

University of Groningen

Co-working in a female-only environment

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Abstract:

Whereas in the past, offices were required to accommodate employees with carrying out business activities, the use of mobile technology and changing attitudes towards work made it possible to work anywhere, at any time. A shift towards working environment preferences led to a new and sparsely researched concept of female-only co-working spaces. This explorative and qualitative study is aimed to contribute to further knowledge on the use of female-only co-working locations. With the use of 17 semi-structured interviews with both providers and users, the determinants of users to choose a female-only co-working spaces are sought. Results show that whereas rental costs are expected to be most important in the choice to work at a co-working space, motives were more often related to social interaction, atmosphere décor and location in the female-only co-working spaces. However, only for a small part of the women, the female-only aspect is the main reason to work where they work.

Keywords:

Female Entrepreneurship, Co-working Spaces, Third place

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the digital transformation in the early 10s, a shift in the working environment took place. Whereas in the past, an office was required to accommodate employees with carrying out business activities, the use of mobile technology and a changing attitude towards work made it possible to work anywhere and at any time for a range of business activities. The recent pandemic seemed to have strengthened this shift, as large amounts of employees had to work from home for longer periods of time. Barrero et al. (2021) expect that 20 percent of full workdays will be supplied remotely after the pandemic, because of 1) better-than-expected experience with working from home, 2) new enabling investments in human and physical capital, 3) a decreased stigma associated with working from home, 4) lingering concerns about contagion risks and crowds, and 5) technological innovations supporting working from home as a result of a pandemic driven surge.

The pandemic, in combination with other market changes such as the sharing economy (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018) and the increasing use of public places as workspaces (Fruianu, De Leeuw & Nilsen, 2011), led to an growing interest in the concept of multi-tenant workspaces and the idea of sharing offices. Felstead and Hanseke (2017) even consider the detachment of work from place as a growing trend, since only one-third of the rise in remote working can be explained by the mentioned compositional factors as the movement to the knowledge economy and the growth in flexible employment. They also relate this to responses to the changing demographic make-up of the employed force.

This potential trend is visible in the growing role of intermediaries in entrepreneurship, focusing on the type of worker attracted to such environments. As a result of this potential trend, the role of these intermediaries, such as co-working spaces and other third places, receives high attention in research, considering the number of articles published in journals. The users of these working spaces are widely researched. Parrino (2015) mentions that co-working is mainly associated with freelancers and self-employed workers. Fuzi, Clifton and Loudon (2014) found that these self-employed, but also other individual professionals, are increasingly looking for a workspace outside their homes, to gain a better balance between their work and personal life but also because of feelings of loneliness when solely working from home. These feelings are answered by co-working spaces, as those could bring casual small talk, knowledge sharing and brainstorming with other co-workers (Deskmag, 2015).

The shift in working environment preferences potentially affects female entrepreneurship differently than entrepreneurship in general. According to Ughetto et al. (2020), the shift towards a more digital work environment provides chances for female entrepreneurship, as digital entrepreneurship lowers the entry point for start-ups, creates a wider network of customers, and contributes to more flexibility in working times and spaces for women. It is even used as a policy measure, as e-commerce initiatives are used as gender equalizer to empower local women economically in the Global South (Maier and Nair-Reichert, 2008). On the other hand, a study on Chinese female digital entrepreneurship by Luo and Chan (2021) found that female digital entrepreneurs are limited by their gender identity in terms of low leadership, the replication of feminine fields, higher stress levels and a work-life imbalance. They even add that this digital gendering leads to a failure of co-working spaces, in providing their acclaimed collaboration, openness, and even sense of community to female entrepreneurship. The study by Luo and Chan (2021) only found scattered cases of helpful collaboration, knowledge exchange or connection, as the “segregated field of female entrepreneurship constrains in-depth mutual learning and collaboration among coworkers” (p.6).

According to Luo and Chan (2021), feminist geography research on entrepreneurship, especially at the workplace scale, is still limited. Despite the growing literature on both co-working spaces and female

entrepreneurship, the relation between this female entrepreneurship and the role of intermediaries remains often neglected, especially when looking at the rather new phenomenon of ‘female-only co-working’. After the opening of ‘The Wing’, the first female-only co-working space in the United States, a trend started. With the global shifting attitudes around gender, and the raising awareness of problems with male-dominated industries, women felt empowered to find solutions for themselves. The owner, Audrey Gelman, told the Observer she got inspired by the mid ‘60s women’s clubs as a foundation for the second wave of feminism (Lepore, 2016). On the other hand, the New York Times recently quoted a former user of the biggest provider of female-only co-working spaces as making ‘feminism a cool club that you can join as opposed to a social necessity’ (Hess, 2020). Therefore, the true value of the female-only co-working space within female entrepreneurship is rather unknown, yet the amount of such locations is increasing.

A research by Ojala and Pyöriä (2018) on the prevalence of multi-locational work found that working on mobile sites, augmenting working in a primary workplace, is most common in the northern European countries. A Google search in September 2021 on female-only co-working in the Netherlands reveals 8 operators of co-working spaces, spread over 11 different locations and all opened within the last decade. The table below (table 1) shows an overview of these location and its website description, providing a rough idea of what female-only co-working places offer.

Name	Location	Since	Description on website
Tribe Hub	Haarlem	2019	‘An inspiring, uplifting and homely location in the Haarlem city centre. Tribe Hub is a co-working space specifically for decisive, flex-working women who believe in joining forces.’
Hashtag Workmode	Amsterdam Utrecht Rotterdam Groningen Amersfoort	2015	‘Hashtag Workmode has become <i>the</i> place for enterprising women who want to develop into smart and powerful entrepreneurs.’
The Second Spot	Zwolle	2021	‘The Second Spot is located in the inner city centre of Zwolle and offers everything a female entrepreneurship need to have a successful day, meeting or workshop!’
Het Kantoor	Deventer	2021	‘Het Kantoor is a co-working space <i>and</i> community for ambitious female entrepreneurs who want to inspire each other. All of this, located in a beautiful monumental building at the most central location in the inner city.’
VIBES	Noordwijk	2019	VIBES Co-workspace is a place where women can motivate and inspire each other, share ideas, have unexpected brainstorm sessions and work on their visibility.’
Boutique Office	Arnhem	2020	‘Boutique Office offers female professionals a stylish workplace. No boring office but an inspiring suite. No standard hassle but pure luxury and a lot inspiring energy.’
WOWO	Amsterdam	2019	‘Where women work together. An inspiring environment to work (together) with other female entrepreneurs. Where you can soundboard, brainstorm, <i>and</i> just have a coffee.’
Good Place 2 Work	Rotterdam	2011	‘Good Place 2 Work is since 2010 the flexible workplace for female professionals in Rotterdam. In our community we share knowledge and experience, and we inspire each other to generate new business and make progress.’

Table 1. Google Search on Women-only co-working spaces in the Netherlands

Moriset (2013) defined that locations are co-working spaces when regarded as “serendipity accelerators’ (p.8), designed to host creative people and entrepreneurs who aim to break isolation and to find a convivial environment that favors meetings and collaboration. Constraining access to women only, the serendipity is however, constraint to this group as well. When looking at the company statements, it is remarkable that indeed ‘inspiration’ and ‘community’ are often mentioned. The same holds for mentioning the location or the building. Typical co-working spaces both offers elements of a workspace, as well as creative spaces (Orel, 2015). Compared to more traditional offices, multi-tenant office concepts offer more informal facilities, such as coffee corners, 24/7 access, a kitchen, meeting rooms, internet access, a lounge space and printer and copying facilities (Kojo & Nenonen, 2014; Schöpfel et al., 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012; Sykes, 2014). The company statements show no differences, as both coffee and luxury suites are mentioned.

As discussed earlier, a feminist motive could potentially be behind the opening of these locations, but it would be interesting to investigate whether such motives hold and reach the users. Study on circumstances under which users choose to work at a female-only environment, as well as the choice to target only females as a co-working locations is thus needed. This holds particularly when looking at current market trends and developments. First of all, as Parrino (2015) found that co-working is often associated with freelancers and self-employed workers, the current growth of freelancers makes research on this topic current and relevant. Numbers on entrepreneurship without personnel in the Netherlands are growing. As figure 1 shows, the growth of this group is very high in the Netherlands compared to other European countries. This growth is even stronger when looking at the numbers on female entrepreneurship.

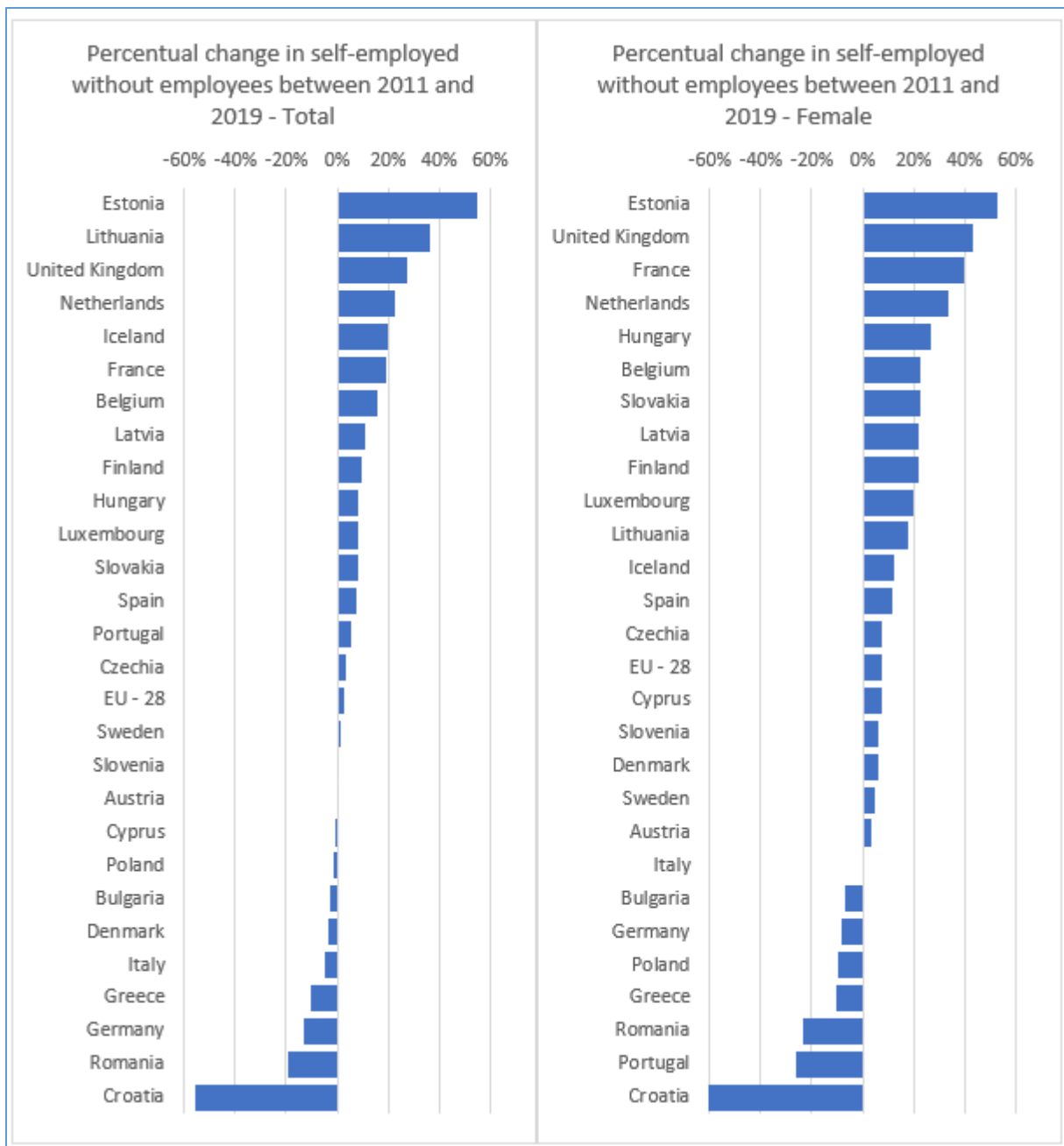


Figure 1. Growth of freelancers per EU country - Total and female freelancers (Eurostat, 2020)

When linking this to the current growth in numbers of co-working spaces, the study of female-only co-working becomes more relevant due to its growth potential. As figure 2 shows, the number of co-working locations has increased strongly over the last years and is expected to grow even stronger.

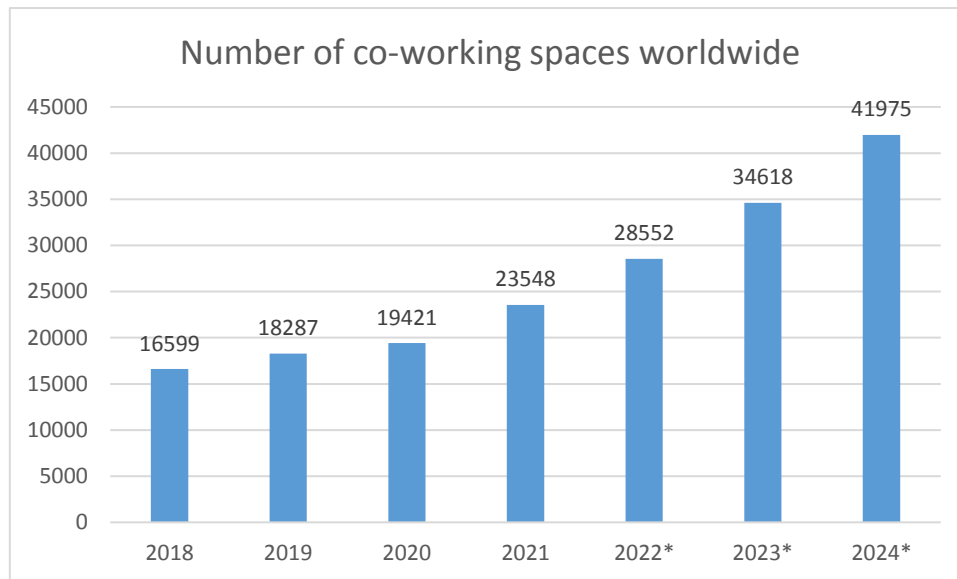


Figure 2. Number of co-working spaces worldwide, forecasted until 2024 (Statista, 2020)

Data on female entrepreneurship confirms this growth potential from the female-side of the demand as well. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2021) conducted a research spotlighting women entrepreneurs. They estimated 274 million women globally being involved in business start-ups, where the global average Total early stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate for women entrepreneurs was 11%, representing almost half of all entrepreneurs active around the world. In comparison, the Established Business Ownership (EBO) rate for women shows 5.6%, representing only one in three established business owners globally (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2021).

It has already been more than 30 years ago that the metaphor of the ‘glass ceiling’ was introduced to describe the often subtle, but still real, barriers women are facing when climbing organizational hierarchies (Bruckmüller et al. 2014). Today, women and girls are often the public faces of anti-poverty policies, occupying an important position in the development discourse, especially when looking at the ‘Gender Equality as Smart Economics’ policy agenda (Calkin, 2015). Cornwall (2016) emphasizes the shift that took place in the feminist approach, where instead of looking at what development can do for women, policies now better integrate what women can do for development. The study mentions that “when women recognize their power within, and act together with other women to exercise power with, that they can gain power to act as agents: when they act in concert to tackle injustice and inequalities, this becomes ‘power for’ positive social change” (p.356).

