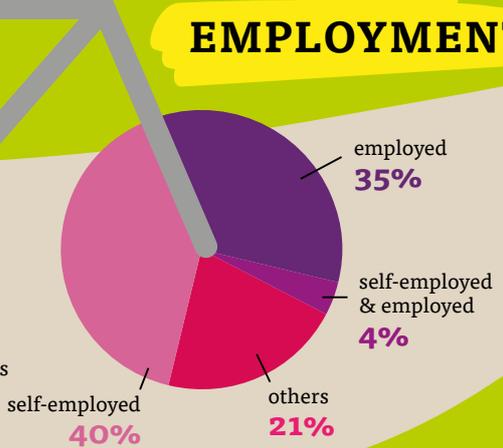
That's what we found out regarding the users of rural coworking spaces:



EDUCATION

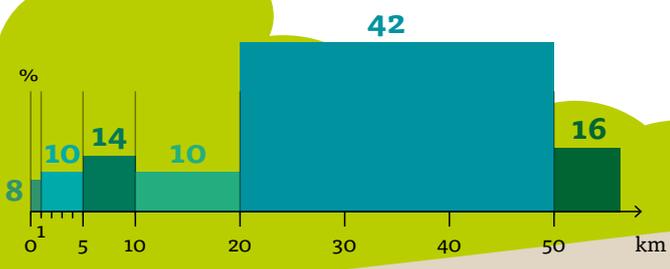


JOB



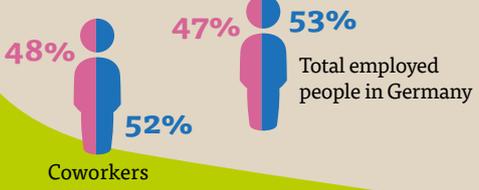
EMPLOYMENT



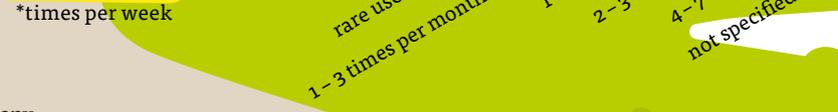


CATCHMENT AREA
Workation / Retreat

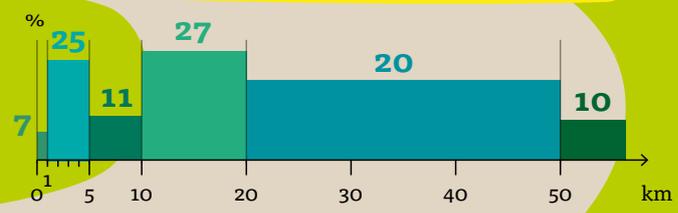
GENDER⁽²⁾
women men



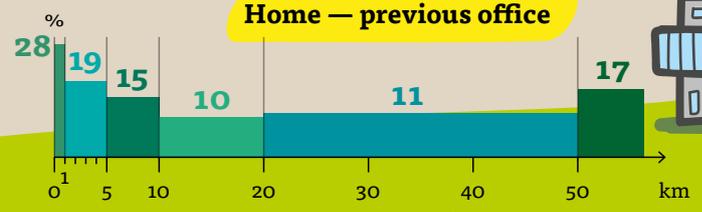
desired FREQUENCY OF USE
*times per week



CATCHMENT AREA
Coworking Space for Commuters/New Village Center

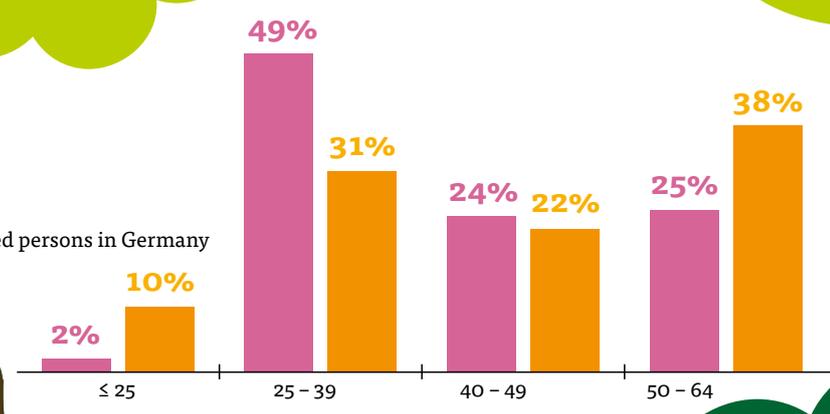


DISTANCE
Home — previous office



AGE⁽¹⁾

Coworkers
Total employed persons in Germany





Transport of a pop-up-coworking-space

How to capture the future – the study setup

Looking back at the year 2018, rural coworking was regarded as a niche topic. Here and there, you could find a rural coworking space, sometimes bottom up, founded as a cooperative like the Ammersee Denkerhaus in Bavaria (see page 47), or sometimes founded and implemented top down by a business development agency like the Alte Schule Letschin in the Oderbruch region (see page 69). The rarity of this rural offer can be attributed to the widespread assumption that since the Industrial Revolution people have to physically travel to their place of work – in rural areas sometimes many kilometres, mono- or intermodal, by car or public transport, and in very few cases on foot or by bicycle. A practice that has been lived out over many decades, created by the industrial model of society with the workplace at the centre of everyday life, supported by the planning paradigm of the functionally separated city into different areas for living, working, recreation and (local) supply. A paradigm that is now being replaced by the model of the compact and mixed city, the city of short distances and polycentricity, in short, the European city.⁽¹⁾

The CoWorkLand project, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, was launched in 2018 under these conditions to investigate the question of whether a future might not be conceivable in which the area between the large cities is filled with life, work and culture, so that city dwellers can live here without having to give up their urban lifestyle. The aim of the project founded by the Heinrich Böll Foundation Schleswig-Holstein was to use a pop-up coworking offer to explore what opportunities rural coworking offers, how such places are used and what business models could work for the operators. Since 2018, coworking has been brought to life for local people and visitors in a total of 20 small towns and rural communities in Schleswig-Holstein, six communities in Lower Saxony and one small town in Brandenburg, for a limited period of three to four weeks. Different scenarios of rural work were tested, some of which were already recognisable as working or business models, even abroad:

Business models: Our starting hypotheses

- **Workation:** Tourist locations, e.g. on Grönwohld beach / Baltic Sea
- **Retreat:** Retreat places with a high quality of stay, e.g. Lucklum / Asse manor
- **Commuter port:** Centrally located in commuter cities, e.g. Gettorf near Kiel
- **Coworking classic**

The aim of this differentiation in each case was to test the associated hypotheses for demand by specific target groups and to uncover the suitability criteria of locations. Since the summer of 2019, the Bertelsmann Foundation has been systematically collecting and evaluating the findings from this pop-up offer by means of qualitative interviews with users and founders of new rural workplaces. The types identified in this way are presented in detail in this publication. In addition to the research question formulated above, the main interest behind this format was to find out what resonance these places of new working in rural areas generate, whether the hypothetical major effects (reduction of commuter flows, revitalisation of rural communities, founding of new businesses) are matched by a real need of the urban and rural populations, and to what extent coworking offers can be implemented in an economically sustainable way.

New Rural Workers – the future of work in rural areas becomes apparent

In order to investigate the resonance of rural coworking, a total of 166 qualitative interviews with users of these new rural workplaces were conducted between 2018 and 2020 as part of the temporary coworking project. During the first interviews, we were surprised to find that many of the users already lived an innovative lifestyle with very unusual working models, which we would have expected in the future

of work, and not necessarily in the present day. Their working models show different facets of future forms of work.

New rural working models

- A new separation of work from fixed places and time periods
- A new functional separation of places of work
- An adaptation of the form of work to individual needs such as family, leisure time, and travel
- New forms of cooperation in closer, fixed or looser, temporary, network-based teams

The respondents agree that their working models were only made possible by the opportunities offered by digitisation (communication, collaboration, data management). They are the **New Rural Workers**.

Rural coworking spaces create places that attract exactly these kinds of people, because that is where they can practice a good, modern, and individual work lifestyle. They offer space to live out their values of working that is simultaneously close to nature and nonetheless urban, digital, free and sustainable. Often these people have already gained experience with the various working models and methods summarised under New Work. Unexpectedly, we met the avant-garde of a new digital and mobile working world in the rural areas – the results of our discussions, a typology of rural workers, can be found starting on page 24. The question of the extent to which these avant-garde forms of work are being transferred to the mainstream is being raised in a new way by the Corona crisis. As we are still in the middle of the peak phase of this crisis at the time of writing this study, we can already perceive a first change in the basic structures of the world of work, especially towards more decentralisation, but we can only describe trends in the effects on our field. We do so, but in clear contrast to the findings actually observed. The trend statements formulated in the context of the publication are therefore to be understood merely as well-founded hypotheses.

Wave of start-ups and diversification – typology of New Places of Work

Based on the primary research interest regarding the users of rural coworking spaces, further research questions soon arose regarding the places of new work in rural areas – the coworking spaces and their founders.

In the months and years following the start of our research work, a wave of rural coworking spaces were opened, which has not abated until today (October 2020), in Northern Germany also triggered by the CoWorkLand project itself.

In the course of this study, we identified 142 rural coworking spaces, although this number is certainly neither exhaustive nor long-lasting – the establishment process is simply too dynamic.



Pop-up-Coworking in Glücksburg

The mobile CoWorkLand workspaces

A pop-up space is easy to set up – the mobile coworking space, built out of containers, offers the basic programme of coworking spaces: fast internet, nice interior, meeting room and outdoor furniture, supported by a community management and good coffee. It is based on converted sea containers, and the Internet is either stationary, via LTE hotspots or directional radio. The workrooms are heated and insulated and supervised during working hours by a Community Manager, who also conducts the interviews. The cooperative now has three units that are in constant use. The coworking spaces are usually used in conjunction with a local authority on a tour to identify possible scenarios in a region. The interviews are supplemented by a collection of demographic and mobility data as well as interactive vision workshops and result in a regional potential study with recommendations for action.

This surprising dynamic resulted in the following questions:

- What drives the founders?
- What are the wishes and ideas for your place, the foundation and operation of a rural space?
- What are the underlying business models?
- What are the interfaces between the needs of users and rural coworking spaces?

There is a great deal of interest in this data, as the continuing wave of start-ups is increasingly raising the question of best practice, the opportunities and mechanics of different business models that simplify the path to sustainably successful coworking spaces for founders, whether private or municipal.



Pop-up-coworking on Waterkant-Festival

What is rural? Coworking outside of the big cities

What is rural? It is difficult to define, depending on the point of view and definition, 75% or 25% of Germans live in rural surroundings. Are suburbs or small towns urban or rural? Scientific opinions differ, and the everyday understanding of people in the city and in rural areas also differs. The CoWorkLand project has always treated this question in a very undogmatic way – we work with the rather broad criterion "beyond the big cities", i.e., in areas that do not offer the typical urban environment for startups. However, in order to provide a clear and objective basis for our study, we first look at the population figures and consider places up to small medium-sized towns. The inclusion of large medium-sized towns is based on the typification of the Thuenen-Institute and requires a classification as rural. In this typification, rural areas are separated from urban areas and further differentiated. The calculation is carried out at the level of so-called district regions, thus taking into account the "regionalisation of action and identification areas".⁽²⁾ This results in different levels of rurality which reflect the "urban-rural continuum from the highly densely populated metropolis to the sparsely populated peripheral space".⁽⁷⁾ The lower the settlement density, the higher the proportion of agricultural and forestry land, the higher the proportion of detached and semi-detached houses, the smaller the population in the surrounding area and the more remote the respective region is from major centres, the more rural a place is.⁽³⁾ According to this classification, around 57% of all people in Germany live in rural areas, which in turn account for 91% of the area.

The research methodology – qualitative in-depth interviews

The primary research interest of this study was to discover and understand the phenomenon of rural coworking and their users and founders. To meet this interest, qualitative research methods were used. This research paradigm is based on "an understanding-interpreting reconstruction of social phenomena in their respective contexts, whereby the perspectives and meanings of those involved are of primary importance, i.e., what is important to them, what life experiences they bring with them and what goals they pursue"⁽²⁾. The qualitative approach was based on the desire to explore the unknown phenomenon of rural coworking and the users of these places, which has not been investigated very much so far, and to gradually condense it into a definition (typology). Due to the explorative character of the study, the process of creating the typology was primarily inductive: Based on the data collected, concepts were formed bottom up.⁽³⁾ The data collection for both research groups (users and founders) was carried out through qualitative, semi-structured guideline interviews. In this methodology, the interviewees had the opportunity to answer in their own words, the course of the interview was designed flexibly and new questions could be raised and processed spontaneously. In this way the interviewees' points of view could be explored in detail and in depth – an in-depth interview was conducted.⁽³⁾ The possibility for the interviewees in this constellation to ask questions and deviate from the questionnaire to then react spontaneously to what was said, meant that they themselves functioned as a survey instrument.⁽³⁾

The Empirical Experience – users and founders

In order to explore the new phenomenon of rural coworking, interviews were conducted with both users and founders of rural coworking spaces using the research methodology described above. The perspective of users was captured in a two-year survey phase. 166 people (users) were interviewed in different pop-up coworking spaces – the basis for a definitional typology "to capture complex social realities and contexts of meaning and to understand and explain them as far as possible"⁽⁴⁾. Typical for this process is the assignment of an object area to types on the basis of one or more characteristics. In this way, a type results from the combination of several characteristics. In this context, both the context of meaning in terms of content (adequacy of meaning) and the empirical regularity (causal adequacy) are relevant.⁽⁵⁾ The formation of different types is therefore based on rules (development of relevant dimensions of comparison, grouping of cases and analysis of empirical regularities, analysis of content-related contexts of meaning and type formation, characterisation of the types formed). In order to increase the density of results with regard to the users, the presentation of the individual types (see page 24) was supplemented by highlighting individual interview partners. Their example illustrates the new work and the related patterns and principles.

With the help of a second qualitative data collection, the new rural places of work were brought into the scientific focus. In more than 50 nationwide qualitative interviews, the

views and perspectives of founders and operators of rural coworking spaces were collected in a survey phase lasting several months.

The interview partners were identified via various databases along the lines of their location in rural areas (see page 22). Due to corona conditions, the actual requirement of conducting the interviews on site could not be met, so the interviews were conducted by telephone. Based on the guideline-based interviews, a comprehensive data material consisting of text and pictures was created. The resulting data-based insight into ideas, wishes, approaches, challenges and stumbling blocks of the spaces that were founded as well as the existing coworking spaces was evaluated inductively (i.e., from the data), reconstructing meaning and interpreting it using a qualitative data analysis procedure. Based on the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)^[6], a global understanding of the text was developed in a first step. In a next step, the most meaningful contents and passages of the text were extracted and the central meanings assigned across several main themes. On the one hand, it was relevant to highlight commonalities across all cases and to point out individual aspects. For intersubjective traceability, the evaluation and interpretation process were prepared in tabular form and coordinated in a discursive procedure. The results of this survey in the form of a description of the different types of rural New Places of Work can be found from page 44 onwards.



Group of digital nomads during "Summer of Pioneers" 2019 in Wittenberge

New Rural Workers type 1

Digital Nomad – returnees bring a global trend to the country

In our coworking space, we met representatives of a new working style that one would not have expected in places like the small town of Wittenberge: Digital Nomads. In recent years, the working style of digital nomadism has changed from a single phenomenon to an international trend. Digital Nomads are digital workers who give up their homes in Germany to pursue their work anywhere in the world – with a preference for the warmer regions of Asia or South America, Thailand, Bali, Vietnam, Mexico and Colombia.

Coworking spaces play an important role, because the Digital Nomads work and network there to form an international community. In places like Canggu in Bali, flourishing coworking spaces have emerged on the beach, providing the necessary infrastructure for an international audience. The coworkability Digital Nomads is correspondingly extremely high – they live a life that demands extreme independence, freedom and high technical skills, and at the same time the ability to network again and again and to successfully shape private and business relationships virtually over a longer period of time.

Until now, the topic has played a minor role in Germany, but that is changing. On the one hand, by returning nomads who want to transfer their lifestyle to their home country and found coworking spaces. At the same time, they are strengthening the trend towards rural coworking, because they want to create places themselves that are attractive to people who are looking for the same things as they are, i.e., working within a community in atmospheric, near-natural places. Examples of this are Julianne Becker, co-founder of the Coconat retreat in Bad Belzig, or Ralf Wiechers, co-founder of the Coworking Schlei in Kiesby (see page 53).

On the other hand, the new rural coworking spaces offer natural points of contact for the Nomads that did not exist before. For example, at the CoWorkLand space in Wittenberge we met the translator Anna Müller, who gave up her permanent residence in 2016 and is now living out of a converted station wagon. Anna is a representative of the Camper Nomads movement, who particularly benefit from the possibility of rural coworking spaces to also provide parking spaces.

Once again, the corona crisis is proving to be a major catalyst in this trend. Closed borders, discontinued air traffic and quarantine regulations destroyed the lifestyle of international migratory birds in a very short time – they are now looking for alternatives in their own areas and have therefore become an exciting target group for regional coworking operators.

Future trend – employed nomads

In the next few years, more and more employees will be working as digital nomads in Germany in changing coworking spaces far away from their companies, and they will only sporadically visit the head office. Employees seem to be excluded per se from a nomadic life – that is until now. In order to realise their personal dream of a free working life in far away, beautiful places, they had to quit their jobs and become self-employed. This break can be found in the biographies of many Digital Nomads – and is suitable for edifying magazine articles for the armies of employees who feel the need for freedom and self-realisation but do not dare take the step. However, the innovation push of the Corona crisis has increased the coworkability of the employees, because the technical requirements are suddenly there and management cultures are changing slowly: Leadership from a distance, cooperation in decentralised teams is no longer a utopia, more and more companies will grant their employees full mobility in the competition for skilled workers.

By establishing more and more near-natural coworking spaces in attractive locations in Germany, a range of services is being created at the same time which will enable this need to be met with low thresholds and little organisational effort.

Tabea Hentschel, 41, confirms this – she works for Hamburg-based software company embarc, but lives in the small town of Ascheberg and often travels between coworking spaces because she doesn't like to sit alone in the office. "Our employees are at home in Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Vienna and Munich. Coworking opens up opportunities for us to work together flexibly – whether in a big

city or in the country. In addition, employees in the rural spaces discover Digital Nomads and their working models. Many of them will also give in to the longing to make their dream of a good working life come true: Working when and where they want. Members of Generation Y in particular will take the opportunity to combine their typical values and life models with a salaried job.

Anja – on the road as an employed nomad

We will meet Anja Lommatzsch in midsummer 2019 in our mobile coworking space in St. Peter-Ording behind the dike. "Actually, I just wanted to drive my mother to St. Peter with the camper, but then I saw that there is a coworking space here and simply rented a room for a week. I go kitesurfing when the wind is blowing, the rest of the time I work here. The container has a small video conference room, that's ideal". Anja, 29, works in IT and organisational development at Continental in Hanover and has tried out new forms of work herself. "I can decide on the spur of the moment and only need to tell my boss briefly – the boss is in Regensburg anyway; the team is scattered all over the world." That's why she is very mobile and can make her idea of a good working life happen: "I'm an outdoor type. Climbing, hiking, surfing – I can't do that in Hannover. I can manage my work from on the road just as well as from a home office". She is lucky to have an innovative employer who has been offering these opportunities to all employees worldwide since 2016, long before Corona. "80 percent of us are currently working mobile or in a home office and are satisfied with it, according to an internal survey. However, there needs to be an overall plan in the company so that not only the technology but also the work culture can change and mobile work options can be implemented, as long as job and appointments allow for it. Different flexibility models would have to be available to cover all the needs of the employees. The freedom and autonomy to be able to decide where and when I work in principle brings enormous added value. A lot of awareness, reflection and the courage to try things out is part of it."



