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Precarity and Asymmetries in Media Production:
How Freelancers Experience their Working Conditions as
Users of Coworking Spaces

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Abstract

This master's thesis investigates how freelancers experience job precarity and asymmetrical power relations which have been established within the media production industry as well as the relevance and value of coworking spaces providing a workspace with the possibilities of knowledge sharing, networking and community building, as a framework in order to challenge their precarious working conditions. Furthermore, the research aims at examining the participants' experiences in a qualitative manner to explore those rather new concepts of freelancing and coworking spaces as previous research has failed to address the individual experiences of how freelancers deal with the nature of work in the media production industry.

Situated in the context of the structural changes within media production towards a project-based nature of work and the decrease of permanent employment, freelancers are increasingly facing precarious working conditions such as uncertainty and instability.

Applying the theory of structure and agency as theoretical framework, it is discussed to what extent freelancers are influenced by the established structures, rules and norms within the media production industry and how their agency is enabled within these structures.

Using a qualitative research approach, this study is based on an investigation of the experiences and knowledge of eleven freelancers working in the media production industry and who are users of coworking spaces by the means of semi-structured interviews. In summary, this thesis reveals that the majority of the participants experience asymmetrical power relations and precarity to a high degree. Furthermore, freelancers who seek for communities in order to challenge their precarious working conditions, experience coworking spaces as highly valuable concept in order to increase the possibilities for their individual agency. Having investigated those rather novel concepts, this thesis serves as a starting point for examining further research on freelancers' individual experiences of their working conditions.

Keywords: Freelancing, Media Production Industry, Coworking Spaces, Structuration Theory, Structure and Agency, Job Precarity, Asymmetrical Power Relations

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Preface

Studying Media and Communication studies means discussing emerging phenomena in the media industry, exploring different types of media and all these interesting platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and so forth. Then why choosing a topic for this master's thesis that at first glance seems a bit ambivalent or even pessimistic? For me, studying Media and Communication studies also means to critically examine the constantly shifting landscape of the media industry with both their positive and negative aspects. Often, the focus either lies on the organisations within the media industries or the consumers of the media products. I want to focus on those who do not find protection within the structures of big media organisations and who are left to rely on themselves: freelancers who work in the media production industry.

I have been working as a freelancer for years. Though, what you will read later in this thesis, it would be regarded as *false* freelancer – a freelancer who would only work for one employer, but would not be employed with a contract. This is only one aspect of evidence for the structural changes within the media industry which increase the precarious working conditions for freelancers. Therefore, the overall aim of this thesis was to explore how *real* freelancers experience their working conditions and the labour market situation within the media production industry as users of coworking spaces. Accordingly, this thesis is dedicated to tackle unawareness and therefore to create awareness and more recognition for freelancers who on one hand have greatest flexibility and freedom in their work, but on the other hand have to face and deal with a sometimes highly precarious nature of work.

I would like to thank all of the participants from all over the world who allowed me to interview them for this master's thesis. Thank you, for taking the time and sharing your experiences with me. Without your help, I would have not been able to conduct this research.

1. Introduction

Freelancers are widely known as those working from home or in coffee shops, as those with endless free time and flexibility, but also as those struggling over money, working isolated and living in constant uncertainty – the debate around freelancers is a controversial issue discussed in the society as well as within the media industry. In contrast to these stereotypes, the freelance workforce has established itself as a permanent and crucial part of the media industries (Mould, Vorley & Liu, 2014). The main factors for the emergence of the freelance workforce were structural changes and economic cutbacks in the media industry towards more flexibility for organisations and less stability for individuals (Edstrom & Ladendorf, 2012). Developing out of these rather precarious circumstances, we have now reached an era where freelance work is often considered as a self-fulfilling occupation which provides a high level of autonomy and flexibility (Bögenhold, Heinonen & Akola, 2014). As opposed to the notion of self-fulfilment, some scholars perceive the whole freelance workforce as *precariat* – considering they are facing challenges like low wages, unstable economic conditions and unpredictable labour market situations (Cohen, 2016; Mould et al., 2014; Standing, 2011; Storey et al, 2005). Consequently, the question arises: How do freelancers cope with those potentially emerging precarious working conditions?

This study investigates how coworking spaces as workspaces with the possibilities of knowledge sharing, networking and community building, could serve as a structure for freelancers to challenge the precarity that comes along with their form of work. Based on the assumptions that coworking spaces provide their users with possibilities for networking, sharing knowledge, collaborating and enhancing their productivity and performance (Gandini, 2015), it is to examine how the freelancers themselves reflect and discuss these aspects and to gain deeper knowledge about their actual experiences about precarious situations. Those affirmative assumptions are also based on the current development of coworking spaces which shows that this concept is more than just a trend: In 2018, around 1.7 million people worldwide will be working in over 19,000 coworking spaces all over the world (Deskmag, 2018). Because freelancers are amongst the main users of coworking spaces, this master's thesis aims at investigating their experiences concerning the motives of their decision to work in such a space as well as the advantages that those spaces offer for them. Additionally, the relationship between freelancers and organisations is an interesting aspect to examine as this relationship is described as asymmetrical by many scholars (Cohen, 2016; Mould et al., 2014; Storey et al., 2005).

Stemming from these aspects, this study is motivated by the following research questions:

- **RQ 1:** How do freelancers experience their working conditions regarding precarity and asymmetrical power relations?
- **RQ 2:** How do freelancers experience coworking spaces as framework to challenge these working conditions and to increase the possibilities of individual agency?

In order to answer these research questions, a qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews has been chosen to explore how freelancers make sense of their experiences and realities. Therefore, a constructivist lens is applied to this research which is grounded on the assumption that individuals “actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, the theory around structure and agency is applied as theoretical framework in order to discuss to what extent freelancers are influenced by the established structures, rules and norms within the media production industry and how their agency is enabled within these structures.

Focusing on the topic of *work*, precisely analysing the phenomena freelancing and coworking in context of the nature of work within the media production industry, serves discussing one of the three main areas of concern in media production studies: organisations, ownership, work (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). With media production studies being a part of the wider field of media and communication studies, this thesis contributes to the field of media production research as well as media in the context social developments, two themes which have been discussed thoroughly in the scope of the master’s programme.

In summary, the aim of this master’s thesis is to explore the relevance and the value of coworking spaces for freelancers working in the field of media production. Furthermore, the research focuses on the freelancers’ experiences around the overall issue of job precarity and asymmetrical power relations. However, the research does not aim to make generalisations on factual grounds – it rather aims at investigating and observing the participants’ experiences in a qualitative manner in order to explore those rather new concepts of freelancing and coworking spaces.

Concluding, the thesis is structured as follows: First, this study is contextualised with the structural changes and the nature of work within the media production industry as well as the emergence of coworking spaces and the sharing economy. Thereupon, the literature review serves to present previous research around freelancers and coworking spaces in order to situate the subject of this study within existing literature. In the following chapter, the

theoretical framework is introduced and the perspectives that guide the analysis are presented. Hereafter, the research design is outlined to motivate the choice of a qualitative research approach and to demonstrate in detail how the research has been conducted. Subsequently, the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and the findings are presented and discussed, followed by the conclusion in the last chapter which summarises the results of the study and highlights the implications for the society and for further research.

2. Context: Freelancers in the Field of Media Production

In order to contextualise the different concepts discussed in this thesis it is crucial to first point out and understand how the structures within the media production industry have been changing until today. Before conducting research with freelancers as the main subject, it is important to investigate the field that they are working in. Because media production is a very broad field, it is important to touch upon the different aspects that are considered important for the context of this research.

Therefore, the development and transformation of the labour market in the field of media production will be pointed out in the following to understand the importance of researching about the experiences of freelancers within that industry as working conditions have changed both rapidly and considerably. Furthermore, the development towards the sharing economy will be illustrated to introduce the emergence of the concept of coworking to the context of this research. The concept of the sharing economy is related to freelancing in the sense that *sharing* of space and infrastructure are the main aspects of coworking spaces (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018). Finally, it will be pointed out why *place* as a concept still matters nowadays in a time where technological advancements provide possibilities to work irrespective of time and space. This highlights the importance of coworking spaces since place, co-presence and physically being together are their main characteristics (Appel-Meulenbroek, 2010).

2.1 Structural Changes in the Field of Media Production

Structural changes within the field of media production have caused a transformation of the labour market towards a project-based nature of work. Those changes as well as the causes are presented in the following.

Let us begin with the phenomenon of outsourcing as departure point in the second half of the twentieth century: “Outsourcing became an influential business model ... across all business sectors, part of what is often referred to as post-Fordism” (Davies & Sigthorsson, 2013, p. 47). Post-Fordism, in this context of the transformation of the labour market in the media production industry, is described as the change from structures of mass production in the previous Fordism time towards a more flexible structure of work. The post-Fordism paradigm brought new ways of organising work, such as moving away from the “traditional

division between mental and manual labor ... to embrace new ways of designing workers tasks” (Vallas, 1999, p. 71). This change towards a more flexible structure of work involved the shift away from mass production towards a more specialised production with the goal to serve different groups of consumers (Vallas, 1999).

What in the post-Fordism time started with outsourcing different manufacturing processes in factories to multiple manufacturers has nowadays developed into companies using external service providers like freelancers. Another important factor that caused the changes in the organisational structure within the media industry was “the influence of neoliberalism on government policy ... mainly through the privatization of state-owned institutions and businesses and the relaxation of state-control through deregulation” (Davies & Sigthorsson, 2013, p. 47). The contemporary media production industry is on one hand characterised by the presence of large corporations, on the other hand there is a constantly increasing number of freelancers and microbusinesses. The increase of flexible labour can also be explained as a result of “the casualization of work” (Davies & Sigthorsson, 2013, p. 50) within post-Fordism. This casualisation of work describes the shift from full-time work to an increasing number of non-permanent employment.

As a result of these developments, we are moving into a new era of work with a growing number of project-based collaborations and more independent workers who operate as freelancers (de Peuter, 2011). The project-based characteristics of the media production industry offer more and more opportunities for organisations to realise projects with freelancers. These structural changes increase on one hand the flexibility of individuals, on the other hand they might increase precarious working conditions in the whole field of media production. This contemporary development leads to a transformation where a whole cascade of workers is described as ‘precariat’. Stemming from the project-based nature of work within the media production industry, freelancers are facing challenges like low wages, unstable economic conditions and unpredictable labour market situations (Cohen, 2016; Mould et al., 2014; Storey et al, 2005).

Broadly defined, the precariat is not only described as people doing casual labour with lower income, but is also perceived “as a normal state of living” (Standing, 2011, p. 10). Some freelancers accept the precarious character of their work “as the inevitable cost of pursuing their passion” (Cohen, 2016, p. 24), while others live in a state of constant anxiety (Storey et al., 2005). The lack of security, especially related to their job and income are the main characteristics of the precariat work force. Even though the precariat itself is a

heterogeneous group, it can be observed that most of the people who are engaged in temporary work, find themselves close to the precariat due to the lack of job security (Standing, 2011). This notion of precarity leads to a series of unanswered questions about the interaction and relationship between organisations and freelancers which need to be picked up and examined by researchers (Mould et al., 2014).

2.2 The Nature of Work in the Media Production Industry

Having explored the broader structural changes within the media industry towards a project-based economy it is now important to focus on the nature of work.

Starting from an organisational point of view, workers in media production are often only seen as economic resource. Hesmondhalgh (2006) argues that the significance of individual workers is based on their “capacity to contribute to productivity and thence to profitability” (p. 136). This connects to the notion of the flexible worker which is nowadays deeply incorporated in the field of media production. The development of this notion is shown in increasing flexibility and decreasing stability regarding labour within organisations (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). These structural changes in the media producing industry towards more flexibility were leading to an increasing number of companies working with freelancers (Kitching, 2015). This results in freelancing being now profoundly and internationally institutionalised within the media producing industry (Kitching, 2015).

The globally growing number of freelancers over the last two decades can be explained with rising opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship created by public policy. Furthermore, increasing privatisation of organisations caused jobs shifting from the public to the private sector. Thereupon, reconstructions of business operations have been enforced in order to keep up with economical requirements. This led to an increasing engagement of freelancers instead of permanent employees. Many of these freelancers have freely decided to become self-employed while others have been forced to leave their permanent employment and to become re-engaged as freelancers. However, it is argued that there are different perspectives on changing working conditions and the organisation of labour: On one hand, there is the affirmative and optimistic view which emphasises the increasing possibilities for creativity and entrepreneurship. On the other hand, there are critical voices claiming that these changes deepen self-exploitation and precarity (Burke, 2015; Kitching, 2015).

Connecting to this, Bögenhold et al. (2014) point out that there are two different ways into becoming a freelancer: either individuals become freelancers for self-fulfilling and self-realising reasons or people get forced into being a freelancer due to poor labour market situations. This ambivalence shapes the freelance workforce and concludes in the “decomposition or the undermining of workers’ earlier sources of organizational power and economic security” (de Peuter, 2011, p. 421). Thus, it becomes apparent that there is a need to further examine these changing structures of power as well as the relationship of freelancers with the organisation that they work for.