Currently, the rise of female entrepreneurship is seen as one of the mayor economic and social developments in the world. Ascher (2012) considers female entrepreneurship as an important source of economic growth, as it could create new jobs and could provide different solutions to management, caused by the genetic difference underlying the management style. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2021) claims little doubt that women entrepreneurship is and will increasingly be an intrinsic part of the backbone of economic stability and growth for nations across the globe, as they recover from the impacts such as the global pandemic. A co-working location fully stimulating female entrepreneurship has the potential to thus strengthen economic activities, and eventually the development.

This is potentially why women-only networks and training programs are popping up more and more, making it a growing phenomenon (Durbin, 2011). A literature review by Villesèche and Josserand

(2017) acknowledges the little attention to this in research, making us lack understanding on how such networks can help counter the difficulties women experience in using networking opportunities as efficient as men. Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) even claim that women-only training enables women to clarify and recognize ambitions and strength of leadership as well as access to leadership positions. They argue this a serious waste in the war for talent, as women do not develop to their full potential. From a safety perspective Lewis et al. (2015) demonstrate with a focus group of 30 women that once women are safe *from* harassment, abuse and misogyny as assumed to be part of a male-dominated culture, they feel safe *to* become emotionally, intellectual, and cognitively expressive. These kind of environments can be provided for in female only co-working spaces.

Research Goal

This research is of explorative nature since certain characteristics of female-only co-working spaces have undergone little research in the past and the phenomenon is relatively new. Therefore, this study is aimed to contribute to further knowledge on the use of female-only co-working locations. It will seek for circumstances under which users choose a female-only location to carry out their business activities.

In addition to that, decisions on choosing a specific target audience, mainly women, by operators of third places are examined. This in order to contribute to a better understanding of business decisions to thrive by third place working locations, aiming to provide well adapted policies for the stimulation to conduct and development of these working locations.

The study is performed in the national context of the Netherlands. The context of the cities/locations addressed in the interviews will be further elaborated on the methodology section. With the use of 17 interviews, both with users and operators of female-only co-working spaces to gather data, in order to gain more insights on why and under what circumstances the female-only concept of the location is appealing. Multiple locations throughout the Netherlands are investigated.

The above-mentioned trends and developments, as well as lacking understanding on female-only co-working, are leading to the following main research question.

Which determinants lead female entrepreneurs to locate their business activities in a female-only co-working space?

This research question will be answered using three sub questions to highlight both the user's and provider's view on female-only co-working spaces.

SQ1: What are the characteristics of workers choosing to work at a female-only co-working location?

SQ2: Under what circumstances do users choose to work at a female-only co-working location?

Answers to this questions should entail work fields, employment types, business models of users, preferences for co-working locations and networks, so that a proper image of the users and, more specifically, motives to work in a female-only co-working space shows.

SQ3: Who are the providers of the female-only co-working locations?

The third sub question is aimed at the supply side of the concept. Answers to this question should entail information on the organizations behind the provider as well as its purpose or aim, to reveal the orientation or strategy of their business. Profit-oriented organizations or more society-oriented

organizations are to be separated. Added to that, choice of location and choice of marketing are to be discussed. This, in order to further shape an image of the targeted women and their, by the providers expected, ways for these female entrepreneurs to strengthen the position on the labour market with the use of their locations.

Chapter 2: Theory and Conceptual Model

When considering the characteristics of workers in a female co-working space, as well as the circumstances under which one chooses to surround herself by women solely, it is important to find the answer to the question why the workers work where they work. It could be because of the women and the female-only aspect of the environment, yet this is not necessarily the case. Co-working related aspects that exist in the environment could also be contributing to the location decision, and women could even be indifferent to the female-only aspects of the co-working spaces. Based on the proposition that both co-working aspects and female-only aspects could be of relevance, expectations from literature on both aspects regarding this location decision-making are considered relevant to elaborate on. Therefore, this chapter makes a distinction in 1) Co-working aspects, discussing potential users, user preferences and value gained from co-working, yet also 2) Female-only networks, the potential career advancements in such networks as well as women empowerment.

2.1 Co-working

The oldest definition on co-working spaces comes from Oldenburg (1989), describing ‘third places’ as places that are situated between the place where one resides and the usual place where one works. Since the appearance of the first hackerspaces in 1995, the practice of the co-working as a phenomenon is present (Lallement, 2015). Ten years after, the objective of allowing co-workers to develop opportunities for creativity and innovation arose as a result of Web 2.0 and free software, leading to co-working in its current shape (Lallement, 2015).

As a public office, e.g. a public library, is a free co-working space, a female-only co-working space as mentioned in the introduction would not meet that criteria. The same holds for third places where users are required to purchase services such as coffee or food. The public aspect of those locations make that a women-only requirement to the customers would not be workable or even legal. Therefore, this study does not consider public workspaces as part of female-only co-working space.

It is important to make a clear distinction in the type of co-working spaces used in this research, in order to fully understand the categories in which female-only co-working spaces belong, as well as to find determinants for the location decisions in comparison to other types of co-working. Kojo and Nenonen (2016) distinguish six types of co-working spaces. Table 2 shows an overview of this typologies, based on their degree of access for users and their business model.

		Business Model	
		Non-Profit	Profit
Level of access for users	Public	<i>Public Office</i>	<i>Third Place</i>
	Semi-public	<i>Collaboration Hubs</i>	<i>Co-working hotels</i>
	Private	<i>Incubators</i>	<i>Shared Studios</i>

Table 2. Six types of co-working spaces (Kojo and Nenonen, 2016)

The users

As mentioned earlier, co-working is often linked to freelancers and self-employed workers yet there are studies often make a separation when looking at the users of co-working, being 1) self-employed workers, 2) small firms, 3) large firms, 4) extended workers and 5) students (Fuzi, 2015; Merkel 2015; Parrino, 2015; Sykes, 2014). Tremblay and Scailerez (2020) acknowledge the little research on the use of co-working spaces by firms, but hypothesize that they use the spaces as much to share certain

expenses as for the purpose of networking and the development of business opportunities through exchange and collaboration, and that of the stimulation of creativity and collaboration.

As to where the users come from, Dossou-Yovo (2019) argues that co-working could be more attractive to businesspeople in rural and peri-urban effects, due to these opportunities of exchange, collaboration, creativity and collaboration. Currently, co-working locations are mostly urban, located in larger agglomerations (Deskmag, 2019). However, more and more projects are set up in suburbs, as well as in small towns, middle-sized cities and rural areas (Krauss and Tremblay, 2019). Based on table 1, data on the female-only co-working spaces in the Netherlands shows that these types of locations are mainly located in the larger urban areas, yet with Noordwijk (small village in rural area) as the exception.

When looking at the freelancers and self-employed workers, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2021) shows a higher relevance for women entrepreneurs, as about 36,6% of women entrepreneurs work as solo entrepreneurs in the early stage, operating on their own and without co-founders or employees, compared to 24,6% of male entrepreneurs.

The sectors in which co-workers are active differ in previous research, yet there are overrepresentations of certain sectors. Tremblay and Scaillez (2020) mention that this overrepresentation lies mostly with: new technologies and digital activities (e.g. programmers, web developers, mobile application development, etc.); communication and writing (e.g. journalists, marketing professionals, publishers, translators, event organizers, etc.); and creation (e.g. (graphic) designers, video editing specialists, graphic artists, etc.). Whereas women are well-represented as entrepreneurs in some service sectors, this is not the case for areas such as science, engineering and technology (SET), which is significantly different for men and despite the increasing numbers of women studying relevant subjects at universities (Hampton et al., 2009). The same holds for communication and writing. Mroczek-Dąbrowska and Gawel (2020) consider the Information and Communication sector (NACE J), consisting of for example publishers and news agency activities, as a male-dominated industry with an average female participation rate of 29%. Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (NACE R) are categorized as a mixed industry. Female-dominated industries in the research are education (NACE P), human health and social work (NACE Q) and other service activities (NACE S), all less fitting the work style of a co-working space.

Gender differences can be found in the patterns regarding work location decisions and the choice to work at a co-working space. A study by Burchell et al. (2021), investigating spatiotemporal work patterns and its gender differences among full-time workers, found that women are far more likely to be restricted to solely working at their employer/business premises whereas men tend to have more complex and varied spatiotemporal patterns of work. They mention that it is more common for men to work in three or more places (e.g. a public space, a vehicle and at home) than it is to combine only the employer's of business' premises and their own homes, whereas the second most relevant type for women is this combination of the employer's/ business' premises and their home. Burchell et al (2021) therefor claim the 'modernization' of work, such as the use of technology in a co-working space, is gendered and dominated by men's work.

User preferences

User preferences for co-working spaces differ greatly between the several studies conducted on this topic. In 2012, Deskmag found that for 47% of the respondents of their survey, rental costs are the most important reason to go co-working. Hartog et al. (2018) combined a top ten of physical characteristics present in multi-tenant offices, being: location, exterior and division of the office, décor, services and facilities, seclusion rooms, leisure possibilities, ICT and equipment, privacy and office

climate. Their results show that users are least satisfied with the personal control over the indoor climate, and most satisfied with availability and accessibility of fixed workplaces. More recent research by Weijs-Perrée et al. (2019) let respondents force to choose between certain characteristics and found that most co-workers seem to look for a workplace outside of their homes, such as the dynamic and inspiring atmosphere in a co-working space, but also seek affordable accommodation and like the social interactions that potentially take place there. Diversity of spaces, such as a fitness area or a bar, was found to be the least important attribute.

The preference for a workplace outside of the homes of co-workers is potentially stronger for those working in a female-only co-working space. Whereas a research by Felstead and Henseke (2017) found that remote working is often associated with higher organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job-related well-being, such benefits come at the cost of work intensification and a greater inability to switch off. According to Marlow and McAdam (2013), family responsibilities continue to be of great impact on the women engagement in the labour market and entrepreneurship, as a closer proximity to children often is a key determinant in women's decision to locate their business at home, making women drawn towards industrial sectors with lower entry barriers and start-up costs, yet also leading to an increasing probability of family responsibilities interfering with work tasks. Findings by Rodríguez-Modroño (2021) show that work intensity, working time quality and prospect depend more on an individual being self-employed than on being home-based. Yet, earnings and time devoted to care work are strongly shaped by working from home. Combining working at home with co-working could be a solution to offset the lack of interaction and social capital of home-based entrepreneurs and to increase their earnings (Rodríguez-Modroño, 2021). Potentially, this also holds for the work intensification and greater inability to switch off. Combined with the social interactions taking place in such locations, in which the sex composition of networks varies by gender with women tending to have networks composed entirely of women, used for emotional support (Foss, 2010), a female-only co-working location could be preferred over a general co-working location.

When looking at co-working locations in mid-sized cities, a study by Jamal (2018) found that 90% of the researched co-working spaces were located in historic buildings downtown, which cites the need to provide access to transit, the aesthetics of an older building, and proximity to urban amenities for the members. This is in line with table 1. Both in Zwolle and Deventer, the historical building located in the inner city centre is mentioned in the website description.

As mentioned earlier, several sectors are found more present in co-working locations than others. Still, according to Remøy and Van der Voordt (2013) the organization's sector influences the preferences of the user. An example they show is that of the creative industry, in which users prefer a flexible layout with meeting spaces, shared areas and a representative interior for their organization. Preferences also change with individual characteristics. Rothe et al (2011) found that, for example, older workers care more about personal control of the indoor climate, whereas younger workers seek for a workplace that stimulates teamwork.

For a co-working location to attract businesspeople, as well as self-employed, Tremblay and Scaillez (2020) found that location, infrastructure, human and financial resources are important factors. However, for a female-only co-working location to attract businesspeople, it is assumed that targeted businesses only consist of women. It is therefore questioned whether this is even the case for hosts and operators of female-only co-working spaces.

Value gained from a co-working environment

Kwiatkowski and Buczynski (2011) found that, while there are multiple types of co-working spaces, there are some shared core values provided, being accessibility, collaboration, openness, community and sustainability. Some of these core values gained from co-working overlap with the six relevant attributes for co-working as researched by Weijts-Perrée et al. (2019) yet there are some differences and/or additions. According to Weijts-Perrée et al. (2019), co-working can become interesting due to 1) accessibility, 2) atmosphere and interior aesthetics, 3) layout of the space, 4) type of lease contracts, 5) diversity of tenants, and 6) reception and hospitality. Values that can be gained from working in a co-working environment and that contribute to the business, such as accessibility and flexibility, collaboration and networking, openness, community and events, and sustainability are considered relevant in the location decision making process. Interesting considerations by both users and providers of co-working locations could be made based on these type of values that have the potential to distinguish female-only co-working spaces from general co-working spaces. An example could be the accessibility in terms of location choice, where a female-only co-working space is located closer to daycare or supermarkets, compared to general co-working spaces.

Accessibility and flexibility can be found within flexible rental contracts (Sykes, 2014), but also in co-working spaces that offer multiple locations to choose from (Fuzi, 2015; Merkel, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). Capdevila (2015) agrees with this, by arguing that the main factor to consider joining are related to the location of the co-working space. Self-employment and entrepreneurship can offer women the autonomy and flexibility to balance their work and family concerns. For women, this flexibility is therefore more important due to the simultaneous roles that are typically ascribed to women for extended as well as immediate family obligations (Smith et al. 2016). Whereas female entrepreneurs are as ambitious in entering professional business services as male entrepreneurs, they are also expected to reach higher degrees of importance to flexibility and to balancing their professional, personal and family responsibilities (Collins-Dodd et al., 2004). As mentioned before, a closer proximity to children can often be a key determinant for women in the decision to work from home (Marlow and McAdam, 2013), probably affecting the need for accessibility and flexibility of a multi-tenant office. Added to this is the need of women to enter businesses with low entry barriers and start-up costs as a result of that (Marlow and McAdam, 2013). Flexibility in rental contracts, as well as a (potential) social purpose of female-only co-working spaces, might broaden the range of businesses and industries to enter whereas it also provide opportunities to balance personal and professional lives.

The degree of collaboration is determined by spontaneous interactions that occur between the users of the co-working space (Gerdenitsch et al., 2016; Hillman, 2011; Roth & Mirchandani, 2016). Fuzi (2015) adds to this that a co-working host can stimulate such interaction, networking and collaboration, by creating a good atmosphere. Gerdenitsch et al. (2016) highlight the importance of co-workers in the role of social support among independent professionals. As these professionals could be described as prototypes of a 'boundaryless workforce', obstacles of such flexibility come in of which professional isolation is one (Vega and Brennan, 2000; Bailey and Kurland, 2002). It occurs when a need for support, understanding and other emotional and social aspects of interaction is not met (Taha and Caldwell, 1993). Gerdenitsch et al. (2016) acknowledge co-working spaces as resourceful environments for such independent, boundaryless professionals, because it provides opportunities for social support, added to the flexible business infrastructure. From this perspective, it can be said that a female-only co-working locations limits its professionals, in terms of being 'boundaryless'. An extra boundary, being a gender restriction, is put on such workspaces. It is therefore, interesting to determine to what extent users of a female-only co-working space feel this restriction in their social support among professional, and whether this indeed leads to a stronger sense of professional isolation in combination to a gender isolation.