New Rural Workers type 2

Urban settlers – decelerated commuters

In the rural coworking spaces we meet representatives from the Both generation who have already implemented the binary life model “living and working in the city and in rural areas” (see p. 12). What distinguishes them from conventional commuters is that they have two places to live and work – one in the city and one in a rural area. Christian Soult, for example, a PR consultant and a classic creative digital worker, lives and works in Wittenberge and Berlin. Born in Prignitz, he returned to his home region with a group of other digital workers as part of a classic rural exodus project – the Summer of Pioneers. The prerequisite for this was the existence of a coworking space in the small town on the Elbe, which he now uses regularly. Once a week he is in Berlin, where he has kept his small flat to meet customers and friends and to participate in big city life. Here, too, a coworking space is his place of work. Rurban settlers are also commuters, albeit at a much slower pace than their suburban counterparts – often only once a week or less, the two fixed places of living with a coworking space make it possible. This is also where the privilege of this life model becomes apparent – of course you have to be able to afford both places, but there are a variety of solutions here too. Coliving models in particular unfold their potential, because their approach based on the logic of sharing enables participation in a permanent place of living, which at the same time is only used when it is actually needed. This reduces costs.

Future trend – several workplaces with different functions

People who opt for this binary work model therefore anticipate the functional division of the world of work that we are facing in the post-Corona period: Everyday desk work is carried out in peace and quiet at a decentralised location of one's choice, which best suits one's own lifestyle. Everyday work communication takes place online, via video chats and cloud servers. The central, urban location is still important – it is mainly used for meetings, networking, social events, experiencing and shaping culture. This is also a trend that will shape the world of corporations in the future: The central high-rise building will no longer be a place for everyday work, but above all a “campfire” – a place where the organisation comes together, assures itself of its own existence, and exchanges ideas.



Manuel – rurban coliving pioneer

In 2010 Manuel Dingemann, 34, owner of a company for sustainable media production, founded the Coliving-Space Coliving Hamburg in the Schanzenviertel with two comrades-in-arms – a place for temporary living that is more than just a large shared flat. It is where self-employed people settle, united by a common theme and a common basic attitude (mindset). The idea is to support one another in the start-up phase through collegial advice, workshops and networking. In this way, the start-ups help each other move forward and help each other to persevere. Manuel's place of work is the nearby coworking space Betahaus.

„My girlfriend Irina comes from the country and wanted to come back, but I'm a city-dweller and it was too big a leap for me to give up everything in Hamburg,” reports Manuel. -He says that many people in Hamburg, like him, lack trial offers for a rural life. The solution was therefore to have both.

In 2019 Manuel and Irina became part of the Alsenhof project in the north of Hamburg and contributed their experience to the construction of a coliving space in the large residential building of the extensive Hof ensemble. In the meantime, Manuel spends most of his time there developing the coliving offer and going about his job as a media producer in the Alsenhof coworking space. But he always returns to Hamburg to attend business meetings, meet friends and enjoy the Schanzenviertel urban life.

There he is still the main tenant of Coliving Hamburg, but has given up his own permanent room. Due to the Coliving's sharing economy, this is not a problem, he can always find a bed in his urban base.

New Rural Workers type 3

Hybrid founders – startups founded by those with good jobs

One working style that we encounter particularly often in our coworking spaces is the hybrid founder.

Digitisation makes it possible to start a business and work part-time on the job. Now, of course, it has long been the case that people have a permanent job and work independently on the side. It is different with hybrid founders. They are usually knowledge workers with good jobs, who have often developed a business idea in this context and are now setting up a start-up that is to grow. It is only through digitalisation that such hybrid start-ups have become possible, and so it is always digital business ideas that can be started from the kitchen table.

Frank Gebauer, for example, whom we met in the mobile coworking space on the beach in St. Peter-Ording – an employee at the emergency call centre 112 – reduced his job by 50% in order to organise online congresses for fire fighters with his start-up. For his public service job, the Eiderstedter has to commute 70 kilometres a day, but he wants to work when and in the place of his choice. These founders' common goal is to increase their own coworkability, and if their own organisation is too rigid, they start building one for themselves.

Frank has chosen to work in a coworking space because he does not want to shoulder the development of his start-up all by himself – he is looking to network, get collegial advice, and find people who listen to him and want help him.

Future trend – rural intrapreneurs

Packaging mechanic, fireman, medical supplies retailer. The hybrid founders we meet in our spaces do not correspond to the classic start-up clichés that one expects in urban coworking spaces. On the contrary, they reflect the breadth of possible life and academic careers. Digitalisation, with its fast and tailored access to server capacities and marketing channels, offers them a completely new opportunity to test and realise their own business ideas in a low-threshold manner. On the basis of their very concrete job experiences, they identify industry-specific improvement potentials and market gaps and translate them into pragmatic problem solutions and improvement-oriented innovations – different from those produced by the conventional start-up scene.

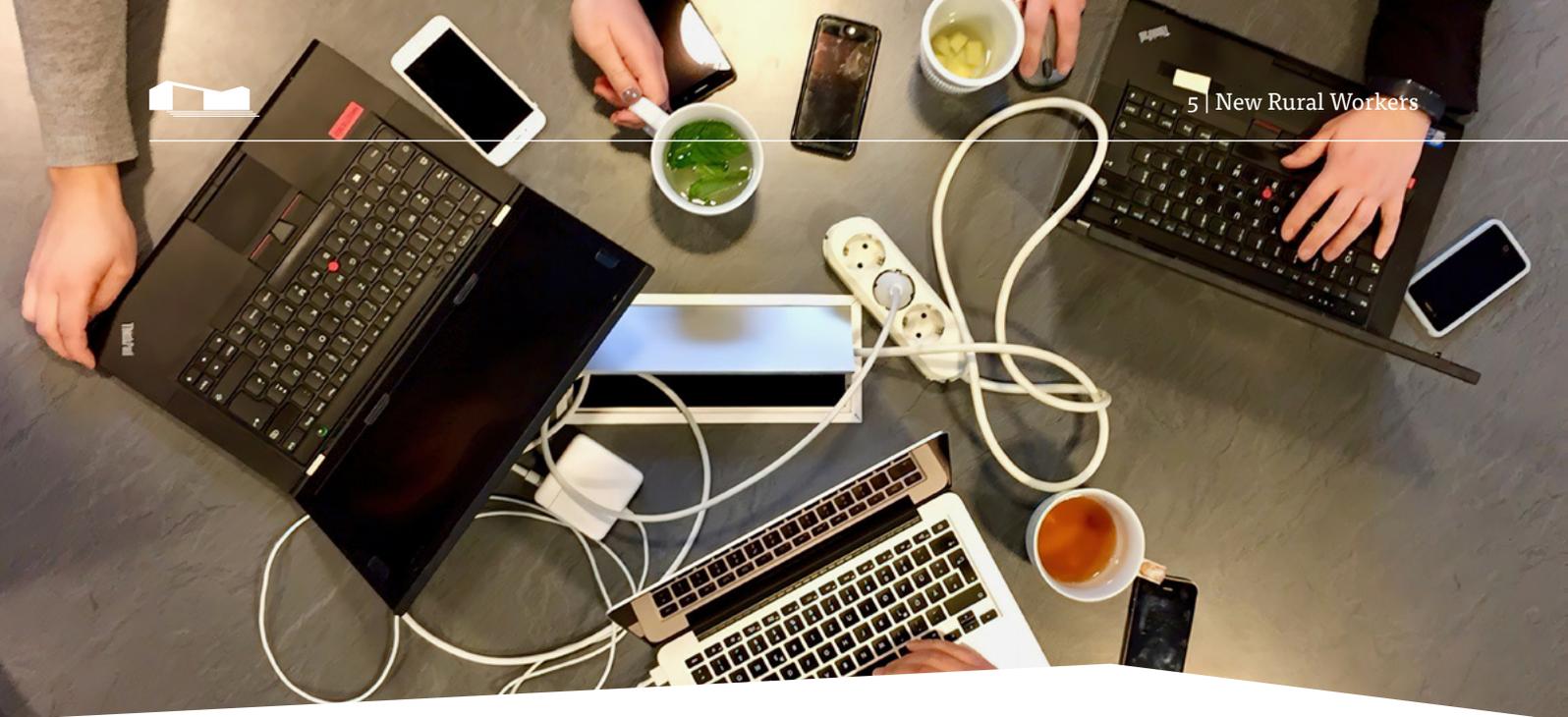
This trend can prove to be a motor for innovation, especially in rural areas with a strong SME sector. For some years now, companies have been trying to profit from this trend with intrapreneurship programmes. Even for rural SMEs, which often do not have the resources for digitisation strategies themselves, exciting prospects can arise here if they succeed in offering the innovators' workforce an attractive environment for their ideas.



Andrej and Johannes: innovation comes from networking

Packaging mechanic Andrej Keil works as project manager for a medium-sized company in Kiel. At the same time, he is founding an online shop for orthopaedic seat cushions and would like to have a beautiful, inspiring environment with exciting people. No wonder he was attracted to our pop-up space, this time on the beach of the seaside resort of Brazil on the Baltic Sea. And his example also demonstrates the productive networking power of coworking spaces. In the space on the beach, Andrej meets Johannes Mohr, who is setting up an online service for a wheelchair rental company. Shortly before, he had given up his medical supplies business near Munich to move to the Baltic Sea with his wife. Now he and his son, who runs an internet agency in Hamburg, have founded a new small start-up, an online rental service for wheelchairs, e-mobiles and rollators. And cycles every day from Laboe to the pop-up space on the beach. Johannes and Andrej, thirty years younger than him, quickly found each other and from that moment on they are engrossed in conversation about wheelchairs and seat cushions that fit.

In the country, such places of networking are rare and without the casual get-together on the terrace on the beach, the two would probably never have met. Coworking spaces bridge an important gap for the development of innovations in rural areas – they provide the widely distributed founders with an anchor point in the area.



New Rural Workers type 4

Teams without a central office

A company needs an office apparently; that seems to be an inextricable link. Our office world developed from the writing rooms of monasteries, the offices of the early modern age. But digitalisation is dissolving the connections. Anyone setting up a company today no longer needs filing cabinets, hanging files or telephone systems. Documents and data are accessible to everyone in the cloud, communication takes place via business chats and video conferences, only the postal address still requires a geographical location for the mailbox, but this could also be a founder's home address.

Today's founder generation sees no reason to invest money in office space. Tim Christiansen, student of business informatics and co-founder of a small North Frisian internet start-up, no longer finds the question relevant: "Why do we need an office? My partner will soon be working from Canada and I would be on my own here". The founders of Cromind Technologies GmbH have a similar view. The employees at the young engineering company live in the rural east of Hamburg and usually work from their home offices. An office is not worthwhile, it would be empty too often.

They would like to have a coworking space in the town of Schwarzenbek, which is central for them, just to meet regularly so that they don't lose each other as a team. And because there is no such space, they are considering setting up one themselves in order to make good use of office space, minimise costs and at the same time offer other companies and self-employed people the same opportunity.

From the employers' point of view, teams with no central office offer the chance to access a Germany-wide pool of applicants through the increase in remote work, as ergovia GmbH demonstrates (see box). A growing number of companies – mostly from the IT or creative sector such as Trello or Zapier –

don't even have a headquarter and they organise themselves without a central office.

The CoWorkLand team does not have a central office either. The employees work all over Germany in rural and urban coworking spaces. The daily work is completely remote, team meetings take place in the different coworking spaces of the cooperative.

In teams that work both locally and remotely, these rare real meetings take on a new meaning – often team members have to travel long distances to get there, usually they stay overnight. Remote teams celebrate their get-together not only once a year at Christmas, but regularly and consciously, because these meetings have to replace all the casual social exchanges that usually take place in the office corridor and canteen. The conscious onboarding – i.e., integration into the team – of new employees is also of much greater importance than in traditional organisations. Getting to know colleagues and understanding the new corporate culture is much less likely to happen through casual, everyday contacts. It must be consciously staged and communicated.

Future trend – satellites without a planet

Driven by the Corona upheaval, many companies are planning to make their employees mobile in the region in and around the head office and only rarely bring them together at the head office on special occasions (see p. 28).

For the teams without a central office, this centre no longer exists. The team members often live and work spread across Germany or even around the world – they meet virtually or at changing, inspiring locations, and they hardly have an emotional or organisational relationship with head office anymore. While most companies will certainly retain their central locations in the medium term – albeit on a smaller scale – the relationship of the employees to these places, their structures and cultures will continue to dissolve. If a company has several locations, it will experience that individual employees will increasingly work in different teams

that have different reference points. The orientation towards the organisation is therefore weakened, the bond to their location dwindles, the relationship to the team becomes more important. In these new contexts, people with high coworkability are able to work well – they no longer design their careers by being present in the head office, but by their ability to relate in networks. However, this does loosen the bond to their employer.

A future challenge for organisations will therefore be to continue to retain these kind of teams and to maintain their identification without forcing them back into the old system – a new culture that makes this possible has yet to emerge.



Ergovia GmbH – team meeting on the beach

The Kiel-based software company ergovia has solved a typical problem of the smart sector – shortage of skilled workers. In the capital of Schleswig-Holstein, developers are in short supply. That is why employees from around Germany work for the company – all of them in their home offices or in shared office spaces. In our mobile coworking space on the beach of Eckernförde Bay we met a very diverse team: Team leader Ralf Kohlgrüber from Cologne, three other employees from Nuremberg and Lübeck. None of them work at the company headquarters, which in fact they rarely set foot in. Regular team meetings like this one at the Grönwohld campsite on the beach of the Baltic Sea are not for recreational purposes

– the work is concentrated, because in a matter of three days the team has to plan and start a Scrum Sprint – a new project phase. It is also important to get to know a new colleague and integrate her into the common processes before the team separates again and communicates via digital tools in the time after.

For these meetings, they look for places that offer inspiration and different work formats in order to be able to work in a concentrated and relaxed way for three days. The office at the headquarters cannot meet this expectation. Jens Buchloh, CEO of ergovia, states that the working meeting on the beach was three times as productive as under normal circumstances in a meeting room at headquarters.

New Rural Workers type 5

Advisors and coaches – drifters with new anchorages

On the road a lot, long business trips, a life out of a suitcase, meeting colleagues where there is internet access and coffee either in hotel lobbies, in rural spaces without coworking spaces, or even fast-food restaurants. In-between concentrated phases of preparation of new workshops and meetings. This is the life of a consultants or coach. A user group, which on the one hand is globally networked and acts remotely, and on the other hand also works locally, on site, in direct dialogue, individual coaching and with small teams.

With approx. 17%, representatives of this industry are the second largest group of respondents after IT staff – and that is no wonder, as decentralised coworking spaces fill a gap in their previous working lives. On the one hand, there is the interest in working in a community, beyond the lonely desk in a home office, and in meeting the team, which may be widespread. And on the other hand, there is the temporary use of good internet access and the enjoyment of a coffee between appointments at different places, but there is also residing in secluded rooms, for example, to conduct a virtual individual coaching or consultation in a protected and closed environment.

Many of the interviewees correspond to this type. Take Dana, for example, coach and virtual assistant in Bliestorf, with clients all over the world. She spends the summer months in northern Germany and the winter in Thailand. Take Steffi in Lucklum, who has her goals clearly laid out and is already well networked. She sees coworking as an opportunity to dissolve old structures and to put agility (as a required concept in companies) into practice. Take Alexander in Schuby, who is involved in dynamic projects and uses coworking spaces to prepare for customer meetings. He expects rural coworking to have a networking effect, to get to know people from the region and to initiate projects together.

This range of activities, needs and wishes places special demands on a coworking space if this type of user is to be reached with the offer. Rooms for quiet, concentrated focus work, long team meetings or coaching sessions in a spatially separated situation as well as an open space for collaborative coworking are a must. The fact that this type of user may be very mobile and travel a lot results in a win-win situation between them and rural coworking spaces. For example, a time gap between two appointments can be filled at a beautiful work location by the water or a team meeting between different locations can be made possible.



Florian – coach and returnee

Florian Matzke grew up on the flat land and left his village as soon as he could. He went out into the big wide world to study and work internationally and live in all sorts of places. As a coach, he can live where he chooses to, his coaching sessions and workshops are conducted either virtually or at different locations. He has now returned to his place of residence with his family and would like to continue this lifestyle there. He can do this with the help of a coworking space in his village, which he not only uses but also helped to found: the TorfHub in Kastorf.

Future trend – new consulting oases in the area

Coaches, consultants and salespeople will be able to revive their previous mobility through the increasing coworking spaces in the city and in the rural areas, and will increasingly populate these New Places of Work – a very evident trend in our survey.

As companies decentralise their work to the same extent, more and more advisory processes will not take place in the head offices as before, but in equally beautiful and easily accessible locations. Accordingly, New Places of Work will develop which specialise in the special needs of this affluent clientele and their corporate customers.

New Rural Workers type 6

Scientists – far from lecture halls

Coworking spaces are also called “third (working) places”. This term stands for the middle ground between the traditional office workplace and work from a home office.

The sociologist Ray Oldenbourg developed and coined the concept of the third place with his work “The Great Good Place. Cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the Heart Community”.⁽¹⁾ Each of these places has characteristics such as neutrality, openness, desired conversation and accessibility – values that also apply in and for coworking spaces. Another common denominator is libraries, i.e., places where concentrated work and learning can take place – usually open and accessible to all.

It is therefore not surprising that scientists and students are also interested in using coworking spaces. Concentrated work in beautiful places, advancing your thesis, meeting in a team to exchange ideas – all these are relevant aspects for people working in this field of activity, which are possible and feasible in a coworking space.

The group is relatively small, similar to that of craftsmen (see p. 32), and few of the people interviewed in the pop-up coworking spaces can be assigned to this type. Some use the space for a team meeting, others for a project sprint or writing a boot camp, far away from a crowded desk. As different as the activities are, almost all of them use the pop-up space as an opportunity to carry out their activities in a nice place, and then, for example, to go surfing after. In order to reach the coworking space, they sometimes take on long distances of more than 50 km, but they are happy to stay a little longer.

The potential of rural coworking spaces for this type of user is obvious: not only is it possible to complete a final thesis in a coworking retreat (see p. 50), but also to create a place to start and a place to stay for young rural residents (or those who want to become one) who can use these places as an alternative to moving to the big swarm cities⁽²⁾. For rural areas, this provides opportunities to keep young people in the villages and small towns, or to win them back. These can then become effective on the spot, for example, in local associations or the voluntary fire brigade, where they can act as innovation and transformation multipliers. Rural areas also have the opportunity to be discovered as a tourist destination beyond mass tourism.



Ansgar – doctoral student at the North Sea beach

27-year-old Ansgar from Lörrach is writing his doctoral thesis in the pop-up space in Husum besides working as a freelance journalist. He is supporting his doctoral thesis himself and his main goal is to work as a political video journalist on international political issues. His dream working condition is to go into exchange with people, not to have his own office, but to have the possibility to do his work from home.

Future trend – the university library comes out on top

Like the large corporations, universities, as central places of knowledge work, will experience a new division of functions. The experience of the Corona era, when hundreds of thousands of students studied at their home computers and professors switched to online teaching, will transform universities. They will increasingly become places to experience scientific and student community and exchange, and less about everyday learning and research. The overcrowded lecture hall will be obsolete, the classic seminar room will be reinvented as a hybrid knowledge space that brings together presence and virtuality.

Students will spend large parts of their studies away from their Alma Mater, and lecturers will no doubt do parts of their teaching from their weekend retreats. Digitised degree programmes will migrate to the province. The small town of Wittenberge is the living proof: It has been possible to complete a Bachelor of Business Administration there since 2020. To the same extent that the role of central rooms for knowledge transfer is declining, the role of the university library is becoming more important as a temporary place of work and networking. Real books will become increasingly rare, and the digitised works will be just as accessible from anywhere. Already today, universities like the Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder are integrating coworking into their libraries.

New Rural Workers type 7

Craftsmen – cosmopolitan with a down-to-earth attitude

A craftsman in a coworking space? Are they not needed on construction sites and at machines, using materials and exerting physical strength? Yes, a craftsman in a coworking space! As in the urban context, the group of craftsmen in rural coworking spaces is the smallest group, accounting for one percent of the users in the survey. But this is changing, and the minority we see in coworking spaces is a good opportunity to look into the future of the profession.

Within the group of craftsmen, there is a trend towards greater coworkability among those we met in coworking spaces. They are able to move the desk part of their work to a different location through developed technology and skills, and this goes hand in hand with an equally developed view of a work-life balance. They explicitly seek different, more urban environments for the knowledge work part. Awina, for example, is 28 and comes from Kiel. We meet in Grönwohld on the beach. She is a blacksmith and actually works in the workshop, but comes here to do more intense office work.