2.3 The Emergence of a Sharing Economy

In the aftermath of the economic crisis around 2008, the awareness and importance of sharing and collaborating has emerged (Arcidiacono, Gandini & Pais, 2018). Widely defined, the sharing economy is seen as the process of sharing goods or services between individuals (Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2015; Sundararajan, 2016). One of the main characteristics of the phenomenon are the blurred lines between full and casual employment, dependent and independent workers as well as work and free-time (Sundararajan, 2016). Even though the debate around the sharing economy is very broad and heterogeneous, the discussion regarding *work* in connection with the emergence of coworking spaces and shared environments for work has become centre of attention (Arcidiacono et al., 2018; Gandini, 2015).

Here the concept of coworking comes into play: driven by the digitalised economy, the concept reflects the global trend of a sharing economy. Since coworking spaces are based on the idea of sharing workspaces, knowledge, and networks, this concept fits in perfectly with the idea of the sharing economy (Bouncken et al., 2017). The proliferation of coworking has been observed especially in times after the economic crisis and the emergence of concepts like the sharing economy and an increasing number of start-ups (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). Jakonen et al. (2017) conclude that „Coworking spaces and coworking as a practice are at the centre of changing post-industrial work, a manifestation of what is often called the new economy or the sharing economy” (p. 235).

The concept of coworking emerged in San Francisco in 2005, with the ‘San Francisco Coworking Space’ founded by Brad Neuberg (Rus & Orel, 2015), and has developed to become a global phenomenon (Gandini, 2015). Being one of the leading new media

production areas in the 2000s, a “hybrid infrastructure of interaction” (Gandini, 2015, p. 195) has arisen which enabled to connect people and spaces by new technologies. Coworking “seeks to restore ‘co-location’ in the digitalising mode of production where tasks can be performed anywhere, anytime” (Johns & Gratton, 2013, p. 1). It can be described as a global phenomenon which has its roots in the emergence of creative districts around cities (Moriset, 2014). The concept integrates different elements of conventional offices, home-offices, communities and incubators with opportunities for networking, social interaction and more flexibility (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018). Especially for freelancers coworking spaces are relevant as they provide structure in terms of separating home and work and a social setting with emphasis on the community factor. Since the demand for a healthy work-life-balance for freelancers is increasing, the interest in new working models is rising (Bouncken et al., 2017). Lange (2011) argues that “Co-working spaces reflect the collective-driven, networked approach of the open-source-idea translated into physical space” (p. 202). Consequently, the decision to work in coworking spaces can in some cases be seen as answer to the precarious working and living conditions of freelancers within the media industry. Relating the concept of coworking to the discussion around work as presented above, it can be observed that affirmative perceptions of coworking are predominant over critical voices. Coworking spaces are mainly seen as a positive concept providing the user with office infrastructures, possibilities to network and collaborate as well as sharing knowledge (Appel-Meulenbroek, 2010; Gandini, 2015). Negative aspects related to the precarity of the freelance workforce might facilitate opportunism and competition between users of coworking spaces which could further deepen precarious working conditions (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018). Previous research discussing the positive and negative aspects of coworking will be presented in the literature review.

2.4 Creative Clusters: Why Place Still Matters

Connecting to the context that this research is embedded in, it can be argued that the shift towards a new structure within the media industry, which started around the 1950’s, can be explained with the rise of the creative class. Florida (2012) validates the point that the economy is moving away from traditionally structured organisations towards “a more people-driven one” (p. 7). In his work, *The Rise of the Creative Class* he confirms that the economy has shifted towards an information or knowledge economy, but first and foremost a creative economy. Florida (2012) also acknowledges the importance of structure and

agency in connection with this research topic: “While driven and molded by economic logic, the key institution and initiatives of the future will be shaped, as they always have, by human agency” (p. xv). His view on this societal change can be perceived as highly affirmative. He states that “the real driving force is the rise of human creativity as the key factor in our economy and society” (Florida, 2012, p. 5). Florida defines this creative class as professionals who “share a common ethos that values creativity, flexibility, difference, and merit” (p. 9). People in this class are knowledge-based workers who use their minds, cognitive and social skills to solve complex problems and create innovative goods or services (Florida, 2012). This is where freelancers working in the media production industry find their place in this concept.

But why is this so important for this research context? Following Florida’s arguments, it can be assumed that *places* are drivers to the incubation of innovation. Even in times where the development of digital technologies has come so far, that people in the media industries can work remotely and from all over the world via internet, Florida claims that the aspect of ‘being together’ is still highly relevant. In contrast to his belief, he argues that for many people “the thinking goes, it is no longer necessary for people who work together to *be* together, so they won’t be” (Florida, 2003, p. 4). His account is based on the assumption that *places* have always had and still have a high level of diversity and creativity: “The ability to rapidly mobilize talent from such a concentration of people is a tremendous source of competitive advantage for companies in our time-driven economy of the creative age” (Florida, 2003, p. 5). The conjecture that people who belong to the creative class are clustering and that *places* are drivers of innovation that can be seen in the rise of coworking spaces. Even though technological advancements provide and enable possibilities to work, connect and communicate with others without being restricted by the borders of time and space, people still come together in coworking spaces. This can definitely be seen as an interesting development as freelancers on one hand strive for flexibility, on the other hand seem to seek stability and structure within coworking spaces.

Asheim, Coenen and Vang (2007) offer a different perspective on the concept of place and emphasise the enabling of communication through being physically co-present. The authors refer to place as ‘face-to-face’ and thus highlight its communicative advantages. It is argued that the term “should be taken literally in the sense that two or more persons are physically copresent in a way that allows for mutual visual and physical contact” (Asheim et al., 2007, p. 657). Instead of focusing on the economic benefits, they highlight the

empowering aspects for the individuals. These face-to-face interactions made possible through sharing the same place are regarded to be highly important for exchange and knowledge creation as well as innovation.

Therefore, the concept of place can be seen in different contexts, either with emphasis on economic aspects or on the benefits for the individual.

3. Literature Review

The literature review aims to collect literature that has been identified as crucial to this research subject. It pursues to align the subject of this study with previous research and to embed it in the context of literature. This chapter serves to present definitions of freelancing and coworking drawn from previous research. Furthermore, it will touch upon different topics and concepts which have been discussed in previous studies. The purpose of the literature review is to develop a basis for the analysis and discussion of the data that has been gathered for this research. Each part of the literature review relates to a relevant and specific subject of research in order to contextualise it appropriately. Because freelancing and coworking are both rather new concepts, the literature review is conducted with an interdisciplinary approach, including literature from media and cultural studies as well as sociology.

3.1 The Field of Freelance Work

In order to embed this study into the context of previous research, definitions as well as different interpretations and perceptions around freelance work that have been identified as important are presented in the following.

3.1.1 The Concept of Freelance Work

Definitions. Despite the increase of research and discussions about the concept of freelance work, a precise and universal definition remains undetermined (Mould et al., 2014). Broadly defined, the freelance workforce includes workers “in a wide range of managerial, professional, scientific and technical occupations” (Kitching, 2015, p. 17). However, academic researchers usually define freelancers as self-employed workers who primarily work in the media and creative industries.

In order to address the lack of precise definitions, Kitching and Smallbone (2008) widely define freelancers as “skilled professional workers who are neither employers nor employees, supplying labour on a temporary basis under a contract for services for a fee to a range of business clients” (p. v). Based on this definition, Mould et al. (2014) describe freelancers as professionals offering their skillset and expertise to organisations that they work with on a temporary basis. Bögenhold et al. (2014) agree in describing the execution of an occupation with temporally limited tasks and projects as the main characteristic of

freelance work. Therefore, Storey et al. (2005) emphasise the aspect of termination “as intrinsic property of the freelance employment ... [and] that responsibility for a continuous stream of work and income lay with the freelancer” (p. 1040).

Although lots of authors use the terms ‘freelance’ and ‘self-employment’ interchangeably, Bögenhold et al. (2014) point out the difference between those two concepts in their study about entrepreneurship and self-employment. While self-employed individuals have more autonomy and flexibility in organising their work, they still might be less independent than freelancers as they have to adapt to the expectations of their customers in their role of service providers. Therefore, freelancers might have a higher level of autonomy and independence in their role as suppliers from the outside for organisations. Accordingly, freelancers can be seen as self-employed, as they are working for themselves, primarily offering their services to companies and organisations instead of running their own business with established clientele.

Different Types of Freelancers. The character of freelance work can be differentiated on various grounds, such as their occupational status, income or the reasons for becoming freelancers. Mould et al. (2014) present three different types of freelancers based on their occupational status. In their study about the hidden impact of freelancers in the creative industries in London, they claim that freelancers remain largely under-researched. According to their differentiation, there are “‘false’ and ‘forced’ and ‘true’ characteristics of freelancers” (Mould et al., 2014, p. 2442). ‘False’ freelancers are described as workers who are registered as self-employed, but technically are employees at a single organisation in order to avoid the amount of administration and bureaucracy, whereas ‘forced’ freelancers are workers who work outside of the organisational structures, but are also depended on only one employer. The notion of ‘true’ freelancers follows the definitions of freelancing that have been mentioned above. They are described as workers who decide to become freelancers “for legitimate economic reasons (such as love of the work, independence, niche markets, etc.)” (Mould et al., 2014, p. 2442).

Additionally, Gandini (2016) presents different distinctions between freelancers according to how much time they actually spend working as freelancers. Traditional freelancers are those who work as independent contractors in full-time. ‘Moonlighters’ are people who are freelancing in their free time or in addition to their regular job. Similar to that, individuals who work in a mix of freelance and regular employment are described as ‘diversified workers’. What Mould et al. (2014) describe as ‘false freelancers’ is here

described as temporary workers who are working for only one employer but are engaged as freelancers. The last type of freelancers are those who are self-employed with their own small business. Contrary to the delimitation between self-employment and freelancing by Bögenhold et al. (2014) that was presented above, Gandini counts freelance business owners as part of the freelance workforce.

3.1.2 The Enterprising Self

As mentioned above, in their study about freelance workers in the media, Storey et al. (2005) point out that the notion of the 'enterprising self' is an important concept within the discussion around structural changes and new forms of work in the media production industry. As a result of these structural and organisational changes towards a project-based nature of work, more freelancers instead of permanent staff are engaged in media production. The concept of the 'enterprising self' connects here and deals with the observation that freelancers need to "accept enterprise as a major element of their self-identities" (Storey et al., 2005, p. 1033).

According to Storey et al. (2005) the concept of the 'enterprising self' can be understood as the process of a freelancer adapting to organisational structures, "becoming in fact a microcosmic business; developing a strategy, marketing herself, developing 'products', establishing herself as a brand, understanding the market" (p. 1036). Furthermore, Storey et al. (2005) have observed that "freelancers certainly adopted and incorporated the language of enterprise in describing themselves and their strategies for coping with the vicissitudes of the market place they faced" (p. 1045). Most of the freelancers define themselves as micro-businesses which need to be branded and marketed.

Mould et al. (2014) emphasise the notion of individualism which the concept of freelance work entails. Similar to what Storey et al. have pointed out, they state that freelancers have to take on responsibility for the economics of the goods or services they produce. Therefore, Mould et al. (2014) conclude that "freelancers can be seen as the embodiment of the entrepreneurial or enterprise society" (p. 2442). They criticise the unawareness of these aspects and argue that the concept of the 'enterprising self' shows how complex the nature of freelance work can actually be in practise.

Describing the same processes as Mould et al. (2014) and Storey et al. (2005), Gandini (2016) refers to the term 'self-branding' to describe the process of freelancers

adopting organisational structures. He identifies self-branding as “investment in social relationships with expected return for the acquisition of a reputation” (Gandini, 2016, p. 123). Furthermore, Gandini argues that freelancers use self-branding as instrumental investment which aims to establish a good reputation and to increase job security.

Whereas Storey et al. (2005) and Mould et al. (2014) concentrate on the aspect of freelancers adopting enterprise structures when discussing the notion of the ‘enterprising self’, Gandini’s (2016) emphasis when talking about self-branding clearly lies on the aspect of reputation. In his study about self-branding and social capital in the freelance knowledge economy, he describes the generation of a good reputation which can be seen as a result of self-branding as social capital. Gandini (2016) sees this social capital as a “feature in securing employment in a freelance-based economy as it represents the indigenous, cultural conception of value shared by participants in this labour market” (p. 124). In conclusion, Gandini (2016) states that these processes lead to a “socialization of the enterprise” (p. 136) which emphasises the complexity of freelance work.

3.1.3 Asymmetrical Power Relations

Storey et al. (2005) indicate that some freelancers experience asymmetrical power relations between them and organisations due to the fact that the market is saturated with a large number of freelance workers. In their study, they investigate how freelancers make sense of their self-identity in terms of *enterprise*, embedded in the context of changes in organisational structures and employment practices in the media industries. Furthermore, they “explore the extent to which, and the ways in which, ideological and structural pressures encourage workers to accept the logic and imperatives of enterprise” (Storey et al., 2005, p. 1033). They use this context as a basis to make sense of how media workers experience their changed circumstances.