For the right social interaction to happen, an open work space and layout is required. The classical physical design of co-working locations is an open-floor plan, where informal and creative spaces are combined with elements of a functional workspace (Orel, 2015). Table 3 provides an overview as stated by Bouncken, Aslam and Qiu (2021) of the design differences between a co-working space and traditional offices, in which the openness and atmosphere of a co-working space becomes visible.

	Co-working spaces	Traditional offices
Layouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both open-plan and private office spaces, with multiple socialization and networking areas • Options for assigned and unassigned workspaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enclosed office layouts • Mostly private offices or cubicles, and assigned workspaces
Design styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative interior designs, with full colour schemes, stylized furniture and varied seat arrangements • Playful and aesthetic office settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually monotonous and dull work environments • Orderly or formal work settings
Functional areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse functional areas to create motivational and flexible work environments • More everyday areas around the work areas, promoting spontaneous interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focussed on working areas and supporting structures, with limited recreational areas • Working areas based on departments, concentrating on one function to ensure efficiency
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership includes the basic facilities such as desks and internet • Additional services require payment, such as a gym or cafeteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full ownership of the infrastructure and the facilities
Digital tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should support space functions, e.g. meeting room bookings • Should support communications among users of the location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should support work and the projects

Table 3. Design characteristics of co-working spaces and traditional offices compared (Bouncken et al., 2021)

Bouncken et al. (2021) argue that the spatial architecture of an office intentionally or unintentionally sets the body language of a space, where creating a fit between the social and material aspects could enable companies, and thus providers of co-working spaces, to foster positive consequences. For this, they can use observations to understand the users' behaviours and needs, digital tools to gain more specific insights and the value promise and value delivery of the co-working space to see whether it is successful in realizing the ideas of sharing.

The community value experienced in a co-working space comes from the created atmosphere where co-workers can find other people, ideas and resources, and also share experiences. Co-working spaces assist with creating favourable conditions for creativity, presentation, and exhibition of outcomes, where there is a particular influence on education (Bednář et al., 2021). This influence take place in the form of events, ranging from lectures and workshop to exhibitions and conferences (Katz et al., 2015). The development process for women differs from that of men (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002). A study on male and female MBA students by Sinclair (1997) found several gender differences, such as communication differences, and showed that an uneven spread of women among student groups led to women struggling to get the female voice in team discussions. Added to that, male peers expected women to undertake subordinate roles and do the more menial and social group tasks. Women perceived their abilities as stupid, ignorant and lacking in prior knowledge when asked question,

leading them to lose their confidence. All in all, the sense of value among the women left them marginalized, unconnected and hindered in their learning. Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) acknowledge this, and as a result of the notion, courses designed courses for women adopting the women-only design of delivery. This, so that women have an equal chance to succeed. Vinnicombe and Singh distinguish (2002) the following objectives for participants in women-only courses or trainings:

- To clarify the feelings and attitudes they have towards themselves and their different work and personal roles (e.g. that of colleague, boss, wife, mother and/or daughter);
- To review the specific issues they face as women in their experiences of the managerial life;
- To examine their management styles, so that they can promote their personal strengths at work;
- To study the concepts of power and politics, which helps them to enable to apply such concepts effectively;
- To help themselves in becoming more proactive when managing their careers;
- And, to satisfy all of these goals in an environment that is safe, so that they can test their own experiences against those of other women.

The presence of women-only events in female-only co-working spaces, for example in the form of women-only training, makes the approach of this sense of community differ from that in general co-working spaces. It is expected that such events acknowledge such designs of women-only delivery.

The sustainability gained from working in a co-working space can be found for example in the sharing of facilities, equipment and services. Another form of sustainability is that of sustainable performance. Cheah and Ho (2019) examined the relationship between the concept of co-working spaces and innovation, in particular the business model innovation for sustainable performance. They conclude that the physical design of a co-working space not only encourages creative thinking and playfulness, but also generates higher quality ideas, helping the tenant to achieve higher levels of business model innovation. This concept of sustainability is associated with growth potential. Outsios and Farooqi (2017) found gender differences regarding enterprise performance and growth, were female role models play a significant role. The earlier discussed social norms around the role of women in society, the balance of commitments between work and family, but also the lack of female role models form growth barriers, apart from mentioned entry barriers (Stoner et al., 1990). This attitude even makes it harder for female entrepreneurs to gain support from family and friends for their entrepreneurial activities (Brush et al., 2004). A female-only co-working space therefore has the potential to become the role model female entrepreneurs need to engage in more sustainable business operations.

A comparison study by Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2021) on The Netherlands, Germany and Czech Republic revealed that co-workers from these countries prefer a reception at their location, but no host, added with only sometimes an event (not too often) and a moderate tenant diversity. It is questionable whether a female-only policy would still reach a moderate tenant diversity, as gender is equal for everyone.

2.2 Female-only networks

The above characteristics of co-working could be an attractive aspect for users of women-only co-working spaces, where some of these are potentially more appealing to female entrepreneurs than others. However, users working in a co-working space would be indifferent to any co-working location offering the right set of their user preferences. As the women-only co-working spaces offers a fundamentally different characteristic to this set, being the women-only aspect, it is important to also consider determinants related to the women-only part of the researched locations. As is mentioned before, many women do not develop to their full potential, which is a serious waste in the war for

talent (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002). In order to define considerations and motives of why users decide to work at a co-working space that is only accessible for women, it is important to define women-only networks and the concept of working with women only.

Career Advancement in Women-only Networks

Whereas the earlier mentioned characteristics are, in combination with co-working, mainly pull factors for female entrepreneurship, because of psychological and social independence, flexibility and job satisfaction, there can also be thought of push factors. These are motivating women towards entrepreneurship by an unfavourable situation in the labour market such as lacking professional development or predominance of male networks (Mroczek-Dąbrowska and Gawel, 2020). A key underlying barrier to entrepreneurship for female entrepreneurs, often decreasing their scale and success, is the limited access to relevant mentors, role models and professional networks (Deloitte, 2016). This report also mentions a lower level of self-belief and higher risk-averseness compared to equivalent male entrepreneurs, and the self-perception of women that ability in key business function is lacking.

Over 25 years ago, a paper by Ehrich (1994) acknowledged that 1) networking is integral to career success, 2) that networks consisting of men tend to be more powerful, and 3) women typically find difficulties in accessing such male-dominated networks. It is even found that successful networking strategies for men do not work with equal success for women. Forret and Dougherty (2004) studied networking to increase internal visibility, which significantly led to a number of promotions for men, but not for women.

As a result of such barriers and limitations women face in their career advancement, several projects and tests with networks at work became present. Networks at work are often seen as “old boys” networks, both formal, informal and personal, yet always linked to the male privilege (Coleman, 2010). It is to some extent because of this that women-only networks attempt to counter perceived advantages men derive from networking. According to McCarthy (2004), the ability to connect women with other women makes that networks disrupt the patterns of social connectivity at work, before privileging for men, yet now providing a new way to balance the power between the sexes.

Pini et al. (2004) ought to value such women’s networks, and found possibilities as well as potential problems when such networks are established in order to increase women’s participation in management. One opportunity arising from women-only networks could be for women to seek alternative interpretations of experiences and events, particularly in situations where harassment, sexism and discrimination are normalized or minimized. Interviews with UK women in women-only networks by Coleman (2010) revealed that their meetings provided a ‘safe haven’ for the women to express doubts and concerns, in such a way that mixed-network meetings could not. In general, women’s networks help self-confidence of women leaders to grow (McCarthy, 2004). Coleman (2010) states that networks provides opportunities to grow in self-confidence, gain support and compare experiences, e.g. in the form of senior women emerging as role models for younger women within the women-only network.

However, women’s networks cannot operate in isolation, and they should attempt to engage with male dominated networks as this is critical for gender issues not be sidelined into the women’s only spaces (Pini et al., 2004). And, women-only groups have the risk not to produce the same advantages for women as single gender networks do for men, since women are numerically less well represented in power elites, are subject to more negative stereotypes in management, and have a lower status in society (Coleman, 2010). Such networks are even caricatured as “mothers” meetings, making them less attractive to women to join (Perriton, 2006). Whereas women-only networks generally not hold

overtly feminist stance (Coleman, 2010), a reluctance to join such networks could even be related to the backlash against feminism (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003).

Nonetheless, female-only networks have the potential to facilitate the essential networks for female entrepreneurs. When looking at the overrepresentation of sectors within the co-working spaces, a lot of the industries complement each other well, especially regarding more female-dominated industries in the service sector. Therefore, users could potentially find cross pollination within the co-working space, making the network found there essential. The same holds for B2B initiatives.

Female entrepreneurship: Women empower women

Empowerment mainly defines to a process where people gain power and mastery over their life on their own, but also with the help of others (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). One way in which policy makers attempt to inspire and motivate young women to engage in entrepreneurial activities, is through the use of role models (Byrne et al., 2018). Women entrepreneurs can function as a symbolic role model or mentor, setting examples and providing valuable lessons for aspiring women entrepreneurs (Kelley et al., 2010). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2021) acknowledges this notion, by revealing that women inspired others, especially other women, to join entrepreneurship and to start yet more businesses. Karimi et al. (2014) researched that role models are in general found to be more important for women compared to men. They suggest that male entrepreneurs focus on the instrumental outcomes of entrepreneurship, while female entrepreneur are more sensitive to the social factors and the opinions of others regarding entrepreneurial intentions and the decision to become an entrepreneur. On this notion, the female-only co-working space has the potential to create environment in which such feelings can find a place, attracting and supporting more female entrepreneurs.

Lewis (2014) defined 'entrepreneurial femininities' where role models could take shape, e.g. individualized femininity, relational femininity, maternal femininity and excessive femininity, in which a hierarchal relationship holds where individual entrepreneurial femininity is superior to maternal entrepreneurial femininity and where excessive entrepreneurial femininity is deemed a failure. Such types cannot be chosen by individuals, yet are rather to be understood as "a set of available bodily and relational (entrepreneurial) performances" that can vary by context and that can be embodied by women (and men) (Schippers and Sapp, 2012, p.30). An overview of the four types is provided in table 4.

	Description
Individualized entrepreneurial femininity: <u>Entrepreneur</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizing the gender neutrality in entrepreneurship. • Trying to be an entrepreneurial women by <i>managing</i> their relation with the private, domestic world of home and femininity, not letting it interfere with their business.
Maternal entrepreneurial femininity: <u>Mumpreneur</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating their lives similar to that of male colleagues, while still maintaining a foothold in the domestic realm. • Not only looking to what fills the market gap, but also connecting entrepreneurship to the women's traditional caring responsibilities of home and children.
Relational entrepreneurial femininity: <u>Female entrepreneur</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has an increased recognition and value for skills, attributes and leadership styles that are associated women, giving form the idea of feminine management. • Rejecting a orientation that is masculine and dominated by growth.
Excessive entrepreneurial femininity: <u>Nonpreneur</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without the counterweight of masculinity, violating the hegemonic norms valued in the entrepreneurial context, risking being perceived as illegitimate. • Enacting traditional femininity, characterized by vulnerability, dependence, passivity and the need for male approval, prevented from fulfilling own ambitions.

Table 4. Overview of Entrepreneurial Femininities by Lewis (2014)

In order for femininities to become successful, Lewis (2012) mentions that 1) women must 'feminine enough' to benefit their business, yet not engage in unwarranted or unnecessary feminine displays, and 2) stereotypically feminine behaviour must be compensated by other behaviours conforming to masculine norms of the entrepreneurial arena. However, using the individualized, entrepreneurial 'superwoman' identity as role model in campaigns can also have a potential damaging impact, as is found by Byrne et al. (2018). It is to be questioned to what extent role models like above, and the different types of them, are present in a women-only co-working location, making its workers able to profit from them.

2.3 Conceptual Model and expectations

Expectations in previous literature reveal potential motives, reasons, and considerations, both on the side of co-working and female entrepreneurship that could be important determinants for users and providers of third places in their choice for a female-only location. A summary of the relevant literature, and expectations resulting, led to the construction of the conceptual framework, presented by figure 3.

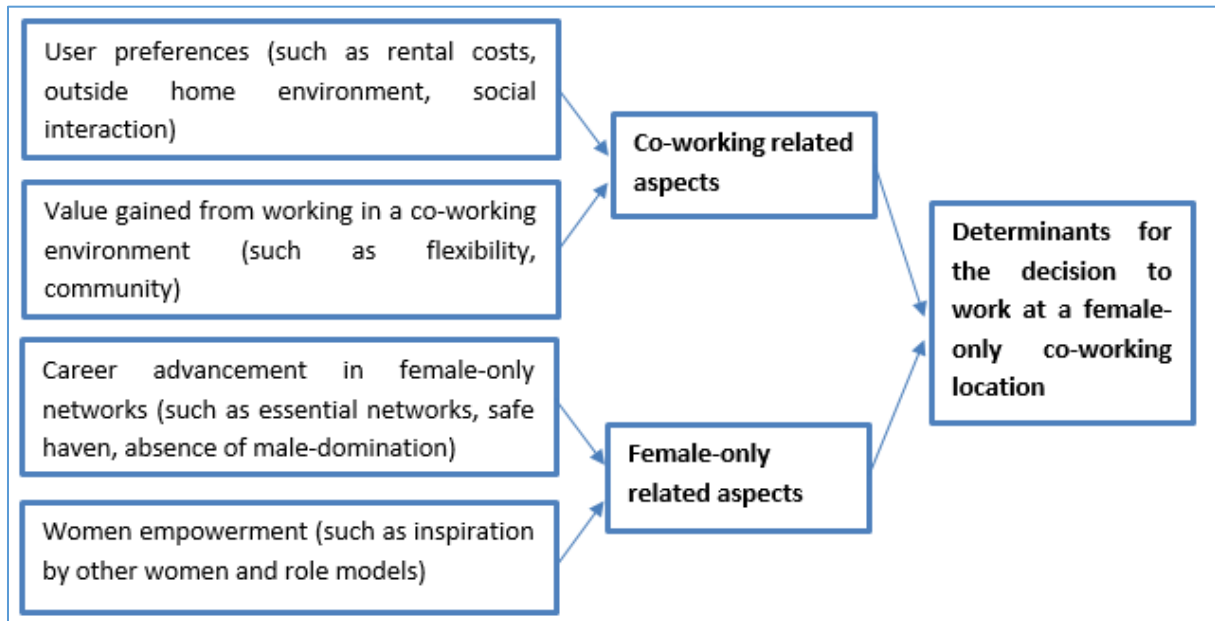


Figure 3. Conceptual Research Model

The users are expected to be mostly freelancers or self-employed, as co-working is often linked to freelancers and self-employed, yet there lies potential for firms to locate their workers in such environments. In the case of the gender limitations in female-only co-working spaces, this potential might be weaker. When looking at expectation of industries, the overrepresentation of the sectors 'new technologies and activities', 'communication and writing', and 'creation' is perhaps different for female-only co-working spaces on the notion that women are less represented in SET, a form of new technologies. Apart from this, and the less suitable female-dominated industries 'education' and 'human health', it is expected that the female entrepreneurs are well-represented in the service sectors most fitting the co-working activities and that the same overrepresentation is present in female-only co-working spaces. However, the expectation that women less fit the concept of co-working than men, as the modernization of work is potentially gendered and dominated by men's work needs to be addressed here.

