

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Summary

In the summer of 2012 Oslo went from 0 to 4 coworking spaces. In 2016, the number of spaces has more than tripled. This thesis investigates 3 startup-related coworking spaces in the Oslo area looking at the spatial culture and urban implications of coworking spaces. This means to study coworking spaces as such and how they are integrated in the larger industrial complexes in decline and the urban fabric. In other words, the study of the relation between heavily tech-based industrial complexes and coworking spaces.

In this development we see skilled labor migrating from corporations to coworking spaces leading to a series of shifts; from corporate to collective ideology, economic security to uncertainty, unified to fragmented institutions, possibly influencing a shift from major developments to micro-city facilities. In the face of the digital age and context of neoliberalism, where so many can work apart and every individual is a competitor, coworking seems to emerge as an enduring necessity, exploring notions of community.

Research question

What characterize the spatial culture of coworking spaces and their urban settings?

Sub questions

- What are the cultural, social and economic factors causing the rise of coworking spaces and in which direction is this development heading in the contemporary society?
- In the digital age and economy and in regards to the concept of a fourth industrial revolution where everybody virtually can work apart from each other; in what way is local proximity still relevant?
- What is the culture of coworking spaces? What are the spatial properties of coworking?

Research design

The understanding of industrial complexes and coworking spaces seem interchangeable with social trends, technological advances and the global market, meaning that dynamic change and revision of theory is common practice when dealing with the subject. Therefore, the social reality and the researcher, as in I myself are independent on one and another in order to not create biased results.

I will approach the thesis with an inductive reasoning and based on empirical studies I will research theory to create new knowledge. This thesis relies on two separate sections of theory; one on industrial complexes and one on coworking, and studies the connection between these two. There exist little or no theory that on how the industrial complexes and coworking spaces relate to each other, however, there are striking similarities between the ideas on and existence of coworking spaces and industrial complexes. There is also the aspect of coworking being under constant dynamic change, rendering the literature and theory on the subject quickly outdated and very scarce. This also applies to the theory on industrial complexes, in which does not say much about how to react to current trends and dynamic changes.

The empirical strategy for approaching the subject is mainly through case studies, which are restricted to 3Oslo-based coworking spaces. The purpose is to compare and contrast the actual conditions of these spaces, and how they are planned and managed. The existing theory on the subject addresses the facilities and describes meticulously the components of coworking, but never actually in relation to physical layout (drawings, designs or design principles). In this study, iconography, stereotypes, physical layout, working and social culture will be investigated in each of the case studies. The data is collected through interviews, observations, reports, floor-plans and current and future masterplans. The research design combines several methods and is mainly based on qualitative data with some quantitative data as secondary information.

The timeframe of this thesis will be cross-sectional, measuring the coworking spaces at a single point of time being their current state. The data collection and data analysis will revolve around the subject of coworking spaces as the main focus and how they relate to existing industrial complexes, as half of the case studies are placed within industrial complexes and the other half discuss the essence of an industrial complexes in urban contexts. The case studies are StartupLab, The Simula Garage, MESH and Tøyen Startup Village in Oslo. The current trend is startup-related coworking spaces, heavily influenced by entrepreneurship, tech services and innovations and temporality of being a startup. By interviewing interest organizations, community managers/curators and local entrepreneurs in each of the case study, I will be able to acquire knowledge on social and corporate culture, management and current and future ambitions of each coworking space. The specific floorplans will not only provide information about the physical layout of coworking spaces, the differences in profile and floor-plans for each of cases, may indicate where the coworking development are heading. The implications of this thesis reveals that coworking spaces may in fact be the next stage of development for industrial complexes.

The research design is modeled after Saunders research onion diagram.