Investigating freelancers’ experiences in context of the notion of the ‘enterprising self’ mentioned above, the authors report that the participants of their study have complained about the unfairness of the labour market. On one hand, the participants of their study criticised that the conditions became unfair due to the structural changes. Some of them claimed “that the market was not an open or fair one; it did not allow full knowledge of, or free access to jobs, or open competition for jobs” (Storey et al., 2005, p. 1042). On the other hand, in contrast to the claims of a too *closed* market, some freelancers criticised that the

market was too *open*. Those freelancers have reported that the structural changes have caused asymmetrical power relationships between them and organisations. Those asymmetrical power relationships are partly caused by this “large supply of freelance labour prepared to accept low rates, to undercut rivals and to accept poor conditions” (Storey et al., 2005, p. 1042). Whenever a freelancer would reject an offer with for him/her not acceptable conditions, for example in terms of the wage, other freelancers were prepared to take their place. This emphasises a critical notion of individualism within this workforce, as freelancers rather undercut each other and work in poor conditions instead of acting upon those asymmetrical power relations together. Furthermore, Storey et al. have discovered that freelancers appear not to be taking action against these poor conditions, as this could be seen as counterproductive towards their reputation and work possibilities in future. They conclude that the “characteristics of the market for freelance work – simultaneously limited in openness to enterprise and over-encouraging to enterprise – represented a constant source of anxiety to the freelance worker” (Storey et al., 2005, p. 1043). Their findings show that the asymmetrical power relationships between freelancers and organisations deepen precarious working conditions for freelancers.

Mould et al. (2014) do not only discuss the under-researched status of freelancers in their study, but they also investigate how freelancers have been overlooked by public policy. The authors introduce another aspect which highlights the possibility of emerging asymmetrical power relations between organisations and freelancers. Mould et al. (2014) point out that “the lack of unionization ... further exacerbates the precariousness and vulnerability of freelance workers” (p. 2445) and therefore, freelancers cannot take action against unequal relationships. They indicate that this is especially the case within the media industries and is not actually taking place in other industries where people are operating as freelancers. This further proves that the structural changes within the media production industry contribute substantially to the precarious working conditions of freelancers.

3.2 Coworking and Coworking Spaces

In the following, different definitions, concepts and discussions about coworking and coworking spaces from previous research are presented in order embed the concepts within existing literature.

3.2.1 The Concept of Coworking & Coworking Spaces

Definitions. The literature provides various definitions of coworking with different aspects that each author focuses on. Widely defined, Bouncken and Reuschl (2018), as well as Gandini (2015) describe coworking spaces as workspaces which provide conventional office infrastructures where professionals can work independently or together, temporarily or long-term. Capdevila (2013), Moriset (2014) and Spinuzzi (2012) especially highlight the aspects of sharing resources and building of communities. In his study about collaborative production, Lange (2011) specifies coworking spaces as hubs or workspaces which accommodate individuals who share the same values, such as independence, flexibility and community. According to Jakonen, Kivinen, Salovaara and Hirkman (2017), coworking spaces are shared workspaces where freelancers and entrepreneurs can rent a desk or an office space. Accordingly, the term ‘coworking’ refers to the actual activity of individuals who work alongside at a coworking space where they share the workspaces as well as lounges and meeting areas where both formal and informal meetings are held.

Usually, coworking spaces offer different membership models with possibilities to rent a workspace and use the office infrastructures on an hourly, daily, weekly, monthly or flexible basis (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018). It is further elaborated that most of the coworking spaces are open 24 hours a day, whereas some have limited opening hours. Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) conclude that “coworking spaces provide ... users a flexible and highly autonomous use of both office and social space that eases the direct personal interaction among the coworking-users for social, learning, cultural and business related interest” (p. 322).

Different Types of Coworking Spaces. Previous studies around coworking have also shown that there are different types of coworking spaces. Based on interviews and secondary research, Bouncken, Laudien, Fredrich and Görmar (2017) introduce four different types of coworking spaces in their paper. They first differentiate between corporate and open corporate coworking spaces, which are both created by firms in order to enhance creativity, productivity and internal entrepreneurship, with the difference that the open corporate coworking spaces are also accessible for externals from outside of the firm. They further elaborate that these types of coworking spaces follow the values of the firms that opened these spaces. The third type of coworking spaces that they have identified are those created by consulting agencies to organise and improve relationships and networks of firms. The fourth type, which correlates with the wider definition of coworking spaces above, are

independent coworking spaces which provide memberships for the public to rent their office facilities.

Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) connect to Bouncken et al.'s earlier study (2017) mentioned above, and introduce the term “coworking-space-provider” (p. 323) in order to cover different institutions offering coworking spaces. They give examples for different providers of coworking spaces, such as organisations, universities, libraries or large firms such as Google or Apple and thus conclude that there are “public, private, and semi-private-public forms of coworking-space-providers” (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018, p. 323). They further elaborate that the type of coworking space and the respective business strategy can influence the users and the community dynamics. However, Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) acknowledge the importance of the role of coworking space users: “Yet a coworking-space culture is strongly influenced from the dynamic interaction among individuals” (p. 323).

In their study about the politics of coworking as an emerging work practice de Peuter, Cohen and Saraco (2017) argue that franchising has become an integral part of the coworking sector. They introduce ‘WeWork’ as an example of a coworking space franchise organisation which offers short-term office spaces to rent. Currently, ‘WeWork’ owns over 363 office locations in 24 countries (WeWork, 2018). De Peuter et al. (2017) point out that “WeWork’s corporate strategy is to extract market opportunities from precarization” (p. 692). The authors perceive this as a critical business model and further criticise ‘WeWork’ for example for hiring low-paid cleaning staff for their coworking spaces and therefore to even more benefit from precarious situations of individuals (de Peuter et al., 2017).

Summarising these findings from previous research, it can be concluded that there is a variety of types of coworking spaces following different business strategies, which also determine the experience of the users. However, especially the argument brought forward by Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) about the importance of the users of coworking spaces in regard to the community dynamics is valid in the context of this study.

3.2.2 Co-presence as Chance for Encounters

In her study about knowledge sharing in open plan areas, Appel-Meulenbroek (2010) points out that co-presence is an important factor when it comes to knowledge sharing and networking in coworking spaces. Jakonen et al. (2017) agree and indicate that coworking spaces provide possibilities for encounters, community building, exchanging ideas and

networking. Their study examines different coworking settings in order to investigate the nature of encounters in these spaces. Jakonen et al. have observed both intended and unintended encounters in coworking spaces, which highlight the importance of the physical *being together*. They describe this idea as ‘economy of encounters’.

According to Garrett, Spreitzer and Bacevice (2017) coworking spaces are designed to enable encounters and create a sense of community. In their study about the emergence of communities in coworking spaces, they have discovered that the community factor is seen as the most important characteristic by users of coworking spaces. They pinpoint that the sense of community created a collective identity within coworking spaces “that enhanced their professional and personal identities” (Garrett et al., 2017, p. 827).

In their paper, Bouncken et al. (2017) investigate amongst other aspects how values are created between users of coworking spaces. They especially highlight that the “individuals’ physical closeness in the professional and social space of the coworking-space eases multifaceted transfers of explicit and implicit knowledge” (Bouncken et al., 2017, p. 385). Thus, the physical aspect of co-presence is discovered to be crucial and essential for the concept of coworking spaces.

3.2.3 The Ambivalence of Coworking

According to de Peuter et al. (2017), researchers have not treated the ambivalent characteristics of coworking in much detail. Gandini (2015) confirms this observation and states that most accounts in the literature only represent positive aspects of the concept. Therefore, de Peuter et al. (2017) argue that “social and political ambivalence is intrinsic to the culture of coworking” (p. 687). The authors investigate the ambivalence of coworking in the context of the precarious working conditions of freelancers, emphasising the politics of this emerging form of work. They argue that the ambivalence lies, inter alia, within the fact that coworking might be seen as the answer to precarity within the media industry.

Competition in Coworking Spaces. Only a few authors deal with the emerging potential of competition between individuals in coworking spaces. In their paper about cooperation in coworking spaces, Bouncken et al. (2017) address this issue and identify the risk of tension and competition between individuals in coworking spaces. In their study, they investigate how competition can improve innovation within coworking spaces, but also cause tensions between freelancers. On one hand, they argue that cooperation (a neologism made up from

the words cooperation and competition) can potentially enhance entrepreneurship and innovation. On the other hand, they acknowledge that exactly this cooperation can pose risks of opportunism between users of coworking spaces. Bouncken et al. state that the practice of knowledge-sharing within coworking spaces can result in fear and rivalry between people who work within the same field.

Negative Impacts of Coworking. De Peuter et al. (2017) criticise research about coworking to only present affirmative views on the concept. Gandini (2015) as well as Moriset (2014) address this with the risk of an emerging ‘coworking bubble’ where critical approaches are being left out of the discussion.

However, Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) touch upon negative aspects of coworking in their study. Just as Bouncken et al. (2017) have explored in an earlier study mentioned above, Bouncken and Reuschl broach the issue of opportunism in coworking spaces, stating that “opportunism, often as knowledge leakage, will directly and indirectly spoil learning processes and entrepreneurial performance as it reduces their antecedents trust and community building” (p. 317). Therefore, they demand more research about negative impacts to further investigate how the risks of opportunism can affect the economic performance of freelancers and community building within coworking spaces. Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) conclude that coworking spaces also “bear risks of self-exploitation, competition, knowledge leakage or the loss of social security within self-employment” (p. 331). These risks need to be considered alongside all of the positive aspects of coworking spaces that are clearly the focus in previous research.

3.3 Summary of Literature and Research Gap

In summary, it can be noted that previous research has dealt with the topics freelancing and coworking spaces. However, a lack of research on freelancers’ experiences in general and especially in context with coworking spaces can be observed. Most of the studies focus on general aspects like emerging politics within coworking spaces or the precarious working conditions within the media production industry.

In previous research on freelancers several authors have been discussing the precarity of the nature of freelance work. However, the focus was placed on the conditions of work rather than the individual experiences. But precisely their experiences with

precarious working conditions and asymmetrical power relations between organisations and freelancers need more attention.

Contrary to literature about freelancing, in previous research there have been only a few critical studies on the concept of coworking which poses this risk of an emerging ‘coworking bubble’ (Jakonen et al., 2017; Gandini, 2015; Moriset, 2014). Even though freelancers are seen as the main group of users of coworking spaces, there has been only little research about how freelancers experience the relevance of coworking spaces for themselves. Since it is in question whether the decision of freelancers to work in a coworking space can be seen as answer to the precarity that the job brings along, it is of high importance to explore how the concept of coworking can influence structures, norms and human action within the freelance workforce.

As presented above, de Peuter et al. (2017) touched upon the ambivalence of freelancing in connection with coworking spaces. With their assumption that “coworking spaces constitute infrastructure that makes flexible labour regimes more robust” (de Peuter et al. 2017, p. 691) they go into a similar direction that this research takes. However, de Peuter et al. only treat the issue superficially. Furthermore, they rather focus on the coworking space itself, leaving out the individual experience of freelancers as users of those spaces. The authors pose the questions for further research whether coworking spaces can be seen as an answer to the precarious working conditions for freelancers. Additionally, they are amongst the very few communication scholars who research those topics which shows that this issue needs to be increasingly discussed within media and communication studies. In previous research, freelancing and especially the concept of coworking have been researched mostly within sociology and cultural studies.

With this thesis, I am positioning my research precisely in this identified research gap in the field of media production research that is related to the nature of work. Within the given context of this study, I am certain that this master’s thesis is of high importance for research within in media production research and the broader field of media and communication studies.

4. Theoretical Framework

To organise the discussion around the research context and to analyse the gathered data, I draw from the theory of structure and agency. Due to the fact that media and communication studies have their roots, amongst others, in sociology (Park & Pooley, 2008) the theory of structure and agency seems to allow for a fruitful discussion around the research topic. In the context of this research, structure can be seen as norms, rules and the constitution of power relations which are established within the media production industry and affect freelancers in their work and life. Agency can be seen as the capability of freelancers, to either act freely or restricted by existing structures. Furthermore, the concept of human agency and power in connection with structure is considered in order to build the theoretical framework around the research topic. Especially the conceptualisation of power is important to this research context as it deals, inter alia, with the asymmetrical power relations between freelancers and organisations within the media production industry. The debate around structure and agency is highly important to this research as it raises questions such as how structure within the media production industry affects freelancers or how the freelancers can actively act upon these structures. Having briefly explained why structure and agency are important in this context, the complexity of these concepts is addressed in the following.

Structure. To highlight the theories' importance, American sociologist Sewell Jr. (1992) argues that 'structure' "is one of the most important, elusive, and undertheorized concepts in the social sciences" (p. 1). In his discussion around the concept, Sewell Jr. (1992) questions whether there is an adequate way to define structure: "no formal definition can succeed in fixing the term's meaning: the metaphor of structure continues its essential if somewhat mysterious work in in the constitution of social scientific knowledge despite theorists' definitional efforts" (p. 2).