As rental costs are considered a main reason for co-working by Deskmag (2012), it is also expected to be the case for female entrepreneurs in a female-only co-working space. The same holds for seeking a workplace outside home, potential social interactions and the dynamic and inspiring atmosphere. Working outside of home however potentially shapes earnings and time devoted to care work, as well as the work intensification and greater inabilities to switch off. On the other hand, family responsibilities can become a key determinant in women's decision to locate their business at home. This makes it interesting to investigate which considerations are in place when looking at female-only co-working, where the co-working location is either a complement or a substitute to working from home. As regards the social interactions, it is to be questioned whether the level of interaction differs at female-only co-working space, compared to a general co-working space. As Foss (2010) found that emotional support can be more present in networks composed entirely of women, female-only co-working spaces have the potential to offer something unique.

When looking at the values gained from working at a female-only co-working space, it is expected that flexibility and accessibility, collaboration and networking, openness, community and events, and sustainability are important consideration in the location choice. Accessibility and flexibility can make a difference for women regarding the proximity to children, lower entry barriers and start-up costs as

well as a (potential) social purpose of female-only co-working spaces. Collaboration and networking is expected to be less important to the female entrepreneurs, as a gender restriction is put on the users, leading to a stronger sense of both professional isolation and a gender isolation. On the other hand, the female-only component also has the potential to create a feeling of a safe haven, and perhaps offering collaboration and spontaneous interactions on other levels, that cannot be found in general co-working spaces. The same applies to openness, in which a female-only co-working space could be seen as either a less open space due to the limitations, or a place where openness more acceptable as a result of the 'safe haven'-feeling. Sustainability, in terms of financial sustainability, is expected to be more important to users of female-only co-working spaces in comparison to general co-working spaces. This is due to the social purpose that can be associated with the female-only aspect.

For the women that particularly seek the female-only component, it is expected that these users provide answers regarding career advancement in female-only networks that they cannot find elsewhere, or women empowerment. As women are more subject to inspiration by other women and the need to be around role models, it is expected that these users can find role models or inspiration in the female-only co-working space. A lower level of self-belief and higher risk-averseness may drive women to find networks outside the "old boys" networks. As women-only networks are often associated with safety from harassment, sexism and discrimination, motives and consideration by users are expected to have a certain level of avoidance to this as well. However, reluctance to the feminist stance or answers regarding a negative stereotype are also expected, as female-only networks cannot operate in isolation and even are less attractive to women to join, because of this.

Based on the literature discussed, potential answers to why women choose to locate their freelance business activities to a female-only co-working space are numerous and diverse. However, a distinction can be made here in determinants that are either based on co-working related aspects, and therefore indifferent to the gender limitation, or determinants that relate to the female-only part of the co-working location. It is thus to be determined which of the expectations made here are actually present in the female-only co-working spaces.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will look into and reflect on the process of data gathering and data analysis. It will discuss considerations regarding the research method, the particular interview method and strategy. It will also touch upon the process of finding participants, conditions of the interview meetings and the ethical issues taken into account.

3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

The research design of this study uses a *qualitative research approach* in order to explore and map motives and considerations in place for women using a female-only co-working space. These motives and considerations are not fixed, agreed upon, or measurable as assumed in a quantitative research. The qualitative approach, as used here, contrasts with quantitative research since there are no identified factors ahead of time of which prevalence and strength can be measured (Merriam and Grenier, 2019). However, this research is focussed on knowing how people experience and understand their world at a certain point in time, in a certain context. The exploring of such individual experiences and interactions with the social world, as well as the meaning it has for them, is based on an *interpretive* perspective that is more embedded in a qualitative approach (Merriam and Grenier, 2019).

Qualitative data can be used to generate theory when studied phenomena are new or not previously investigated (Graebner et al., 2012). Based on the notion that there is little or no research on the concept of female-only co-working spaces, a method aiming for inspiring and deepening the theory is needed. In this case, and based on the type of information searched for, a qualitative method is the preferred strategy.

Whereas, according to Graebner et al. (2012), the building of theory is a powerful justification for using a qualitative data method, a second rationale of enabling informants to speak in their own words and allowing researchers to capture respondent's own subjective interpretation and/or experience more closely would be of use in this research as well. Creed et al. (2010) used a qualitative method in apprehending experiences and interpretations of marginalized organizational members, focussing on 'complementing and extending' the previous literature rather than building entirely new theory.

As this study is of exploratory nature, the aim of this study is not to provide grounded theory on the subject, nor to generalize the results. Therefore, a combination of both a lack of existing literature on the topic, as well as acknowledging the subjective character of this study, leads to the choice of a qualitative research approach.

3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative data research is a broad term, consisting of multiple research methods. For this study, the data collection method takes place in the form of semi-structured interviews. The flexibility and versatility of such interviews provide multiple advantages to this approach. Kelly (2010) mentions that rigidity of semi-structure interviews can vary depending on the study purpose and research questions. Galletta (2012) adds the success in enabling a reciprocity between the participants and the interviewer, making it possible to improvise follow-up questions based on the given answers. Cridland et al. (2015) confirm the ability to focus on issues meaningful for the participants, allowing the expression of diverse perceptions. The exploratory nature of this study asks for answers to 'how' and 'why' questions, as the aim is to find motives and considerations for a location choice.

Interview Guide

Kallio et al. (2016) aimed to develop a qualitative semi-structured interview guide based on a systematic methodological review, resulting in five phases of the development of a qualitative semi-structured interview guide shown by figure 4: 1) identifying the conditions for semi-structured interviews; 2) gathering and using previous literature; 3) formulating a preliminary semi-structured interview guide; 4) pilot testing; and 5) presenting the complete semi-structured interview guide.

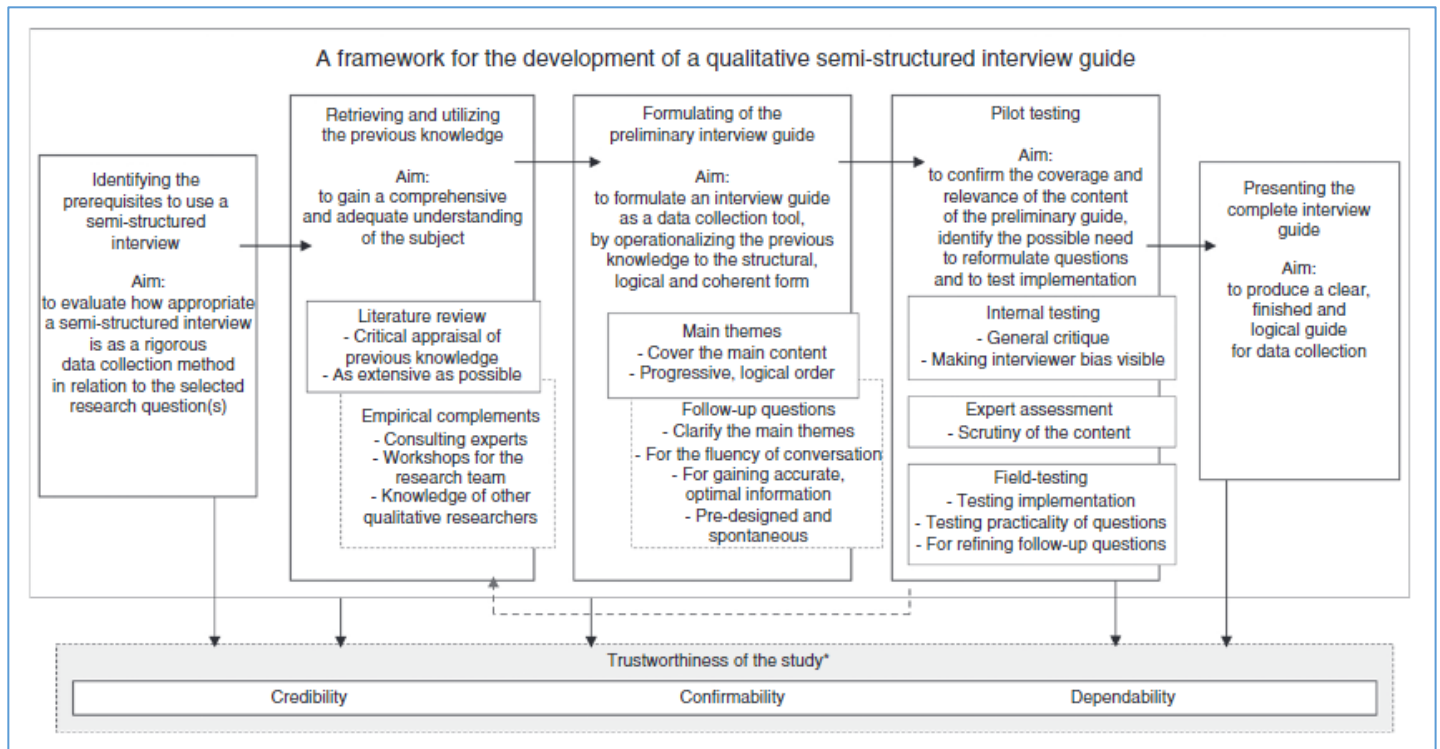


Figure 4. The phases of a semi-structured interview guide development based on the synthesis/review (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2962)

The first step, therefore, is to determine the appropriateness of semi-structured interviews based on the prerequisites, in relation to the selected research questions. Turner (2010) mentions the ability to determine certain areas of the phenomenon, when looking at the previous knowledge, to which Barriball and White (1994) add that the method is suitable when studying for one's perceptions and opinions, and complex or emotionally sensitive issues. This is the case in this study, based on the search for motives and the decision-making process. More profound is the fit mentioned by Astedt-Kurki & Heikkinen (1994), suggesting the method appropriate when respondents have lower levels of awareness of the subjects, for example when they are not used to talk about, i.e. values, intentions and ideals. Experience after the interviews teaches that the decision-making is often times a not very well thought of topic, where respondents were simply unaware of their own decision-making, leaving prerequisites suitable for this data collection method.

A certain level of study in the previous literature is necessary in order to conduct semi-structured interviews, as the interview questions are based on previous knowledge (Kelly, 2010). This is in line with the second step of the framework as develop by Kallio et al. (2016). An extensive literature review, as presented in chapter 2, is created as conceptual basis for the interview guideline. By doing so, a good grasp of the research' substance is known before the start of the interviews.

The third phase of developing the interview guide aims at formulating the actual interview guide that can be used as a tool for the data collection, using the previous knowledge on structural, coherent and

logical forms (Kallio et al., 2016). The semi-structured approach however, made it possible to improvise and to ask follow-up questions, leading to a more open and spontaneous conversation between the interviewer and the respondent than the questionnaire potentially suggests. The questionnaire consist of two levels of questions, being main themes and follow-up questions. The main theme questions are aimed to encourage the respondent to speak freely, whereas follow-up questions are used to make the respondent understand the main themes and to potentially direct the conversation towards a certain subject, but also to maintain the flow of the conversation. In order to avoid guiding or leading the respondent toward an answer, the main themes should dominate the interview pattern, and the follow-up questions are only necessary when respondents have difficulties in understanding the main theme (Smith and Osborn, 2008).

The testing of the interview guide (phase 4) is conducted using three techniques by Kallio et al. (2016), being internal testing, expert assessment and field-testing. *Internal testing* led to removing ambiguities and inappropriate leading questions from the questionnaire if possible. Added to that, awareness to the interviewer bias was sought before conducting the interview. These limitations are further addressed in the section on ethical issues. *Expert assessment* is particularly beneficial when assessing comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the questionnaire when looking at the aims and the subjects of the study, as it brings valuable guidance about de wording and arrangements of question, and allows for discussion on the relevance of the question (Barriball & While, 1994). A peer, with a master's degree in Communication Science therefore shed light on the questions before the first interviews, looked at interpretation and checked whether the proper questions were asked in order to receive the right response necessary to answer the research question. Due to the timeframe of this study, and the number of interviews conducted, *field-testing* only took place in the form of trail-and-error, where every interview could be used as feedback for the next. This led to some adjustments to the questions during the interview period, such as the adding of specific, often used, examples to clarify main themes. The definitive version of this semi-structured interview guide can be found in the appendix.

Participation

Participants have been recruited in two ways. The first attempt to reach users and providers of female-only co-working spaces was an e-mail request to all locations stated in the Google Search (table 1), leading to a positive respons and invitation from 'GoodPlace2Work' to work and interview at their location for one day. This led to the first 7 in person interviews with providers and users. After this, an extensive search for respondents on the 'users' page of 'Hashtag Workmode' started, in which all users of the locations Rotterdam, Groningen and Amersfoort received an email invitation for either online or in person interviews, resulting in the other 10 interviews with providers and users.

3.3 Data analysis

Since the semi-structured interviews consist of open questions, answers given in the interviews needed to be transcribed in order to collect the information in written form and to be able to analyse the interviews. To do this, yet only after permission, the interviews were recorded, making it possible to transcribe the conversations word for word. By doing so, only the information truly given is analysed, and no assumptions are to be made. After creating the written version of the interviews, using F4 Transkript, the transcripts were coded with the use of Atlas.Ti. The code scheme constructed for this process can be found in the results section. At the end, the 7 interviews coded in the beginning were coded again, in order to make sure that the same line was followed throughout the process of analyzing.

When coding and interpreting the transcript of the interviews, the risk of misinterpretation arises. To tackle this as much as the time frame for this research allows, a the earlier mentioned peer performed the same actions randomly to two interviews. As a result, a comparison could be made, followed by a discussion on how to interpret. No major disagreements were found there.

3.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations are important to acknowledge in this research. As there are participants involved in this study, efforts in order to provide a safe and protected environment for the respondents need to be made. This, so that confidential conversation can take place without risk of privacy issues afterwards. Especially in this gender related study, were potentially sensitive motives underlie the location choice of the interviewed women, privacy or safety issues should not be neglected. Therefore, all interviewed participants remain anonymous. In the invitation email, as well as before the start of the interview, the respondent was informed that the gathered data would only be used for this research purpose, and that none of the transcripts will become publicly available. The same holds for the recordings of the interview. These will be stored by the Thesis supervisor dr. A.E. Brouwer in the secured RUG repository for the appropriate period and afterwards deleted.

Positionality

Another issue to be acknowledged is that of positionality. Positionality is defined as ‘the perspective shaped by the [researchers] race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and other identities’ (Mullings, 1999, p337). Lata (2021) refers to this as the difference between outsiders and insiders, in relation to the researched community. In the context of this study, the insider- or outsider role depends on the subject, yet should not be neglected. As this study is related to gender studies, it is important to mention the matter that the respondents were interviewed by a female researcher, potentially affecting the circumstances under which the interview takes place. The same holds for the fact that the research is introduced as that of an ‘economic geographer’, potentially being of influence on the given answers.

3.5 Limitations

Upfront, there are some limitations to this study as a result of choices made during the gathering of the information. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that the interviews were held in Dutch, whereas the results and conclusions are written in English here. As a result, there is a risk of statements getting lost in translation. The choice to have the conversation in Dutch was based on the idea that people can speak more freely and easily in their native language, which is assumed to be more important.