Craftsmen who feel more like the classic coworkers in the creative industries are united by a sustainable, transformation-affine attitude to life, similar to typical urban milieus. They have a high degree of coworkability, as this background enables them to score in the areas of skills and tools and other areas such as new work-life balance – combined with a high degree of freedom, which they enjoy as most are self-employed. Others make use of offers where the spaces cater to their needs and provide appropriate workshop facilities or other space offers. Like Christa who, as a tailoress, is a member of the old hayloft, which has been converted from a sailmaker's workshop. Founder Heiko Kolz is a trained roofer, studied economics and created the Space according to the bottom-hub concept (see page 48).

A development that is quite branch-specific can be seen in places like the factory death in Salzburg: Coworking for craftsmen with workbenches, machines and tools for hire. The initially surprising image of a craftswoman in the coworking space appears at second glance to be quite obvious and conclusive. For more and more people in the field of craft trade activities, however, a rural coworking space does not only function as a place for concentrated work. As in other professions, networking and community are key drivers for the use of a coworking space.



Thilo – cheese dairy manager and kite surfer

Thilo Metzger-Petersen, 33, is head of the raw milk cheese dairy Backensholz in North Frisia, where he makes cheese from the organic milk from his 430 cows. He learned to make cheese on his parents' farm and later studied dairy food technology in Hanover. Then he wanted to learn to cook and attended the Ballymaloe Cookery School in Southern Ireland for three months. For him, the coworking space is a place where he can concentrate on one part of his work. Even if the current conditions are what he wants – a short commute and a family working environment – a rural coworking space offers the widely travelled kite surfer a balance in which he can experience a different, urban milieu.

Future trend: craftsmen in coworking spaces – a potential for rural areas

In rural areas, the craft trades often take on stabilising and innovative functions: Training and employment opportunities close to home, stabilisation of local labour markets, innovation by adapting technologies and strengthening local and regional cycles. And it is of course a source of income for the local population. For example, the craft trade sector contributes around 30 % more to employment in rural areas than in urban regions.⁹ However, rural craft trades are also suffering from demographic change, the migration of young people to the cities. Coworking spaces with their diverse effects can make an important contribution to solving this dilemma and giving craft trades a future. Our examples show it that craftsmen too need to be connected to an urban lifestyle, networking and inspiration. If they find this in their region, the chances of slowing down migration increase. Attractive, sustainable rural areas, local value chains and stable supply structures are important components in this respect, to which rural coworking spaces can make a relevant contribution. On the other hand, the innovative power of existing rural craft trade industries can be strengthened by coworking spaces: An interplay of mutual help and giving as is so common in rural areas.

New Rural Workers type 8

IT workers and engineers – the root of coworking

The picture is persistent: Working in coworking spaces is something for IT-based industries and those that fiddle with computer-related engineering. Indeed, Deskmag coworking magazine, with its international evaluations of coworking space members and users, confirms that members in “IT jobs are still the biggest group and were able to slightly increase their ratio compared to the previous year (20% to 22%)”⁽¹⁾. And in our pop-up rural coworking spaces this ratio is no lower: Nearly 20% of the respondents are from the IT and technology-related industries, whereby the majority of them are self-employed or freelancers. A very small proportion of people in this field are part-time self-employed and are starting a company as hybrid founders (see page 27). The relatively high rate is not necessarily a sign that there are as many IT specialists in the rural areas as in the city, but rather that coworking spaces are seen as attractive places to work for this group of users. This results in distances of up to 1000 kilometres and more within the working environment. For example, an employee from a Cologne-based animation film company, who normally works remotely from Kotzenbüll in North Frisia, drove five days in a row to the coworking space in Brazil on the Baltic Sea beach to be, as he said, among like-minded people – that is a distance of 130 kilometres.

Users: This type of user is an important group for coworking spaces in rural areas, as they are familiar with the New Work working methods and naturally use the New Work spaces. They are therefore always among the first to start using newly opened coworking spaces. The added value of using a coworking space for this user group is also the possibility of meeting far away from the team headquarters in a common place for joint project sprints, joint meetings and team-internal exchange. Many kilometres away from the employer, a contribution can be made to team spirit and a sense of commitment. The fact that lifestyles and ways of life in rural areas are similar to those in urban areas is a reality; it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between rural and urban populations. In rural coworking spaces, different worlds meet and make the already existing internationality and diversity of rural areas visible and tangible as clearly shown by this type.



Frank – part-time IT worker in Schuby

In his search for networking, Frank Radzio from Tarp sets off for the pop-up coworking space in Schuby. Frank is employed on a part-time basis; in addition, he is self-employed “with a full-time job” as an IT consultant. He prefers to organise his working hours individually enabling him to balance his private and professional life – a great challenge within itself. And he also likes to go shopping during the day when the shops are empty. He would like to use a coworking space several times a month, preferably also for a postal address.

Future trend – rural innovation hubs

Not only can classic software development be done remotely, but thanks to digitalisation so can many other technical jobs. One example is Markus from Schinkel. The head of the Media Dome at the Kiel University of Applied Sciences has the operating software of the complex multimedia planetarium on his laptop and can control the system conveniently from his home office. With the ever-increasing automation of industrial processes, jobs that would otherwise have had to be done on the factory floor or in the laboratory can now be carried out remotely.

As our figures show, these New Agricultural Technicians will rent out disproportionately large numbers of coworking spaces to network and exchange information. If such places are well curated and equipped with additional technology, new innovation centres beyond the cities, new start-ups and jobs could be created there.

New Rural Workers type 9

Creatives – new places shape the scene

Strong networks, a high willingness to cooperate and smaller companies – characteristics of the creative user. These are one of the original milieus of urban coworking, and even in rural coworking spaces they are always among the first users. They often originate from urban milieus and can usually work independently of a location. They have normally actively chosen to live in a rural area, following the call of the family and sometimes love. Rural coworking spaces are new anchor points in rural areas for creative people, offering a reflective framework for the special nature of creative work and an increase in visibility. For them, coworking spaces represent the very important spaces for casual encounters, where networks can be formed and exchanges can take place and where presentations and exhibitions can be catered to.

But who actually belongs to this group of creative people? The creative user developed in this study represents a subsegment of the Creative Class according to Richard Florida, in that it belongs to the so-called super-creative core and ⁽¹⁾ seeks authentic, “multifunctional places and cultural diversity as a space of experience”. The resulting classification leads to a type of user of which 10% of the respondents can be allocated to. These are, for example, writers, comedians and musicians. They are part of the cultural and creative industries, whose “creative act is the initial process step in the value chain of cultural and creative services”⁽²⁾. Companies in the creative sector are often small, and any deficits that may arise are compensated for by strong networks and a high willingness to cooperate, which in turn promotes spill-over effects, both within the sector and externally.⁽³⁾

Our survey reveals a fairly clear needs profile for this user group: they consciously seek out the community in order to use and shape it for themselves. This can happen for a short but concentrated period of time in a retreat or at regular intervals, for example, in a work session. Depending on the equipment and facilities of a coworking space, a focus can be placed for these users: A recording studio in the country, subject-specific workshops and much more. Ultimately not only the creative people but also other user groups benefit from this in the coworking spaces. Companies and the public sector, if willing to open up, could use the creative and cultural industries not only as service providers but also as drivers of innovation.⁽⁵⁾

The resulting potential for rural areas is manifold. They can be identified, for example, in the participation in shaping digital and social transformation processes. These effects are particularly strengthened by projects such as the Fichtelgebirge artists' colony in Bavaria or VekselWirk, which aims to strengthen the creative industries in the German-Danish border region – both of which place coworking spaces for creative people at the centre of their activities.



Kea – musician in Dorstadt

Kea Schwarzfeld has turned her hobby into a profession: The trained media designer from Gielde is a musician and dancer and writes children books on the side, most recently in a coworking retreat. She uses coworking spaces for networking, reflection and interdisciplinary support, for example through financial and communication advice, in order to ultimately have more freedom of thought for her creative activities. Kea is very interested in helping to develop her residential area and making it fit for the future.

Future trend – rural cross-innovation

Cross-industry and interdisciplinary cooperation between creative people and companies with the aim of developing innovation and finding new problem-solving strategies is referred to as cross-innovation. Cross-innovation takes place in a targeted manner, in innovation and creative labs set up specifically for this purpose or en passant in coworking spaces. This is where corporates work alongside creatives, where specialist silos are broken down and new knowledge is developed and knowledge transfer established by bringing together different types and stocks of knowledge. Through the creative user group, companies in coworking spaces enjoy a previously exclusive service. In this way, new perspectives, solutions and product ideas are created. The influence of creative people can increase through rural coworking spaces and achieve sustainable effects beyond the boundaries of the coworking space.

New Rural Workers type 10

Teachers – a lot of feeling for the right environment

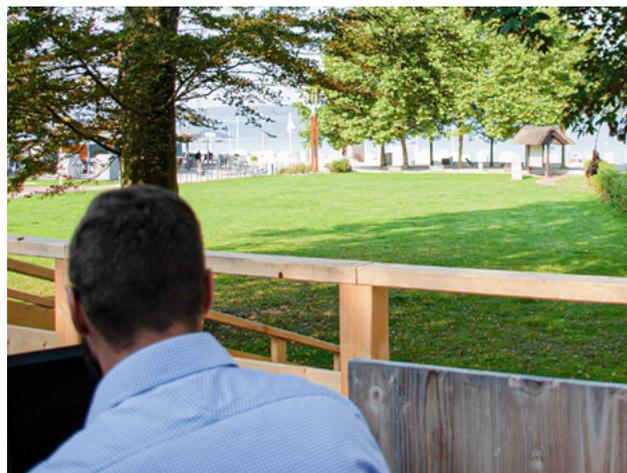
Teachers and coworking? That seems almost as inappropriate as craftsmen. Attendance time at school, preparation and follow-up work routinely done at the individual desk at home or at school. So why should teachers move into coworking spaces?

Some distance from one's home office, working in a creative and productive atmosphere, seeing other people outside of work – also applicable to other types of users. Representatives of the education sector stated these intentions for using a coworking space. A total of 7% of the surveyed users in pop-up coworking spaces can be assigned to this industry. Sometimes it is a teacher who uses the communal atmosphere to avoid preparing for the next school year in a quiet little room, sometimes it is a school social worker who uses the environment as an alternative to the daily grind. A workplace in a beautiful, creative place in the immediate vicinity – that is the benefit as mentioned for most of those interviewed. The resulting user group represents an exciting spectrum: An existing need for exchange and contact with a (non-subject related) community, for rooms, and for regular concentrated work in the immediate vicinity.

This type of user is not only an opportunity for rural coworking spaces, but also for rural areas in general. If this type of user has the opportunity to use a coworking space, they appear as inhabitants of rural areas and can act as multipliers, both in their own (school) networks and in those of the coworking space. It is about digitisation as a whole and about insights into innovative professional fields and forms of new work as an option for their own pupils – a perpetual, dynamic market of possibilities.

Since the data represents the perspectives from the time before Corona, this type of user has many additional options within the different framework conditions. With their professional environments and fast internet access, coworking spaces as a whole provide an adequate environment for distance and digital teaching.

Whether before, with or after Corona, the combination of rural coworking spaces and teachers creates added value for coworking spaces, for the teachers, and indirectly for the pupils as well and this in diverse and future-proof rural areas.



Manuel – teacher and volunteer in Saint Peter-Ording

Manuel, 35, is a teacher at a comprehensive school in Göttingen. He loves his job and is very satisfied with his professional environment. He enjoys working with young people so much that he implements corresponding projects at the Goethe-Institut during his holidays – preferably in ever new and unknown places around the world. Manuel can do the preparation and follow-up of his lessons on the move. He feels most comfortable when he can keep his work away from his home. Coworking could definitely be integrated here – or be used during holidays in St. Peter-Ording because such a location “is much more casual than working in a hotel room”.

Future trend – competent workplace pioneers

One trend can be observed particularly well in the teacher type: The disintegration of professions into different activities that can be ideally carried out in different places. The teacher profession is exemplary here, as it offers a high degree of freedom and a high degree of coworkability. For teachers, a home office is nothing new, the entire occupational group has been living by it for centuries. They already have a high level of workplace competence and know where they can best carry out which of their various activities: A sports teacher, for example, prefers the stimulating atmosphere of a pop-up coworking space in Bliestorf for class preparation; she prefers to correct work at home. This makes her part of the avant-garde. Many other people who will be working in mobile formats in the future have yet to acquire this high level of awareness. A high level of workplace competence should also be seen as a contribution to health as it reduces stress and increases productivity.

New Rural Workers type 11

Managers – shaping leadership from afar

The Corona crisis has brought the technology for decentralised work into companies in leaps and bounds. Technology can be installed quickly, however, new management culture and team rituals take time to develop. This challenge still lies ahead. This is why executives and managers in particular were particularly challenged during the crisis. Not only did they have to do quiet office work at home, but they also had to organise their teams in new ways, keep them together and keep them efficient. Zoom Fatigue: A feeling of exhaustion, caused by uninterrupted video conferences, is a symptom of this new challenge. Let's take a look at managers that we met in our coworking spaces before the Corona crisis even began. They organise their teams remotely and have already developed this new working culture for themselves. Our type of manager is a result of the predominantly inductive way of working and the conspicuousness with the data material that a relatively large proportion of the respondents, approx. 8%, assigned their own actions to a management activity. Regarding the research question, which users are interested in working in the coworking space, this is a conspicuous finding, these people are decision makers and multipliers in a company and work structure. Nearly all respondents of this type state that they work in an employed position and even before the corona-related changes, nearly all of the respondents were allowed to carry out their work in a remote manner. In particular in places of work that can be classified as Workation or Retreat, respondents of this type use a rural coworking space. Furthermore, respondents of this type often state that they want to use rural coworking as a source of inspiration and for reasons of atmosphere. The desired separation between professional and private life also acts as a driver, with many of the respondents stating that they love their work on the one hand and face the challenge of work-life balance on the other. These findings lead to the assumption that the manager user type is not to be found in every rural coworking space. However, since the possibility of using the unique selling point "very scenic" is quite common in rural areas, the potential of using this type of user is certainly there, including the connection to large networks, team events that take several days and regular use of the rural coworking spaces.

Future trend – digital leadership requires real counterpoints

Communication in teams and projects is a bottomless pit – many managers have come to experience this during these Corona times. Where previously meetings were inevitably interrupted by a change of location at company headquarters or business trips, resulting in time out, the home video diary fills up seamlessly, absence is no longer a reason to turn down a meeting. Even during video meetings, additional communication is often carried out on other channels. And all this while at the same time real isolation and monotony at home. Exhaustion and excessive demands are the

results of this situation. More and more managers will therefore seek work situations in which there are again inevitable breaks, inspiration from the environment and chance encounters. Coworking spaces offer these conditions and are therefore a contribution to occupational health, especially for managers. In addition, a new work culture will have to be actively developed in companies that aim to solve simple tasks in new ways: How, for example, can new employees be socially integrated if they cannot be shown around on their first day at work, if chance encounters in the canteen no longer take place?



Norbert – the best of both worlds

Norbert Hassepas works at Telefonica in Hamburg and leads a team of ten colleagues – mostly from his home office in the faraway Schleswig-Flensburg district. He lived in Hamburg for a while, but he soon moved back to the country with his wife and children. The very liberal working culture of his employer has made this possible. There are two major challenges he faces: On the one hand, it is demanding to unite all team members and get them on the same path. On the other hand, the distinction between his work and private life in his home office is often not easy for him. Therefore, he would like to have a nearby coworking space that offers him a permanent workplace as well as exchange, new ideas, suggestions and networking. This would make it much easier for him to manage from a distance – this desire goes so far that he has committed to setting up a rural coworking space himself.

New Rural Workers type 12

The interested parties – high potentials for transformation

The present study sheds light on the New Rural Workers and their New Places of Work. The user surveys from the pop-up coworking spaces reveal, on the one hand, the sectors and working methods in which the new working practices were already a reality before the corona-related transformations, and on the other hand, they show how rural coworking spaces are or can be an answer to existing challenges of everyday (working) life.

In order to reveal these phenomena and actions, the respondents were condensed into a typology along their activities and forms of work. In addition to these New Rural Workers, the pop-up coworking spaces were also visited by people who did not come to work there.

They visited the New Places of Work in rural areas out of curiosity – to get information, to gain access to (new) networks, or simply to have a coffee in a nice, special place. This group of interested people is very important, accounting for just over 20% of the total. For most of the respondents in this group, the desire for exchange is a central aspect of coworking and coworking spaces. For example, Britta in St. Peter-Ording: Britta would like a place in rural areas where people who have arrived in the digital working world can exchange ideas. There's a retired computer scientist in Bliestorf who just wants to drop by and get some information. There is the unemployed person in Süderlügum who hopes for new perspectives. There is the senior citizen from the Grönwohld campsite who asks for help with her new tablet computer.

Whether it is the connection to (new) labour markets, political target groups or other generation groups, this group shows a further, diverse potential of rural coworking spaces: they have the potential to have an impact far beyond the provision of jobs. They are places of social interaction and exchange, places of culture and learning, "infrastructures of cohesion"⁽¹⁾. In many places, these functions have long been practiced in pubs, clubs or youth centres. In some places they still exist, in others they are still there, often these places of encounter and intergenerational exchange are no longer there, meeting places and "opportunity structures"⁽²⁾ have been cut down, are no longer in existence or the backlog of renovations has been too great.

The interested parties who met in coworking spaces beyond the New Rural Workers point out the existing need for places of cohesion in rural areas and demonstrate the social integration power of these places. In addition to their importance as places of work, coworking spaces can (re)establish these functions and services and with it create new places of general interest and robust, resilient cohesion in rural areas.⁽³⁾

Future trends – coworking spaces as incubators of a rural future

In innovation management, we speak of serendipity – something new is created from chance encounters or observations. Coworking spaces offer space for such unintentional encounters, high-tech specialists meet craftsmen and administrative staff. This effect makes coworking spaces a place with a high probability of innovation. Their high degree of inclusiveness and attraction for the most diverse milieus makes them incubators of a rural future.

These inclusive spaces of opportunity offer a place for yet to be fulfilled needs. In the future, completely new places with new functions for the people in rural areas can be created. One example is coworking kitchens, where rural food producers share approved machines for processing and packaging in order to reach the regional market with small quantities. This concept is currently being planned at the Kirschenholz farm near Neumünster.



Coworking in the nature at Gut Mechow near Schalsee.

Kindergarten, Corner shop, Coworking – the coworking space as a catalyst for rural development

Somewhere in the middle of nowhere lies the Viehbrook farm – in passing a Holstein farm in a solitary location like many others. And yet it is here that the future is made: Viehbrook has a small shop, a day-care centre and a coworking space. A privately organised service that represents a large part of what services of general interest will mean in a rural future, and is therefore a pioneer for the digitisation of rural areas. For so far, the promises of digitisation have not yet arrived – while today many people could actually work where they live and save commuting time, petrol and nerves, in reality digitisation is driving the rural exodus (see p. 10).

Full urban supply – an illusion?

The Viehbrook farm shows that things can be different when the offers are created – like in a Berlin neighbourhood, villagers can walk to a coworking space to work, take their children to the day-care centre next door, buy the essentials in the farm shop on the way home, eat in the restaurant in the evening, and accommodate visitors in the guesthouse.

At the same time, the coworking space with its fibre optic connection also offers a social environment, colleagues, with which one can discuss not only professional matters but also the latest village gossip. This is an exciting offer, especially for young families in the cities – and a good reason to go back to the country. After all, Viehbrook offers everything that a neighbourhood in Berlin-Friedrichshain would also have to offer: Anyone who lives next door can

do all the everyday things they need to do on foot and doesn't have to leave the place for days on end while having a state-of-the-art job at the same time. The village will once again become what it once was a hundred years ago: the centre of work and life for its inhabitants. Only that some of them have completely different backgrounds and professions than back then – they are making a rural life in the country happen. Places such as Viehbrook Farm or Prädikow Farm are examples of the transformative power rural coworking spaces can have if they are not thought of as isolated places of work, but as new centres of life.

Coworking today is similar to the ecology of a coral reef: it is a basic culture and once it is there, it offers space for other, specialised life: sea anemones, clown fish, barracudas.

Coworking offers a fundamental culture: with a coworking space, a reliably open and supervised place is (re)created in the village, offering a culture of openness and inclusion. Many things can be set up in a complementary way, bringing whole places back to life. They can provide the everyday supplies you wouldn't want to go to the nearest supermarket for – but they can also offer the special things that a supermarket might not have: regional craft beer, for example. But they can also be the place for a variety of other offers, from repair cafés to meeting places for clubs or decentralised administrative services. And above all, an open place where a new village community can be shaped.