To some extent, it can be agreed on the complexity of structure. Nevertheless, following British sociologist Giddens' arguments around structure and agency helps to get closer to understanding how structure can be connected to the context of this research. Therefore, I will refer to Giddens works '*Central Problems in Social Theory*' (1979) and '*The Constitution of Society*' (1984) as well as to Loyal (2003) who examines Giddens theory of structure and agency in his book '*The sociology of Anthony Giddens*'.

Introducing the discussion, Loyal (2003) criticises, just as Sewell Jr., that the concept around social structure has been defined and used vaguely. He claims that many sociological approaches “unwittingly affirmed the object over the subject, structure over agency, society over the individual, or determinism over free action” (Loyal, 2003, p. 71). In order to organise this discussion, Giddens reconstructed the concept of structure with his account of a ‘duality of structure’. Creating this concept of the dualism of structure, Giddens (1984) argued that structure can be seen “as 'external' to human action, as a source of constraint on the free initiative of the independently constituted subject” (p. 16). Using an analogy of the concept around speech and language, Loyal (2003) explains the meaning of Giddens ‘duality of structure’: “Just as language is a structure which forms a condition of possibility for speech (agency), so more generally social structure provides the conditions of possibility for social action” (p. 73). This can be seen as an optimistic view on structure as it is rather enabling than constraining.

Giddens (1979) creation of dualism essentially means that “structure is both the medium and the outcome of the reproduction of practices” (p. 5). The core of Giddens (1979) ‘duality of structure’ hereby lies in the assumption that structure “enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and ‘exists’ in the generating moments of this constitution” (p. 5). This shows that in Giddens theory, structure and agency are not opposed, but rather facilitate each other. Giddens (1979) concludes that structure is “not to be conceptualised as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production” (p. 70). In the context of this research, Giddens perception on structure and agency can be seen as an optimistic view which suggests that the structures within the media production industry rather enable freelancers than restrict them. Using his theoretical approach helps to investigate the interviewees’ experiences through the lens of the duality of structure.

British sociologist Archer (1996) criticises Giddens approach of conflating the human agent with the social structure. She argues that the emphasis should lay on the interplay between structure and agency, instead of conflating them. This critique will be discussed further below in the section around ‘agency’. Archer (1996) defines structure as “system [which] is constituted by the corpus of existing intelligibilia – by all things capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone” (p. 104). More detailed, structure can be broken down in subdivisions such as language, knowledge, norms, beliefs, rules, power and relations (Archer, 1996).

King (2010) discusses both Archers and Giddens' approaches and identifies "social reality is investigated as a duality of structure and agency" (p. 255) as similarity of both concepts. Furthermore, he states that for both of the scholars "social structure, irreducible to the individual, was reproduced and changed by conditioned individual action" (King, 2010, p. 255). In both of their theories, the emphasis lies on social reproduction. This aspect is of high interest in context of this research as the question arises whether reproduced individual action of freelancers can influence or change existing structures such as asymmetrical power relations within the media production industry.

Agency. Generally, and simplified, human agency can be understood as the free will of a person and their capability to act independently and make their own decisions (King, 2010). If you set agency in context with the concept of structure, you will face increased complexity which will be examined in the following.

To penetrate this complexity, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) point out that "the key to grasping the dynamic possibilities of human agency is to view it as composed of variable and changing orientations within the flow of time" (p. 964). They criticise that many scholars have not been regarding agency as its own concept. This led to the misconception that agency "tends to remain so tightly bound to structure that one loses sight of the different ways in which agency actually shapes social action" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963). Having discussed the shortcomings of other approaches on theorising agency, they define it as the "temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments ... which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). Firstly, this means that agents incorporate patterns in their activities to create stability and therefore sustain identities and interactions. Secondly, actors are able to imagine or anticipate which path their actions might take in future. Thirdly, individuals are able to make judgements based on the respective situations that evolve. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) emphasise the importance of the human agent being capable of the "hypothesization of experience" (p. 984), which means that through their lived experiences in the past, they can estimate which impact their actions might have in future. They conclude that human agents "are always living simultaneously in the past, future, and present, and adjusting the various temporalities of their empirical existence to one another" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1012).

Following Archer's (2000) arguments, humanity is central to the general discussion about agency. Therefore, it is crucial to consider humanity in order to understand the debate around structure and agency as a whole. Archer criticises accounts where either structure or agency is seen as the root of the respective other. Instead, Archer (2000) points out that "both humanity and society have their own ... properties and powers, which makes their interplay the central issue of social theory for all time" (p. 17). In her conceptualisation of agency, Archer (2000) assumes that human interaction with the world constitutes human development:

Indeed, my key argument maintains that it is precisely because of our interaction with the natural, practical and transcendental orders that humanity has prior, autonomous and efficacious powers which it brings to society itself – and which intertwine with those properties of society which make us social beings, without which, it is true, we would certainly not be recognisably human. (p. 17)

In her critique towards conceptualisations around structure and agency, Archer (1996) identified three different types of conflation: downward, upward and central conflation. 'Downward conflation' assumes that human agents and their interests are dominant to the structure, whereas 'upward conflation' deals with perceptions where structure is seen as superior to human actions. The approach where neither structure nor agency are seen as the dominant power of the respective other is called 'central conflation'. According to Archer, Giddens' perceptions around structure and agency fall into the central conflation approach. Discussing the notion of central conflation, Archer (1996) points out that according to this belief "every actor is an active participant – never a passive recipient or an enforced receiver" (p. 73).

Connecting to Archer's discussion around central conflation, in Giddens' theory people are emphasised as active agents. In his account for agency, the human agent is characterised as knowledgeable and capable. Loyal notes that "despite his claim to provide a sociological account in which a delicate balance between agency and structure is reached, Giddens' agent remains the sovereign autonomous agent of liberalism: one who is both rational and creative" (Loyal, 2003, p. 51). Giddens (1984) defines "action or agency as the stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world" (p. 56). Giddens' account is based on the belief that human agents are conscious and aware of their actions. This perception of the active agents will

help understanding how freelancers are coping with established structures and asymmetrical power relations.

Power. Giddens also conceptualises *power* in the discussion around structure and agency and believes that “power is tied to agency and refers to the transformative capacity of agents to make a difference in the social world” (Loyal, 2003, p. 80). Giddens assumes that human agents have the power and capability to make changes to existing structures.

However, Archer (2003) argues that there is an “interplay between two different kinds of powers – those pertaining to structures and those belonging to agents” (Archer, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, Archer raises the questions of how structural powers influence agents and how agents use their own power to act upon it. She concludes that when examining these powers, it is crucial to deal with both structure and agency to observe the interactions between those.

The aspect of power in connection with structure and agency can be seen as a very important concept within the context of this research. Asymmetrical power relations between freelancers and organisations have been mentioned in previous research and are a critical aspect for the debate around the job precarity of freelancers.

Summary. In conclusion, it can be stated that discussing different approaches around the theories of structure and agency has helped understanding and crack the complexity – even just in the scale of this research context – of this theory. Loyal (2003) pinpoints that the “conflict between ‘structure’ construed as structuring action through generative rules and resources via agency and ‘structure’ as patterned social relations which causally constrain agency, has come to constitute *the* central point of disagreement in the agency/structure debate” (p. 86). Depending on which position one is taking in the debate, the power shifts between either structure or agency being dominant.

Even if criticised by Archer, Giddens perception about the ‘duality of structure’ and his belief of active agents seem to be appropriate approaches in order to understand the interplay between structure and agency in the context of this research. Structure shapes practices of human agents, but their actions also reproduce and establish these structures. The assumption that structure and agency are not opposed, but rather facilitate each other

seems to be a valid approach. This belief provides an appropriate context for the analysis of the gathered data. It will help to understand how freelancers experience and deal with job precarity, asymmetrical power relations and where the rules, power and norms within the media production industry have their origins and which role coworking spaces play within this construct.

5. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology and research design are outlined. The research aim of this master's thesis is to gain insights into how freelancers within the media industry experience working in coworking spaces, including aspects of job precarity and asymmetrical power relations. A qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews has been conducted in order to answer the research questions. Using qualitative research for this topic is appropriate because it aims at interpreting and understanding people's experiences and therefore helps understanding the freelancers' views, perceptions, and circumstances (Hall & Quick, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative research has investigative characteristics and an explorative nature which is suitable for rather new concepts or phenomena like freelancing and coworking spaces. With this approach, it is pursued to gain a deep understanding of how people make sense of their reality and experiences.

As stated in the introduction, the research philosophy underlying this thesis is the paradigm of constructivism. Several authors argue for a constructivist approach in the context of qualitative research (Grieger & Ponterotto, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Research grounded on constructivist belief aims at “understanding and reconstructing of the construction that people ... initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). In contrast to quantitative methods with a positivistic research philosophy, the chosen approach implies a different understanding of ‘reality’, rather than focusing on factual knowledge as in positivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Major & Savin-Baden, 2013). The assumption here is that “each individual constructs knowledge and his or her experience through social interaction” (Costantino, 2012, p. 116). Therefore, semi-structured interviews have been identified as an adequate approach to gain a deep understanding of how the interviewees construct their knowledge and experiences through social interaction. Especially social constructivism as one of the emerging variations of constructivism during the 21st century, seems to be an appropriate philosophy to follow for the context of this research and in connection with the theory of structure and agency. Social constructivism addresses the “ontological-epistemological questions of constructivism in describing the bodies of knowledge over human history as social constructs” (Costantino, 2012, p. 119). This sub-category of constructivism is based on the belief that all knowledge has been determined “by the intersection of politics, values, ideologies, religious beliefs, language, and so on” (Costantino, 2012, p. 119). Therefore, it emerges clearly that not only the research

method and the theoretical framework are appropriate to argue for the constructivist approach, but also the view that knowledge is created by and depended on the social interaction of the interviewees with others. Because social interaction is one of the main aspects within coworking spaces (Moriset, 2014), this research philosophy in connection with the theory of structure and agency helps investigating how the interviewees create their knowledge.

5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Conducting semi-structured interviews is an adequate approach for this research topic as these types of interviews allow the interviewee to articulate their perspectives and personal experiences. Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between structure and freedom for both interviewer and interviewee, following the existing structure constructed by the interviewer beforehand, meanwhile allowing a variation in the sequence of the questions, depending on the process of each interview (Bryman, 2012). In contrast to structured interviews with closed questions, this can lead to more depth since this approach allows to follow up on the interviewees' statements. However, acknowledging limitations of this study, it also has to be taken into consideration that semi-structured interviews do not allow the same depth as unstructured interviews (Collins, 2010). Nonetheless, a semi-structured interview approach is more appropriate in this context as it has been considered crucial that all interviewees give answers to the list of questions that have been defined beforehand. Finally, the decisive advantage of semi-structured interviews in this research context is seen in the nature of this structured openness, *as I would call it*. The structure of these interviews works as a guideline which provides the participants with a certain leeway. A list of specific questions (*see appendix*) has been developed beforehand in order to gather the qualitative data, but the possibility of elaborating further and following up on responses remains.

5.1.1 Sampling

A sample is defined as an approximate presentation of the population and their characteristics from which the sample is drawn. However, samples in qualitative research might only be representative to the characteristics that have been identified as important for the research questions (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Therefore, a stratified sampling method has been considered as applicable in this research context. With this approach, it is ensured that

an appropriate number of participants is drawn from a homogeneous group of the population (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

The stratification for the semi-structured interviews was based on the following variables:

- **Full-time freelancers**

To get an adequate insight in the experiences of freelancers, only people who *freelance* as their main occupation are being considered. Fulfilling these criteria, each participant of the interview was seen as potentially providing relevant insights into the work practice.

- **Users of a coworking space**

As coworking spaces are a crucial aspect within this research, every freelancer who would be eligible for the research must be a user of a coworking space to be able to report and discuss their experiences.

- **Working within the media production industry**

In order to give relevant information for the context of this research, the participants must work within the media production industry. As there are different types of media production, such as journalism, entertainment, advertising, etc. (Strömbäck, 2009), different occupations within this industry can be seen as relevant for this research. Considered as relevant are occupations such as film or video producers, text producers like journalists or content producers, illustration and animation etc. – precisely those who are affected by the structural changes within the media production industry which constitute the context of this research.

- **Demographics**

In order to avoid biases in regard to demographics, the participants should differentiate considering gender, age, nationality and residency. During the initial research, it has become evident that freelancing and coworking are global phenomena. Therefore, the distribution of participants in different countries has been considered as important.

Recruitment Strategy & Process. The process and strategy of recruiting the participants for the semi-structured interviews has been executed as follows: Due to the restricted time frame for this thesis, Facebook groups dealing with the topic of coworking and freelancing where members discuss issues and questions around coworking, coworking spaces and freelancing have been researched and the membership had been requested (*Coworking Worldwide, Coworking Australia Oceania, Coworking Deutschland, Coworking Europe, Global Freelancers, Production Freelancers, Freelance Writers, Freelancing Females, Female Digital Nomads*). Facebook groups with females as members were emphasised in order to get a balanced sample with both male and female participants.