Since the interviews have a semi-structured nature and follow-up questions were sometimes not necessary when respondents gave very detailed answers, not every in-depth question was asked to every respondent. This led to certain questions being only asked to ten of eleven respondents, whereas other questions are asked to every respondent. The same holds for time limits during the interviews. Respondents were often too busy to have a conversation longer than 30 minutes, and even though not all questions were asked, interviews sometimes needed to finish early in order to keep it under 30 minutes.

Body language is another limitation that should be taken into account as limitation to the research method. Sometimes the respondent reacts to a gender related question by giggling, laughing, or making a gender related joke. In a human conversation, as the researcher, it is very tempting to laugh along, which can sometimes be seen as guiding or leading the conversation somewhere. Whereas this is not intentional or even accidentally, it should not be neglected as limitation to the research style.

Previously mentioned interviewer biases are limitations to the study as well, however rather inevitable.

Chapter 4: Results & Discussion

4.1 Data overview

For this study, a total of 17 interviews have been conducted of which 14 consisted of user respondents and 3 of providers that have a managerial or decision-making position within the co-working locations. Table 5 shows a detailed overview of the respondents. Added to that, figure 6 gives more insight into the distribution of the co-working spaces, locations, roles and meeting types regarding the interviews.

Nr.	Co-working space	Location	Role	Employment	Meeting type	Date
1	GoodPlace2Work	Rotterdam	Provider	N/A	In person	01-06-2022
2	GoodPlace2Work	Rotterdam	Provider	N/A	In person	01-06-2022
3	GoodPlace2Work	Rotterdam	User	Employee	In person	01-06-2022
4	GoodPlace2Work	Rotterdam	User	Self-employed	In person	01-06-2022
5	GoodPlace2Work	Rotterdam	User	Self-employed	In person	01-06-2022
6	GoodPlace2Work	Rotterdam	User	Self-employed	In person	01-06-2022
7	GoodPlace2Work	Rotterdam	User	Self-employed	In person	01-06-2022
8	HashtagWorkmode	Groningen	User	Self-employed	Video call	14-06-2022
9	HashtagWorkmode	Amersfoort	User	Employee	Video call	16-06-2022
10	HashtagWorkmode	Amersfoort	User	Self-employed	Video call	16-06-2022
11	HashtagWorkmode	Rotterdam	User	Self-employed	Video call	16-06-2022
12	HashtagWorkmode	Rotterdam	User	Self-employed	Video call	20-06-2022
13	HashtagWorkmode	Amersfoort	User	Self-employed	Video call	20-06-2022
14	HashtagWorkmode	Groningen	User	Self-employed	Video call	21-06-2022
15	HashtagWorkmode	Rotterdam	Provider	N/A	Phone call	27-06-2022
16	HashtagWorkmode	Groningen	User	Self-employed	In person	28-06-2022
17	HashtagWorkmode	Rotterdam	User	Self-employed	Video call	08-07-2022

Table 5. Overview of respondents: Key characteristics

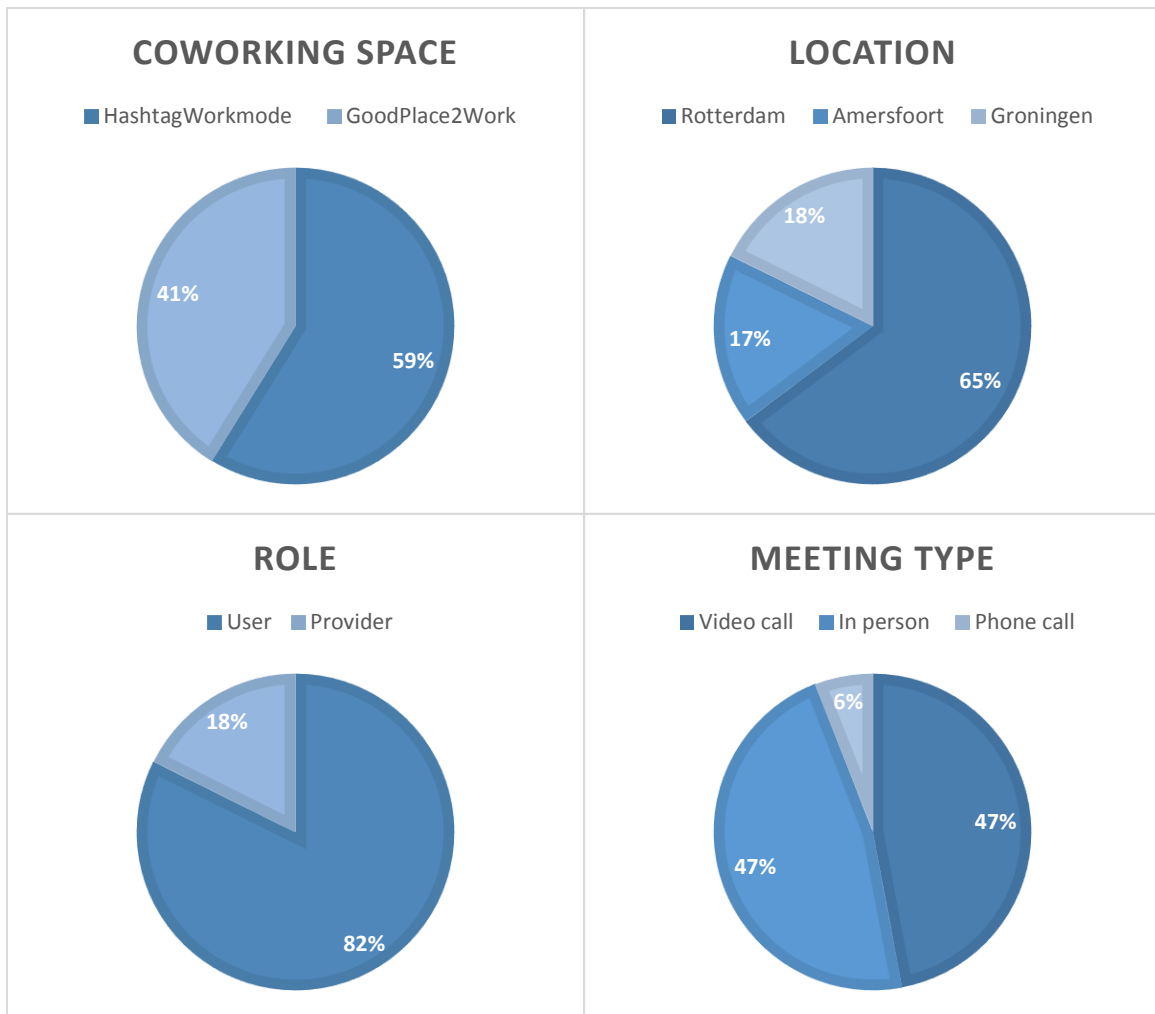


Figure 5. Distribution of key interview characteristics

This chapter on the results follows the line of the literature review, the interview guide, and the coding scheme accordingly. Since the first question of the interview was the same in every interview, being 'Who are you, what do you do for a living, and why are you doing that wherever you are doing that?', the first section of this chapter will be focussing on the users and their preferences. After this, more depth is sought to topics and preferences that were not 'top of mind', with the use of main themes and follow-up questions. However, when these deeper levels of motives, such as the main themes regarding female-only aspects, were given as 'top of mind'-answer straight away, this is mentioned specifically. In order to analyse the transcripts, the code scheme as presented by table 6 is used.

1	The users
1.1	Employment type
1.2	Firms using co-working to share expenses, networking, stimulating creativity
1.3	Rural / Urban / Semi-urban
1.4	Sector
1.5	Gender in relation to co-working
2	User preferences
2.1	Focus on rental costs
2.2	Work-environment based important determinants for location choice
2.3	Inside/Outside home environment
2.4	Social interaction
3	Value gained from a co-working environment
3.1	Accessibility / Flexibility
3.2	Collaboration / Networking
3.3	Openness
3.4	Community / Events + training
3.5	Sustainability
4	Career Advancement in Women-only Networks
4.1	Essential networks
4.2	Role of men in networks
4.3	Feeling of male-domination
4.4	Feeling of male-privilege
4.5	Safe haven
4.6	'Mothers'-meetings / Crab's bucket / Criticism / Prejudice
5	Women empower women
5.1	Inspiration
5.2	Role Models

Table 6. Coding scheme for analysing the transcripts

4.2 Users

Self-employed / Employee

The distribution of self-employed workers and employees is skewed. Due to the fact that some users have more than one business, the amount of businesses does not align with the amount of respondents. However, only businesses of which their activities take place in the co-working space are considered in the results. In total, the activities of 21 businesses are present among the interviewed users. Of these 21 businesses, 19 were the user's own enterprises (90%). Only in 2 cases (10%), the respondent indicated that she pursued business activities as an employee of another firm.

As in line with the association by Parrino (2015), the sample consists mainly of self-employed professionals. Whereas there are employees in the sample, these employees are partly self-employed as well. It can even be said that all respondents pursue activities from their own businesses in the co-working space.

One of the providers answered the question on attracting businesses to their co-working space by indicating that this does not align with their policy and vision. Whereas Tremblay and Scaillerez (2020) argue businesses' opportunities to share expenses for the purpose of networking, exchanging, collaboration and the stimulation of creativity, the policy at the market leader in female-only co-working spaces is to not allow more than three users of one organization at once. According to this provider, their motive is to find women who are alone, willing to find matches with new people. In

their expectations, organizations with employees would form their own small circle. They hope to create a safety net, which only happens when users do not know each other beforehand.

The majority of the interviewed users live close to, or in the city the co-working space is location. Travel times of over 30 minutes were not mentioned, yet the providers claim to attract women from places further away. These women are however not present in the sample.

Sector

Figure 6 shows the distribution of represented sectors among the respondents. In addition, the distribution per sector is presented in figure 7, since in all cases the businesses only fall in one or two categories within the sector. This detailed perspective prevents from drawing a distorted picture. This is for example the case when looking at the ICT-sector and the sector of 'Technology, production and construction' in which the businesses lean more towards creative professions than the sector implies.

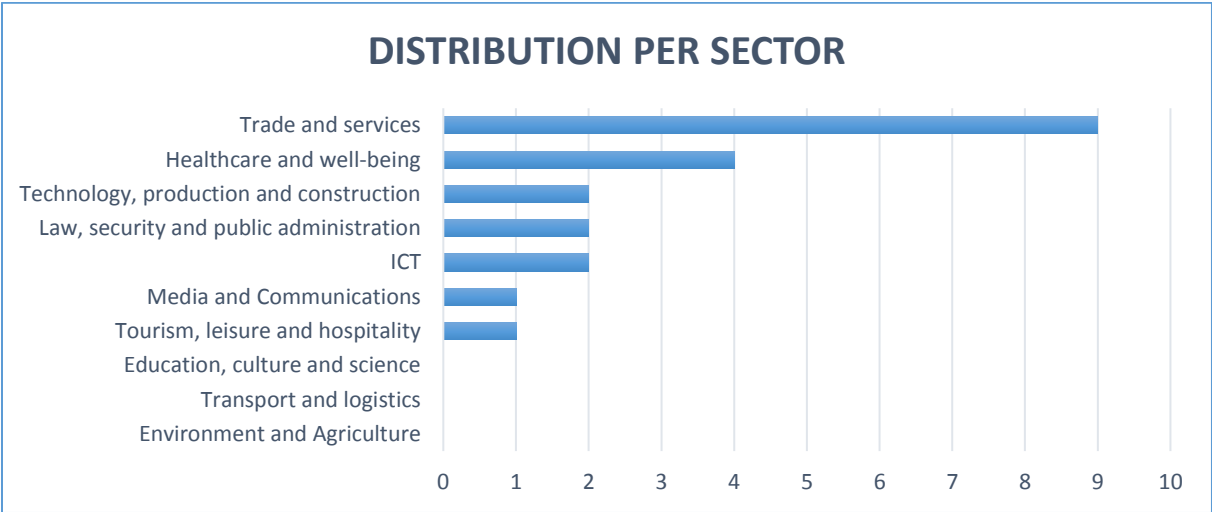


Figure 6. Distribution of businesses per sector

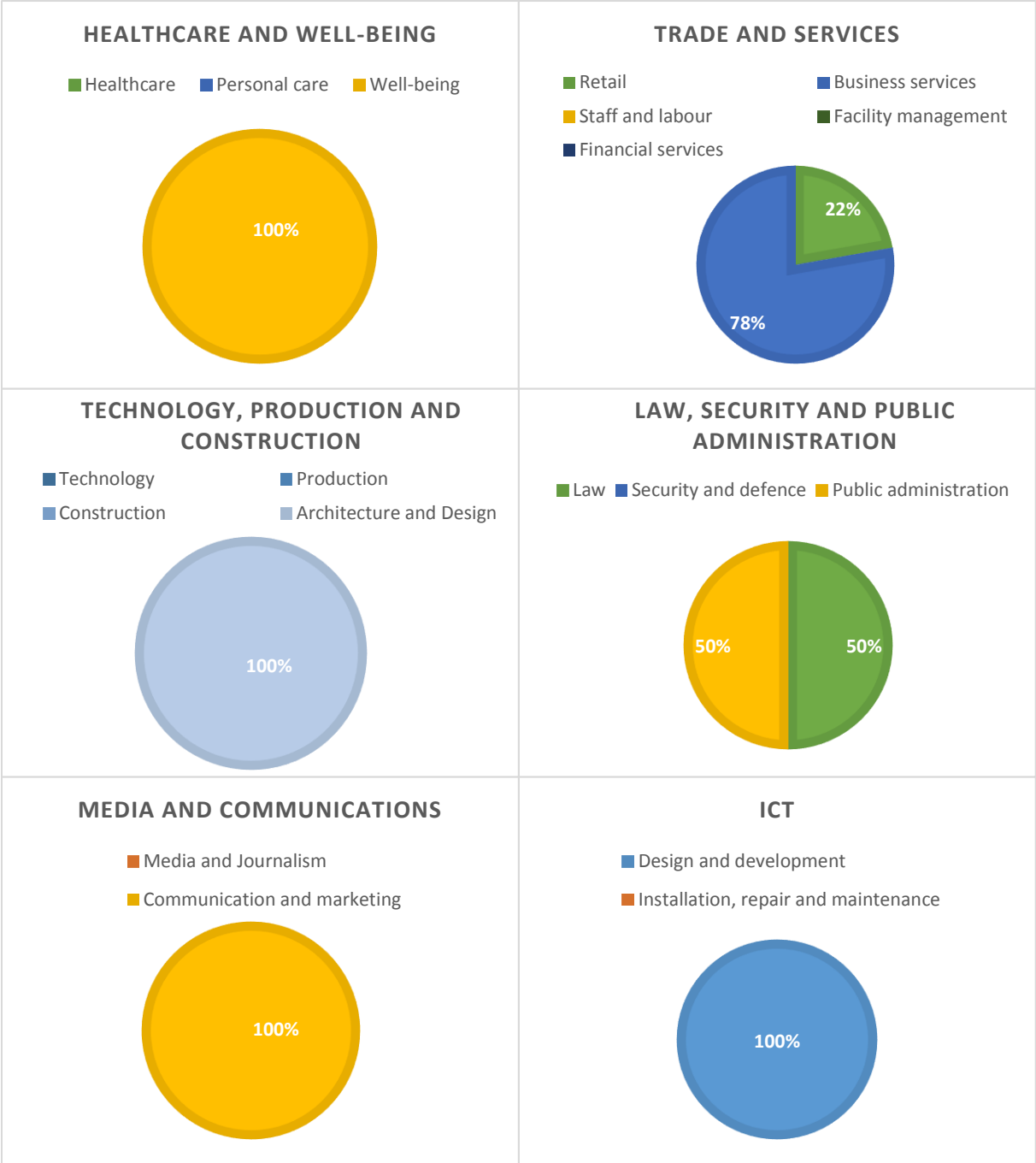


Figure 3. Distribution of businesses per sub-sector

When looking at overrepresentation of the sectors ‘new technologies and digital activities, communication and writing, and creation’ as researched by Tremblay and Scailerez (2020), this can be found in this sample. Professions like graphic designer, virtual assistant, interior designer, influencer and marketer are all part of the sample. However, another business type, that of coaching and personal development is strongly represented as well. Many interviews mention the large amount of coaches in the co-working space. Half of the 14 interviewed users, added by one of the providers, pursue some form of coaching as part of their business activities or are focussing their business activities on one’s well-being. This human health, as considered a female-dominated industry by (Mroczek-Dąbrwoska and Gawel (2020) was expected to be less fitting the work style of a co-working space, which is clearly

not the case. However, it turns out that the almost all users fall in either the first category, being an industry well-fitting the co-working concept where women are expected to be well-represented, or a considered female-dominated industry potentially not fitting co-working. No major surprising results are found here.