In the future, these places will be an important part of rural services of general interest – and places that offer coworking space will be able to attract new inhabitants who would not have dared to step outside of the suburbs. Especially after Corona, moving to the country will be on the rise, but many young city dwellers still fear that they will lose too much if they move to the country. What is needed is the best of both worlds – places that show both rural and urbanity. The new urbanisation will consist of a new, different division of functions between town and country, making the transition between seemingly separate spaces less perceptible through urban features. These places are still rare, but they do exist, and they function. We describe how in more detail on page 44, but they are only one of the many manifestations of the

New Places of Work in the rural areas, each of which fulfils very specific functions in its ecosystems.

A place like Hof Viehbrook functions far out, beyond the periphery of the cities, where large parts of the supply have already been cut off. Here it closes a gap by offering these services again – in a new format that meets the lifestyle of a new generation of rural dwellers. In larger, still well-served communities, it would not work like this.

Coworking also has its place in such places – but with a different concept, and here again the question is whether such a place is located in the urban periphery or further out in the country. Depending on the concept, it will provide other services and supplies in addition to coworking itself – the rental of workplaces and meeting rooms. Starting on page 62, we describe the very diverse business models and services that rural coworking spaces have developed into in the short time they have been in existence.

The origin – coworking in urban areas

Coworking concepts in cities essentially follow two clear business models:

Owner Spaces

These are individual spaces, which were created by local founders. Their main business is membership, through which users have access to workspaces and – equally as important – to the community. Clients are mainly individuals or small teams. In successful cases, further branches are founded. This is the classic and original model of coworking that emerged from the café scene. Examples are the St. Oberholz in Berlin or the Betahaus in Hamburg.

Multinational chains

These coworking spaces are designed as chains from the onset and are designed for growth. Their main business is the flexible provision of office space for larger teams. Their customers are mainly companies that want to flexibly manage the workplaces for their staff. Despite the discredit that this concept fell into in 2019, due to the turbulence around We-Work, this is a very profitable business model that providers such as Regus or design offices are running with great success.

The chains in particular benefit from the fact that the metropolises have become increasingly similar in the context of globalisation. After all, a concept that works in New York also works in Berlin and Shanghai – there is little difference between a coworking space and Starbucks. The concept, once developed and tested, can be scaled and easily transferred or imitated.

Rural coworking – as different as the regions themselves

However, as similar as the world's metropolises are, so different are the rural regions – they differ according to the culture of their regions, the distance to the nearest major city, their level of supply, their population density, their settle-

ment and economic structure, their closeness to nature and certainly many other factors.

Every coworking space in the countryside is unique – what works on Lake Ammersee near Munich does not necessarily fit into the vast expanse of Prignitz, the Baltic Sea beach needs different ideas than the Münsterland region does. There are definite constants which we have identified as classic business models in this study based on over fifty interviews with owners of such spaces.

However, we also always speak of "core business models" – the variances within a type are great, and we usually also see further features or offers of other types in addition.

For a work location at a tourist hotspot, it can therefore make sense to also provide offers for the local population in the off-season.

Correspondingly, such a core business model can always be seen in our examples, but will also often be noticed in other ongoing offers. When founding a space, it is of course important to recognise what is the most promising business model, because in order to economize the space in the medium term, target groups must be addressed accordingly. The development of an offer that fits the location is often an intuitive, agile process. Often the real needs and opportunities for a location only emerge in the course of running the place, and the spaces then develop in this direction. It is precisely this adaptability, the development of several pillars, that makes them very resilient on the one hand and beneficial for their region on the other.

The typology of different manifestations of rural coworking spaces presented in this study is therefore an attempt to clarify a new and dynamic phenomenon. It is to be understood as a proposal which is to serve founders as a source of inspiration and orientation on the one hand, and on the other hand as a guideline for their support offers.

The researcher team is open to discussing this typology, especially since we will only be able to see in years to come which manifestations and business models will prove sustainable, which trends will have proven to be truly structural.

At a glance – rural coworking spaces in Germany

This map shows the coworking spaces in rural areas known to us at the time of the publication of the study, whereby we determine the rurality according to the criteria defined on page 22. The selection of the interviewed founders and operators of coworking spaces is also based on these criteria, whereby the respective coworking space must be located in a district region classified as rural and/or in a small or medium-sized town. The aim was also to achieve the broadest possible distribution of the total case selection.

Spaces whose operators we interviewed for the study and those that we present as examples in our typology are highlighted.

This general map does not claim to be complete; it shows places open during the survey period. We are aware of numerous projects that are in various stages of development and are about to open – meaning further growth can be expected in 2020.

On the other hand, it is foreseeable that some of the spaces will not survive the Corona crisis. Nevertheless, the map shows a trend picture of the development in the regions and the quantitative distribution of the business models. This is particularly important in view of the fact that the number of rural coworking spaces could be counted on one hand in 2017.

Quick to understand – the work place profile

The different coworking business models have many different effects and distinguishing features. In order to be able to differentiate the New Places of Work at a glance, we have developed a traffic light system based on certain criteria in order to make the different characteristics clearly tangible. The complexity and diversity of the individual places cannot be taken into account in its entirety – the classification is intended to facilitate understanding of the mode of action and requirements of the individual places. In the following, we describe the individual categories and the evaluation scale behind them.

Space:

This classification describes the space required as well as the required variability of working spaces. Where a young bottom-hub coworking space can be a minimum of 100 sqm, the retreat type with its attached gastro-kitchen, accommodation and seminar rooms requires considerably more space. The traffic light therefore shows low space requirements (●○○○○) to very high space requirements (●●●●●).

Community:

The community plays a central role in the discussion about coworking spaces. However, the different business models have different characteristics. A classic coworking space requires a

strong and supportive community (●●●●●) where coworking has a different focus. The temporary model places a clear focus on a concentrated working environment, so that the community aspect is of less importance (●○○○○).

Dissemination:

The study describes a variety of characteristics. While known business models are comparatively often located in rural areas (●●●●●), there are differentiations that are still very rarely found with concrete examples (●○○○○).

Catchment area:

Users in coworking spaces have different commuting distances depending on their business model and focus. While the Workation model in a holiday region addresses people from across Germany as well as from abroad (●●●●●), a place in the category "new village centre" has a much smaller catchment area and can be reached in about 15 minutes by car (●○○○○).

Resilience:

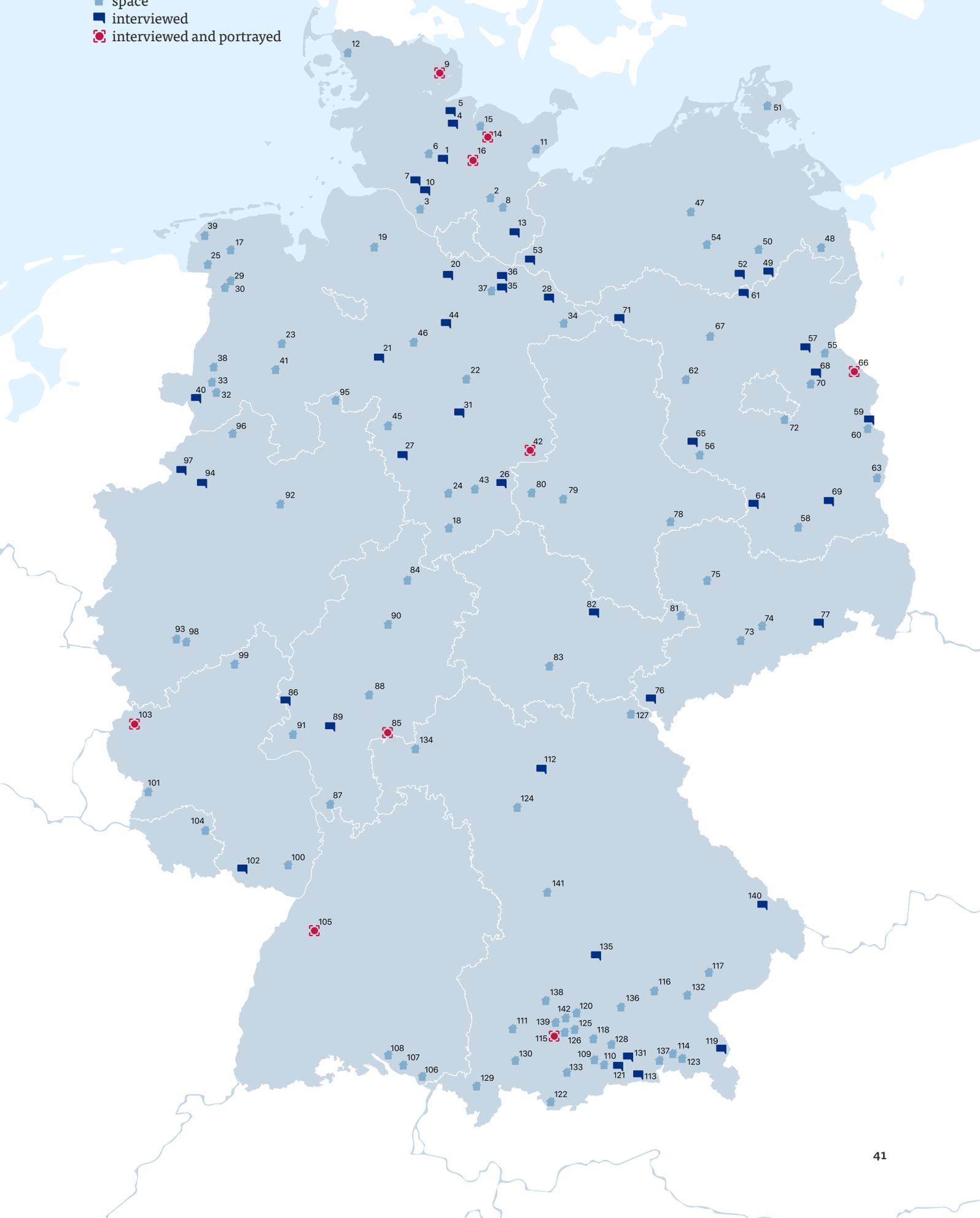
The business models are characterised by varying degrees of resistance to economic fluctuations and crises. 5 points (●●●●●) indicate a very resilient business model for different target groups, whereby it does not have to be the most profitable one.

Region:

The business models described have different effects on the region. Where committed people (bottom hub) dedicate their time to the quality of life on site and initiate new ideas in local development, we see a high added value for the surrounding area (●●●●●). Places with a tourism component (e.g., retreats) are well networked locally, but there are usually less impulses compared to other models.

Map Legend

- space
- interviewed
- interviewed and portrayed



The spaces:

🏠 space
 🗨️ interviewed
 🗨️ interviewed and portrayed

No.	Study	Location	Name	Website
1	🗨️	Aukrug	Mini-Workspace	https://www.monteurzimmer-aukrug.de/workspace/
2	🏠	Bad Oldesloe	CoWork Oldesloe	https://www.annette-schumacher.de/cowork-oldesloe/
3	🏠	Elmshorn	Smart Factory	https://smartfactory-elmshorn.de
4	🗨️	Felde	Alter Heuboden	http://www.alter-heuboden.de/
5	🗨️	Gettorf	GettWork	https://gettwork.cobot.me
6	🏠	Hohenwestedt	Gründerzentrum Hohenwestedt	https://coworknord.de/hohenwestedt/
7	🗨️	Itzehoe	Westerwerk	https://westerwerk.com/
8	🏠	Kastorf	TorffHub	https://www.torffhub.de/
9	🗨️	Kiesby	Coworking Schlei	https://www.coworking-schlei.de/
10	🗨️	Lägerdorf	Alsenhof Genossenschaft	https://alsenhof.de/
11	🏠	Neustadt in Holstein	Hafenraum	https://hafenraum.business.site
12	🏠	Niebüll	Nordfriesischen Innovationcenter in Niebüll	https://nic-nordfriesland.de/
13	🗨️	Niendorf/Stecknitz	Das Herrenhaus	https://herrenhausvonhollander.de/
14	🗨️	Preetz	cobaas	https://www.cobaas.de/
15	🗨️	Raisdorf	Gewerbe- & Technikzentrum Raisdorf	https://coworknord.de/schwentimental/
16	🗨️	Rendswühren	Coworking Space Viehbrook	https://www.hof-viehbrook.de/coworking-space/
17	🏠	Aurich	Coworkerhaus	https://coworkerhaus.de
18	🏠	Bovenden	LandErfolg	https://innovationhubs.de/landerfolg
19	🏠	Bremervörde	Junges Haus	https://junges-haus.de
20	🗨️	Buchholz in der Nordheide	ISI-Zentrum	https://isi-wlh.eu/mieten/vermietungsangebot/coworking.html
21	🗨️	Bücken	Tokunft Hus	https://tokunftus.de/
22	🏠	Celle	CreativCelle	https://cellecreativ.de/coworking
23	🏠	Cloppenburg	Coworking Cloppenburg – Dein Businessquartier	www.coworking-cloppenburg.de
24	🏠	Einbeck	3eck	https://3eck.spaces.nexusus.com/de
25	🏠	Emden	Coworkerhaus	https://coworkerhaus.de
26	🗨️	Goslar	sharedspace.	https://sharedspace.de/
27	🗨️	Hameln	Orangery	https://www.orangery.io/locations/hameln/
28	🗨️	Hitzacker	Coworking-Space Hitzacker	https://coworkland.de/spaces/coworking-space-hitzacker
29	🏠	Leer	nesse.office	https://nesse-office.de
30	🏠	Leer	team neusta coworking Leer	https://www.neusta-ds.de/agentur/coworking-in-leer
31	🗨️	Lehrte	COWORKING SPACE LEHRTE	https://coworking-lehrte.de
32	🏠	Lingen	IT-Zentrum Lingen Coworking-Space	http://www.it-zentrum-lingen.de/leistungen/coworking-space/
33	🏠	Lingen	Part of Port	https://www.partofport.de
34	🏠	Lüchow	PostLab	https://gruene-werkstatt-wendland.de/?page_id=1180
35	🗨️	Lüneburg	Innomania	https://innomania-cowork.de/
36	🗨️	Lüneburg	FREIRAUM	https://freiraum-lueneburg.de
37	🏠	Lüneburg	DSi Co-Working-Space	https://www.leuphana.de/universitaet/organisation/studierende/dsi.html
38	🏠	Meppen	FREIRAUM [coworking]	https://www.coworking-meppen.de/
39	🏠	Norddeich	Coworkerhaus	https://coworkerhaus.de
40	🗨️	Nordhorn	Bürowerk	https://www.buerowerk-nordhorn.de/coworking
41	🏠	Quakenbrück	BIQ - Business- & Innovationspark Quakenbrück	www.biq-quakenbrueck.de
42	🗨️	Schöppenstedt	DSTATION	https://dstation.org/
43	🏠	Seesen	Coworking Seesen	http://coworking-seesen.de/
44	🗨️	Soltau	MS 39	https://ms39-soltau.org/
45	🏠	Stadthagen	IKANTINE	https://ikantine.com
46	🏠	Walsrode	Coworking und Meeting Space im Hotel ANDERS	https://www.hotel-walsrode.de/restaurant/co-working-meeting-space
47	🏠	Alt Sührkow	Gut Pohnstorf	https://smart-doerp.de/gutshaus-pohnstorf/
48	🏠	Damerow (Rollwitz)	Rittergut Damerow	https://www.rittergut-damerow.de
49	🗨️	Feldberger Seenlandschaft	Werkraum	https://www.zone-einz.de
50	🏠	Groß Nemerow	Hotel Bornmühle	https://www.bornmuehle.de/work/coworking-area
51	🏠	Lietzow	Project Bay	https://project-bay-coworking.de/
52	🗨️	Neustrelitz	Kiezbüro CoWorking	https://kiez-buero.de/neustrelitz/
53	🗨️	Nieklitz	Wir bauen Zukunft	www.wirbauenzukunft.de
54	🏠	Waren an der Müritz	CoWork im EGZ	https://wirtschaft-seenplatte.de/existenzgruendungszentrum/
55	🏠	Bad Freienwalde (Oder)	Rathenau Coworking im Schloss	www.facebook.com/coworkingimschloss
56	🏠	Dahnsdorf	Haus Flaeming	https://haus-flaeming.de
57	🗨️	Eberswalde	Thinkfarm	https://thinkfarm-eberswalde.de/
58	🏠	Finsterwalde	Comeback Elbe-Elster	https://www.comeback-ee.de/
59	🗨️	Frankfurt / Oder	Blok O	https://blok-o.de/
60	🏠	Frankfurt / Oder	Roman & Fritz	https://www.roman-fritz-coworking.de/
61	🗨️	Fürstenberg / Havel	Verstehbahnhof	https://verstehbahnhof.de/
62	🏠	Großwudicke	Die Waldstadt	https://www.die-waldstatt.de
63	🏠	Guben	K24	https://www.guwo.de/k24-dein-ideenladen.html
64	🗨️	Herzberg	Lug2 Herzberg	https://www.lug2-coworking.de/
65	🗨️	Klein Glien	Coconat	https://coconat-space.com/de/
66	🗨️	Letschin	Alte Schule Letschin	https://www.coworking-oderbruch.de/
67	🏠	Neuruppin	Quartier 20	https://www.quartier20.net/
68	🗨️	Prötzel	Hof Prädikow	https://www.hof-praedikow.de/
69	🗨️	Raddusch	Kaiserliche Postagentur	https://www.kaiserliche-postagentur.de/wp/
70	🏠	Strausberg	Coworking TP6	https://coworking-tp6-strausberg.business.site/
71	🗨️	Wittenberge	Coworking Space Wittenberge	https://tgz-prignitz.de/coworking-space