I posted a short introduction of myself, where and what I study, the intention and aim of the research, and the criteria that the participants had to fulfil in order to be eligible for my study, in all of those Facebook groups mentioned above. Furthermore, I asked whether anyone of the group members would like to participate in the interviews. Additionally, I informed them that their data will be handled confidentially. Over the course of three weeks I was contacted by around 20 people who offered to participate in an interview. Around half of these people were not eligible for the context of this research as they were either working as freelancers but not users of coworking spaces or they were users of coworking spaces but their occupation was not related to the media production industry. With eleven people eligible for my study, I have reached my initial goal of recruiting at least ten participants.

However, with this recruitment strategy, some limitations have to be acknowledged: Recruiting from a social media platform such as Facebook, it has to be taken into account that individuals who do not use Facebook, are being left out of the population. Therefore, I had also contacted numerous coworking spaces in different countries via email, asking whether any of their members would participate in my study, which did not prove to be a fruitful approach as I only received one response. Still, this single response from a coworking space in Malmö helped me to recruit three participants. Nonetheless, the recruitment strategy performed for this research can be seen as appropriate as it is assumed that freelancers who work within the media production industry are also users of Facebook because it can serve as tool for them to market themselves, to network and to find jobs (Gandini, 2016).

Final Sample. Within these variables (defined on page 26), and following the recruitment process explained above, eleven participants fulfilling the criteria were found. Eleven

interviewees were considered an adequate sample as this size allowed variations within the demographics. The aim of gaining variations was to allow as many different experiences and perceptions as possible to get a holistic and in-depth insight into the working world of freelancers. The eleven freelancers were engaged in different projects and various occupations within media production such as journalism, design, animation and film production. Furthermore, the sample consists of five male and six female participants, aged between 27 and 48 years, with various nationalities and countries of residency (*see table below*).

In conclusion, it can be stated that the sample is seen as an adequate size for this research, especially within the given timeframe. I am confident that it allows an appropriate level of saturation and a sufficient amount of data in order to investigate the interviewees' diverse experiences of working in coworking spaces and different perceptions of job precarity and asymmetrical power relations.

Given Alias	Sex	Nationality	Residency	Age	Occupation	Use of CWS ¹
Interviewee 1	Male	Latvian	Latvia	31	Graphic Designer	Mix of based/different CWS
Interviewee 2	Male	German	Germany	48	VR/3D Animation	Based in one CWS ²
Interviewee 3	Male	Norwegian	Norway	39	Journalist	Based in one CWS
Interviewee 4	Female	French	Indonesia	30	Web Designer	Using different CWS ³
Interviewee 5	Female	British	Sweden	30	Content Writer	Based in one CWS
Interviewee 6	Female	British	England	32	Content Writer	Based in one CWS
Interviewee 7	Male	Irish	Sweden	36	Film Producer	Based in one CWS
Interviewee 8	Female	Israeli	Thailand	29	Content Writer	Using different CWS
Interviewee 9	Female	French	Sweden	27	Graphic Designer	Based in one CWS
Interviewee 10	Male	Swedish	Sweden	30	Graphic Designer	Based in one CWS
Interviewee 11	Female	British	Sweden	34	Content Writer	Using different CWS

Table 1: Overview of the sample.

¹ CWS: here short for coworking space

² Based in one CWS: means that those interviewees are based in a certain CWS and do not use different ones

³ Using different CWS: means that those interviewees are using more than one certain CWS

5.1.2 Conducting the Interviews

Due to the fact that coworking is a global phenomenon, most of the participants were based in different countries all over the world. Therefore, I decided to conduct the majority of the interviews via Skype. Conducting interviews via Skype provides the advantage to be able to reach out to participants who are based throughout the world which has been identified as crucial for this research. Talking to the interviewees via Skype seemed to be an appropriate alternative to face-to-face interviews as interviewer and interviewee were able to see each other through the screen and read each other's body language and facial expressions. Even though the body language is not part of the analysis, it has helped to constitute a personal setting which facilitated the profoundness of the interview. Furthermore, I was able to conduct four interviews face-to-face as those interviewees were based in Malmö.

Each interview started with a brief introduction to clarify the aims and the intention of the research in order to achieve full transparency for the participants. Thereupon, the semi-structured interview questions were asked and discussed with the interviewees. The average length of the interviews was 25-30 minutes. All interviews have been recorded using a digital voice recorder and have been transcribed verbatim. Then, the interviews have been analysed using the approach of a thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006) which will be described in the following.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

To analyse the gathered data, I used the thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) with an inductive approach. This procedure helps organising and reducing the interviews to the most important statements and identifying emerging patterns and topics. An inductive approach was chosen to identify the categories and themes that have emerged from the gathered data. This is appropriate when data is collected especially for the research, which is provided through the semi-structured interviews that have been conducted with the freelancers. Inductive approaches also benefit from openness to the results because the data is coded without needing to fit in a pre-existing coding frame.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis should be seen as an essential method for qualitative analyses. The main benefits of this approach are the flexibility and theoretical freedom. However, providing flexibility does not mean that the thematic analysis can be criticised for the absence of guidelines or rules. The theoretical

freedom provides another important benefit: In contrast to other approaches which are frequently applied to the analysis of qualitative research such as grounded theory, the use of the thematic analysis is not bound to a single theory and can be used with different theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This provides the freedom to apply the theory of structure and agency as theoretical framework for this research. Furthermore, the thematic analysis is also compatible with research based on constructivism as research paradigm because it does not restrict or hinder the researcher to examine realities and experiences. Therefore, it is a useful and appropriate tool for the representation and analysis of qualitative data in context of this research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have identified six steps for the thematic analysis which have been followed for the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis starts with searching and noting emerging patterns or topics during or after the data collection. To identify these patterns and themes, the interview transcripts have been read repeatedly. In the second phase, initial codes have been generated. Therefore, I worked systematically through the data to identify interesting aspects, themes and initial codes which I noted manually. In the third phase, I have sorted the initial codes generated in the second step into the different overarching themes. Next, I reread all data extracts which have been sorted into each category to refine the themes. Furthermore, I have reviewed these themes to make sure they are suitable and useful for the aim of this research. Then, I have further refined the themes by naming them and pointing out why they are important to the research context. Irrelevant data has been disregarded as the analysis aims at discussing the emergent themes in order to discuss the research questions. The following themes have been identified during the coding: (1) effects of structural changes on freelancers, (2) typologies of freelancers in coworking spaces, (3) different structures enabling different agencies, (4) dealing with asymmetrical power relations. The analysis is structured by using these four themes as chapters. Those themes are further described in the table below.

Themes	Subcategories	Description of theme
Effects of structural changes on freelancers	a) deferring to precarious conditions b) striving for flexibility and freedom	Includes all data concerning information of how the interviewees experience the effects of the structural changes within the media production industry on their work and personal life
Typologies of freelancers in CWS	a) CWS as office substitute b) CWS as community	Includes all data concerning the motives of the interviewees to decide to work in a coworking space
Different structures enabling different agencies	a) different structures in different countries b) different structures in different CWS	Includes all data concerning the different experiences that the interviewees have made regarding norms and regulations in their countries as well as different experiences made working in different CWS
Dealing with asymmetrical power relations	a) experiencing asymmetries b) challenging asymmetries	Includes all data concerning information of how the interviewees experience and cope with asymmetrical power relations

Table 2: Summary of themes identified during thematic analysis based on Braun & Clarke (2006).

5.3 Ethical Implications

Ethical considerations have to be made before starting to research and ethical principles have to be applied whilst and after conducting research (Kvale, 2011). Concerning this study, ethical factors have been taken into consideration accurately. Especially when conducting research under the constructivism lens, adhering to ethics is intrinsic because the interviewees values have to be considered and included (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Depending on the research subject, ethical implications can be more or less conflicting and sensitive. According to Hall and Quick (2015) the most important ethical principles that have to be applied to qualitative research are consent, confidentiality, anonymity and credibility. Especially in the context of this research, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity is of high importance (Bruun, 2016).

Therefore, to provide full transparency and trustworthiness I have stated the intention and purpose of the research to each interviewee at first contact and once again before conducting the interview. Furthermore, to comply with ethical considerations, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. This seemed to be an important aspect as information in the media production sector might have to be handled confidentially (Bruun, 2016). Because reputation is highly important for freelancers, anonymity must be ensured so they can talk freely about their experiences without being exposed with their name and occupation (Storey et al., 2005). Accordingly, the names of the interviewees will not be used in the analysis. I will refer to the participants as ‘Interviewee’ and number them consecutively in the order that the interviews have been conducted.

5.4 Validity

The discussion around validity in order to ensure the legitimacy in qualitative research is an ongoing debate (Maxwell, 1992; Whitemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). In a broad sense, validity in qualitative research is concerned with the accounts and the approach of analysis as well as using an adequate research method. The chosen qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews is appropriate in order to answer the research questions and to follow the aims of this study as it pursues to investigate in-depth insights into how the participants experience working in coworking spaces as well as job precarity and asymmetries in the distribution of power within the media production industries.

Furthermore, especially in qualitative research, validity has to be ensured on levels of description and interpretation of the data (Maxwell, 1992). Guba and Lincoln (1994) approve this and emphasise that trustworthiness and authenticity are the most important criteria for quality in constructivism-based qualitative research. In conclusion, the validity of the research has to be reviewed in consideration of the qualitative research approach, the paradigm of constructivism as well as the respective research context.

After this discussion and presentation of how validity is interpreted in qualitative research, I believe to have conducted the research in a trustworthy and conscientious manner. This serves the requirement of internal validity, which is concerned with the sufficient description of how the research has been conducted. External validity was ensured through a diverse sample with participants of different origins, residencies, gender and age as well as occupations within the media production industry (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Nonetheless, in order to ensure validity, it is important to acknowledge possible disadvantageous factors and limitations of the study. One of these factors could be the different occupations of the interviewees. Even though all of the interviewed freelancers are working within the media production industry and thus are all relevant to the context of this research, the occupations within this industry can differ. Therefore, the experiences of the participants can vary based on their different occupations. However, the aim of the research is not to point out the different experiences that each group of jobs within the freelance workforce has made, but rather examining the experience of those who are affected by the structural changes within the media production industry.

6. Presentation and Analysis of Findings

In this chapter, the analysis of the semi-structured interviews is presented. As stated in the methodology chapter, the gathered data has been analysed using the thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke. Therefore, the different themes that have been identified are used to structure this chapter as follows: Firstly, I examine how the structural changes within the media production industry have affected the interviewees, especially in terms of their decision of becoming a freelancer. Secondly, I introduce different types of coworking space users that have been identified during the analysis of the interviews. Thirdly, I present regional differences which have emerged as a result of interviewing participants working in different countries and coworking spaces. Investigating these aspects helps to finally examine and conclude how freelancers deal with asymmetrical power relations and how coworking spaces might provide possibilities for freelancers to challenge existing structures of asymmetry and precarity.

6.1 How Structural Changes Affect Freelancers

Considering the context that this research is embedded in, the first set of questions of the interview aimed at investigating the reasons and motives of the participants to become freelancers. As discussed in previous chapters, structural changes within the media producing industry, have led to a shift towards a project-based nature of work with an increasing number of freelancers (de Peuter, 2011). Therefore, it seemed crucial to investigate how these structural changes have actually affected professionals working within this industry. Whilst conducting the interviews and during the data analysis it has emerged clearly that the participants were split in two camps: those who became freelancers because of increasing precarity and those who became freelancers to increase their flexibility and freedom.

Deferring to precarious conditions. Previous studies, as mentioned in the literature review, have shown that the changing structures within the media industry forced individuals working within this industry into becoming freelancers due to the decrease of permanent employees in media producing organisations. In the interviews, around half of the participants have stated that their reasons for becoming freelancers were related to precarious conditions. Interviewee 1 explains that he was forced into the decision of becoming a

freelancer because the company he has been working in previously went bankrupt and all of the employees lost their jobs. He explains that he had to choose between looking for a new job in a traditional employment situation or to pursue what he liked doing at his old job and become a freelancer. However, he emphasises that the main reason to become a freelancer was that he has lost his job due to the structural changes that the whole media industry was and is going through.

Another interviewee stated that he wanted to break out of a precarious situation, what he experienced to be the restricting structures of those big corporations where one cannot develop their skills. He adds that *“as an employee, you are exposed to these political games in companies.”* (Interviewee 2). He further elaborates that it is a tough choice to make, but taking this leap of faith might be worth it when one succeeds in increasing the potential to develop their skills through gaining flexibility and independency as a freelancer.

Interviewee 3, a freelance journalist, had been directly affected by the structural changes within the media production sector towards the contemporary landscape with dominance of big corporations and smaller ones that cannot keep up with the economic pressure. He sees it as having been forced into becoming a freelancer because the only newspaper publisher in his town was neither hiring regular employees nor freelancers due to economic difficulties after the economic crisis around 2009. The freelance journalist was faced with the decision of either leaving the town he lives in or becoming a freelancer.