4.3 Co-working related aspects

User preferences

Whereas the expectation from the literature was that users of the co-working spaces strongly take rental costs into account in their location decision choice, this is clearly not the case for users of female-only co-working spaces in the sample. In contrast to 47% of the respondents in the Deskmag survey (2012), none of the respondents gave rental costs as ‘top of mind’-answer to the question on why they work where they work. No answers indicating that the rental costs are the main reason to choose the location, were given. However, after questioning whether or not it was a consideration, this image shifted partly. Since the businesses are often small businesses, the owners have to take the costs in mind, even though it is not their main concern in the location decision.

In 7 of the 14 interviews with users, the topic of money and rental costs was not discussed. In the cases where it was asked to elaborate on rental costs, it became visible that 3 of the women mention that the place cannot be too expensive, otherwise they had chosen another location, other office type, or the kitchen table. Another respondent mentions flexibility versus costs, where flexibility is more important than costs. One respondent sees the costs as threshold to commit to the community, and therefore to the entire atmosphere in the co-working space.

One of the three providers was asked to tell more about the rental costs and choices made in the determination of the price. Their first priority is to cover their fixed charges. However their social purpose comes out clearly when the provider explained how they are able to help women, as long as it is financially responsible, in offering for example deferral during the pandemic. One of their goals is therefore to promote financial independence for the women who work there. This is in contrast to the provider of other co-working spaces, who mentioned that, even though they have their social values, they are not a charity and they are profit driven.

“Costs are always important. That you are able to afford it, and that it is not too expensive. However, it being more or less expensive was not the reason for me to change my work location.”

More physical characteristics, as researched by Hartog et al. (2018) are mentioned in different amounts, and are therefore presented by figure 8. The times the answers in the top ten physical characteristics, added by a workplace outside of home, atmosphere and social interactions by Weijs-Perrée et al. (2019) were mentioned as “top-of-mind”-answer by respondents are counted and shown below.

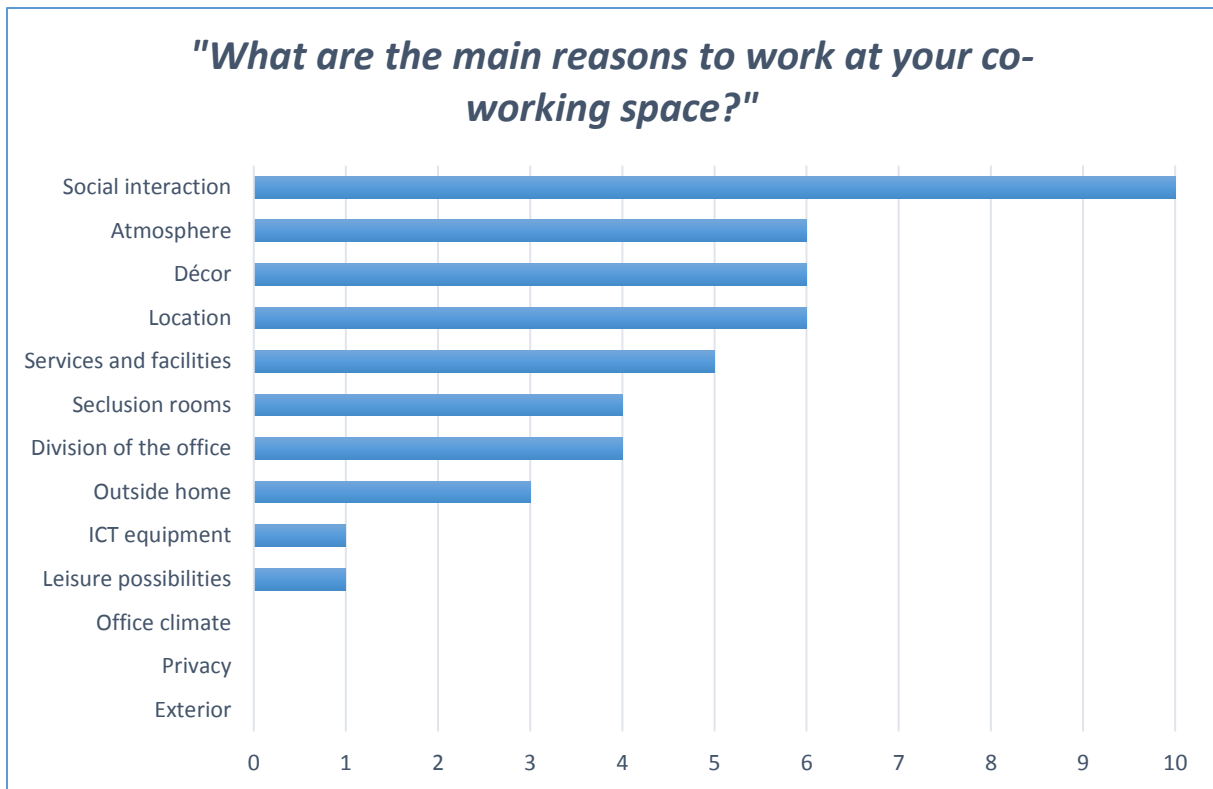


Figure 8. 'Top-of-mind'-reasons to work at the co-working space

As in line with the study by Weijs-Perrée (2021), social interaction and atmosphere or dynamics are often mentioned characteristics. Whereas working outside of home is a finding in that study as well, it came not to the surface of 'top-of-mind'-answer in these interviews. However, the follow-up question regarding this theme revealed that it was an important factor, which will be elaborated later on. When looking at the study by Hartog et al. (2018), similar topics are found relevant in this study, as décor, location, services and facilities, seclusion room and the division of the office are all mentioned in the 14 interviews. In line, office climate and privacy are less important.

Three characteristics, not mentioned in the previous studies, are added to the motives by the respondents, and are presented in the graph below (figure 9). These are considered more a value gained from working at the location than a preference of working there, and are therefore elaborated later on.

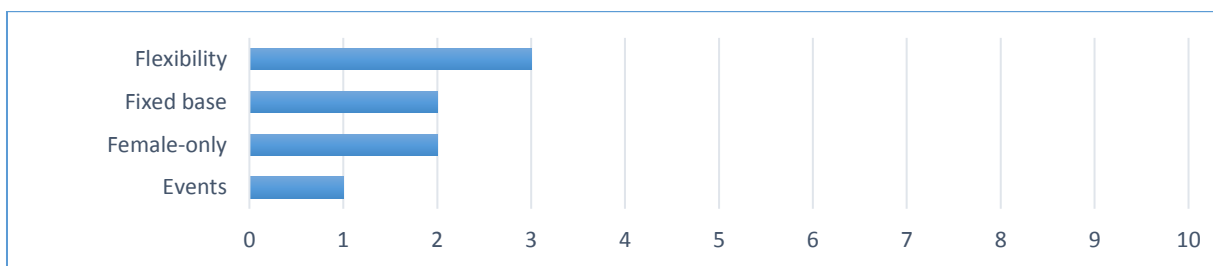


Figure 9. Additions to 'Top-of-mind'-reasons to work at the co-working space

The notion by Remøy and Van der Voordt (2013) that the organization's sector influences preferences, and that the creative industry prefers a flexible layout with meeting spaces, shared areas and a representative interior for their organization could potentially explain the structure of figure 8. Most of the women in the sample work in creative industries, and these characteristics are all present at the top half of the graph.

“It needs to have enough spaces to meet. It needs to be a workplace that invites to engage in business activities in different ways. So the variety of possible ways to meet and have a conversation, that is what I find important at a co-working space”

When looking at the preferred lay-out of the co-working space, secluded rooms or meeting rooms are often mentioned. Since a large part of the sample, 7 women, describes itself as coach (or a synonym to that), users find the ability to see and meet clients at the location very important. This also holds for 3 users in other professions that find it a plus to be able to invite customers to their location. However, this is not something they think of straight away, as secluded rooms are only mentioned as ‘top-of-mind’-answer 4 times.

“There need to be enough meeting rooms, because everyone is on phone calls and is talking all day. So that you are able to invite people over and have the appointment there.”

In order to fully understand the function of the co-working space to the users, a questions is asked regarding the use of the co-working space, either as a replacement or a complement to working from home. The answers to this questions are presented by figure 10.

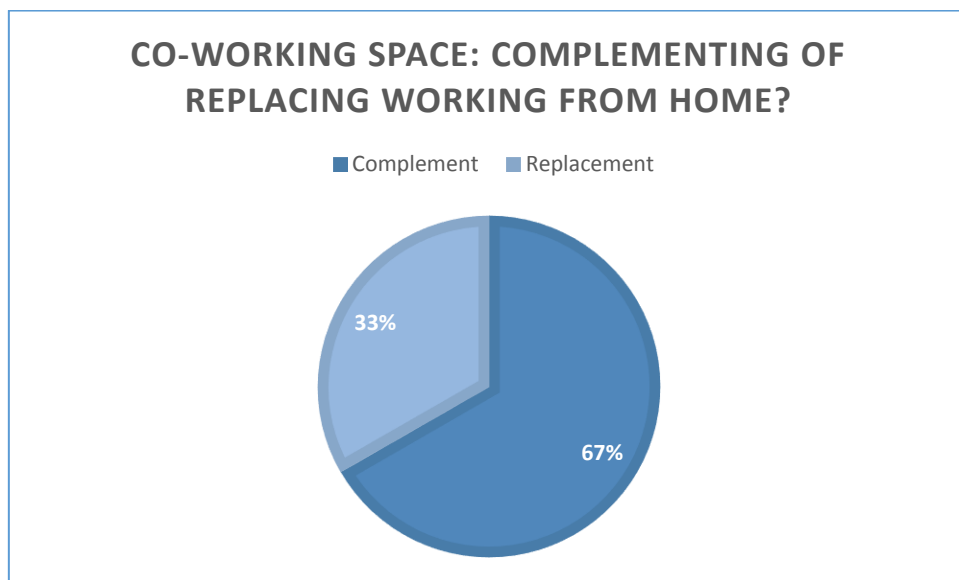


Figure 10. Distribution of answers to the question 'Do you consider the work environment as a complementing or replacing working from home?'

Elaborations on this question gave a strong image to how the women perceive the function of a co-working space in relation to their work environment at home. As several reasons were given more than once, the explanations to why women choose to either work or do not work at home are presented in figure 11.

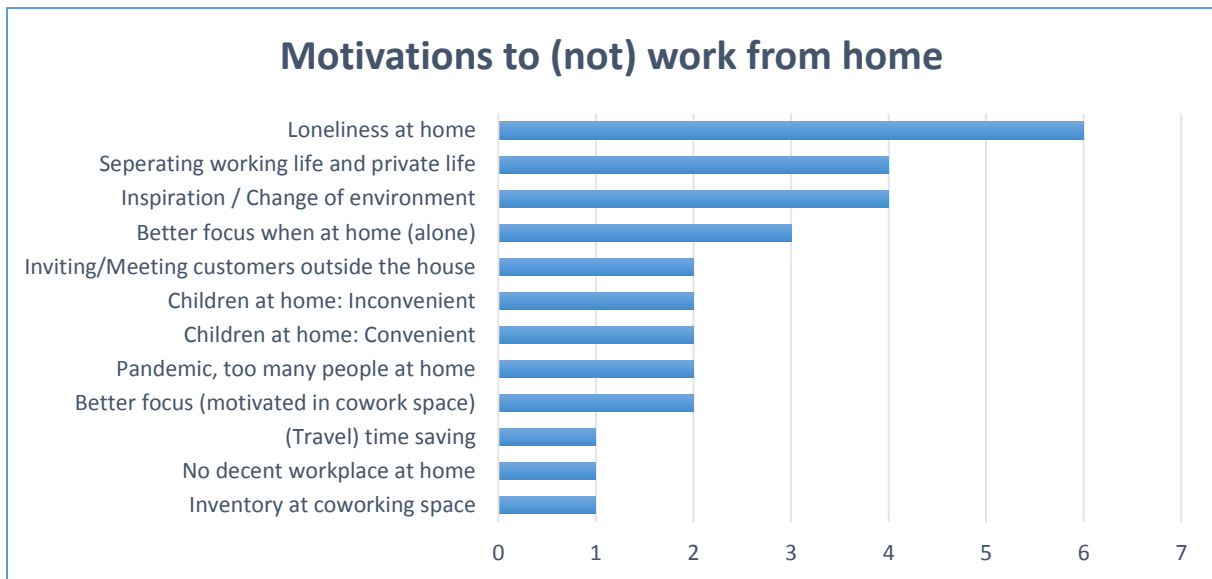


Figure 11. Motivations to (not) work from home

These motives are partly similar to the expectations from previous studies based on general co-working spaces. Fuzi et al. (2014) acknowledge that self-employed professionals are increasingly looking for a workplace outside of their homes because of the better work- and personal life balance, as well as of feelings of loneliness. As Deskmag (2015) adds the answering to these feelings by mentioning small talk, knowledge sharing and brainstorming, the top three of these results align with previous research.

However, new to this sum of reasons is that of a better focus when at home. 3 out of the 14 women mention that they can do more work when at home, opposed to when surrounded by the women in the co-working space. One respondent even mention to not plan to much work on days when present in the co-working space, due to all the distractions as well as the traveling time there. On the other hand, 2 respondents feel more motivated to focus in the co-working space.

The same contrast is found when looking at the children at home. Whereas two respondents find it convenient to have their children close to their working location at home, others mention it a reason to locate their business activities their home.

“I wasn’t really excited about working at home, all alone. And, to separate working life and private life, keep that balance. I go to work and I go home.”