No.	Study	Location	Name	Website
72		Zeuthen	Coworking Zeuthen	https://coworking-zeuthen.de/
73		Augustusburg	Kleinstadtbuero	https://kleinstadtbuero.de/
74		Freiberg	Coworking Space FreiWerk	https://www.cpbau.de/standorte/freiberg/coworking/
75		Grimma	Alte Kaffeerösterei	https://coworking-burogemeinschaft-kreativwerkstatt.business.site/
76		Oelsnitz	UNISONO	https://unisono-buero-vermietung.de/
77		Pirna	Projektsalon	/
78		Bitterfeld-Wolfen	Gleis 5	https://gleisfuenf.de/
79		Quedlinburg	Coworking Harz	https://www.coworking-harz.de
80		Wernigerode	WOHNZIMMER	https://www.wohnzimmer-coworking.de/
81		Altenburg	OpenLab	https://www.stadtmensch-altenburg.org/
82		Apolda	Open Factory	https://www.open-factory.de/
83		Ilmenau	Space28	https://ilmenau.space
84		Baunatal	Coworking Baunatal	https://www.coworking-baunatal.de
85		Gelnhausen	Kinzig Valley	https://www.kinzig-valley.de/
86		Limburg	Coworking Limburg	https://www.coworking-limburg.de
87		Lorsch	Coworking Lorsch - Die Bürogemeinschaft	https://www.eglorsch.de/coworking-lorsch.html
88		Nidda	Coworking Nidda	https://coworking-nidda.de
89		Oberursel	Thiiird PLace	http://www.thiiirdplace.de
90		Schwalmstadt	Coworking Space Schwalmstadt	http://www.coworking-schwalmstadt.de
91		Taunusstein	OG2	https://www.og-2.de
92		Beckum	Work LnB	https://www.work-lnb.de/
93		Brühl	brüneo freiRaum	https://www.brueneo.de/de
94		Coesfeld	Flamschen2	https://www.flamschenzwei.de/
95		Rahden	PMT Coworking Space	http://pmt-coworking.blogspot.com
96		Rheine	co.viron	https://coviron.de
97		Stadtlohn	cw+	https://cwplus.de/
98		Wesseling	brüneo freiRaum	https://www.brueneo.de/de
99		Flammersfeld	g.r.i.p.s Raum	https://grips-raum.de
100		Landau in der Pfalz	Room 4 Work	https://room4work.de
101		Langsur-Wasserbilligerbrück	DEULUX	https://coworking-deulux.de/
102		Pirmasens	PlanB	https://www.cowork-planb.de
103		Prüm	Schreibtisch in Pruem	http://schreibtischinpruem.de
104		St. Wendel	Brühlhaus CoWorking Space	https://brühlhaus.de
105		Gernsbach	Kornhaus Gernsbach	https://www.kornhaus-gernsbach.de
106		Langenargen	Coworking Bodensee	https://coworking-bodensee.de
107		Markdorf	codesk	https://www.codesk-markdorf.de/
108		Überlingen	SYMBÜROSE WORKINGSPACE	https://coworking-ueberlingen.de
109		Bad Tölz	Gschafft	https://gschafft.com/
110		Bad Tölz	VISION³	https://visionhochdrei.de/coworking/
111		Bad Wörishofen	Dyno Lab	https://dyno-lab.de
112		Bamberg	Femme Space	https://femmespacebamberg.de/
113		Bayrischzell	WENDELSTEIN SALETTL	https://www.coworkation-alps.eu/locations/wendelstein-salettl.html
114		Bernau	Co*WorkSpace Chiemgau	www.co-chiemgau.de
115		Dießen am Ammersee	Denkerhaus Ammersee	https://ammersee-denkerhaus.de/
116		Dorfen	Die Coworker	https://die-coworker.de/
117		Eggenfelden	BizJuz	https://www.eggenfelden.de/de/coworking?highlight=WyjJb3dvcmtpbmciXQ==
118		Egling	Projekt Draußen	https://www.projekt-draussen.com/diemoeglichkeiten/
119		Freilassing	Kreativnest	https://www.kreativnest-bgl.de
120		Gilching	alvea workspace	https://alvea-workspace.com/
121		Gmund am Tegernsee	Die Coworkerei	http://coworkerei.com
122		Grainau	Lakeview Office	https://www.hotelambadersee.de/coworking.html
123		Grassau	Chiemgau Collective	https://www.chiemgau-collective.com/
124		Gutenstetten	aischforum	https://aischforum.de
125		Herrsching	Institut für Form und Farbe	https://althammer-studios.com/
126		Herrsching	Konturwerk	https://konturwerk.com/
127		Hof	Einstein1	https://www.einstein1.net/coworking/
128		Holzkirchen	DAS ATELIER	https://www.dasatelier.io/
129		Immenstadt	seven-work-space	https://members.seven-work-space.com/
130		Marktobendorf	The Green Room	https://the-green-room.net/
131		Miesbach	Stadtplatz 10.0	https://www.stadtplatz10-0.com
132		Mühlendorf	IO Park	https://www.iopark.de/angebot1
133		Murnau	IQ Murnau	https://www.innovationsquartier.com/co-working-im-iq/
134		Partenstein	Mehrluft	https://mehrluft.com/
135		Pfaffenhofen	Echtland Coworking	https://www.coworking-pfaffenhofen.de
136		Poing	Rockzipfel München	https://www.rockzipfelmuenchen.de/
137		Samerberg	Bergwerk	https://www.facebook.com/bergwerk.samerberg/?utm_source=worknsurf.de
138		Schmiechen	Co-Working Schmiechen	https://www.coworking-schmiechen.de/
139		Schondorf am Ammersee	Business Lounge Ammersee	https://www.coworking-event-ammersee.de/
140		Spiegelau	Dahoam 4.0	http://www.digitales-dorf.bayern/
141		Weißenburg in Bayern	WUGwerk	https://wugwerk.de/
142		Wörthsee	Impact Plaza	https://impactplaza.com/de/#about



Kinzig Valley, Gelnhausen

New Places of Work type 1

Coworking Classic

The basic ingredients of any successful coworking space are having diverse spaces, a productive working atmosphere and an inspiring community. The original model from the metropolises is on the increase in rural areas, albeit with some special features.

Does the classic business model also work in a rural setting?

Coworking in the narrower sense is primarily an urban phenomenon and cannot be easily transferred to rural areas. There are good reasons for this and this has led to the many different forms of coworking that we describe in this study. However, the classic interpretation of coworking does exist in rural regions, as the requirements for equipment and space are comparable to urban models. In addition to a stable Internet connection (at least 50 Mbit), shared work rooms (open space) and, if possible, closed offices (individual offices/team rooms) are made available, as well as separate meeting rooms and basic services (at least a kitchenette). Due to the comparatively lower demand and density of use, the space requirements of rural coworking spaces are, on average, lower than those of their urban counterparts (less than 500 sqm).

In the city, families often live in 2 to 3-bedroom flats, where there is seldom a separate room that can be used as an office. For many self-employed people, the lack of space is a motivation to use coworking spaces. In addition, conventional offices are expensive and often have long rental periods. In comparison, a home in the country offers much more space. Rural coworking space must therefore offer clear advantages over private space. These advantages can seldom be represented by high-quality furnishings alone – even if a professional working environment, individual offices, meeting rooms for customer meetings and the spatial separation of living and working space is important to many people. In

the country, scarce resource is not space, but a social environment. The community, as it is often called, is the real glue and elementary building block for coworking spaces that are successful in the long term. This is true for urban spaces, and especially so in rural areas.

By focusing the business model on the leasing of infrastructure and premises, classic rural spaces can generally pay for themselves without subsidies after a start-up phase, and can at least cover its own costs even with smaller spaces. One challenge is the financing of additional staff for the important community management work, which is a mandatory part of coworking. This is the only way to look after the community, organise events and create networks. In the city, these overhead costs can be generated by the larger space, but in the rural areas it is difficult. All too often, the operators are caught in a dilemma where they want to create lively places based on the urban model, but the necessary networking work is rarely financed and is difficult to do on long-term on a voluntary basis. In addition, the spatial isolation in the country is often found in the minds of the tenants. Individual offices are in great demand, and the approach and added value of coworking spaces must be explained and advertised. This makes it more difficult to build an inspiring community and even more active networking is needed. In the planning stage, for example, there is often competition between these offers and the challenge of bringing the economically more lucrative expansion of individual offices into a justifiable balance with the own ideas of a vital community. The founders are often influenced by their own coworking experiences in the metropolises and draw their motivation for founding their own place in the country from this. However, the working atmosphere of well-known urban coworking spaces cannot be transferred par to par to rural areas. And yet the still young scene continues to evolve and develop (similar to the cities) individual offers for special target groups – the FEM{ME} SPACE in Bamberg, for example, offers services focussed on the needs of women and the coworking space Kinzig Valley in Gelnhausen focuses on the local start-up scene. The majority of the locations interviewed are currently concentrating on increasing occupancy rates and have no expansion plans at present. However, there does seem to be a trend towards larger spaces. Where older coworking

spaces are still on about 250 sqm, new locations are increasingly venturing into spaces with 250 – 500 sqm. This warrants economic basis for financing the required personnel. A look at the operators shows that classic coworking is often initiated by local entrepreneurs who see the need for jobs in

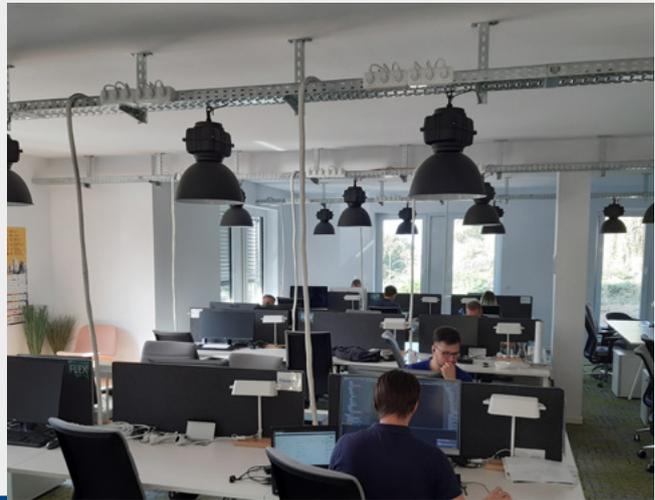
their own company (e.g., advertising agency) as the basis. In addition, the model also functions as municipal coworking spaces, where the community management does not have to be financed by the rent (example: GettWork Gettorf).

Kinzig Valley

The coworking space in Gelnhausen is located in the Hessian Main-Kinzig district. As a new building, the Kinzig Valley was planned from the onset as an extension of the headquarters of the founder's existing online marketing agency. In addition to private offices and workplaces for the company's seven employees, there is space for 24 permanent desks. An equipped kitchen, a large meeting room for 20 people and a separate place for community management show the professional orientation. This is also reflected in the office equipment – an interior design and furnishing concept was already commissioned during the planning phase. In the Kinzig Valley a wide range of tariffs are offered. From the trial offer Valley connect (3 days/month) to the model Valley Flex (Mon to Fri) and the unlimited Valley-go tariff. The rent includes all additional costs such as internet, cleaning and access to the meeting rooms. The users come from a catchment area of approx. 20 km and some of them work in the IT and marketing sector. The vision is to expand with more locations along the A66 motorway between Fulda and Frankfurt/Main. A valley campus with a wide range of offers for future founders in the region is the platform for growth.

Operator

Bernd Weidmann is the initiator of the Kinzig Valley and a thoroughbred entrepreneur. In 1999 he founded WIV GmbH, an online marketing and advertising agency which forms the business basis of Space. As a passionate founder, Bernd likes to share his knowledge and wants to be together with other inspiring people. Therefore, in 2018, the founder spirit overcame him and he opened his own coworking space. Since its opening, the coworking space has not only been home to the company's own advertising agency, but also has another location close by in Wächtersbach.



Work place profile

Place:	●●○○○○	Community:	●●●●○○
Distribution:	●●●●○○	Catchment:	●●●○○○
Resilience:	●●○○○○	Region:	●●○○○○

also offers opportunities in the combination of municipal (co-)financing and local operators' community management. This creates local coworking offers with added value for the regional economy and additional space for events and cultural diversity.

Potential

In many small and medium-sized towns and cities, there are coworking spaces whose services are based on the urban model and which cover their economic costs. The first regional coworking chains – like the Orangery – and other providers are already growing and like in the cities, they are expanding into the surrounding areas (e.g., Kiez Büro). The more rural the region, the more difficult it is to gain the critical mass of members willing to pay. Places with less than 30 regular users are dependent on voluntary support, subsidies or alternative business models. As mobile work becomes more widespread and the demand for coworking rises, larger areas are increasingly being created (see Commuter Harbour, p. 46) and specialised services are emerging. The overall growing market

New Places of Work type 2

Commuter Port

For many people, the daily journey to the office is normal, which is increasingly supplemented by opportunities for mobile work. This is how commuter harbours are created – New Places of Work along popular commuting routes, which address the needs of companies and employees with tailor-made offers.

Coworking spaces for commuters – an opportunity for communities and the environment

Many metropolises are struggling with new challenges – traffic gridlock, exploding residential and commercial rents, driving bans due to nitrogen oxide emissions and anonymity. The surrounding area of vital cities is often developing in a similarly dynamic way in the slipstream, creating living space for families, career starters and professionals who prefer to live closer to nature, cheaper and more rural or who simply can no longer afford the rents in the city. For their work, however, this usually means commuting daily. Germany is the country of commuters.

The analysis of our interviews shows that the current commuting times and distances are significantly higher than many employees would like them to be. The services offered by the commuter ports are therefore attractive for commuters who have jobs that also work in a mobile setting. For this target group, the separation of living and working space on the one hand, and the lack of social contact in the home office on the other, are the strongest arguments for using a coworking space. Especially in rural areas, proximity to the place of residence is considered particularly important. As the shortage of skilled workers continues to grow, this situation is becoming increasingly interesting for companies in order to meet the desire of their employees for reduced commuting distances and a better quality of life. This strengthens their position as modern employers with a wide range of teleworking options, and it is making it possible to reduce expensive city offices. At the time of publication of this study, this scenario has matured into a very likely future due to the changes that the Corona crisis has triggered in the world of work – many companies are already planning to reduce their urban office space. In the Kiel region, coworking spaces have been available on all main transport axes since the beginning of 2020, and a "satellite ring" of coworking spaces has developed around the Fördestadt. This is typical for the location of potential commuter locations as they are mostly at important junctions and on highly frequented routes. Here the density of use is correspondingly high, and accessibility is also facilitated by public transport. In neighbouring Switzerland, too, where commuting has long been a tradition, coworking services are increasingly emerging outside of the big cities. The commuter space in Gettorf, north of Kiel, was already fully booked during the planning phase with a large IT company as an anchor tenant. Even before the opening, the space was expanded from 150 – 300 square metres.

The equipment and premises of the commuter ports are in principle comparable to classic coworking spaces. However, the business model of the commuter port differs in its increased focus on anchor tenants and corporate customers with greater space requirements for several of their employees. The quality of the furnishings must be in line with the standards of professional offices and therefore requires greater investment. The higher prices for individual desks and team offices can be met by corporate customer, especially as they can save costs by reducing expensive office space in city centre locations. The demands for space is comparatively higher because where entire teams and departments are to find a place, room-in-room concepts and service offers such as secretarial services, mail room, cleaning services and the like are needed, similar to what renowned office providers offer in conurbations. The space and service requirements are therefore to be classified as much higher, but so are the income opportunities.

The requirements at commuter ports inevitably lead to a different working atmosphere in the places. A look at the big cities shows that providers like Regus, WeWork, Rent24 mostly lack a warmth, a community and authenticity. No wonder given that the individual users are less likely to have made the the coworking space decision themselves and are more firmly integrated into their colleague circle.

Two trends will develop in rural areas – on the one hand, shared office spaces from the larger chains moving to attractive locations in the periphery. On the other hand, local providers on the outskirts of the big cities with individual offers that often also provide other services of general interest and socio-cultural services for their community. In contrast to the chains that focus on corporate customer business. The commuter port model also offers the possibility of cross-financing these less lucrative and yet important services for the local community.

The challenge for the local operators is to promote and breathe life into events and community activities. A café area or an open meeting place for socio-cultural events lowers the inhibition to step inside these locations. This can help to create a balance between shared office and coworking space, economy and inspiring atmosphere.

Ammersee think tank

Dießen am Ammersee is a tranquil market town with an lively cultural scene. In recent years, the region has experienced a strong influx of people due to its proximity to the state capital Munich. Initiated in 2011 and founded as a cooperative in 2013, the Ammersee Denkerhaus is one of the oldest rural coworking spaces. In recent years, a wide range of experience has been gained and an independent and cost-covering business model has been developed. With twelve regular users, the existing jobs are stable, but there is still potential for growth. In addition to flexible desks (10 in total) in the common area, a meeting room, a kitchen with a coffee machine, and five self-contained offices are on offer. In order to further increase the occupancy rate, the team is focusing on newcomers and teleworkers. The commuting distance from Dießen to Munich is about one hour (one way) due to the location on the western shore of the lake and the lack of a direct connection: A good argument for an alternative desk in the region. Through future users, the occupancy rate is to be further increased and the added value for the community made even more transparent. After almost 10 years, the effects, advantages and concepts behind the coworking model must still be explained. In future, the Ammersee Denkerhaus would like to have a further location and generous rooms for further development. However, the pressure on land in this region is enormous and real estate prices are developing rapidly – high hurdles for the independent financing of coworking services. The viable and well-connected community is working on a wide range of ideas, e.g., for the use of vacant railway station space, new event formats and business co-operations. The next location is to be specially designed to meet the target group and requirements of commuters and will continue to present the Ammersee Denkerhaus as a positive example of successful coworking beyond the metropolises.



Operator

Hans-Peter Sander is a graduate journalist and independent communications consultant. As co-founder of the Ammersee Denkerhaus and chairman of the cooperative with the same name, he has discovered coworking to be something close to his heart. It was never primarily about renting desks out, but always more about the social effects it could have. Since moving from the outskirts of Munich to the Ammersee in 1999 with his wife and children, he has been involved not only in the Ammersee Denkerhaus but also in the trade association, the town twinning association and, more recently, the newly formed mobi-LL citizens' initiative. Two grown-up children have now moved out into the big wide world and the youngest son will soon be studying in Augsburg. Another reason why Hans-Peter was motivated to commit himself to the provision of basic services and innovative projects in the region helping to improve the general conditions for returnees and newcomers.

Work place profile

Place:	●●○○○○	Community:	●●●○○○
Distribution:	●○○○○○	Catchment:	●●●○○○
Resilience:	●●○○○○	Region:	●○○○○○

Potential

The establishment of coworking spaces along common commuter routes and at intersections also shows a stabilisation of demand in rural areas. Comparatively larger towns with more usable space, a wide range of services and

professional facilities are being created here. Especially the conversion of vacant train stations and real estate close to these stations seems to be predestined for this kind of model. Due to the comparable requirements, the franchise approach is obvious and therefore also attractive for existing coworking providers in the future.

This business model has the potential to become the most common type of rural coworking. During the Corona era, the framework conditions of the working world have changed in such a way that we can assume a strong increase here in the future.



TokunftHus, Bücken

New Places of Work type 3

Bottom Hub

The establishment of new coworking spaces in smaller communities is often the result of private initiatives. Started on a small scale, these people activate further comrades-in-arms to create an initial offer and from there to develop it further.

The founder community is as important as the real estate

Particularly in smaller towns, the economic operation of a coworking space is a challenge. Our study shows that there is an increasing number of founders who have a personal need for a social working environment and do not primarily pursue economic interests. Either because they run a business themselves and have their own space requirements, or they are simply interested in social contacts and exchange during working hours, or because they want a reliably open space as a communal meeting place in their place of residence. This is how ideationally driven, private initiatives – known as bottom-up initiatives – emerge throughout Germany. A manageable circle of a maximum of eight regular coworkers, low fluctuation, independently operated community management and comparatively small premises (up to 150 sqm) are the distinguishing features of this type. The attitude of the initiators and the equipment is based on the offers of classic coworking spaces, which the operators have often used themselves. In addition to fixed and flexible desk offers, private offices are sometimes subtle and independent meeting rooms provided. These initiatives usually start on a smaller scale due to a lack of local demand and to avoid large investments for large spaces that are not yet economically viable. Breaking even is financially sufficient for many founders because their own business generates the central income, and it is in fact the social added value that is the primary motivation. Often the office space serves as a separate location for self-employment, so the founders are regularly on site and form the communicative centre and community management as a voluntary component. These projects appear have a variety of names, some call themselves coworking space in order to convey the range of products and services to their desired target group. We call this model a bottom hub because these places form a crys-

tallisation point and function as a networking space and meeting place for coworking enthusiasts, and are therefore more than just a classic office community. These hubs, initiated by private actors, share the values of coworking and develop a space for regular open events and offers for their environment. For example, an empty shop with few desks can be established as the starting point for a slowly growing local scene. The parallel use as workspace, exhibition space and event space offer a variety of development opportunities. In the Aukrug mini-workspace, a former party room with up to 10 desks serves as a multifunctional workspace that can also be used for events. These places have a variety of effects on their surroundings. Through their openness and the creation of an initial offer, they offer points of contact for interested people who want to work outside their home office. In addition, they can reactivate vacant spaces and also support the establishment of municipally run coworking spaces. In the chapter on page 65, we explain the combination of municipal space and committed community using the Gernsbach Kornhaus example. Low-threshold rehabilitation enables the actors to open up spaces with few financial resources and a great deal of their own work – this also increases their commitment to and the connection to this kind of meeting place. Often the first users come from personal acquaintances or the direct neighbourhood. The resulting atmosphere is the basis for an inviting and activating community – an important key to further development. Once started, classic coworking offers can develop over time. There are many examples, such as Thinkfarm Eberswalde, which moved into new, larger premises from a private initiative after a few years in order to grow organically with demand and be able to offer a full range of coworking services. The iterative approach helps to develop the services and spatial structures along the users' intrinsic needs and to keep the financial risk manageable.

Tokunft Hus

The Tokunft Hus is centrally located in the small town of Bücken in Lower Saxony. With just over 2000 inhabitants, there is a vital club culture and a high level of civic involvement, a strong church community, but for some time now also an urban and international influx. The region is characterised by many medium-sized companies and hidden champions – world market leaders in their fields.

The building was a local savings bank in the past and then it was put up for sale. The team quickly agreed and purchased the building. Verena Vellmer and Laura Eckhardt converted the old premise – the former over-the-counter banking area was converted into an open flex-desk area for temporary users and events. On the upper floor, fixed desks (Fix Desk) and individual offices with separate 24/7 access are rented out. The meeting rooms as well as a lounge and kitchen area are also located there.