“There is only one big newspaper here and they weren’t hiring anymore, it was even hard to get some small jobs there. So, I was forced to start working as a freelancer. At first it was my only choice if I wanted to stay in this town and work as a journalist. But when I had done that, it was hard to give that up.” (Interviewee 3)

Even though his situation has been developed out of very precarious setting, Interviewee 3 is now satisfied with working as a freelancer. Becoming a freelancer made it possible for him to avoid a forced relocation for a new job. Instead, he was able to work remotely for other newspaper companies that had a better economic standing than the publisher in his hometown. These findings correspond with previous studies (Mould et al., 2014; Bögenhold et al., 2014) about individuals sense to be forced into becoming freelancers due to the structural changes within the media production industry which has especially affected the nature of work in this sector.

Those observations demonstrate how the interviewees experience structure to be superior to agency and constraining upon their possibilities to act freely. This presents an

example of what Archer (1996) conceptualised as upward conflation. The established structures within the media production industries, here the shift towards increasing flexibility and decreasing stability with a reduction of regular employees, have made those interviewees feel forced into becoming freelancers. Having observed that, it can be noted that they sense that structure is determinant upon them as human agents. Those examples illustrate how the interviewees experience upward conflation as structure forcing them into a certain situation leaving them only little chance for emerging agency against those structures. However, the experiences of the interviewees also show that even if they find themselves forced into a structure, here to decide whether they would become freelancers or need to adapt to their changing situation in other ways, their own perception can change from the feeling of being forced towards finding themselves in a satisfactory work situation. This shows that those interviewees are capable and knowledgeable which reflects Giddens (1979) perception of the active agent. This perspective, as Giddens (1984) emphasizes, could nonetheless be seen to entail an act of agency. In this case, regarding the first research question, it can be argued that the act of becoming a freelancer is made by an active and autonomous agent who reproduces and constitutes the established structures within the media production industry, which made some of the interviewees feel as being forced into their situation.

Striving for freedom and flexibility. Even though it is assumed that the structural changes towards a project-based nature of work affect most of the people who work within the media production industry negatively to some extent, a typology of freelancers who choose to become freelancers for reasons of freedom and more flexibility has been observed. For this type of freelancer, the demand for freedom and flexibility in terms of their ways of living and working outweigh the precarity that they might be facing, such as uncertainty, irregular income or experiencing asymmetrical power distributions between them and the organisations operating within the industry. All of the interviewees who I would associate with this group, decided to work as freelancers in order to increase their flexibility in terms of organising their work as well as deciding when and where they would work. They also strive for independency and freedom especially concerning the escape from traditional work structures. One of the interviewees decided to work as a freelancer to be independent from a traditional place-bound employment situation:

“I’ve always loved travelling – I mean many people love travelling nowadays, right? - I never really knew what I wanted to do but one thing I knew is that I wanted to travel. It had to be a job that enables me to travel and explore the world while I can work.”
(Interviewee 4)

These aspects of being able to travel and not be bound to a certain location seem to be of high importance for all of the freelancers who strive for more freedom and independency. Two other interviewees state that being a freelancer allows them to combine travelling and working which was the decisive argument for them to leave their permanent employment situation. Connecting to this observation, Interviewee 5 states: *“I love the freedom to work from wherever I want. I’m hoping to build my client-base so I can have more control over my working locations and hours and work flexibly in the future”*. This shows that working as a freelancer is connected to a certain idea of flexibility. However, achieving this flexibility is depended on the clients that each freelancer works with. The established norms and rules originating from the organisations can be seen as structure in this case, which influences the freelancers as they are depended on their clients to some extent. In order to get hired for a project and to secure their subsistence, freelancers have to accept the rules and norms set by the organisations that they work with. Nonetheless, freelancers appear as what Giddens (1984) describes as active agents because they are able to act autonomously and rationally. Freelancers can actively decide which organisations they want to work with and therefore they are ideally independent from the structures that the organisations follow. However, they are not entirely independent from these structures as they have to earn enough money to make a living and if there is not enough work available, freelancers might have to defer to these structures. These observations illustrate an example of what Giddens (1984) has conceptualised in this dualism of structure: Structure as both enabling and constraining upon the human agent. Considering this conceptualisation helps understanding the interplay of structure and agency in the situation of the interviewees. The active choice among these interviewees and the positive connotation with which they ascribe a certain degree of freedom to their work situation might then be contrasted with the structure of being depended on organisations to some extent, in order to secure their subsistence.

Interviewee 7, a film producer, emphasises the creative freedom that he gets from working as a freelancer. In previous jobs, he felt hindered by the organisational structures and was not able to realise the full creative potential he saw himself possessing. In this case it can be observed that the decision to become freelancer can also have self-fulfilling purposes. This group of freelancers represents a strong contrast to the group that has been forced into becoming freelancers. Deciding freely about becoming a freelancer in order to increase flexibility and freedom, knowingly that there is another group of people that was

forced into the decision by precarious conditions, almost seems like a luxurious lifestyle. Connecting to these findings, another interviewee states:

“What was the main reason to become a freelancer? I guess the aspect of freedom. I always thought freelancing was something for me. I was doing a lot of internships during my studies and the small agencies were the nicest. So, I thought I can also do it on my own. I love the freedom, the flexibility, getting some balance. Getting sleep when I want to, eat food when I want to, plan my days however I want to.” (Interviewee 9)

This strive for flexibility and freedom as well as the free decision of becoming a freelancer can be seen as another example of Giddens (1984) belief that structure can be both enabling and constraining, rather than only constraining as conceptualised in Archer’s (1996) upward conflation. The established structures within the media production industry have enabled the interviewees to choose that path of becoming a freelancer, considering freelancing has become an established feature within that industry. Viewing and analysing those experiences through the lens of Giddens (1984) duality of structure helps understanding how the norms, regulations and practices within the media production industries: At first glance, the structure within the media production industry might only be perceived as precarious conditions that hinder freelancers in acting freely. Applying his dualism, and therefore considering both sides of the coin, it becomes evident that those structures within that industry can also be enabling for freelancers.

Observing the different experiences of the interviewees in regard to the first research question, it can be concluded that the structures within the media production industry on one hand have made some of the respondents feel forced into becoming freelancers, on the other hand the structure towards more flexibility and a project-based nature of work provided some of the interviewees with the necessary framework to become freelancers rather as a self-fulfilling occupation. Furthermore, even those freelancers who saw themselves being forced into their situation due to the structural changes in the media production industry, report that their level of satisfaction with being a freelancer has increased over time. Therefore, it can be assumed that even though most of the freelancers are facing precarious working conditions, the possibilities of agency towards challenging this precarity can emerge in those structures.

6.2 How Freelancers Use Coworking Spaces

After investigating the reasons and motives of the interviewees for becoming freelancers, the subsequent questions in the semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring their reasons for joining and experiences of working in coworking spaces. These questions were posed to get useful insights in order to answer the research questions.

Coworking spaces as office substitutes. During the conduct of the interviews I have observed that some of the freelancers have joined coworking spaces first and foremost because they needed a place to work. Those freelancers want to avoid the isolation that they face when working from their homes and to make use of the office infrastructures that coworking spaces offer. Furthermore, those interviewees state that they hope to increase their productivity when working in a coworking space instead of working from home. Connecting to this observation, interviewee 7 stated: *“I have worked from home before. It is terrible, in my opinion you can’t work from home. There is something psychological about leaving the house and going to work at the coworking space”*. Interviewee 9 reports that working in a coworking space motivates her because it provides her with some kind of structure in her work day as she has to leave the house and to then spend a full working day at the coworking space.

However, this motive of joining a coworking space first and foremost to fulfil the need for a work place with office utilities like desks and internet might change over time: Interviewee 5 stated that at first, she joined a coworking space only because she needed a comfortable place to work, a good internet connection and hoped to be working more productively than from home. She points out that her motivation to work in a coworking space has changed to now wanting to benefit from intended and unintended encounters, which can result in exchanging ideas, enlarging her network as well as providing the possibilities to collaborate with other coworking space users. The aspects that Interviewee 5 has mentioned are precisely those benefits and advantages of coworking spaces that all of the other interviewees who see coworking spaces as office substitutes have referred to. Additionally, it can be observed that this type of user works in coworking spaces rather for their personal benefits than for the community factor.

Coworking spaces as community. Most of the interviewees state that they mainly use coworking spaces to benefit from the community aspect and the possibilities of intended and unintended encounters which are provided through the physical co-presence of freelancers in coworking spaces. Furthermore, these freelancers value coworking spaces in a different

way than those who only see those spaces, to put it bluntly, as a better version of their home office. Especially the community aspect seems to be of high importance for this type of freelancers. They do not only want to avoid isolation that they face when working from home, but also socialise, network and build up a community:

“The community aspect in a coworking space creates a sense of belonging and a context for your existence professionally. It is not at all the same to sit and work in a café. It is not just about the internet and free coffee. Humans are not lone wolfs, they are flocks. And so, this doesn’t mean that we don’t need our lone time, but it means that we don’t have to be alone all the time.” (Interviewee 11)

Creating a sense of belonging seems to be highly important for freelancers using coworking spaces. Even though they are striving for independency and are working only for themselves most of the time, freelancers are no ‘lone wolfs’ who want to work isolated from others. Giddens (1984) belief that co-presence is crucial in order to have the possibility to orientate towards the action of others as well experiencing their own actions is reflected by the statement of this interviewee. The aspect of physical co-presence in coworking spaces which creates a sense of belonging and helps others to orientate themselves towards the actions of the other freelancers is represented in what Giddens (1984) conceptualised as ‘spatiality of the body’ in the context of social interaction. The importance of the community aspect and the creation of a sense of belonging is reflected particularly strong by the experiences that Interviewee 2 reports:

“This is not just a coworking space, for me, this is home. I came here with nothing. No one asked me for money or anything, they just took me in and let me be part of their community. They said, sit down at your desk and start working. Within the shortest time, I built up a network and started to get my first projects. There are so many things that I have learned here through exchanging ideas and interaction. I am 48 years old and I thought I have learned everything already. But here I saw that I can still learn more.” (Interviewee 2)

Those experiences show how coworking spaces can provide a lot more than only a place to work. Calling a coworking space a ‘home’ indicates that for some freelancers coworking spaces carry an emotional value. This interviewee has left his old job in a large company to break out of the hindering structures where he felt he could not develop his skills. Becoming a freelancer was a decision that involved a great risk as it takes time building up a network and a client-base as well needing to adapt to organisational structures. However, as stated above, Interviewee 2 has experienced great support within the coworking space that he joined when he left his previous job. Furthermore, he states that he was not asked to pay the

usual membership fee at first, because when he joined he was in a highly precarious situation. Not having to pay for a workspace within a coworking space is rare which highlights the importance of the community aspect once more. In line with his experiences, many of the interviewees report that they have been facing precarity especially in the beginning during the process of launching their freelance careers. They emphasise that especially in the beginning of being a freelancer, the precarity can be experienced particularly strong as the interviewees needed to build up their network and needed to invest a lot of time into educating themselves about administrative tasks such as marketing themselves, dealing with taxes, writing invoices and possibly setting up social media channels and websites. Accordingly, Interviewee 10 stated: *“In the beginning I felt like these are not my tasks to do but it all belongs to the freelance job and you just can’t ignore it.”* These aspects will be discussed further in the following section.

In line with the experiences mentioned above, Interviewee 3 addresses how the notion of the ‘enterprising self’ (Storey et al., 2005) can increase job precarity for freelancers:

“Now I also have to be a business man, I have to be a salesman, I have to come up with ideas to get new clients or projects and I also had to make sure that I could live of it, had to discuss the price for several jobs. Sometimes they [the organisations] wouldn’t follow my claim and especially at the beginning I did the job anyway because I feel I had invested so much time in getting the job or the deal.” (Interviewee 3)

His experiences show how the need to adapt to the enterprise structures as a freelancer can give rise to difficulties. All of the additional tasks that emerge when working as a freelancer that have to be taken care of while the normal job operations are running parallel are investments in their micro-businesses, but also do not directly contribute to their income. Interviewee 3 has experienced the increasing precarity as he had to accept jobs offering for him personally non-acceptable conditions because he had invested a lot of time in discussing the framework for the project and felt like it would be a waste if he would not accept the organisations’ offer. These structures can be seen as hindering for freelancers as they have to invest time in fulfilling those enterprise tasks which regular employees in organisations do normally not have to deal with. However, adapting to those enterprise structures can potentially improve the freelancers’ success and professionalism as they can increase their business performance through for instance marketing themselves, their skills and services. This represents another example of how Giddens (1984) conceptualised the duality of structure: Through existing structures within the media production industry, the interviewees

are expected to adapt to enterprising structures. However, complying with these structures provides the possibility for freelancers to enhance their professional performance. Giddens belief that structure can be enabling is reflected by the experiences of the interviewees regarding the notion of self-enterprise. At first, it might increase their feeling of precarity as they need to adapt to those structures, which shows the constraining qualities of structures. However, when they can possibly improve their career through adapting to those structures, the enabling qualities of structure emerge.