The most mentioned ‘top-of-mind’-answer is that of social interaction as 10 out of the 14 users named this straight away. Added to that, the follow-up question of ‘Do you have a feeling that there is social interaction here, that is missing elsewhere?’ gave very unambiguous results. Almost all respondents mention that they find a special social interaction at their co-working spaces, where this can mean several different perspectives. For only one respondent, this social interaction is not as important.

Whereas another respondent experiences the contacts in the co-working as casual or fugitive, there are 8 respondents that feel like they are among colleagues, and appreciate their bond with them. Three respondents even name it friendship. They value the social interaction in the form of small talk and fun, mentioned by 6 women. Six women attribute the uniqueness of the social interaction to being among like-minded. In addition, the ability to easily ask around for tips, tricks or opinions is contributing to this unique interaction. Two times, the absence of competition is valued. However,

only two respondents mention that being solely among women contributes to the type of social interaction. Therefore, it is to be questioned whether or not this form of social interaction is a cause of the female-only feature of the co-working space.

“Just the in-the-moment question: Hey, do you mind looking at this for me, what is your opinion? And also, how was your weekend and other small talk.”

Value gained from a co-working environment

Based on the shared core values provided in several types of co-working spaces, as stated by Kwiatkowski and Buczynski (2011), main theme questions regarding accessibility, collaboration, openness, community and business sustainability were asked.

Accessibility as found in flexible rental costs (Sykes, 2014) was often mentioned as important, after asking the importance of flexibility. Three respondents even gave flexibility in terms of rental costs, reservation availability or lease contract options as their ‘top-of-mind’-answer. When asking further into what respondents find valuable about flexibility, multiple answers were given. For 5 respondents, the fact that you can go there any time, and decide the amount of hours yourself, makes them flexible which is appreciated. Two respondents mention the multiple options in rental contracts, fitting their own preferences. Three users indicate that they have either a personal work place, or appreciate the ability to leave their belongings, making them more flexible. For two respondents it is valuable not to have any obligations or commitments, giving a feeling of flexibility. Other answers given once are the extensive reservation system, the fact that there are always enough seats available, and the ability to build up credit when not using the contracted hours.

“I can walk in and say: I’m here to work for a few hours. That is nice.”

The two respondents who claimed it valuable to work without obligations or commitments are typical examples of that Vega and Brennan (2002) name a ‘boundaryless workforce’. This flexibility in contacts, as well as the flexibility in collaboration, has the potential to lead to ‘professional isolation’ as is studied by Bailey and Kurland (2002). Therefore, questions regarding the lack of professional expertise in the co-working space was asked.

Collaboration can be perceived very broadly, as it could entail social interaction as mentioned below, but can also mean networking and reaching cross pollination between businesses in the co-working spaces. Follow-up questions were asked to understand which type of collaboration applied to the co-worker. When looking at the generating of work, nine respondents state that they use the community for either putting out work jobs for the others, or that they sometimes work for their fellow co-workers. Two add to this that they bring their fellow co-worker to the attention of her own clients.

However, once is asked about the co-working space as a network opportunity, six of the fourteen users reveal that networking is not really part of the co-working activities for them. For example, because it is not the right target group or because they already have enough work. On the other hand eight users have a feeling of networking to a certain extent. This reaches from generating customers and promoting each other to potential clients to ventilating about mutual partners/clients, entrepreneurial questions and lifting your product to a higher level using the network.

“I once worked with a copywriter from here. I am considering working with the website builder. I found my coach through this community. So in that sense, a lot of knowledge is shared, for sure.”

When applying the design characteristics by Bouncken et al. (2021) from table 3, a certain openness can be created, which is one of the core values gained from working in a co-working spaces. In the interviews, the ability to ask for tips, tricks and the ability for sparring is often referred to when talking about the openness of the space. The same holds for the place being accessible regarding communication.

Examples of the openness are: the transparency in the community regarding irritation; the fact that everyone is very easily accessible; and a warm first welcome. Especially the function of easily sparring is often mentioned. This is also the case for asking for help with entrepreneurial question, opinions on work or on ventilating issues. The lunching together is often referred to as a good place to do so, but also the open lay-out and the open corridors are considered to be boosters to be open.

“It is not like everyone is sitting on their own island. We lunch together for example. It is more like being colleagues or friends”

Based on the social interaction and openness in previous results, the community value created by an atmosphere with a proper fit between social and material aspects is already partly explained. According to Bednář et al. (2021), education can play a particular influence in this. The form of events, ranging from lectures and workshop to exhibitions and conferences mentioned by Katz et al. (2015) can also be found present in this co-working spaces. Both the providers and the mention such events, yet the offering of events was only once given as a ‘top-of-mind’-answer. On the other hand, the social interaction is often seen as part of the community as well, which is the most given ‘top-of-mind’-answer.

Providers have a very strong vision when explaining their events and workshops. The market-leading female-only co-working space for example offers a yearly event for all users and non-members which is described as a “a network event for women by women, to offer women a stage and role models, matching the vision of self-education and development”, called the Selfmade Summit. Also on a smaller scale, brainstorm sessions and mastermind groups are offered. The same holds for the other co-working space, where the provider organizes monthly knowledge sessions or network lunches where she or other interested users spread their expertise on a certain topic. Whereas not every user suggests to make use of it, all of the respondents gave the impression appreciate the option to learn something new in an accessible way.

Sense of community was not only explained by the events and workshops. Women gave very different answers to why it feels like a community, yet almost every respondent mentioned the word ‘community’, and acknowledge this function of the co-working space. Examples for this are: actively choosing to be part of the network and to choose for each other; being able to use the community platform; a we-feeling instead of being alone; being able to find each other very quickly; and, the feeling of support from the community.

“It is very much together. It is not being alone. A strong we-feeling. We know more about each other than only business-related things.”

As the community has a function to help and educate the members, it has the potential to contribute to the businesses’ performances. As Cheah and Ho (2019) researched, a co-working space not only encourages creative thinking and playfulness, yet also generates ideas of higher quality, helping the tenants to achieve higher levels of innovation. Results confirm this notion partly. In order to determine the relation between the co-working space and the businesses’ financial sustainability, the respondents were asked to answer the following question: ‘Do you have the feeling that a co-working space like this contributes to the financial sustainability of your business?’. The distribution of users who gave either a positive or negative answer to this question are presented in figure 12. below.

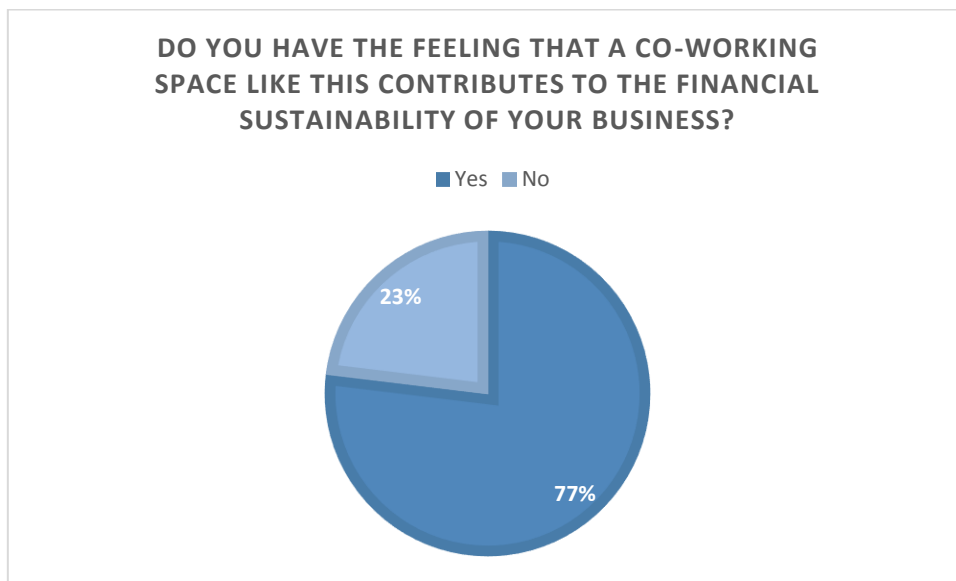


Figure 12. Distribution of visions regarding financial sustainability

For those three respondent that answered this question with no, their reasoning is that they can locate their business elsewhere without losing any benefits. For one respondent it is just the fun that keeps attracts her to the co-working space, whereas the other two do not mind working from home.

The reasons to consider the co-working space essential for financial stability or sustainability are very divergent. Table 7 presents a summary of the given answers.

DO YOU HAVE THE FEELING THAT A CO-WORKING SPACE LIKE THIS CONTRIBUTES TO THE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUR BUSINESS?
<i>"I don't think the network itself provides financial sustainability, but the fact that it is easily accessible to be more vulnerable around your business, does."</i>
<i>"I think it is very essential to go out of your house and work somewhere else."</i>
<i>"On my own, I languish a bit and here I get more discipline, more regularity, and more tendency to make something of it. But also customers."</i>
<i>"Due to the fact that if you get stuck for a while, you can just have a cup of coffee and purge, and you don't really feel like you're on your own"</i>
<i>"I think, as an entrepreneur, you have your blind spots. And you certainly don't have to do it perfectly, but it's just very nice to have an extra pair of eyes watch."</i>
<i>"It contributes, but I would not give it all credits."</i>
<i>"Without them I would have had much less growth."</i>
<i>"That you can make use of each other's knowledge. There is always someone who knows something, or knows someone who knows someone, when I can't figure something out"</i>
<i>"It's essential and a reason I'm there. If I want to grow, perhaps want to outsource things, then these professionals are indispensable. You also get to talk to other people with different insights, which is very important."</i>
<i>"When it comes to pricing, I rely on the advice of the people around me. Who then say, yes this is normal, it's also worth starting because you really deliver something."</i>

Table 7. Elaborations of how a co-working space contributes to financial sustainability

"Without them I would have had much less growth. Even though I always think of myself that I can come very far, together you really go further."

4.4 Female-only related aspects

Whereas the above mentioned aspects to co-working could potentially be influenced by co-working spaces being female-only, those consist mainly of values and characteristics that can be found in co-working space accessible to all people as well. Since only two women gave the co-working space being female-only as their 'top-of-mind'-answer, the first impression of the interviews did not provide a strong reasoning for women choosing such a specific location. However, the follow-up question later on revealed underlying values that confirm the notion that these women chose these location based on this feature. Even more remarkable, in multiple interviews the women did not know how they valued being among women only, until the interview took place. During the interview, their perception changed slightly.

Career Advancement in Women-only Networks

Although the above results show that a large part of the women do not see networking as the main use of the co-working space, this perspective changes when asking about the indispensability of the network created there. Since the literature review reveals the importance of networks for female entrepreneurship, as well as the link to male-entailing networks, it is questioned to what extent these networks are essential for their businesses, but also whether or not men are or should be part of it.

The result on the absence of men in these networks are mixed. Three of the women find the presence of men in networks essential. However, one disagrees by stating that men are not essential, as they are already everywhere. Someone else emphasizes that it is essential to work in women groups more often, as we are not used to such thing anymore, yet women need a sense of sisterhood. Another

remarkable note to make here is that four women suggest not to have chosen to exclude men from these networks purposely, as it was a pure coincidence that this was the policy. Apart from the discussion on whether or not men are essential in networks, the larger majority, at least seven women, does not miss a male voice inside of the network. For example because men are already part of other networks they are in, or men are easily found elsewhere. Three women even mention that, because of the men in other networks, they have to compensate, leading to the choice of a female-only network.

“Male energy is essential in your network. I miss this less than I expected in this co-working space. I make sure that I occasionally see men out here too.”

Added to this discussion, the differences in male and female energy in networking are often brought to discussion in the interviews. Three women feel that, while networking, there is strong tendency to search for work and business generation among own gender group. According to them, men automatically find an easier connection to other men, and the threshold for men to help each other is lower than that of women.

“I have a feeling that men mainly connect with men and women mainly with women.”

To find the perception regarding the reason the exclude men from the networks, it is to be questioned in what way men can be dominating, to reveal what part is left out of the mix. This is interesting on both the networking, but also on the work environment level. Results on whether or not men can be dominant are mixed. Although ten women confirm dominant role, where two women do not see this when it is only one man, four other women disagree with this point of view.

The modes in which men can be dominant differ, whereas it is often about vulnerability or safety, which will be elaborated later on. When looking at the work environment, three respondents feel that the topics, and potentially the level of bonding, would change when men would be part of the environment. Another respondent even claims that the discussion would mute, while someone else expects women to change their attitude towards more masculine characteristics. This is in line with what three other women suggest about manly networking styles, which are more confident or arrogant, resulting in a form of dominance. According to one respondent, the networking atmosphere would however benefit from a certain amount of male dominance, as she finds men more used to and at ease when networking, making it more pleasant to do so for others.

“Men can have a tendency to dominate. I remember a nice conversation with a man, where he – out of the blue – mentions a possibility that he might take over my business”

When discussing the male characteristics that make them potentially dominant in networks, the question on male-privilege was a logical one to ask, as networks at work are often seen as “old boys” networks, and always linked to male privilege (Coleman, 2010), which was found in the literature and therefore expected to be of influence on the results.

However, the women in this sample do not strongly agree or disagree with this link. To the question whether doing business is easier for women, 5 women answered with yes. For two respondents nuance this more, by claiming that it depends on the industry people are active in. Two other respondent

suggests that stating this depends on the way you define success, in which everyone acts on a different level. That men are different, yet not more successful, is answered by two respondents where the female characteristics could be beneficial too. One of them however mentions that female traits make them victim of their own characteristics, as men simply dare and do more.

“Men, in general, get along really well. Women have to take an extra step to deliver the same product.”

An often mentioned part of the female-only co-working spaces by the respondents is the vulnerability and safety that can be found when among the other women. To the question: *‘Does working in a female-only environment make you feel more safe?’* all elaborated on a safe place where vulnerability and insecurities can be shared easily, and referred to more social security feelings. Only two women specially said they feel safer than when with men, yet almost all women gave examples of situation in which they feel safer. Seven of the women mention to feel safer to speak freely about everything, and remarkably almost all mentioned typical female problems regarding monthly cycles as an example. Two women referred to this as being less reluctant in showing vulnerability. The mutual understanding of women was given as reason by three respondents, whereas for one respondent the mutual understanding was found due to being likeminded. In contrast, only two respondents answered to this question that they do not feel more or less safe when among men.

To the question whether or not the same feeling applies to physical safety as well, all respondents answered by mentioning that physical safety is not a problem.

“I do notice that women are very open and willing to be vulnerable on moments that not everything is perfect.”

As mentioned by Perriton (2006), yet also touched upon during the interviews, the concept of female-only co-working spaces sometimes receives criticism. The respondents were asked *‘Do you ever receive criticism when you talk about working in a female-only work environment?’*. Topics regarding criticism such as the crab bucket phenomenon or own preconceptions were asked to elaborate on.

The criticism of ‘mother’s-meetings as described by Perriton (2006) is mentioned by none of the respondents. The crab bucket on the other hand was mentioned twice in the first interviews, after which it became a follow-up question: *‘Do you have a feeling that the phenomenon of a crab bucket takes place in your co-working space?’*. All of the respondents (8x) receiving this question answered with a strong no, where most of the women said that no one sees the other women as competition, and that no one would be harmed by other’s successes or by helping others. Therefore, there would be no use in taking each other down.