In addition to the well-known offers of desk and office rental, the Tokunft Hus is an anchorage for people, clubs and events outside working hours. For example, concerts, evening Qi Gong and Yoga courses, VHS courses and business regulars' tables take place here. In addition to fast internet access and excellent Demeter-certified coffee from the co-founder, the Tokunft Hus also offers professional moderation and workshop equipment.

The community management is run by Verena on a voluntary basis. Since the opening in May 2019, new users are constantly joining, but setting up and making the local coworking space more known takes time and perseverance. The team is pleased about the essential support and openness of the mayor, the local business development agency and the local council, which have made it easier for the founders to become self-employed and have provided important start-up financing in the form of a rent subsidy for the first three years.

Operators

The founders and operators are Laura Eckhardt and Verena Vellmer. Both studied business administration and have several years of professional experience. Laura Eckhardt is best known in the region for her coffee and cocoa roasting business. She knows important regional stakeholders well and she knows what communication and sales channels are used and work well in the region. After her studies, Verena Vellmer worked, among other things, as Senior Communications Manager in the Berlin Tech Incubator of Deutsche Telekom. As one of the first women to establish the Hubraum Inkubator, her task was to build up the community, manage the coworking space and the programme. Her experience in setting up and expanding the business has now brought her to Bücken.



Work place profile

Place:	●○○○○○	Community:	●●●○○○
Distribution:	●●●○○○	Catchment:	●●○○○○
Resilience:	●●○○○○	Region:	●●●○○○

Potential

Just do it – an attitude and strength especially of coworking initiatives that start small and manageable. Acquiring spaces and putting them to a new use goes without saying for many creative people. Without financial pressure and economically driven business models, experimental fields are created whe-

re trial and error are allowed. A thoroughly healthy approach, especially in regions with little demand. Through organic growth and the very personal touch, these initiatives can grow into larger networks and classic coworking spaces, but they don't have to. There are many people who prefer a small and manageable office community to a larger coworking space and do not need networking events and community management for their professional development. Especially in peripheral spaces with little demand, these bottom-up projects offer a good start into new working worlds and form the first crystallisation point for further people and developments. Support, for example, in start-up financing is important to enable these initiatives to continue and often determines their long-term success.



DAS HERRENHAUS from Hollander, Niendorf at the Stecknitz

New Places of Work type 4

Retreat

New Work thrives on innovative ideas and inspiring places to work. The classic office space is not included. This has led to diverse creative places coming into being – especially in the rural areas. Here too, people brainstorm, work and laugh – an ideal breeding ground for moments of inspiration and strong teams.

New retreats for knowledge workers

Classic conference hotels and convention centres appeal to people for the range of offers that have been perfected over many years, high capacities and a wide variety of services. Let's put ourselves in the shoes of a four-member team from the innovation department of a major German car manufacturer: What would its requirements be? It's quite possible that it could be a different place – something smaller, more personal, and a bit rough around edges. A place in the middle of the outdoors, perhaps even part of an inspiring community. They would probably feel at home in the Coconat Workation Retreat. This often-quoted place serves as a best-practice example of a combined offer of coworking space, accommodation and inspiring community and all this in the middle of the country. Seen from the outside, with accommodation, breakfast and bike hire, the offer looks like a classic country hotel – and yet it is so much more.

If coworking alone does not promise a viable business model, the hotel business could be the solution. It often generates two thirds of the turnover and provides the personnel basis for further offers. The turnover is primarily generated by the overnight accommodation business with catering, but meeting rooms or places in the coworking area are also offered. The inspiring coworking atmosphere makes the hotel part attractive for the financially strong clientele from the companies. They hope to find inspiration and innovation combined with the comfort they are used to. Thus, retreats gain access to the lucrative market of corporate offsites, which are playing an increasing role in the digital age.

A successful retreat is the right balance between a professional working environment and feel-good areas, the right approach to business people and bachelor students, and has the courage to focus on the business customer target group. Just as office landscapes in cities are changing, new offers are also emerging in rural areas. We look at the niche in places that interweave coworking values and hotel offers. With the focus of this study on coworking business models, we deliberately ignore the large number of exclusively rentable country houses for team retreats. These places have a special flair because they are open and accessible, receive guests from the local community and the world, focus on active community management and follow a collaborative approach. Besides location and equipment, it is above all attitude and spirit that determine success. A conference room called a coworking space does not make the country hotel a retreat by a long shot.

Urban target groups and corporate customers are often addressed as target groups. Freelancers, students and company founders also use the time in a retreat to work on their project, business plan or annual strategy. The time spent in the retreat can vary from a few days to several weeks – a wide range of accommodation (single rooms & shared rooms) helps to avoid overstressing your wallet, even for long-term stays.

This type of coworking shows a distinct overlap with tourism concepts. This is also reflected, for example, in the fact that the Coconat won the German Tourism Prize in 2019. Retreat concepts can certainly be a further mainstay for conventional hotels, especially for those outside the top locations. However, it should not be underestimated that, like every coworking concept, a retreat also requires the authority of community management. Simply making rooms available is rarely promising; they must be managed with competence and heart. An adequately cross-subsidised coworking area can be offered to users from the region and open up new target groups. However, it should be noted that tourists (recreation), local coworkers (concentration and exchange) and visitors, the team retreat (experience and concentration) sometimes have conflicting demands. The result, however, is inspiring places which, through their accessibility and the mix of users, encourage chance encounters and exchange.



Coworking Schlei, Kiesby

New Places of Work type 5

Workation

Bali, Bangkok, Lake Constance – it is not only young people who travel the world as digital nomads, combining their stay in beautiful places with mobile work. In Asia, entire regions are geared to the needs of this special target group, but now it seems there is something happening in Germany.

Working like on holiday – but space in the front row is scarce

The combination of work (Work) and leisure (Vacation) is thought of as a business model under the term work. No, here work is not primarily done on holiday, it is work that feels like a holiday. Attractive holiday regions have the opportunity to develop new target groups beyond package and individual tourism. At the heart of this you will find professional coworking offers that have to meet a plug-and-play standard. The target group is familiar with the coworking landscape and is demanding – hoaxing internet, poor equipment or unreliable opening hours are quickly acknowledged with a critical Google rating. In contrast to the remotely located retreat, work offers can be found at tourist hotspots – typically on the beaches of Thailand or on Tenerife, but also like Cowork Klittmøller at the surf spot on the Danish North Sea coast, on a holiday island like Project Bay on Rügen or in a sailing area like Coworking Schlei. At these infrastructurally well-developed locations there is an abundance of overnight accommodation available. That means that, in contrast to a retreat, they are not necessarily part of a work business model.

Work opportunities in areas intensively used by tourism are very promising. Hotels and holiday homes can expand their range of offers and sell additional services. Tests with a mobile coworking space by CoWorkLand on several beaches, including St. Peter-Ording on the North Sea, have shown that these services are in high demand. Nevertheless, "coworking on the beach" is still in short supply in Germany, and there is

a simple reason for this. In the holiday strongholds, flat rental is highly profitable in the season, there are hardly any vacancies, and a fully rented holiday flat means incomparably less effort, because apart from daily cleaning, the work model cannot be planned without professional service staff. Coworking competes for space with these uses. It is difficult for founders to find suitable properties at an affordable price. This offers opportunities for other actors, for example, the Glücksburg municipal library is developing a coworking offer in its premises near the beach in addition to the actual library operations.

But Workation actually offers exciting prospects, especially for holiday resorts which, like the North German seaside resorts, have a short season in which turnover must be generated for the whole year. Given that this business model is not only suitable as a temporary model during the holiday season, it can also serve to extend the season. In this way, the capacity utilisation by the target group of work tourism can be increased even outside holiday periods and weekends. In its implementation, a work project can have many facets. From temporary pop-ups and professional coworking offers with overnight accommodation to work camps and theme-based festivals, coworking offers can also contribute to longer rental periods and open up new target groups for campsites. Events are defined more by joint leisure activities than by pure knowledge transfer – a workshop on the relevance of search engine optimisation would not be included in this context, but a joint after-work surfing session with an evening barbecue would. The users know that they will only spend a limited amount of time here, but the duration varies greatly from a long weekend to extended parental leave. In contrast to classic coworking spaces, the aim is not to build up synergies and networks on site, but to find a professional working place where users can carry out their tasks effectively and as undisturbed as possible and still meet like-minded people – doing business on the beach. Whereas in classic coworking, fixed offices and desks are primarily rented out, the work model focuses on flexibility. Hourly and day tickets should definitely also be offered, as long-term individual offices are hardly in demand by the target group. For successful implementation, requests should be commented on in real time, preferably via WhatsApp, social media or e-mail.

Coworking veil

Kiesby is a small village in northern Germany, not far from the Danish border and situated directly on the idyllic Schlei. A popular holiday region and ideal environment for a work project. The former children's home, which has been unused for a year, is now being put to a new use in the Coworking and Coliving project Coworking Schlei. The basis is the infrastructure and equipment of a professional coworking space, which offers space for a maximum of 12 people in three rooms and is also open to users in the region.

In addition, rooms are available in various price categories for up to 15 people. Digital Nomads like to spend several weeks in a region in order to experience it in depth and develop their own projects. Inexpensive overnight accommodation such as the planned three-room shared flat is easy on the wallet for long-term stays. In future, the focus of the offers will be on the needs of an international audience, which the operator team has gotten to know from the guest perspective on their travels around the world.

Operator

Ralf Wiechers travelled the world for many years as a digital nomad from Hamburg. After stops in Denmark, Turkey, Thailand and their destinations, he returned to his home region full of inspiration and ex-

perience. As an enthusiastic surfer, he himself spent a lot of time on his travels in workspaces that are geared towards watersports, such as Fuerteventura. Back in Germany he found out that there is no such attractive offer for people like him on the local coasts and decided without further ado to create one himself. In 2020, the self-employed programmer and his mother will start their own coworking space with overnight accommodation in Kiesby, close to the Schlei.



Work place profile

Place:	●●●○○	Community:	●○○○○
Distribution:	●○○○○	Catchment:	●●●○○
Resilience:	●●○○○	Region:	●○○○○

Potential

Short trips in Germany, a renaissance of camping and slow travel, increased environmental awareness and less air travel – various trends in tourism underline the potential of the Workation concept. The combination of long-term stays, increasing opportunities for location-independent work and the desire for sustainable travel experiences are driving new destinations and concepts. Especially on the German coasts, workation concepts have the potential to extend the always relatively short summer season. At the same time, however, the season poses the biggest problem: During the beautiful months, all rooms are traditionally used as holiday flats. Coworking is in competition with this very lucrative use “in the first row”. This is also the main reason why we have hardly seen any work concepts in Germany so far. What is needed here are innovative, sustainable concepts that challenge previous truths about the year-round use of real estate in tourist hotspots. Especially the future trend towards “employed nomads”, which represent a potentially large and solvent target group, will considerably strengthen the market opportunities of such offers.



Hof Prädikow, Prötzel

New Places of Work type 6

New Village Centre

Multifunctional places stand for flexible use concepts in villages and communities. They are meeting places, market places and event spaces with promising synergies for coworking spaces.

Volunteer fire brigade 2.0 or digital Dörpskrog – they do more than just coworking for the communities

Do you know the donut effect? It mainly affects villages and small towns. When more and more people move to new residential areas on greenfield sites, there is a risk that the inner cities will lose their attractiveness and vitality. Fewer people mean less demand and frequency – a downward spiral with long-term consequences. Particularly in villages and communities in the bacon belts, there are major challenges in keeping the existing meeting places alive. The reasons for the disintegration are manifold – newcomers often have no connection to village life, and shopping is done in greenfield supermarkets.

The lack of successors in the retail sector, a lack of sustainable business models and falling demand have also led to the closure of cafés, pubs, cultural events and social meeting places in many places. The social consequences are enormous. The quality of life for residents and newcomers alike is reduced when these institutions are no longer there. Vital places need vital meeting places.

Coworking spaces create new places that are increasingly aimed at younger target groups. Many new residents also want alternatives to the often existing meeting places such as volunteer fire brigades or shooting clubs. The available coworking spaces serve as a basic structure to attract other services and uses. The great advantage of coworking, on the one hand, is once again a reliably open space in the community, and on the other hand, coworking services are basically inclusive and

accessible to everyone. Rooms and infrastructure can be used temporarily and they are full-service offers. Key handover, cleaning and catering can be organised centrally and fast internet is available. Users can therefore become active with little effort and bring in their own offers without having to worry about facility management.

Coworking spaces in rural areas are particularly suitable for trying out new retail ideas as pop-up offers, for example, without taking too many risks. Did you know that good coffee is an important criterion for attractive coworking spaces? The possibilities are multifaceted and a café, seminar and event rooms are still among the classic additions. However, a post office, copy shop, regional shop, bistro, medical centre, senior citizen meet-ups, bakery, library and many other facilities can develop around coworking spaces. In the Old School Letschin coworking space (see page 69), a wide range of services has developed indirectly since the coworking space moved in. The premises are used by the local choir group, the sports club and for senior citizen meet-ups – simply because the house is now permanently open and occupied by one person on site thanks to the coworking space. These users have little contact with the coworking space itself, but for a short chat and to help with technical problems, the local operator is gladly called upon.

The more diverse the use becomes, the more important good communication and coordination between users becomes. A bouncing sports group can only get along with an important customer in the meeting room to a limited extent. Clear regulations on usage times should be discussed and agreed from the onset. Clear responsibilities and cleaning instructions are absolutely necessary to ensure mixed use in the long term.

The advantage of mixed use is high economic resilience – the mix of different sources of income buffers fluctuations. In the long term, this results in a coral reef effect. With the basic coworking structure, more and more offers can be tried out and established. The (mixed) use of the premises increases until an independent system develops which, through diverse personal and commercial interdependencies, creates a socially and economically sustainable structure which is filled with life by the users and operators and can also operate independently of municipal subsidies.

Viehbrook Farm

Farm Viehbrook is situated in a secluded location on the outskirts of Rendswühren (approx. 760 inhabitants) in the district of Plön, Schleswig-Holstein. The family-owned farm was taken over by Kirsten Voß-Rahe in 2008 and was renovated until 2011 in accordance with the preservation order. With the new owner, a variety of uses have been created on the previously unused remaining farm. In addition to a restaurant, a holiday flat, three hotel rooms, a large room for celebrations, a day-care centre, various courses and seminars and a cooking school have been established. In the meantime, there is also a farm newspaper and a shop for farm and regional products. The project has functionally developed into a new village centre, where a wide range of offers are located and mutually support each other. Since the founder got to know the concept of coworking in 2018, several workplaces and two individual offices have been created on the upper floor. The users are tourist guests, farm employees and regional residents.

The surrounding land (25 hectares) is only a micro-farm by today's agricultural standards. The operators have therefore opted for niche farming. Together they breed old breeds of domestic and farm animals that are threatened with extinction, keep robust cattle and have established a game preserve with red deer and fallow deer. The mix also works economically – the farm feeds the founding family as well as several employees.

Operators

Kirsten Voß-Rahe and her husband Christian Rahe have strong ties to the region. In addition to setting up their various services, they are also involved in local politics and are actively involved in local associations (e.g., Viehbrooker Landleben Verein e.V.). As deputy chairmen of AktivRegion they are involved in regional development and support private individuals, associations and companies in the creation of concepts, provide advice on subsidies and support networking on site and in the region. When they heard about the coworking concept in 2018, they were immediately convinced that it would ideally complement the existing farm offers.



Work place profile

Place:	●●●●○	Community:	●●●●○
Distribution:	●○●○●○	Catchment:	●●●○●○
Resilience:	●●●●○	Region:	●●●●○

all combined in one place. This makes them meeting places for the old and young – where people discuss, celebrate, learn and live creating model places for the future of rural life. Their promotion should be of particular interest to the public authorities, as they play a central role in the upcoming structural change.

Potential

The small-scale offers and employment opportunities in rural areas require synergies, commitment, know-how and often voluntary support in order to flourish. As soon as a critical mass is reached, these places act as enabling spaces and experimental fields for new ideas. Short decision-making processes, a firm grip and mutually supportive business models create resilient places which provide strong impulses for social, cultural and commercial commitment on the spot.

The coworking spaces are integrated into a structure that meets many needs. A working mother living nearby with young children and a high level of coworkability does not need to leave such a place during the week – consumption (or supply), childcare, work opportunities and culture are

New Places of Work type 7

Integrated housing and work projects

In rural areas, a wide range of community projects are being developed, whose residents combine the basic needs of living and working in one place. Mobile working and new lifestyles make exciting projects possible – not only for the younger generation.

The new urban refugees do not dream of a new development area

More and more people dislike the living conditions in the city, not only since Corona. However, not all of them can identify with the traditional housing offers in the country – they do not want a detached house in a new residential area. They are looking for new offers that bring together communal living, self-catering, sharing and new ways of working. The existing communal offers are no longer sufficient; new forms of offers must be created. Corona in particular will increase the exodus from the city, but many young city dwellers still fear losing too much if they move outside of the suburbs. What is needed are both – the best of both worlds – places that show both rural and urbanity.

In this niche, diverse housing projects are being developed beyond the metropolises, and coworking spaces are a central component of these places. There are many examples that have set out to combine modern working and rural living. The synthesis of these supposed opposites gives rise to new ways of living and working. Digital work culture and diverse social exchange go hand in hand with the proximity to nature and craftsmanship. The infrastructural limitations of rural life can be improved with the help of digital and social solutions. These places often become accessible to guests and visitors through their offers such as open workshops, cafés, accommodation and cultural activities in the region and see themselves as open places, a clear difference to the housing projects in the country that have existed for years. The diverse offers between tourist, craft and digital working models often generate hybrid and resilient business models on site.

The range of the places so far created is very wide. Projects like Hof Prädikow, for example, have a lead time of many years and require a great deal of personal commitment and hard work from the future residents. Alternative offers such as the co-village offer a more service-oriented approach by selecting available Tiny House models and central project management. In addition to good accessibility to the nearest conurbations, the existing educational facilities, political diversity and cultural offerings of the region are also important decision criteria for many residents. Often actors in the creative industries play a key role in the transformation of existing buildings through their location-independent work, for example, an old prefabricated concrete slab building, an abandoned four-sided courtyard or a disused meeting place can be turned into a lively place.

The target group of these projects are primarily people who have previously lived in metropolitan areas such as Berlin, Hamburg or Leipzig and are looking for an alternative to anonymous homes in residential areas. Where larger groups of 10 to 100 people move into a region together, a variety of dynamics and challenges arise, as different life plans often clash. In the best case, this creates positive impulses, such as the establishment of coworking spaces within these projects, which already have a basic workload due to the residents' own needs and can act as open event locations and interfaces to the region.

Thanks to their high affinity for technology and sustainable development goals, many projects support innovative offers such as regional car-sharing schemes, new festivals and event formats. Some are real laboratories and therefore an important part of larger research projects such as the Conat Workation Retreat in the Smart Village project in the Bad Belzig and Wiesenburg region. Successful urban-rural integration is a prerequisite for the sustainable anchoring of the projects on site. Conflicts are inevitable if the newcomers establish their own (independent) schools and day-care centres out of frustration with the existing structures, stay away from the local club landscape and develop spaces without consideration for the local population.

The strong demand also gives rise to new offers. Initiatives such as the Future Places Network address the individual challenges and support the transformation of old, unused buildings into new impulse locations in the countryside. In doing so, they address people from the city who are willing to move and communicate concepts, projects and people to interested local authorities (see page 59).

An interesting development of these residences is the proximity of Coliving. This is a temporary residential community where people work on projects and use common infrastructure similar to coworking. In this way, places such as Alsenhof are being created, which, for example, offer a trial country life and provide accommodation and workspace in combination for a certain period of time. The basic values of coworking (including openness, sustainability and collaboration) are reinterpreted in modern living and working projects and are strongly developed.

Uferwerk eG

The former industrial site on Lake Zernsee has been brought back to life with the Uferwerk. The 17,000 square metre site, about 20 kilometres from Potsdam, has become home to 100 adults, 60 children and a wide range of initiatives. Organised as a cooperative, the re-development of the industrial buildings and several new buildings were realised in a construction period of only 3 years (2014-2017). Great importance was attached to climate-friendly construction methods such as a straw bale construction. In addition to the various residential units for singles, families and senior citizens, common rooms and a coworking space were planned from the very beginning. The users mainly come from the Uferwerk and are self-employed people as well as non-profit associations that are also strongly involved in regional development. The coworking space and other event areas are also available to the public. While the coworking space is mainly characterised by a common infrastructure and a concentrated working atmosphere, the climate workshop is about active networking of local associations and initiatives. The offers range from self-help workshops, repair meetings and organised events to educational offers for school classes.