In order to deal with these issues and the increasing precarity of the nature of work as freelancer, coworking spaces can offer a place for them to share their experiences and to exchange knowledge around these issues mentioned above. As reported by the interviewees, the experiences with precarity are especially regarding uncertainty and anxiety to not earn enough money to secure their subsistence. Interviewee 7 shares this assumption and thinks that knowledge exchange is key to solving these problems:

“I think, a way to change that, in the context of a coworking space is to just ask people what their experiences are. There is another guy who works in this coworking space and we discuss a lot about the tasks that freelancers have to deal with, like how to do taxes, how to run social media channels, how to market yourself and how he is negotiating prices and contracts.” (Interviewee 7)

Co-presence and the possibilities for encounters in coworking spaces help freelancers to share their experiences and support each other when they are struggling with the sometimes highly precarious situations that they find themselves in. These observations connect to a crucial aspect regarding the importance of social interaction in Giddens (1984) structuration theory: The “routines of day-to-day life are fundamental to even the most elaborate forms of societal organization. In the course of their daily activities individuals encounter each other in situated contexts of interaction – interaction with others who are physically co-present” (p. 64). Giddens belief shows that even things that at first glance seem insignificant, such as daily routines of individuals, can be highly important for societal organisation as well as social interaction. Because coworking spaces are based on spatiality and being physically co-present, Giddens conceptualisation helps uncovering the importance of this co-presence for social interaction. This is reflected by the experiences of Interviewee 4:

“I guess it just depends on the environment whether a coworking space will help you as a freelancer improve your performance or general situation. That’s why you have to choose wisely in which coworking space you want to work, so it fits your requirements. For me, I was looking for a place where I won’t feel alone, where I will meet a lot of people and

where I can learn from others and be part of a community which encourages and supports me.” (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 4 further elaborates that she was struggling to find the right coworking space that met her expectations of having a community which helps her overcoming the feeling of loneliness and isolation. The first coworking space that Interviewee 4 has been working in was lacking in terms of community and social interaction. Currently, she is working in a coworking space with “*a great community*” which is facilitated by collectively organised events and a high level of social interaction within that space. According to these experiences, Interviewee 8 states that she works in a coworking space in order to network and specially to meet people who understand the struggles and sometimes precarious conditions that accompany the nature of freelance work.

In line with other studies (Appel-Meulenbroek, 2010; Jakonen et al., 2017), Giddens perception shows the importance of shared routines and shared spaces through the physical co-presence which is given in coworking spaces. Through the emergence of this new structure within coworking spaces, freelancers might create a framework and find support in order to deal with their precarious working conditions. This argument finds validity by the experiences of Interviewee 2:

“Yes, coworking spaces offer the infrastructure to work in, getting a desk, internet and so on. But I don’t see coworking spaces like that. For me, it is a big community where I am 100% accepted. I have people here who help me with anything and always give me helpful tips for my work. But I think it always depends on the owner of the coworking space and the people who work in it. I guess there are also some spaces where people just go to work, but that is not how I experienced it. In my opinion, coworking should be more than that because in my experience, here you do not just get a workplace, you get a home. You don’t just get some tips, you get real solutions for your work.” (Interviewee 2)

In the coworking space where he is working, Interviewee 2 experiences a strong bond with the other users of the space. He further elaborates that the community within the coworking space actually supports him in order to challenge precarious situations:

“Every freelancer knows this, to be down and have a hard time. You put effort into getting a client and then it didn’t work out. Working in a coworking space with this great community makes it so much easier to deal with things like that, it changes your mind-set back to a positive attitude. The community encourages you, strengthens you and also pushes you to not give up in tough times.” (Interviewee 2)

Even though freelancers are working individually most of the times, in some coworking spaces tight communities are emerging. This contradicts the critical notion of individualism

which is assumed to occur within coworking spaces as a result of freelancers rather trying undercut each other and compete instead of creating a community. Accordingly, Interviewee 2 concludes: *“We are all benefitting from this, people sharing their experiences.”* Connecting to the aspect of sharing knowledge, Interviewee 4 once again emphasises the importance of physical co-presence as catalyst for social interaction: *“Because we are sharing the same environment, people are more willing to just share things.”*

Tackling one of the possible limitations of this study concerning the different experiences of the interviewees which might be based on their various occupations, Interviewee 8 states that even though freelancers in coworking spaces mostly have different occupations, they all know the possible struggles that accompany the nature of work as freelancers. Therefore, talking to them helps Interviewee 8 to feel supported and less anxious.

Concluding the experiences of those interviewees, it can be observed that a few of the freelancers report that they work in coworking spaces first and foremost to use the infrastructure, whereas most of them use coworking spaces in order to benefit from the community aspect. Even though freelancers are working independently and in their own rights, the interviewees state that they are seeking for social interaction and encounters within coworking spaces. The importance of social interaction has been emphasised by Giddens (1984), as mentioned above, and is expected to lead to knowledge exchange which could help freelancers dealing with or overcoming their precarious working conditions. Based on the experiences of the interviewees, it can be assumed that especially learning from the experiences of dealing with precarity of other freelancers within coworking spaces to be very advantageous in order to feel strengthened by the community aspect within those spaces. However, as observed in the beginning of this chapter, there are also freelancers who use coworking spaces primarily to benefit from the office infrastructure, recognisable by statements such as: *“I feel like we’re all independent individuals who exist in the same orbit”* (Interviewee 5). Therefore, the emerging characteristics of a supportive environment and knowledge sharing, creating a structure for freelancers to challenge their precarious situation are depended on the type of coworking spaces and the users within that space. This aspect will be further investigated in the next chapter.

6.3 How Different Structures Enable Different Agencies

Having conducted interviews with eleven participants residing in seven different countries and holding eight different nationalities, the data appears to suggest analysing the emerging differences between the experiences of the interviewees according to their location. Because coworking spaces as well as freelancing are both global phenomena, it seems important to briefly discuss those differences that have been reported by the interviewees. However, as pointing out dissimilarities between the experiences is not the main aim of this thesis, the analysis of the data will be limited to the relevant responses in order to discuss the research questions.

It has emerged very clearly that the experiences of the interviewees differ accordingly to the country that they are working in. Different structures established within public policies and organisations are the origin of the varying experiences that the participants have made working as freelancers. Interviewee 11 highlights this argument and states that *“The experiences of each freelancer depend on the country, because the country sets the conditions for them.”* She has experienced that for instance, the laws and regulations in her home country England are much more beneficial for freelancers than in Sweden where she currently resides. Interviewee 11 reports that this convenience has contributed towards the high number of freelancers in England. Conversely, she states that in Sweden it is more difficult and more complicated to register and work as freelancer due to stricter regulations:

“Here in Sweden it is kind of this parent-child relationship whereas in England the structure treats professionals as professionals and they trust that the freelancers know what they are doing, rather than top down, giving instructions about what to do and what to think.” (Interviewee 11)

Interviewee 1 has made similar experiences. He lives and works in Latvia, where the structures and regulations from the state make it easy for freelancers to operate their micro-businesses in terms of administration, costs and taxes. However, he reports that those structures have been changed recently towards an increase of the taxes for freelancers and stricter regulations. Nevertheless, comparing Latvia to other European countries, Interviewee 1 is appreciative of the conditions for freelancers in his home country.

Even though these few experiences are only scratching the surface of a vast topic – and exploring it in depth would open up a whole new discussion which could be considered for further research – the interviewees observations show that how and to what extent freelancers experience precarity as well as asymmetrical power relations is depended on the

structures that have been established in each country. These aspects are also determining to what extent those freelancers experience coworking spaces as emerging structure to help them dealing with precarious working conditions. But not only the locally varying regulations and policies are reasons for different experiences, it is also the different coworking spaces that determine whether freelancers can benefit from working in such a space.

To the idea of a ‘*great community*’ mentioned earlier, Interviewee 11 adds another interesting aspect to this discussion. She argues that not only the regulations and structures established by public policies play a decisive role in how freelancers gain their experiences, but also the intentions of coworking space owners:

“The experiences really depend on the coworking space. The benefits of coworking spaces do not happen by themselves. They need to be established and that is something that needs to be taken care of. Some people open coworking spaces as a business to make money. But that is not how it works. You have to care about the idea. You want to do it because of the magic that happens in the coworking space.” (Interviewee 11)

Interviewee 11 highlights that founders and users of coworking spaces have to put effort in towards creating a coworking space that has the potential to provide freelancers with a structure that helps them to tackle precarious working conditions. The observation that also the users of coworking spaces carry responsibilities in order to enable the emergence of a community as well as the possibilities for knowledge sharing is shown by the experiences that Interviewee 8 has made in different countries:

“The experiences and support that you feel really depends on the place. In Chiang Mai [in Thailand], I went to a coworking space and it’s not really a community, but more like a nice cafe with a huge sitting area. In Romania, I was totally one of the guys. The place is mostly for local people and they helped me so much, finding a place to live, invited me to hang with their friends, and even took me to lectures there. I felt as if I instantly had 15 friends.” (Interviewee 8)

Interviewee 8’s experiences emphasise the statement by Interviewee 11 presented above: To let the ‘*magic*’ – with that term Interviewee 11 refers to aspects of community building and knowledge sharing – in coworking spaces happen, the users need to be willing to invest time and effort into building up a community as well as having the intentions to use coworking spaces in order to benefit from those aspects and not only use those spaces as office substitutes.

Concluding with the first research question in mind, it can be detected that how freelancers perceive and experience their circumstances is depended on different aspects: the structures coming from public policies and organisations in different countries, how the coworking space is managed and how the users of the coworking space are interacting. Considering the different structures in each country it can be seen how some structures are more favourable for freelancers than others and enable different possibilities for agency. Reflecting upon the theory of structure and agency, it becomes evident that similar structures can take different forms and expressions depending on their local context, how they are managed and regulated in public policies.

Having these identified differences in mind, it has to be noted that all of them are individual experience which are depended on subjective factors. However, they serve as though-provoking impulses for further research, which will be further elaborated in the conclusion.

6.4 How Freelancers Deal With Asymmetrical Power Relations

As presented in the literature review, some freelancers experience asymmetrical power relations between them and the organisations operating within the media production industry. This asymmetry stems from the freelancers' dependence on work and projects which are obviously provided by organisations and is accelerated by the high number of freelancers that might undercut each other in order to get work (Storey et al., 2005). In the following, the interviewees' experiences with those asymmetrical structures will be examined.

Most of the interviewees report that they have been experiencing asymmetrical power relations during their work as freelancers. This appears to be the case especially in the beginning of the interviewees' freelance careers, but can also be an issue that accompanies them at all times. Interviewee 7 states that he is experiencing those unequal power relations on a regular basis:

“I experience this all the time – every project I do. They [the organisations] are always trying to get you for cheap. Coworking spaces could be relevant here because I can learn from others how to deal with that, learn from their experiences and for example learn how to charge correctly. But I think a lot of people in the creative industries are having this problem. Companies see that you are passionate about something and they say, hey we will

give you some clothes for your work, instead of money. But well, I can't pay rent with that.” (Interviewee 7)

Interviewee 7 further explains that many organisations within the creative industries are trying to push prices for the work of freelancers down or are trying to pay them for instance with merchandise of their brand. He further elaborates that sometimes there is no other choice than giving in on those precarious conditions which can force to acquiesce and taking on jobs with poor conditions due to those asymmetrical power relations:

“But it is tough sometimes. When you are in a position where you do not have a lot of work coming in – I have been in that position before and I never want to get in that position again. Because I got into a situation where I said yes to a really big job for super cheap and the client was not reasonable. It makes you hate your work.” (Interviewee 7)

He states that those asymmetrical power relations, accompanied by unreasonable working conditions do not only increase precarity, but also spark dissatisfaction with his work. Interviewee 10 has made similar experiences. When asked about asymmetrical power relations he reports: *“I think it is like that all the time. Every company does that. They all assume that this work in the media production or creative industries is just some kind of hobby.”* This shows that some organisations might not be aware of the nature of work and reality of working as a freelancer.

A similar aspect arose in the interview with Interviewee 5. The freelance content writer is one of the few who did not experience asymmetrical power relations in the same extent as the other participants mentioned above. However, when asked about the relationship with organisations that she is working with, she states: *“Generally, my relationships with clients is fairly good although I wish they valued my work more highly.”* This indicates once again that organisations are lacking awareness of the circumstances that freelancers are working within and the precarity that they are facing.

Stemming from these precarious conditions, Interviewee 3 has a pessimistic view on asymmetrical power relations and perceives those as *“unsolvable problems”* and further emphasises that working as a freelancer is very tough. In his opinion, asymmetrical power relations are the result of freelancers trying to undercut each other as well as the fact that those who have little experience take on jobs that are paid badly to gain work experience, especially in the beginning of their careers.