Providers agree with this notion. One mentions that she prefers referring to the situation as ‘the popcorn principle’ where “we put time and effort in each other, and we help each other pop out of the bucket together”. Another suggests that this is part of creating a safe environment, where there is “someone at every location, a point of contact, who is there four days a week. That person is selected based on certain traits” in order to make sure that such a culture cannot exist.

Six of the users, as well as all three providers, experience criticism on the concept of female-only co-working. In most cases, this is based on it being ‘discrimination of men’ (5 times), but other mentioned critical notes are: it being ridiculous or nonsense (2x); it being whining from women (2x); not

understanding the reason why; talking belittling on women gathering together, it only consisting of lesbians; and, menstruation cycles being the only topic of talk.

Remarkable in the results is that many of the women had their own preconceptions before joining the co-working space, creating some sort of reluctance or resistance beforehand. Five users had an expectation of the space being frumpy, or a dull ladies club. One even claims the female-only part a reason to not go there in the first place. Some women find it double sided, where they appreciate the women around, but also finding it rather non-inclusive.

However Coleman (2010) found that women-only networks generally not hold a very feminist stance. This aligns with results from the interviews as 5 respondents made sure not to be part of any feminist movement.

“At first I thought, only women... Because that could be hen’s coop sometimes, with a lot cackling. That I really don’t like.”

Women empower women

In order for women to empower each other, a certain amount of inspiration is essential. This can be in the form of role models as presented in the literature review, and by general inspiration on a more daily, or task specific level. The latter is more visible in the given answers, as almost every respondent perceives a level of general inspiration in their co-working space. The link or relation to the female-only part of inspiration is however less present. This inspiration level is sought by asking the question ‘*To what extent do you inspire each other in the co-working space?*’, where the degree of inspiration was an answer to the first ‘top of mind’-question in none of the interviews.

The way in which The Global Monitor (2021) suggests that women could be inspired, especially by other women, into joining entrepreneurship and to start more business, turns out to be less applicable to the researched co-working spaces. Whereas a few women mention the inspiration to be essential to the sustainability of their business, almost all women in the sample already have their businesses and are not assumed a target group of women who need to be inspired into joining more entrepreneurship.

One woman mentioned the inspiration from such positions necessary in order to enable others, not in the position, to join. However, most women considered the inspiration gained from the co-working space as celebrating successes together, as well as asking others for tips and tricks, to pursue their activities. Inspiration is here understood in learning from each other and seeing each other thrive, instead of inspiring into new business ideas.

“Everyone has something special here, so special, that it inspires each other. Everyone has something really unique. You start to think out of your own box.”

To the question ‘*Are there any role models for you in this co-working space?*’, the answers are very mixed. Whereas there are some clear yes- and no-answers, often the term of role model was interpreted very broad. The dispersion of the (simplified) given answers is shown by figure 13 below.

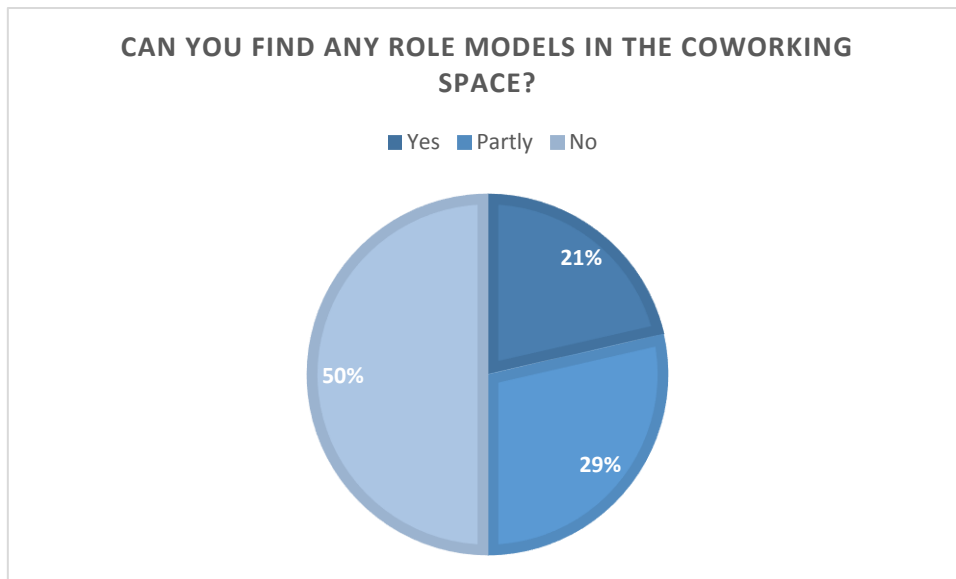


Figure 43. Distribution of visions regarding role models

7 users cannot find their role models within the community, yet three users do mention a form of inspiration without a role model function. On the other hand, 3 out of the 14 users confirm with a strong yes that role models are present in the co-working spaces. One even claims her function as a role model to be one of the drivers to locate her business at the co-working space. In a more broad term, where the co-working space itself is seen as the role model, 4 respondents answer to this question with neither a yes nor a no, but confirm a role model function to be found in the co-working space.

Two respondents consider the provider of the co-working space as a good role model. This is in line with the provider's perspective, where two out of the three providers mention to stimulate and create the functions of role model, either by being one or by offering a stage to other potential role models, i.e. by using events and social media within the community.

The question on role models reveals in most cases the respondent's perception of a good role model. This is mostly in line with that of a 'mumpreneur' by Lewis (2014), instead of the more successful 'entrepreneur', as the aim is to live life similar to that of male colleagues yet also with connecting this to the women's traditional characteristics (Table 4). In summarizing the given answers to this main theme, it becomes visible that strong role models show courage in their business and are not afraid to take risks or to grow, which shows a similarity with more masculine traits. However, this is very often combined with the ability to show vulnerability and struggle, setting strong boundaries, and be a caring and binding factor to the community.

"Everyone is a role model in their own way, without them even knowing. But everyone has an ability. I can name something for everyone, at least one thing that inspires me, so their power affects me, for sure."

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The lack of understanding on female-only co-working, combined with trends regarding the digital transformation and shifting work environment preferences, and added by the growing interest in female entrepreneurship led to investigating such third places. Due to the scarcity of literature on this topic, an exploratory study is conducted in order to reveal determinants leading female entrepreneurs into locating their business activities to a female-only co-working space. The research questions regarding the characteristics of these workers, and the circumstances under which this decision can be made are visible in this research.

Results show that expectations from the literature partly align with the conducted interviews, yet there are some exceptions. As expected, mostly self-employed workers use the female-only co-working spaces. However, surprisingly, a provider of a co-working space indicated that firms locating their employees at their co-working space is not in line with their policy and vision. Based on previous literature, this is different compared to the uses of general co-working spaces. As for sectors, it is remarkable that one particular business type, that of coaching (partly health-care related) is strongly visible in the sample.

Another notable result is that, even though part of the consideration, rental costs were never the main reason of biggest concern for the female entrepreneurs when choosing the co-working space. This is different from the expectations, where this was ought to be the biggest motive for the location choice. What users do find most important are the social interaction, atmosphere, décor and location.

Pointedly, only two women in the sample indicated that they chose the co-working space because of the female-only aspects. Whereas the users later elaborated on their underlying values confirming the notion that the aspect is appreciated, the first impression in the interviews not often provided a strong reasoning for women to choose such a gender limited location. Almost a third of the women even mentioned that this feature was a coincidence, where excluding men is not fully a choice. On the other hand, almost all women gave examples during the conversation in which they revealed that they feel safer in sharing female problems or to speak freely about everything.

When looking at inspiration and the function of role models, this was expected to be of large relevance, due to the strong potential that lies there for female entrepreneurship. However, the inspiration to join entrepreneurship and to start more businesses turned out to be less applicable to the researched co-working spaces. Inspiration takes place in the form of celebrating successes together, as well as asking others for tips and tricks, yet only one fifth of the women can find role models within the community. On the contrary, half of the women does not have this feeling.

The third research question, in which the providers are explained, can be answered as well. Based on the three interviews with providers of two co-working spaces, both a picture of a profit-oriented and a more society-oriented organization are drawn. Whereas both organizations have different strategies, expectations from literature align strongly with their vision. The strongest examples of this are: 1) for the society-oriented location, the flexibility in rental costs in order to ensure financial stability and independence for its users, and 2) the Selfmade Summit, an event in which the creation of role models with the use of female-only workshops and courses is central to the community.

This study provides implications for further research. Whereas this exploratory research touched upon the characteristics and motives of women using female-only co-working spaces, the proper comparison between general and female-only co-working spaces is yet to be made. The same holds for the performances of the businesses using female-only co-working spaces compared to those that do not. It is rather unclear to what extent the female-only co-working space can contribute to the

business or to the women's positions in labour market. Secondly, this research take place in co-working space in the Netherlands, where female entrepreneurship is more everyday's business than it is in less developed countries. Therefore, the potential of gendered co-working spaces in countries with different cultural views regarding female entrepreneurship could also be beneficial for government's purposes of entrepreneurial innovation and growth. The more societal function of female-only co-working spaces in strengthening women's rights is something to be investigated as well.

Added to the implications for further research, Luo and Chan (2021) also came up with an advice for policy makers, that is in line with the conclusions of this study. They suggest that integrating a "gender lens" in the implementation of spatial entrepreneurial activities, such as co-working spaces, is necessary (p.7). Consideration should be given to different impacts on genders and undermining structural barriers to women using such co-working locations.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guide Users

<i>First question:</i> <i>Who are you, what do you do for a living, and why are you doing that wherever you are doing that?</i>			
Topic	Subtopic	Main themes	Questions / Follow-up questions
Co-working aspects	The Users	Employment type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you self-employed/ freelancer or employed?
		Sector / Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What sector are you active in? - Do you feel like the concept of co-working fits your sector's activities?
	User Preferences	Focus on rental costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent did you take the costs into account in your search for a co-working space? - Did the costs influence your choice?
		Work environment based determinants for location choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you find important when choosing a co-working place? - What features made the difference? <p>Examples: location, exterior, division of rooms, decor, services and facilities, secluded rooms, sport facilities, ICT, privacy, office climate</p>
		Inside/Outside of home environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you also work from home? - Why not solely from home? / Why not? - Do you consider the co-working space as complementary to working from home, or as a substitute to working from home?
		Social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent are you able to find a social interaction here, that you cannot find elsewhere? - On what level? - Why is that of added value? - What can you or your business gain from this?
		Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there different types of rental contracts? - Is that important for you? - Why is that important?
	Value gained from a co-working environment	Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you have the feeling that you are working with colleagues with whom you can spar? - Do you suffer from professional isolation? (where you miss the specific social need and support that suits your work within the co-working space?) - Do you use the expertise of the people around you? - Network level / Collegiate level?
		Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When choosing the co-working space, did you consider the layout of the location? - What did you find important in this? <p>Examples: design, functional areas, facilities, digital resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you consider it as an accessible atmosphere here?
		Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any possibilities for workshops or trainings?

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are these women-only? - Do you use it? - Why is this appealing to you?
		Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you have a feeling that this co-working space contributes to sustainable entrepreneurship or stability? - Would this be the same without this co-working space?
Female-only aspects	Career advancement in women-only networks	Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you feel like forming networks here? - Do you think these networks, being solely with women, are essential to your entrepreneurial success? - Is the network here large enough?
		Men in networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any men in this network? - How important are men in a network? - Are they essential? - Do you feel like you miss a male voice in here?
		Male-dominated network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can men be dominant in a network? - How? - Do you feel like going to this co-working place decreases this effect?
		Male privilege	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is it easier for men to achieve entrepreneurial success? - Why do you think that? - Do you feel like going to this co-working place decreases this effect?
		Safe Haven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you feel safe here? - What makes you feel safe? - Would this change when men would be allowed?
		'Mothers'-meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you ever receive criticism because you are part of a female-only network? - Do you have any examples? - How do you feel about this? - Do you feel isolated from men? - The idea of a crab's bucket, do you think that is present here?
	Women empower women	Inspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you feel inspired by the women in this co-working space? - Do you have any examples? - Do you feel like you inspire others?
		Role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you find any role models within this co-working space? - What makes them appealing to you? - In what way can you be a role model to others here?

Appendix B: Interview Guide Providers

<i>First question:</i> <i>Why is this co-working space accessible for women only?</i>			
Topic	Subtopic	Main themes	Questions / Follow-up questions
Co-working aspects	The Users	Employment type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What type of users do you have? Self-employed, employees or both? - Are you looking for a certain mix?
		Firms using co-working for employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What businesses are suitable for sending employees to your co-working spaces?
		Rural/Urban/Semi-urban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where do your users come from? - What is your target group?
		Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you search for a certain sector mix? - Which sectors are fitting the concept of co-working? - Do you change the layout to the sectors present?
		Gender in relation to co-working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you feel like women are better or less fitting the concept of co-working than men? - Why are women the focus?
	User Preferences	Focus on rental costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you find important when determining the price?
		Work environment based determinants for location choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are important considerations when offering a work place? <p>Examples: location, exterior, division of rooms, decor, services and facilities, secluded rooms, sport facilities, ICT, privacy, office climate</p>
		Inside/Outside of home environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you consider the co-working space as complementary to working from home, or as a substitute to working from home? - How do you act on that?
		Social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent are you able to find a social interaction here, that you cannot find elsewhere? - On what level? - How do you stimulate this?
	Value gained from a co-working environment	Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there different types of rental contracts? - How do improve your accessibility? - What is the role of location? - Why is this space not accessible for men?
		Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you have the feeling that users are able to spar? - Do you stimulate this? - How?
		Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you consider it as an accessible atmosphere here? - How do you stimulate this? <p>Examples: design, functional areas, facilities, digital resources</p>

		Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any possibilities for workshops or trainings? - Are these women-only? - Do women use it?
		Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you have a feeling that this co-working space contributes to sustainable entrepreneurship or stability? - Would this be the same without this co-working space?
Female-only aspects	Career Advancement in Women-only Networks	Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you feel like forming networks here? - Do you think these networks, being solely with women, are essential to entrepreneurial success? - Is the network here large enough?
		Men in networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any men in this network? - How important are men in a network? - Are they essential?
		Male-dominated network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can men be dominant in a network? - How? - Do you feel like going to this co-working place decreases this effect?
		Male privilege	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is it easier for men to achieve entrepreneurial success? - Why do you think that? - Do you feel like going to this co-working place decreases this effect?
		Safe Haven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you feel safe here? - What makes you feel safe? - Would this change when men would be allowed? - Do you actively try to create safety?
		'Mothers'-meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you ever receive criticism because you are part of a female-only network? - Do you have any examples? - How do you feel about this? - Do you feel isolated from men? - The idea of a crab's bucket, do you think that is present here?
	Women empower women	Inspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do you feel inspired by the women in this co-working space? - Do you have any examples? - Do you feel like you inspire others?
		Role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you find any role models within this co-working space? - What makes them appealing to you? - In what way can you be a role model to others here?
Providers		Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would you describe your organization as profit oriented or societal oriented? - Why and how did you choose this location?