The biggest challenge is the organisation of the accounting and the necessary foundation of a company constituted under civil law. In the cooperative, the resources for membership administration and accounting are not available – the coworking space does not have the size and claim to professional community management and accounting. So even today, it is still a challenge to organise coworking and financial controlling between the members. However, as a meeting place and central workspace, the coworking space provides the basis for joint projects and a variety of synergies that no user would ever want to miss.

Operators

The Uferwerk cooperative has renovated the entire site and rents the coworking areas to a company constituted under civil law (GbR). The GbR brings together associations and private individuals, who early on brought the need for shared workplaces, in addition to the home office option, into the construction planning.

The coworking space is cost-covering and was able to utilise the 10 workstations well right from the start. For members of the cooperative, the costs for fixed workplaces are very favourable – external coworkers, on the other hand, pay a higher price.



Work place profile

Place:	●●●○○	Community:	●●●○○
Distribution:	●○○○○	Catchment:	●●○○○
Resilience:	●●●●○	Region:	●●●●○

Potential

Demand for new, alternative forms of housing and work already exceeds supply, but unlike in traditional new housing developments, this is not matched by supply organised or facilitated by rural communities. In addition, these projects often encounter major planning hurdles, such as the prohibition of non-agricultural use of farms in outdoor areas. The development of integrated housing and work projects requires freedom, capital, committed people and staying power. The starting conditions appear to be better due to lower land prices and more (structural) freedom in eastern

Germany. If implemented correctly, they can also offer a high added value for the region, complement local offers in a meaningful way and provide impulses for new ideas and services. As a result, these places will be an important element in the transformation of rural areas by combining meeting places, innovativeness, civic commitment and an affinity for technology, therefore creating centres of attraction for new skilled workers and residents. With the increasing demand and a parallel formation of structures on the part of regional planning and municipalities, these concepts should, however, become more and more accepted as alternatives to traditional offers, as they bring with them great opportunities for rural development. Both sides – actors and administration – still have to explore how ideal implementation conditions can be created.

Networks and satellite rings – forms of coworking organisation in rural areas

The rural coworking spaces are rather small compared to their urban counterparts. While in the city owner spaces are on average 600 sqm, those of the big chains even 3000 sqm¹⁷, in rural areas sizes between 100 sqm and 300 sqm predominate. This is mainly due to two basic conditions: Firstly, many of the properties available to the owners do not offer more space. On the other hand, the successful marketing of such limited space in rural areas is already a challenge. It was not until 2020 – especially in small and medium-sized towns – that offers with considerably larger areas were added, e.g., with the opening of the D-Station in Schöppenstedt with 1100 sqm, the Orangery in Hameln with 700 sqm or the Smart Factory in Elmshorn with 1500 sqm.

Self-organising founders

A fundamental challenge for rural coworking spaces is marketing. While coworking in large cities is a developed and still growing market, where there is a great demand on the part of the customer and a well-developed supply, this is not yet the case in rural areas.

When a new coworking space is created in the centre of Munich, most people there know what it is about and many are looking for such an offer. In this case, the supply meets an existing demand. In contrast, founders of rural coworking spaces face a completely different situation: The concept of coworking is mostly unknown in the places where they are established, and demand has to be created by supply. It is certainly potentially available, but it requires a great deal of communication and explanation to actually make it happen. However, the rather small rural spaces are often overwhelmed by this.

Visibility in the (emerging) market is therefore one of the major challenges facing young rural coworking spaces. A natural reaction to this is to organise themselves in order to generate visibility as a group and therefore together promote the development of the rural market. In Germany, this self-organisation takes place in two main forms: cooperatives and associations.

Germany-wide networks – the CoWork Land eG

In 2019, a group, which emerged from a successful pilot project of the Heinrich Böll Foundation Schleswig-Holstein, founded the CoWorkLand cooperative. It currently (11/2020) unites 34 rural coworking spaces throughout Germany. As an association of private and public operators, it has two objectives: Firstly, to support start-ups with advice,

feasibility studies and starter kits, and secondly, to promote the ongoing operations of its members through central marketing, a booking and accounting platform, networking and political lobbying.

CoWorkLand eG is Germany's largest rural coworking network, which maintains regional offices in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein to organise the regional network development and marketing into the respective metropolitan regions. Starting in 2021, CoWorkLand will offer the CoWorkLand-Pass, which gives private individuals and employees easy access to all coworking spaces in the cooperative. Through quota contracts with major employers, their employees can easily check into any coworking space, whether it is near their home or on a business trip. The cooperative guarantees that the spaces comply with labour and data protection standards. This gives the member spaces a great advantage: They receive regional and national bookings without having to actively market themselves. This means that they only have to do marketing where it is easy for them: in their own micro-region. For some time now, the cooperatively organised platform VillageOffice has been in existence in neighbouring Switzerland, which pursues similar goals, but unlike CoWorkLand eG, it also represents spaces in the major Swiss cities.

The cooperative form of organisation is ideal for associations of coworking spaces because the idea of cooperatives has a large common value base with the coworking movement – the idea of community unites them. In addition, the joint marketing platform developed by the cooperative has the advantage of being owned by the members, so that the added value created by centralised marketing also remains in the cooperative and with the members, and sustainably strengthens their existence in the regions.

This is fundamentally different from the efforts of numerous providers such as Independesk or shareDnC who, following the maxims of platform capitalism, are trying to build Airbnb-like platforms for mobile jobs in order to keep the placement profits for themselves, but without investing in infrastructure or locations. Especially in the area of food delivery, the negative effects such services can have on an industry once they have gained some market power, if access to customers is almost exclusively through them, enables them to dictate the placement fees. Here the profits often go to shareholders, while those who create the real value – a pizza, a holiday home – only benefit from being visible on the market, but often lose money.

Germany-wide networks – the network of future locations

The network Zukunftsorte is an association of collaborative projects that combine living and working in rural areas and revive vacancies in active exchange with their surroundings. The first forerunners of the network were a meet-up group (2016) and the website Creative Places Brandenburg (2018), which makes visible the manifold impulse places in Brandenburg. Since 2020 the network has been organised as a non-profit association.

Future locations are characterised by various criteria. They convert existing vacancies, create first residences on site and support the quality of life in the region by creating new offers. These can be open meeting places, events, but also coworking spaces. Places of the future send impulses into their surroundings, from which residents and newcomers benefit equally. They become small magnets that attract and inspire more and more committed people. In this study, the future places can be found with examples in residential and work projects, retreats and new village centres – the spectrum is wide. As a practical network the actors are connected, especially in the eastern German states – including the Coconat Workation Retreat, Posa Monastery, Hof Prädikow, Uferwerk eG and Projektraum Drahnisdorf.

The network and its members support each other in the design, construction and operation of complex housing and work projects. They accompany the development of new future locations with practical knowledge, concept ideas and matching formats. In this way, people with a love of the country and returnees from all over the world are approached in order to develop new places of impetus together with future-oriented municipalities and mayors. The exchange of knowledge takes place via a digital knowledge platform, thematic meetings and online meet-ups. For local authorities, the vacancy safari format offers a walk with local associations and interested urbanites with the aim of together thinking about spaces, people and suitable utilisation concepts at an early stage – away from profit-oriented real estate portals.

Through events, panel discussions and participation in research projects and studies, the network brings the views, experiences and competencies of project actors in politics, society and science to the table. Together with other initiatives, the Future Sites are committed to a new narrative of rural areas and show with their examples how new living and working in rural areas can work.

Regional networks – marketing regional strengths

The associations CoworkationALPS and Smart Doerp are examples of regional coworking networks, which are often characterised by their emphasis on a particular regional quality. What makes CoworkationALPS special is that the association organises work and retreat providers across national borders in the entire Alpine region in order to market their projects via a joint Internet presence and to support founders – the focus here is on attractive locations on alpine pastures and similar locations.

Smart Dörf is an association from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which was founded in 2020 and pursues similar goals. The outstanding project is the development of a "pearl necklace" of coworking spaces in the rural area of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which primarily aims to develop the numerous manors and mansions in the state. Both associations focus on the development of working- and retreat offers, following their location in natural peripheral regions where the tourism industry is strong. Thus, many of the places marketed through these associations are more like seminar

houses or workshop locations, but do not offer traditional coworking – i.e., renting out work places on a membership basis and building a local community. Proof that this can also work high up in the high mountains, for example, is provided by projects such as Coworking Bansko, a coworking space founded by Germans in a Bulgarian ski resort, where a very international community has now formed, some of whose members have settled there permanently. The authors of this study expect that the growing demand for decentralised coworking will lead to a change in this area in the coming years and that classic seminar houses and retreat locations will increasingly develop coworking offers for regional supply. From this perspective, these regional networks also act as drivers of innovation in the traditional tourism of their regions. Especially when it comes to tourism concepts, marketing as a regional network makes sense, since people who already have a preference for these holiday regions can be approached for new forms of work tourism, like extending their holiday stay.

The dilemma of the critical network mass

A big challenge for the networks is the rather small number of offers at the beginning. In order to provide an attractive offer for customers, they are dependent on the number of coworking spaces reaching a certain critical mass. Take another example: A holiday home platform with only five offers is not attractive and offers little benefit to the customer.

The young networks must therefore quickly motivate other owners of suitable properties to develop coworking offers and add them to the platform in order to be successful – an important motivator for this is the promise of good marketing and correspondingly rapid profitability. Networking is therefore immensely important as a catalyst for the rural coworking spaces to become sustainably profitable. It is difficult to finance the models only through membership fees or to run the spaces voluntarily. For this reason, all German networks have been or are being publicly funded – including those that are currently being set up, such as Coworking in the Leipzig Muldenland region or initiatives related to the coworking movement, such as Zukunftsorte Brandenburg.

No matter whether supported by European (Interreg, LEADER), federal or state funds. Often a long phase of voluntary work is required before a suitable funding opportunity can be found – this is also the case with future cities. For this reason, it would be desirable in future for the federal government to provide targeted, standard funding geared towards the establishment of networks. After all, networks and their work are the midwives of rural coworking locations.

Natural growth in the region – small chains

More and more successful rural coworking spaces are starting to set up small chains in order to continue the model, once successfully developed, at other locations and warranting profitability and resilience with moderate additional effort. They are usually based in medium-sized and small towns and follow the classic urban coworking business model. Two trends have been observed.

Initially there are private sector start-ups, which form first one and then more offshoots. One example is the Kinzig Valley in the Hessian district town of Gelnhausen – after successfully establishing in 2019, the founder opens a second, larger location in 2020 in the small town of Wächtersbach, only 15 minutes away by car. With increasing demand, we will certainly see more and more chains developing from individual projects, as there are often no growth opportunities in the founding properties. If the demand exceeds the available space, then the step to expand at another location is obvious – especially if this location is only a short distance away, as in the case of the Kinzig Valley, and can therefore be managed by the permanent staff, so that additional personnel costs are kept within limits.

Another model is the Hildesheim Orangery. From the outset, the idea behind this space was to create a network of coworking spaces for the start-up scene in medium-sized German cities. However, with its focus on founder teams, the concept is more similar to a company incubator (the operators also aim to acquire shares in the companies on their premises as part of their business model) than to a classic coworking space open to anyone interested. The Orangery locations are larger than the average rural space at 700 sqm and bigger and are marketed very professionally. In a short time, the founders first expanded to Hameln and then in 2020, in close cooperation with the local business development agency, to the far-away town of Stralsund. The latter space is more like a developed, modernised and coworking enriched business incubator.

Founders centres and coworking

This brings us to the second driver of chain start-ups in the countryside – regional economic development. They often begin with the desire to connect the incubators that have been established throughout Germany since the late 1980s to the modern trend of coworking – and rightly so, since coworking spaces have proven to be greenhouses for start-ups and innovation.

An outstanding example is Cowork Nord, an association of six coworking spaces in Schleswig-Holstein, which are all independently operated, but share a common community management and a uniform appearance and are benefiting from network effects. This joint marketing is one way of mastering the challenges of these facilities described on page 68 while at the same time taking advantage of networks that have grown over the years and establishing new target groups for coworking.

The future post Corona period – satellite ring concepts

A particularly promising form of organisation for coworking networks are satellite rings. This is based on the simple idea of developing a ring of coworking spaces around a large city, so that all employees who commute from the suburbs can find a coworking space in close proximity to their place of residence as an alternative to commuting. The operators of such a satellite ring then conclude contingent framework agreements with municipal employers, so that employees can use the offer without any complications and at no cost to themselves. Satellite rings have the potential to make coworking on the outskirts of large cities economically viable in the long term and, through the lucrative business with the companies, to cross-finance other offers which, for example, compensate for social or cultural deficits in the suburban communities. Financed by a classic coworking offer in the municipalities concerned offers the possibility of implementing New Village Centre type locations with a variety of functions for the residents.

The idea itself is so plausible – and very promising in terms of profit – that there are already numerous companies that have set about developing such a concept. A good example is the start-up 1000 Satellites from Mannheim, which emerged from the BASF incubator Chemovator and which intends to implement this concept in the Rhine-Neckar metropolitan region in the first instance and then throughout Germany. Another example is the Berlin concept Beydes by the Berlin project developer Glockenweiß, which specialises in sustainable urban repair. However, this and other private sector approaches focus strongly and often exclusively on the employees of large companies – other users and local self-employed people play a minor role in the concepts, as do other socio-cultural services for the respective community (New Village Centre). Rather, the spatial design creates uniform branches of a chain ("starbuckisation"), and the local added value flows to the respective company headquarters. A major challenge for these concepts, however, is the provision of systems – the above-described prerequisite of a critical mass of coworking spaces before the offer of a satellite ring makes sense for the municipal companies. It's like implementing a new metro: whereby having only two stations in the city is not an attractive proposition for users – it requires fifty for the system to work.

However, planning, financing and implementing the construction of a ring of coworking spaces around Munich, for example, is an enormous development task that hardly any of the young companies can shoulder. So far, no project is known of that has actually progressed well beyond the concept phase – the logistical challenges are too great. Even the establishment of a single Space that meets the requirements of the company's customers generates considerable costs and, as a solitaire, promises profitability only in the medium term. 1000 satellites alone have already opened a first coworking space in Neustadt an der Weinstraße. It is foreseeable that large coworking and managed office providers such as Regus or design offices will also increasingly look for locations in the promising areas of the suburbs. They have the financial and logistical power to quickly open up several locations around a large city and develop

the market of urban companies through concentrated marketing. In these cases, the development trend described above will become even more acute: only lucrative locations at large commuter hubs with standardised office offers will be developed – as is to be expected – and the resulting profits will flow into the company headquarters. Smaller offers opened by local founders, who want to create added value for their communities, will have a hard time alongside these multinationals.

Network beats business plan

Another way to solve the system dilemma of critical mass is again the networking approach. Here the system is not planned centrally, but the ring is created from the initiative of individual founders, which are only coordinated and marketed centrally. With this approach, CoWorkLand eG, in cooperation with the Cowork Nord association supported by business development agencies, succeeded in organising a satellite ring of nine coworking spaces around Kiel, the capital of Schleswig-Holstein, as early as 2020, with the added value that there is a coworking space on every railway line leading into the city. The network approach has the advantage of speed. They set up their coworking spaces independently and at their own risk, but in the knowledge that they are following a common plan. In this way, a system can quickly emerge bottom up in order to achieve the critical mass as described above. The cooperative is currently developing a satellite ring around Hamburg in the same way, a much larger undertaking, but one that is making rapid progress thanks to the initiative of a wide variety of founders – from group projects such as Alsenhof, to municipal startups such as in Winsen (Luhe), to banks such as VReG in Norderstedt. The Coworking Münsterland network is also following a satellite ring concept, and here, too, a special feature of the region, which is characterised by hidden champions, becomes apparent – it relies on the strength of medium-sized companies. This network, initiated by the regional economic development agency, includes coworking spaces in technology companies or in their immediate surroundings. Software companies such as d.velop, orderbase and shopware are particularly close to the culture of the coworking scene, and it is easy for them to integrate spaces accessible from outside into their structure and to profit from them. On the other hand, they allow a relatively fast growth of a satellite ring in the region, which is complemented by independent spaces such as Flamschen 2. Here, too, a decentralised, loose organisation proves to be superior to centrally planned concepts, with the business development agency taking on the role of providing impulses by activating and qualifying different founders.

From the city to the country

Owner-managed urban coworking chains like Berlin's St. Oberholz also see the future market and have dared to venture to rural areas – the coworking veteran operated the Space Wehrmühle in Biesenthal between Eberswalde and Berlin for one summer in 2019. The Kiez Büro chain, in turn, which specialises in very small spaces in Berlin and Hamburg, is using the developed business model and well-

established equipment and operating processes to also establish coworking spaces in the country, the first of which were built in 2020 in Neustrelitz and as part of the Alsenhof project in Lägerdorf. Both initiatives are examples of expansion movements of classic coworking spaces, whose founders are committed to the coworking values. This, in turn, makes their strategy easier – coworkers' fundamental attitude is focused on cooperation and networking, so that in case of doubt, they would rather seek cooperation with apparent competitors in order to achieve their goals than pursue a classic the-winner-takes-it-all strategy, which is otherwise typical for the digital economy. For example, the Kiez office cooperates with CoWorkLand eG, and 1000 Satellites is also trying to provide its customers with a larger network quickly by including third party spaces in their system.



DStation, Schöppenstedt

Coworking start-up – an overview

The establishment of rural coworking spaces can have very different motives, they appear as a solution to very different challenges. And so, the founders, their aims and requirements are very different, which in turn leads to very different forms of establishment and support requirements. It makes sense to be aware of one's own starting position. Here is an overview of the most common types of founders, their opportunities and challenges.

Founder Type 1

Corporate spin-offs

What do automotive suppliers, country hotels, event agencies and furniture stores have in common? They were founded by entrepreneurs who operate a coworking space in addition to their core business. With their own motivation and amazing results.

Our interviews clearly show that entrepreneurs are one of the most common groups of coworking space founders. The coworking space business model is, at least initially, cross-subsidised by other areas. The clear advantages of this form of founding are often available adequate budgets, short decision-making processes and fast implementation. The motivations are varied and range from increasing the utilisation of space to gaining know-how, ideas and talent to diversifying existing offerings.

The Coworkerei Tegernsee has been operated by the flow-motion GmbH event agency since 2015. The attractive new building, which is comparatively large at 360 square metres, was an opportunity for the company to make its own workplace fluid. Due to the seasonal event business, the premises can be assigned to external coworkers or internal employees as a “breathing space”. At the same time, a place

has been created that is lively and functions as a popular event location and meeting place. The company reduces office costs and improves the quality of the working atmosphere. At the same time, events make the company “tangible” and, , and the visitors remember without marketing costs – a win-win-win situation. This effect is also used by many advertising and IT agencies in rural areas, who also often become coworking providers.

In Nordhorn, near the Dutch border, Averages – originally a company for office technology, office planning and document management – has now turned its exhibition into a lively coworking space. With 10 permanently rented desks, the additional costs could be covered after only 6 months. As a planner for modern office worlds, the company can now score points with real practical knowledge - and the coworkers benefit from professional equipment. There are more examples: Rural hotels that want to develop in the direction of a work or retreat model can take a first step in this direction by implementing a coworking space. The challenge is often similar. The coworking space runs alongside and is more complicated in everyday life than expected. Individual enquiries have to be answered, and the coworkers' accounts and questions have to be organised internally. At the beginning, the offer requires extensive marketing measures and in day-to-day operations the requirements of employed staff, temporary users and event guests are contradictory. The planning and implementation should be professionally accompanied. However, the examples show that this operating model is very promising – both for companies and coworkers.

Profile: Corporate spin-offs

Opportunities

- Financially strong and independent
- Positive effects for companies
- Premises available
- Staff available

Challenges

- Effort is underestimated
- Mix of employees and coworkers
- Security and access control
- Sufficient space for community building
- Use of the entire infrastructure

Founding Tip

The implementation of a coworking space can have many positive effects on your own business model. However, this requires a corporate culture of open minds and doors. Clarify with your employees in advance whether this is desired. Be aware that, in addition to meeting rooms, toilets and kitchens, you also need to share your WLAN with external users and plan appropriate security concepts. The role of community management can be filled by existing staff. Plan for sufficient space and expansion stages, because you need a critical mass of regular coworkers (at least 10) to ensure a stable supply.



DStation

Dr. Imke Dressler

The Dressler Automation site used to be a farm and has been undergoing change since the beginning of the 1980s. Since 2020, nature and village charm have met with modern coworking. Core users are the employees, supplemented by local coworkers and supported by start-ups from Dresinvest GmbH. Based on positive experiences at the company's location in the USA, the modern and open coworking space is also intended to support rural structures in Germany, help to avoid emigration and make working environments more attractive for the Elm-Asse region. The DStation is a good example of how entrepreneurs can support the development of their region: In autumn 2020, the first Lab4Land-Accelerator took place here, organised by the Stiftung Zukunftsfonds Asse, DStation and Co-WorkLand and supported by the Bertelsmann Foundation and DB Smart City. Four founder teams worked for four weeks on innovative start-up ideas for rural areas.



Kornhaus Gernsbach

Founder Type 2

Committed community

Successful coworking spaces convince through their committed operators and initiators. Especially in regions where coworking does not yet exist, private initiatives usually play an important role – they network, provide information and give impetus.

A large part of the coworking spaces beyond the big cities is due to the commitment of small founding teams. These people are intrinsically motivated and united in their vision – they want to create an attractive coworking offer in their region. Some of these initiatives are organised as cooperatives or local associations, often they are ambassadors of new working models and have a great passion for the topic and for their place.

While for the other types of founders, the question of how to use an existing property usually provides the impulse to start a business, for these founders, the need for new, joint work and a vision of the future for a vital life in their community is at the forefront. Due to a lack of offers, they often venture into the role of the founder, but often the real-estate is difficult to find.

A wide range of concepts and usage options are emerging – from pop-up offers to the conversion of vacant buildings. The locally networked actors create an initial demand and create a high level of identification with the location. As a rule, they work on a voluntary basis and usually see the establishment of a company as a side project rather than as a commercial pillar. Committed communities stand for a lively community – they create a basic workload and entertaining event formats. It is a stroke of luck when such people commit themselves to a place.

In the further development, several factors are then important. Many of the initiatives wear themselves out in the search for a suitable location, as they often have no start-up capital. If they succeed in finding a suitable location, these start-ups can develop from their own needs into sustaina-

ble coworking spaces. However, voluntary work can also lead to overwork, so not every initiative is sustainable in the long term. Particularly in the initial phase, expenditure and income are not well balanced, and the transition from initiative to permanent, profitable operation is often difficult.

For municipalities interested in coworking, such initiatives represent a great potential – they are the ideal partners for municipal start-ups.

It cannot be stressed enough that such a “starting group” and its network are the most important basic prerequisite for a sustainably functioning rural coworking space. After all, a start-up phase requires communication, network and know-how above all. Intrinsically motivated initiators bring the necessary passion and give the places a soul. If public agencies take over the financing of such staff positions (community management) and allow for creativity, attractive coworking spaces with the right mix of authenticity, vitality can be created. It is important to involve the founders in the planning as early as possible in order to create user-centred spaces with a high degree of identification.

The Duchy of Lauenburg County has recognised this and supports coworking start-ups of motivated groups with pop-up coworking as a test phase and start-up subsidy.

Profile: Committed community

Opportunities

- Intrinsically motivated
- Bring coworking expertise
- Often suitable for community management

Challenges

- Economic efficiency
- Lack of location
- Overload as a secondary activity

Founding Tip

Founders should actively consider the offers of existing networks for planning, founding and equipping coworking spaces in order to prepare their foundation in the best possible way. The local business development agency can provide very good support with suitable start-up

coaching. Municipalities should monitor the cooperation with committed founders and involve them actively and at an early stage in the planning. These group processes are often very dynamic – it is therefore worthwhile to approach other initiatives through existing supraregional networks in order to learn how these processes can be designed in a goal-oriented manner.

Kornhaus Gernsbach

Sebastian Kopf, Ina Kutschera, Marcel Kutschera

Under the motto Meet - Work - Share, the initiative wants to create a place that brings life to the city. They want to create spaces in the digital age in which networking and exchange can take place offline. They were given the real-estate from the municipality at a reasonable price for two years. Through presentations, exhibitions and sales areas, regional entrepreneurs and founders are to develop a common place.





Desk in Prüm, Prüm

Founder Type 3

Municipal foundations

More and more municipalities understand that coworking spaces will in future form an important part of the provision of services of general interest and will be a weighty argument in the competition for new residents and commercial settlements.

From a local authority point of view, the concept of coworking spaces is highly interesting – more and more local authorities are realising that coworking will be an important part of services of general interest in the future, and are looking into developing a supply. A positive aspect of this approach is that it is usually this fundamental need for a new place of work that is the triggering factor rather than the desire to convert an existing property. Therefore, it is first possible to determine what space capacities are needed for the project and then find a suitable property. These premises are generally suitable for multifunctional use – an important effect, because only the regular presence of approachable persons (e.g., community management, regular coworkers) and reliably opened premises improves accessibility and identification with the location. Clubs and groups with limited financial resources can also find a place here. What starts with a small coworking offer often develops into a vital meeting place with diverse events and offers for both the young and the old. And it also serves to provide local services of general interest. Where self-employed people, employees, teachers and entrepreneurs meet instead of commuting, spaces for ideas and initiatives are created. Those who stay support the local economy and become active in the region. Especially in rural areas, where offers and services are often reduced, coworking spaces as multifunctional places can fill a gap and bring together committed people. New components such as the village office, the repair café and the social media course complement the local offer. This makes it easy to hold a local council meeting and programming course in the same premises. No new buildings have to be built for this purpose, but existing municipal areas can be converted. The village community centre, the vacant space in the old post office or

the municipal housing association can have suitable space available or, as in the case of the establishment of the Gettwork in Gettorf, a suitable centrally located shop area can be rented and converted.

The biggest challenge is to equip and communicate the rooms in a way that is appropriate for the target group. After all, a municipality is rarely an ideal operator of a coworking space and is not a marketing expert. Fortunately, there are many opportunities for collaborative design, implementation and operation with local coworking enthusiasts and professional providers. If the local authority is not the permanent operator, it should ideally support the future operation with financial and human resources. Support in the first two to three years through reduced rents, refunding of cleaning costs or booking of room capacities by municipal companies are only a few examples of how the sustainable operation of a coworking space can be supported.

Profile: Municipal foundations

Opportunities

- Vitalising rooms and buildings
- Meeting place for various age groups
- Contribution to services of general interest
- Strengthening commitment
- Business start-ups and tax revenue

Challenges

- Municipality has little experience with equipment, operation, conception
- Finding operators
- Coworking needs unclear
- Investment needed for start-up
- Risk appetite

Founding Tip

Not every area is suitable for every coworking concept – and not every concept works in your region. Don't think about an area that is currently available – focus on the question of why and design your space concept according to the real needs of the first users.

Connect with committed people from your region. They will be your starting community and fill the place with life. The development of the community is just as important as the development of the premises, but

for a community often uncharted territory. A reason to act here with a special awareness and courage to experiment, to hand over responsibility and to allow participation. If you do not yet know of a committed community, organise a pop-up coworking event, advertise in the local newspaper or set up an information stand at the next town festival – from there the journey continues.

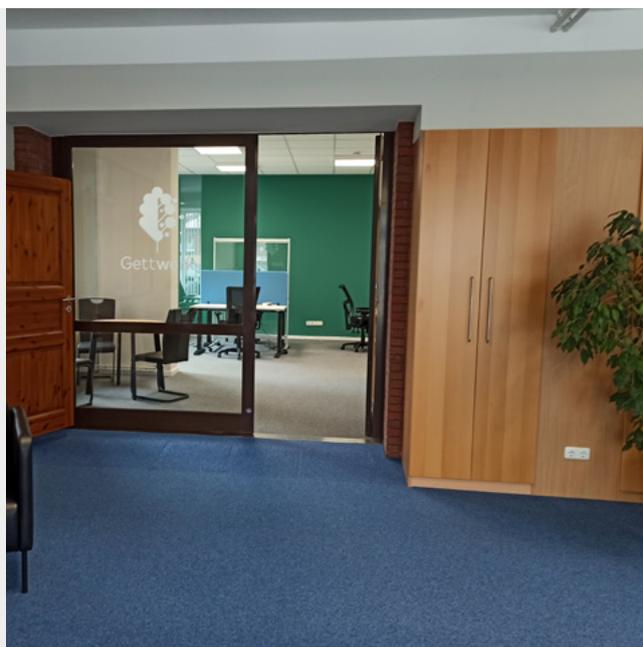
Only when you know for whom and for what you want to develop a coworking space, should you start looking for suitable rooms.

Gettwork in Gettorf

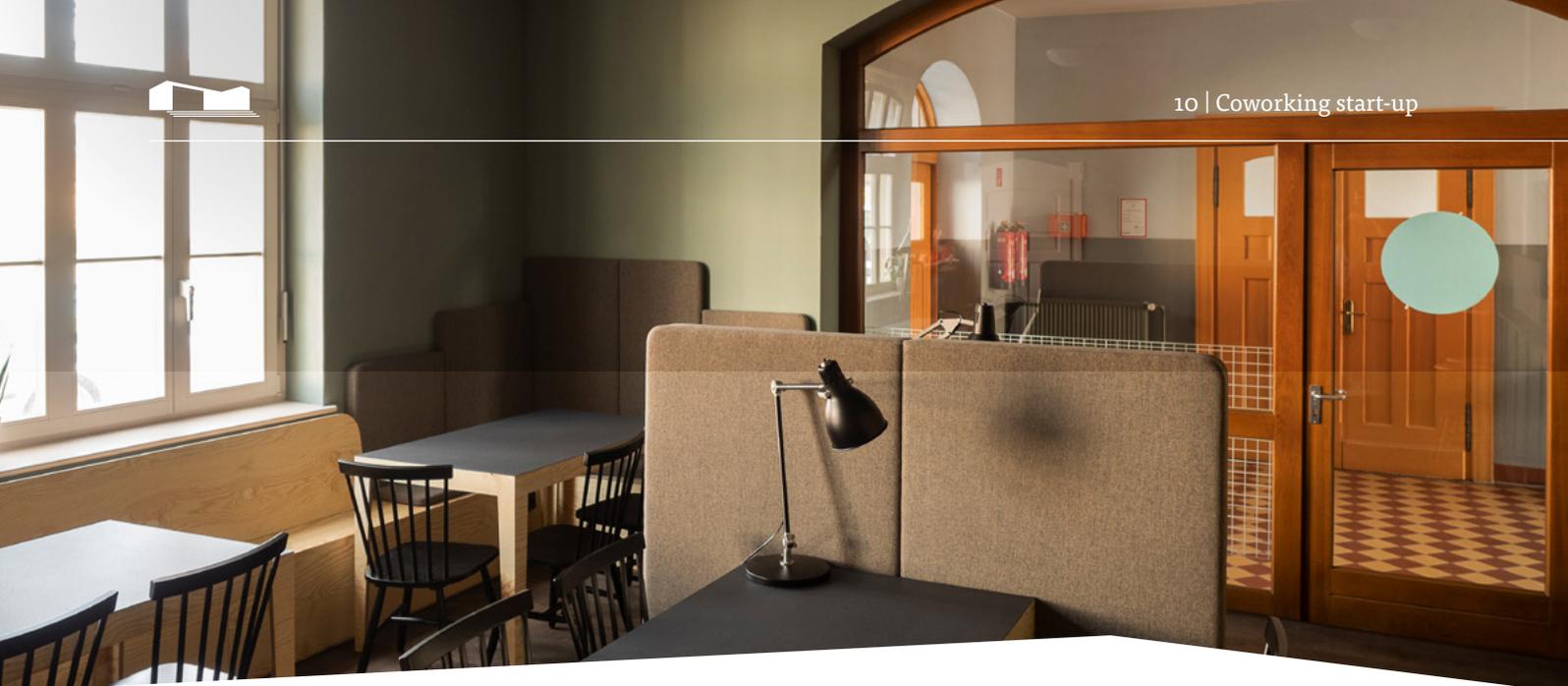
Ulrike Münzberg-Niemann

The Gettwork is the first municipal coworking space in Northern Germany. In spring 2018, the first Co-WorkLand project site was located just outside Kiel where commuters would typically begin their journey. Subsequently, the local authority has continuously developed the idea of founding a coworking space – from the needs analysis in the wake of pop-up coworking, the search for a location, the establishment of a start-up community, joining the cooperative until the opening in October 2020.

Dataport, the IT service provider in the north for public administration, took the initiative during the planning phase and joined the project as anchor tenant. It was then clear that the originally planned area of approx. 150 sqm would not be sufficient. Space was almost fully booked even before it opened. It was therefore expanded to 300 sqm even before the opening with planning support from CoWorkLand. Dataport recognised the opportunities offered by the decentralised work concept. The employees from Gettorf, who otherwise commute to the headquarters 13 kilometres away, can now comfortably cycle to work – an offer that has been well received. From the outset, an exciting mix of self-employed and employed users was created. The gettwork benefits from the fact that the IT service



provider is researching the future of communication technology for its public clients – Dataport took on the task of equipping the gettwork technically and is developing the Space as a model project from which other coworking spaces can learn. The Space is being developed and supported in operation by the location manager Ulrike Münzberg-Niemann, who has also moved her workplace there and now devotes part of her working time to community management.



Coworking Oderbruch – Alte Schule Letschin, Letschin

Founder Type 4

Economic development and business incubators

Coworking spaces are very much used by founders and self-employed people. As a space for ideas, new business models and digital know-how, they are also of interest to local business development and start-up centres.

Young entrepreneurs need a successful start when they venture into self-employment. Besides a good business idea, a business plan and a good strategy, they need network, coaching and regular feedback. Therefore, it is often an advantage for founders to rent a coworking space in order to make a variety of contacts, events, potential customers and tips and tricks from other entrepreneurs – because the home office is usually quiet and lonely.

Existing business incubators convince through existing networking opportunities, coaching, subsidy advice and access to the local economy. They can provide interesting offers for coworking spaces and are an important partner in rural areas. More and more, local business development agencies are deciding to set up their own coworking space within their business incubators and are moving from being a partner to being an operator.

The advantages are obvious – usually there are existing premises in the start-up centres which can be converted or extended. The existing staff has a direct line to the target group and the close exchange helps to develop suitable offers. The basic financing also allows longer start-up phases to be bridged and the coworking offers do not suffer from the pressure of maximising profits. Nevertheless, as in all municipal coworking concepts, there are challenges – especially in terms of authenticity, community, aesthetics and operation. Often the business incubators date back to the 1990s and are not necessarily predestined to be frequented by the desired target group due to their location and construction. Often, the centres are located on the outskirts of towns and cities – they are not a natural environment for the urban coworking

scene. An unused office space is not turned into a popular place for local founders by simply coining it a coworking space. It is important to create independent spaces with their own identification – ideally easily accessible and not hidden away on the third floor. It is worth investing in an interior concept by experienced architects and interior designers and seeking advice during the planning phase. For community management, a person should be chosen who enjoys networking, has a connection to the region and, at best, comes is from the founders' scene. Cooperation with private initiatives can help to build up this important core group – as soon as the first regular users are available, they should be supported in building and expanding and a joint programme of events should be planned.

Profile: Business incubators

Opportunities

- Suitable event and coaching formats
- Premises with low rent
- Close to the target group

Challenges

- Independent concept and brand
- Interior design
- (Development of) community management
- Suitable partners

Founding Tip

A coworking space needs a heart and a soul. Even if the concept may seem simple on paper, it is usually the soft factors that decide on success and long-term use. Be user-focused and be inspired on learning journeys. Accept different standards and aesthetic ideas. Exchange ideas with colleagues from other regions and let them accompany you in planning, construc-

tion and operation. Invest sufficient time and energy in the position of Community Manager – the most important pillar of your project. Offer interesting events, day tickets and also meeting rooms to test your location and reach a diverse target group. A cooperation with other regional coworking spaces can be very worthwhile in order to create meaningful offers for the users through functional divisions.



Old School Letschin

The STIC Wirtschaftsfördergesellschaft Märkisch-Oderland mbH has converted vacant premises on the ground floor of its Alte Schule Letschin site into an at-

tractive coworking space. Torsten Kohn was involved as project manager and community manager from the very beginning. He knows the region and the needs of the target group – this is how he is constantly expanding the offers. The third STIC coworking space has now opened in East Brandenburg.

Churches, banks, railway stations – where could coworking grow?

In addition to the business models and founder types described above, there is a wide range of opportunities that can produce these new places that has yet to be tapped – great potential is in institutions and associations that traditionally maintain open places in rural areas and are often on the decline due to demographic change. Here it is worth taking a look at current developments and projects in this field.

Church parish halls

Parishes own community centres, which are often only used temporarily. The idea of the congregation – where the community is at the centre of it all, could unite coworking and church to a an extent. One challenge is the question of the threshold of access to a denominational space. Despite many contacts and considerations, there is no rural coworking space in Germany connected to a church as it stands. A project in Lower Saxony is currently in the preliminary planning stage in cooperation between CoWorkLand eG and a church congregation.

Stations

Small provincial train stations are often the heart of their communities. Many have already been sold and converted. Preserving them as public places to then play a role in the labour mobility of the future is an obvious idea. Deutsche Bahn is already experimenting with coworking at stations in central locations such as Berlin's main railway station: everyworks. The Swiss railway SBB has gone one step further and has entered into a strategic partnership with the Village Office cooperative. The aim is to create regional coworking spaces in 60 to 80 small and medium-sized Swiss railway stations over the next few years. The railway company shares the cooperative's public-interest objectives. It also plans to provide facilities for local associations, senior citizens' groups or childcare at a lunchtime table. Coworking Plus is intended to promote regional culture in the buildings, some of which have been empty for some years. Another example is Geltendorf station in the suburbs of Munich, where coworking is being developed in cooperation with CoWorkLand eG.

Banks

Cooperative banks in particular appear to be natural partners for coworking enthusiasts, as the cooperative idea is closely connected to the value base of coworking. Not surprising that there are already some joint projects between coworking operators and cooperative banks. Examples are the BLOK O in Frankfurt/Oder, which was developed by Sparda-Bank Berlin together with the Berlin coworking chain St. Oberholz, and the VR Coworking in Tübingen, which resulted from a cooperation with the coworking space Wexelwirken. VReG in Norderstedt near Hamburg is also currently developing a concept in cooperation with CoWorkLand eG, which is intended to bring the bank's entire branch network into flexible coworking use, thereby crea-

ting a new offer for the region. A first space is being created as a mother ship in the new Norderstedt headquarters.

Libraries

In some major European cities (Cologne, Berlin, Aarhus, Helsinki) there are already great examples of coworking concepts within modern libraries, which are increasingly becoming the "third place". In rural areas this is more difficult to implement, as the space available is often very limited. New, smart concepts for multiple use of space need to be developed that make coworking possible without disturbing the actual reading process. CoWorkLand is developing such a concept as a model project with the public library of Glücksburg from autumn 2020.

Sports Club Homes

Sports clubs in rural areas often have the challenge of keeping their clubhouses permanently in operation when a lease from an operator is no longer worthwhile. Here too, coworking can be an exciting complementary concept to make these spaces, which are found in almost every rural community, more usable for the village community. The concept of working where you (or your own children) like to spend your free time can work out – this was the result of the Coworkland popup phase in summer 2020 at the Mechow riding farm. Here, the coworking space with a view of the paddocks was used intensively by those riders who had a corresponding job.

In Schleswig-Holstein, an information campaign will be launched in 2021 by the state government in cooperation with the state sports association and CoWorkLand eG, which is intended to bring the coworking concept to rural sports clubs. At the same time, a model project is to be developed with a sports club, in which the clubhouse is to become a digital sports hub in order to make innovative digital approaches in popular sport tangible.

This is certainly only an excerpt from other ongoing and emerging co-operations between coworking providers and other actors who give structure to the rural areas – coworking on campsites, in country inns, in administrative buildings, in co-operation with community foundations. Many things are conceivable and are being deliberated on. There are also opportunities in places where formerly more heavily frequented buildings are hardly or no longer used at all. However, closure is often a blow, especially for smaller communities, which lose publicly accessible places – coworking spaces can also fulfil an important structural task in rural areas by preserving these places as community centres.

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