Connecting to the issue that asymmetrical power relations are perceived as being partly the result of freelancers with less experience taking on jobs that offer poor conditions,

especially in the beginning of their career, Interviewee 9 reports her experiences concerning this issue:

“It is a process, at the beginning you just take any job – or at least we did. I feel like we are getting better at it. It is a lot of education, it is a big part of or job as a freelancer to tell the client that our work takes time and so on, so they can understand the price.”
(Interviewee 9)

Interviewee 9 describes dealing with asymmetrical power relations as a process that freelancers might have to experience in order to learn from those situations and to improve their reaction towards those asymmetries. Moreover, she touches upon a notable point: She argues that it is part of the freelance occupation to educate clients about the precarious working conditions that freelancers are facing as well as explaining in detail how the prices for their services are determined. This can be understood as a slight shift in the perception of asymmetrical power relations as Interviewee 9 also transfers part of the responsibility to the freelancers to educate the organisations. This perception corresponds with the opinion of Interviewee 4:

“Most of the times you would think these asymmetrical power relationship is created by the client, but actually it is the freelancers who let the clients do whatever they want and not go against it.” (Interviewee 4)

She is certain that the asymmetrical structures within the media production industry are partly created by the freelancers themselves since they are not acting upon organisations who are trying to oppress them. This reflects on Giddens (1979) conceptualisation of his ‘dualism of structure’ and his belief that “structure is both the medium and the outcome of the reproduction of practices” (p. 5). Considering that freelancers are active agents who are conscious and aware of their actions, the statements of those interviewees who see asymmetrical power relations as an outcome of reproduced practices by freelancers who are not counteracting against those structures, find validity. The reproduced agency of freelancers who do not challenge unfair and poor conditions offered by the organisations within the media production industry can constitute and sustain those asymmetrical power distributions.

Interviewee 6 acknowledges that asymmetrical power relations can originate from unfair practices of organisations, but she also confirms that reproduced action of freelancers can constitute and maintain them. When asking her about those emerging asymmetries she states:

“I think it's true however it goes back to the old saying: if you pay peanuts, you'll get monkeys. Organisations should understand that good freelancers come at a price. I also think freelancers should band together more instead of undercutting each other. It drives prices down and makes a mockery of us.” (Interviewee 6)

Interviewee 6 proves that reproduced practices such as freelancers trying to undercut each other to get projects constitute disadvantageous and counterproductive circumstances for the whole freelance workforce. Instead, she argues that freelancers should join forces to raise awareness and demand to increase recognition for their work from side of the organisations in the media production industry. She further elaborates that coworking spaces can be seen as highly supportive in order to band together as freelancers and to change existing structures through shared practices:

“I think we are all sharing the values of wanting to have freedom, flexibility, being authentic and honest as freelancers and also strengthen each other. The community is super important, so we also all share the value of solidarity.” (Interviewee 6)

She perceives the community aspect and shared values in coworking spaces, such as solidarity, as highly important for freelancers to take action against the asymmetrical power distribution within the media production industry. Therefore, those coworking spaces where users and founders have the intention to create a community can be seen as a framework for freelancers to reproduce agency and practices. The experiences of the interviewees show that when freelancers strengthen each other, sharing their knowledge around the issues of asymmetrical power relations and how to deal with them, as well as being solidly united, the possibility of reproduction of agency arises which might change existing structures. Giddens belief that human agents have the power and capability to make changes to existing structures is reflected by the perceptions of the interviewees: Structures can be determinant for the circumstances and working conditions of freelancers. However, their experiences show that through shared routines and the reproduction of individual action, the possibility of changing established structures arises.

Interviewee 10 pinpoints the importance of reproducing individual agency and practices in order to challenge asymmetrical power relationships with the organisations:

“It is also up to as freelancers to not only do our job but also try to do all this extra work of raising awareness and trying to run this system. Then it would be easier for us and also easier for people who want to start being a freelancer.” (Interviewee 10)

He perceives the education of organisations who engage freelancers as a crucial aspect in order to raise awareness for the problems and precarity that they are facing due to the asymmetrical distribution of power which has been established within the media production

industry. In conjunction with this perception, Interviewee 2 acknowledges the importance of raising awareness for freelancers on different levels:

“I think in general there needs to be more support for freelancers. Especially here in Germany we have a lack of specialists in many jobs. In my opinion, freelancers are the perfect fill for this gap. They are specialised, independent workers who can help organisations to enhance their performance. Freelancers definitely need more recognition, within the industry and from side of public policy. We need more people like you who do research on freelancers to create more awareness for our problems – because freelancers are fighters.” (Interviewee 2)

Again, Interviewee 2’s statement shows his emotional connection to coworking spaces and freelancing in general as he has called the space where he works a ‘home’ and demands for more recognition within society, the organisations, public policy and research towards freelancing as he sees freelancers as ‘fighters’ who can withstand the precarity that comes along with the nature of their work.

Interviewee 1 emphasises that especially the awareness for coworking spaces amongst freelancers need to be raised:

“The problem here is, the awareness of such for the relevance coworking spaces for freelancers is still not enough and people still question coworking spaces. They say, why should I join a coworking space when I could work from home. There is a low level of awareness amongst the freelancers of why coworking is beneficial and why should they join. I think it is highly relevant.” (Interviewee 1)

In the interview, he reports that additionally to his job as a graphic designer, he is giving lectures and speeches around the topic of how to become a freelancer in order to raise awareness for the importance of the use of coworking spaces in his home country Latvia. Interviewee 1 states that in his opinion, “it is a must” to join a coworking space when wanting to start a successful freelance career: “I always tell everyone, if you want to become a freelancer, join a coworking space”. He further elaborates that he was one of those people who questioned the importance of coworking spaces at first. However, now he is “fully for coworking spaces” and is convinced that it is crucial for freelancers to join such a space in order to benefit from the supportive community and structuring characteristics.

In summary, all of the interviewees perceive coworking spaces as an important concept for freelancers: A few, first and foremost use them as an alternative to be working from home in order to avoid isolation. Most of the interviewees use them to benefit from intended and unintended encounters that enable networking and knowledge sharing to enhance their business performance. Some emphasise and emotionally connect to the

community aspect and feel supported and understood by other users. These experiences show that we can understand the value and relevance of coworking spaces for freelancers in order to challenge precarity and asymmetrical power relations in different degrees: Depended on the intentions of using coworking spaces, the interviewees experience the potential of such spaces to challenge precarious working conditions and the asymmetrical distribution of power differently. Those interviewees who use coworking spaces mainly as office substitutes to benefit from the infrastructure such as a good internet connection and a comfortable workspace have reported that in the course of time they have become more appreciate of the community aspect in those spaces. Investigating the experiences of the interviewees has shown that most of them have joined coworking spaces precisely to benefit from the community and characteristics like knowledge sharing and networking. In regard to the second research question, *'How do freelancers experience coworking spaces as framework to challenge these working conditions and to increase the possibilities of individual agency?'* the findings of this study indicate that the possibility of coworking spaces to provide such a framework can be strongly considered. Examining the experiences of those interviewees who have precisely reported that coworking spaces make them feel strengthened and provides opportunities for them and others to join forces and to share knowledge around how to deal with precarious working conditions and asymmetrical power relations, it goes to show that coworking spaces can be experienced as framework which increases the possibilities for individual agency.

Regarding the first research question, *'How do freelancers experience their working conditions regarding precarity and asymmetrical power relations?'* it has been observed that the interviewees have experienced the asymmetrical power relations and precarity especially in the beginning of their careers. However, those asymmetries and precarious working conditions might also accompany a freelancers' whole career. The initial thought that asymmetrical power relations are only established by the organisations, has been contradicted by the statements and perceptions of the interviewees. The in-depth analysis of the experiences of the interviewees revealed that the asymmetrical distribution of power within the media production industry is not only created by the organisations, but also by the freelancers themselves. The most remarkable result to emerge from the data is that the interviewees have acknowledged and particularly elaborated that their reproduced action of not challenging those asymmetrical structures within the media production industry constitutes and further incorporate those structures.

Having investigated the interviewees experiences and considering the research questions and findings, it can be concluded that coworking spaces, depending on the type of space, can be experienced as a framework for those freelancers who are affected by asymmetrical power relations as well as precarious working conditions and who seek for communities to join forces, to exchange knowledge about these situations and to act upon these structures. Within this framework, the reproduced agency of freelancers against this asymmetrical power distribution and precarity might change existing structures towards less asymmetry and more awareness of their circumstances.

7. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this master's thesis was to explore and investigate how freelancers experience precarious working conditions, asymmetrical power distribution within the media production industry and the relevance of coworking spaces for them in order to challenge these circumstances. This was motivated by the following research questions: (1) How do freelancers experience their working conditions regarding precarity and asymmetrical power relations? (2) How do freelancers experience coworking spaces as framework to challenge these working conditions and to increase the possibilities of individual agency?

First, the research topic has been contextualised with the structural changes in the media production industry towards more flexibility and less stability, the precarious nature of freelance work and the emergence of coworking spaces. The following literature review has revealed that there have been very few studies investigating individual experiences of freelancers – most of the studies focused on general aspects like emerging politics within coworking spaces or precarity within the media production industry – and precisely no study has been found that has investigated how freelancers experience the value of coworking spaces for themselves as frame to challenge precarious working conditions.

The evidence from this study points towards the idea that freelancers can experience coworking spaces as highly valuable and relevant in order to provide them with a framework to challenge precarious working conditions and asymmetrical power relations within the media production industry. Another significant finding regards the constitution of those asymmetries and precarity: The interviewees do not only perceive them as a product of structural changes within the media production industry, but also as a product of their failure to act upon those structures. Considering these findings, the theoretical framework around the theory of structure and agency has served a fruitful ground in order to analyse the experiences of the interviewees. Especially applying Giddens dualism of structure, and therefore considering both sides of the coin 'structure and agency' as interdependent concepts, has enabled me to investigate the interaction of structure and agency regarding the circumstances and experiences of the interviewees. Without applying this theory, this duality would have remained undiscovered. Through the experiences of the interviewees it is emphasised that the reproduced agency of not challenging those structures has constituted and maintained them. Reflecting upon those findings with the structure and agency theory

in mind, Giddens belief that that human agents are capable of making changes to existing structures is reflected by the perception of the interviewees.

As this study is amongst the very few that investigate the individual experiences of freelancers and also because the concept of coworking is quite novel, discussing emerging impulses for further research seems crucial. Acknowledging the limitations of this study, the findings contribute towards a critical view of the nature of work within the media production industry as well as the relevance and value of coworking spaces for freelancers working within this industry and have therefore implications for society at large. Given that the findings are based on a limited number of interviews, the results should consequently be utilised as a starting point for further research focusing on different aspects that are premised on the conclusions that this thesis presents: Firstly, further research should conduct studies focusing on various countries to further differentiate how the structures in each country influence or enable agency of the freelancers and to investigate to what extent reproduced practises and agency of freelancers can challenge these structures. Secondly, research focusing on different types of occupations within the media production industries, for instance researching only on freelance journalists or freelance film producers, could reveal whether groups of different freelance occupations experience precarity and the value of coworking spaces differently. Finally, after conducting qualitative research in order to further explore those concepts, the execution of quantitative research, based on those qualitative studies, is an important step towards making generalisations about these aspects gaining representative results and factual knowledge around this research topic.

In future, the debates around the working conditions of freelancers as well as the concept of coworking will constantly lead to new questions and discussions within academic research, organisations within the media production industry as well as within the society in general. Because the awareness and recognition is slowly increasing and the aspect of sharing is growing in the society, the concept of coworking is assumed to increasingly appear on the agenda of organisations as well as in academic discourse and within the scope of freelancers. Finally, two aspects emerge clearly: Neither coworking spaces nor the freelance workforce are representing short-term trends, but rather significant and highly valuable concepts and forms of working that need to be considered in future discussions around work within the media production industry.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Q1: How long have you been working as a freelancer?

Q2: What were the reasons to become a freelancer?

Q3: Since when are you working in a coworking space?

Q4: What were the reasons to join a coworking space?

Q5: How would you describe the benefits/advantages of working in a coworking space?

Q6: How would you describe the disadvantages of working in a coworking space?

Q7: How would you describe the community in your coworking space?

- a. How much do you feel as part of the group/community?
- b. Do you have the feeling that the community aspect of a coworking space strengthens you as a freelancer who is normally working alone?
- c. Do you share a collective identity in your coworking space?
- d. Do you and the other users of your coworking space share the same values?

Q8: How would you describe your relationship to companies that you are working for?

- a. Did you ever make negative experiences with organisations while negotiating about a project?
- b. In previous research, it came up that some freelancers are too concerned about their reputation to take action against organisations who act unfairly. How do you think about that and what are your experiences?

Q9: I have noticed that some authors speak about asymmetrical power relations between organisations and freelancers. This means: Because there are many freelancers, companies can still find someone to do their work even if they offer poor conditions.

- a. How do you think about that?
- b. Have you made experiences like that?

Q10: How do you experience the precarity of freelance work in the media production industry?

Q11: Summarising, how would you describe the relevance of coworking spaces for freelancers?

Demographics:

Age:

Country of residence:

Country of origin:

Gender: